

## **PE1603/EE**

Petitioner Letter of 10 February 2017

We would refer the Committee to the three requests in our petition and underline that they do not ask for an end to under-18 recruitment, try to impinge upon the “legitimacy” of an armed forces career, or ask for the armed forces to cease their relationship with schools.

We are calling for the provision of guidance ensuring balance around armed forces visits to schools, for the collection of information for transparency, and for sufficient parent/guardian/pupil consultation around an issue. We believe the evidence gathered by the Committee so far shows a confusion round the issue and underlines the need for these measures.

### **Skills Development Scotland (SDS)**

While it is good that impartiality and balance are required of careers advisers, it would be useful to know if, when and how they are informed of the various unique risks and legal obligations involved in an armed forces career. Understanding how they are kept in touch with developments such as research into the greater health risks of an armed forces career for those who enlist as minors, and potential later problems with social mobility, would be valuable.

SDS does not address the lack of balance in careers advice or materials from the armed forces. It is not adequate to rely on the armed forces 'own approved processes for engagement with schools' when they have an interest to promote. For example, we question whether displaying military hardware, such as the vehicle displayed at Skills Scotland in October 2016, supports, or detracts and distracts from a nuanced and balanced portrayal of the military.

We refer to the ample evidence presented with our petition that the armed forces do in fact engage in schools for the purposes of recruitment. We consider that SDS should include the armed forces in guidance produced in line with the Developing the Young Workforce Strategy.

The armed forces are particularly well resourced in relation to other employers and, can have a significant presence at careers event. This may not be balanced with the contribution of other employers. It would be useful to hear any views from Skills Development Scotland on how to mitigate this so that children receive a balanced perspective on the variety of different options available to them.

### **Ministry of Defence (MoD)**

We have detailed our concerns about the MoD's claim that they 'never visit schools for recruitment purposes' in previous submissions. Recruitment is not a single event; it is a process which includes marketing an armed forces career, engaging individuals, assessment and interviews. These steps can all take place in schools.

It is very clear from MoD documents that they view their 'engagement in schools' as

a key part of fulfilling defence recruitment needs (see the MoD's 2011 *Youth Engagement Review* and the 2008 House of Commons Defence Committee report on *Recruitment and Retention*). Capita's Army recruitment contract states: *'The Service Provider shall begin pre-eligible activity from Year 9, when young people are making their first career-orientated choices... the Service Provider aims to attract potential recruits over the long-term.'*

In 2006, they stated in their *Short Review of Engagement With Schools* that, *'there appeared to be a need to distance "recruiting" from other "youth and curriculum" activities since the former appeared to be alienating some teachers and preventing Defence messages reaching some students... many schools are uncomfortable about taking in personnel from MoD/Armed Forces because of their links with recruiting and unpopular activities in Iraq and Afghanistan... Thus some recruiters package their work as citizenship programmes rather than pure recruiting.'* The armed forces are indeed quite extensively involved with the delivery of curriculum materials, including more recently, STEM education.

The MoD state that they do not visit schools based on social-economic or related factors. However, it is clear that they regard an armed forces career as an opportunity in particular for young people who have fewer options. Without data on where visits are taking place and the frequency of these visits we cannot know if this is the case.

Most schools in Scotland will have children from a variety of different backgrounds, including socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, given economic struggles families have faced in recent years.

Children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more vulnerable to marketing, peer pressure and making poorly processed decisions involving long-term risk.<sup>1</sup> They are more likely to feel that they have fewer options, particularly when the armed forces visit schools more than other apprenticeship and career providers. It cannot be said that just because the forces feel they don't target schools in deprived areas, does not mean that they are not targeting pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The submission from the MoD suggests that while the possibility of combat is acknowledged, the associated risks are barely, if at all, mentioned. It would be useful to see the detail of all their educational materials in full and how they are presented in schools. It is unclear what 'Educational Stages 1-3' refers to.

