

PE1603/HH

Petitioner submission

We thank the Committee for this opportunity to respond to the evidence given on 9 November 2017 by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) (Brigadier Paul Buttery), British Army (Major Deborah Scott), RAF (Wing Commander Ian Garnett) and Royal Navy (Commander Billy Adams).

In this submission we provide a summary response to the witness evidence and address individual points raised. We also provide our own [analysis of the Freedom of Information data provided by the MoD](#). Finally, we offer a number of next steps and recommendations to the Committee.

We remind the Committee that our petition asks for: a. information to the public on the frequency and number of armed forces visits to schools; b. guidance on how schools can create balance around armed forces' visits; c. the right of parents/guardians and pupils conscientiously to object by removing themselves from armed forces' visits.

Summary response to the witness evidence

- There remains a disparity in the definition of recruitment. While the armed forces claim recruitment is getting young people to sign a form, they acknowledged in their evidence that visits to schools constitute part of the recruitment “process”. We believe recruitment needs to be seen as a process, not an event.
- The new data provided by the MoD indicates that the issues discussed in the petition have continued to remain in Scotland.
- Examples of activities and materials used were not given for the Committee to judge for themselves about balance.
- At no point did the witnesses indicate that the reasonable requests of our petition would cause a disproportionate or negative effect on their existing or future relationships with schools in Scotland or recruitment numbers.
- Of particular concern is the current self-regulating approach and the lack of information to provide external oversight. This does not provide adequate safeguards for what is recognised by the UN and the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland as a child rights and welfare issue. The risk remains that the armed forces are given preferential access to the education system to market the armed forces without fully informing young people of the risks, legal obligations and realities.
- Ensuring greater oversight, guidance, and consultation around armed forces visits to schools in Scotland should not affect balanced and appropriate activities of the services in schools but would provide a clear framework in which they would operate and to which education authorities, schools, parents and students could refer.
- Some of the evidence contradicts the experience of others, and other evidence previously obtained.

Detailed points

The recruitment agenda behind military visits to schools

We reiterate our concerns about the claim that the armed forces do not recruit in schools, as stated by the witnesses. This is justified by defining recruitment as the final act of signing up.

This very limited definition denies the importance of the role that armed forces activities in schools play in recruitment. Defence reports have stated that recruitment is the main driver behind visits to schools, as well as providing positive information to 'influence future opinion formers'.¹ 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'.² In 2007 the MoD acknowledged concern in their *Engagement With UK Schools* review that recruiting activities, 'appeared to be alienating some teachers and preventing Defence messages reaching some students... *Thus some recruiters package their work as citizenship programmes rather than pure recruiting.*' (emphasis added)

The witnesses referred to outreach teams having awareness-raising and educational, as well as recruiting, functions. These 'double-hatted' roles suggest that raising awareness and recruitment are very closely linked, and perhaps indivisible. We also know that the MoD themselves understand recruitment as a process that starts with sparking an interest in a young person at an early age. The mention by Wing Commander Garnett that the psychology of recruitment understands that, 'it takes three contacts before a person looks at a particular job or career', suggests a continuum between raising awareness and other outreach activities, and recruitment. Certainly the 5-day Insight courses mentioned by Major Scott, for pupils who have shown an interest in a career in the Army is some way along the recruitment process.

Wing Commander Garnett mentioned that previous recruiting history gave a school priority for subsequent visits, indicating the recruiting objective is the primary aim.

Each witness described a large array of ways in which their service is involved in schools – careers activities, STEM and other curriculum activities, student development, insight into Army life courses, supporting groups of pupils etc. Major Scott stated that the Army's aim, is 'to support all schools, whether independent, state sector or special needs and regardless of postcode area.' The question is why such a massive remit would be given to an organisation whose primary purpose is defence rather than educational, if no recruitment outcome was expected. A further question may be whether the aim of the armed forces to 'support all schools' is appropriate.

1 See the following for a full discussion:

https://www.forceswatch.net/sites/default/files/ForcesWatch_recruitment_in_schools_evidence_briefing_May2015.pdf

2 Army email response to FOI request, 3 July 2015.

Instigation of visits

While the armed forces state that they only go to schools on request, the witnesses acknowledged that each service contacts all schools in Scotland annually and ensures each school has up-to-date information available to pupils. Communication about potential visits is therefore not initiated by schools but by the services cold calling.

Balance and realistic representation

Despite assurances from the witnesses, we remain concerned that the armed forces are provided with significant opportunities to market their careers, and their operations, in a way that is both open to partial representation of reality, and not balanced by alternative opinions. Providing the balance of politics and opinion within activities taking place in school is vital in order for schools to fulfil responsibilities towards duty of care and fostering critical awareness.

We would also consider that it is very difficult to create balance in some of the activities that the armed forces undertake in schools. The significant involvement of the armed forces in some schools is itself an endorsement by the school, which creates problems of balance.

Marketing

The Convenor recalled 'adverts where it was all about skiing' at a time when 'people were being deployed to some quite difficult circumstances', and asked if the armed forces had changed their approach to favour greater honesty and transparency. Brigadier Buttery assured the Committee that the recruiting process is 'honest and open and transparent' and presentations 'do not hide or shy away from what we might ultimately be required to do on behalf of the nation. That is not glossed over, glamourised or understated in any way whatsoever.'

Brigadier Buttery stated that their approach to engagement had 'matured', particularly since 2014, although the suggestion was that it is now better organised, not that the marketing of careers is no longer the main focus. His assessment in relation to balance seemed to be relying on having watched the presentational video himself. A video showing the diverse range of opportunities, including combat, does not in itself constitute balance or encourage consideration of the concerns involved in a career that has unique risks attached to it.