## **Together**

We welcome Together's detailed submission from a child rights' perspective, and their support for increased regulation of armed forces visits. We fully support their suggestion that the Committee commission a Child Rights Impact Assessment on armed forces visits to schools in Scotland.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.medact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/medact\\_childrecruitment\\_17-oct\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.medact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/medact_childrecruitment_17-oct_WEB.pdf)

Together echo our concerns regarding the evidence that the armed forces do not always offer a realistic representation of an armed forces career and the lack of compliance with OPAC in this matter. We welcome their valuable explanation of how guidance could be constructed, and the importance of the full participation of young people in decision-making.

We support Together's suggestion that data related to this issue should be 'published publicly and presented to Parliament', and perhaps collected by the armed forces rather than by schools or local authorities.

### **The Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Scotland**

The Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Scotland expressed their concern over this issue, and its importance to them as it directly affects Catholic schools. They note the evidence of imbalance in armed forces visits to schools. We share their concerns that parents should always be informed of input from outside agencies prior to the event and able to withdraw their child from activities conflicting with their faith and moral conscience, and add to this that children should also be able to withdraw their consent. We agree with the content of their submission.

### **Medact**

We agree with and support the Medact submission, and welcome their emphasis on the specific vulnerabilities of adolescents in all schools to making potentially ill-informed decisions and to peer pressure. This supports our request that national guidance be provided to all schools in Scotland to ensure balance around armed forces visits.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Scottish Branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)**

The submission from WILPF shares our concerns. While we respect WILPF's view that the military should provide no material to schools, or visit them, this is not the stated aim of our petition.

### **Eileen Cook**

We welcome the submission from Eileen Cook and regret that teachers' organisations have not responded to the Committee's request for views. Eileen Cook notes that while the armed forces readily use schools 'as recruitment grounds', other organisations with good educational materials such as the Scottish CND, lack opportunities to have their materials used in schools.

We suggest that guidance ensuring balance around armed forces visits to schools could include the recommendation that organisations offering educational materials

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<sup>2</sup>A former staff member of Medact now works at ForcesWatch.

about sustainable security measures are also invited to engage in schools.

### **Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC)**

The submission from SPTC is very welcome. SPTC are particularly concerned about the lack of sufficient parent and guardian consultation in all schools in Scotland around armed forces visits. The SPTC submission is a clear endorsement of the petition's requests for guidance, scrutiny and consultation around military visits, from a parental perspective.

### **Conor McAllister**

We welcome the detailed research undertaken by Conor McAllister, himself a veteran, which consists of details of his investigation into the legal aspects of armed forces policy within schools, the rights of the child and their wellbeing. He has consulted members of civil society, veterans, legal professionals and public bodies and notes that his investigation is ongoing.

We highlight the concern cited in this submission about the increased risks of mental health problems for young men in the armed forces, compared to the general population. Given that overall rates for suicide or PTSD in the armed forces are comparable with, or lower than, the general population, the evidence that those recruited particularly young are anomalies in this regard (for example, young men under 20 in the Army have a 64% increased rate of suicide than their matched cohorts in the general population), shows that personnel can be directly disadvantaged by their enlistment during minority. These health risks are significant and should form part of full information provided about armed forces careers when they are promoted in schools.

His submission explores the relationship between recruitment at a young age, leaving the service early and later difficulties in civilian life. Children in Scottish schools may end up being among these early service leavers, impacting their social mobility. Schools visited by the armed forces, along with career advisers, should be aware of these risks.

Conor McAllister points out that it would be unreasonable to expect the armed forces themselves to ensure fully balanced information given their recruitment goal, -and given regulations preventing military personnel from 'speaking out' about things that may concern them or be construed negatively. The onus is therefore on schools to ensure balance, and since this is evidently not always the case, national guidance is important.

### **Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR)**

SGR are concerned about the involvement of the military in STEM subjects in Scottish schools, and we welcome the unique perspective they bring to this discussion with their submission, as well as their calls for scrutiny around armed forces visits, the collection of data, and the right of children, parents and guardians to conscientiously object. We hope their specific concerns will be considered in the drafting of the STEM Education and Training Strategy for Scotland which was

recently consulted on by the Scottish Government.

## YSI

We welcome YSIs submission. We concur with their conclusions on the evidence submitted from local authorities and echo their call to move Scotland in line with international and national human rights bodies. We note their concern around the armed forces' promotion of hyper masculinity in presentations and would be interested to explore how this fits with efforts to reduce homophobic and transphobic bullying in Scottish schools.

### **New information regarding the armed forces and social mobility**

Combat Stress, a veteran's charity published a paper on 31 January 2017 This paper finds:

- Scottish veterans are at a greater risk of deprivation than those in the rest of the UK.
- Veterans who are most affected by deprivation are those who are youngest, who are Early Service Leavers, who have a lack of social support and who are Army veterans.
- There has been a 71% increase in referrals to Combat Stress in the last five years.

As early Service Leavers are among the veterans who are most affected by deprivation, it is evident that enlisting early often disrupts, rather than enhances, the social mobility of many young people. This chimes with other research showing that one-third of the minors who enlist in the UK army leave or are discharged before they complete training, having to find employment or re-enter education with a lack of qualifications due to the low standards of education provided with army training.<sup>3</sup> Research by the British Legion has found that the unemployment rate among working-age veterans is approximately twice the civilian rate; a lack of transferable, accredited qualifications acquired in service is a common complaint.

The Commissioner for Veterans in Scotland in November 2016 writes:

*'In preparing this report, I was surprised to discover the number of Service Leavers and veterans who still fail to find civilian employment because of their struggle to read, write and work with numbers. In many cases this can be attributed to some difficult years in school and often an overriding desire to escape the confines of their community and classroom at the earliest chance. For many, the Armed Forces – especially the Army infantry regiments with their lower academic entry requirements – have provided an attractive alternative with the obvious lure of travel, excitement, comradeship and a good salary. The disadvantages come later as individuals transition to civilian life and look for employment in a world that can often appear harsh and unforgiving.'*

And...

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.child-soldiers.org/shop/is-it-counterproductive-to>

*'I have had many conversations with veterans during the past year – both young and old – and have been struck by the number who recognise that their lack of formal qualifications has restricted employment opportunities and their subsequent earning power since leaving the Armed Forces. For some it has been a question of needing to improve basic literacy and numeracy skills. Others acknowledge the need for better academic or technical qualifications to widen their job options, strengthen CVs or enhance future promotion prospects.'*

Given the high number of those who enlist in minority who become Early Service Leavers, we ask the Committee to ensure that Scottish children are presented with full and balanced information around armed forces recruitment activities in schools, so that they are aware that a lack of qualifications may disadvantage them in later life.

### **Concluding comments**

We welcome the recognition in many of these submissions that this issue should be approached from a **child rights and welfare** perspective. We refer to our submission of 11 November 2016 for further discussion on this and on the legal requirement of schools and local authorities to act *in loco parentis* and safeguard the rights and wellbeing of children in their care.

We believe the evidence gathered shows there is a need for a clear and consistent national approach on this issue which could be achieved with some of the following steps:

- **Commission a Child Rights Impact Assessment on armed forces visits to schools in Scotland.**
- **Inquiry as to how existing policy and practice, such as that covering employer relations with schools under the Developing the Youth Workforce Strategy, can accommodate the scrutiny, guidance and consultation that the petition calls for, and to explore ways forward.**
- **Inquiry into armed forces visits to special schools and if this should be prohibited.**
- **Awareness raising amongst organisations involved in schools and school career activities about the issues surround armed forces recruitment.**
- **Involvement of young people, parents, teachers and others in drawing up guidelines.**
- **Commitment from the armed forces to make accessible good quality data that covers the range of ways in which they engage with young people within the education system to the public and The Scottish Parliament.**