Contrary to Brigadier Buttery, we consider that references to skiing and other adventurous sporting activities should be minimised. They may be part of the experience of being in the armed forces but they are not the main component of a military career or its focus, and you do not have to join the military to do them. Drawing attention to them is a recruitment tactic appealing to adolescent decision-making tendencies wherein teenagers are drawn to adventure and stimulation, and take a short-term view.

Michelle Ballantyne MSP referred to the sense of belonging people have in the military and how this may drive a decision to enlist. Indeed this forms part of the current Army recruitment strategy. We are concerned that this marketing is based on what recruits are

seeking rather than what the experience of being in the armed forces actually offers.³ It is a powerful recruiting message, which may disproportionately appeal to young and vulnerable recruits and should not be the basis of recruitment activities in schools.

Contrary evidence

Past evidence, including presentation material and anecdotal accounts, suggests that armed forces careers have often been presented in a sanitised or glamourised way, with some concern that this approach was standard.⁴ We have made a FOI request for current presentation materials, but this has not been responded to. Recent instances of lack of balance include:

- The Scottish Youth Parliament 2016 survey results concluded: 'Of the focus group participants who had experienced armed forces visits to schools, only one had experienced a presentation that highlighted possible negative consequences of a career in the Army as well as the positive.... The presenter completely sidestepped a question someone had about PTSD.'
- Skills Development Scotland's *My World of Work* website mentions some of the risks and legal restrictions, but with serious omissions. Some sections refer to 'mental, physical and emotional challenges' but others, such as the Army Soldier page does not. There is no detail or indication of the severity of the risk.

We urge the Committee to request to see materials currently used in schools in order to assess if they present the armed forces in a realistic and unsanitised way.

'Checks and balances'

Brigadier Buttery also suggested that there are 'checks and balances along the way' which will bring the risks associated with an armed forces career to a potential recruit's attention. Such balance must be contained within school activities with no reliance upon information being encountered further down the line, particularly as this additional information may not be adequate (e.g. legal obligations are not contained in brochures and other recruitment materials).

Lack of balance compromises a school's responsibility for duty of care and fostering critical thinking. If a presentation takes place within a school, which will give it an extra sense of authority, then that presentation must either contain the necessary balance or be balanced by additional material. Research presented in the Medact report on *The Recruitment of Children by the UK Armed Forces* shows how military recruitment marketing takes advantage of adolescent cognitive and psychosocial vulnerabilities. Whatever the nature of other information that comes to them later on, it may be too late to override an early influence with more factual information.

3 <https://www.forceswatch.net/news/belonging>

4 Recruiting officers told not to warn would-be soldiers about true horrors of Army life, *Daily Record*, 9/11/2012, <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/recruiting-officers-told-not-to-warn-1426512>

Education about conflict

The issue of balance is not just important for potential recruits. Informing young people as a whole about the realities of conflict for all those involved is an important part of education for citizenship, peace and human rights. This should not be skewed by the input of the military without balance from other perspectives.

Diversity

The armed forces are concerned to attract recruits from diverse communities and to appeal to young people who are not in traditional white, male and heterosexual demographic groups. Indeed, the new Army recruitment campaign works hard to portray itself as a diverse and inclusive employer. However, this does not mean that this is the experience of all recruits or that the Army lives up to their stated standards.⁵ Bullying and sexual harassment in the armed forces and cadets is still a considerable concern. Recent examples include the forthcoming court martial of 17 instructors from Army Foundation College Harrogate, a training establishment for under-18s; and the uncovering of the extent of historical and current sexual abuse, and its cover up, within the cadet forces by Panorama in July 2017.

Despite Brigadier Buttery's assurance that damaging stereotypical comments would no longer happen, evidence from the Scottish Youth Parliament focus group in 2016 suggests that traditional ideas of masculinity still prevail. It is clear that, despite the armed forces stated values of diversity and inclusivity, such attitudes remain heavily associated with military life.

New data

Our analysis of the FOI data provided by the MoD to the Committee is shown in the appendix to this submission. Our analysis is based on one year of data in order to make it comparable with our earlier report. Therefore, the figures are a subset of those already presented to the Committee.

The headline findings are:

- 770 visits were made by the armed forces to schools in Scotland between April 16 and March 17, including a small number to primary schools and special schools.
- The Army made 58% of all visits.
- 68% of state secondary schools are visited in one year, some many times.
- Three-quarters (75.5%) of visits are promoting a career in the armed forces.
- State schools are visited far more than independent schools, even taking into account that they are far larger in number.

5 An Inclusive, Emotionally Supportive British Army? Not Yet, *Huffington Post*, 11/01/2018, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/an-inclusive-emotionally-supportive-british-army-not-yet_uk_5a5725aee4b03bc4d03e2416

Changes over time

Comparing the figures to those in our earlier report from 2010-12, we see that the annual number of visits is similar. One significant difference is that a higher proportion of visits are identifiable as careers-related in the recent data – 75% rather than 35% during 2010-12. This may be a result of changes in how visits are recorded as well as changes in emphasis on what is provided to schools.

Frequently visited schools

Our analysis shows that 47 schools were visited 5 or more times within the year and four schools were visited more than 10 times.

Relationship to deprivation

State schools are visited far more than independent schools (even taking into account that they are far larger in number). Only 27 (3.5%) of visits were made to independent schools. This is an indication that, while the armed forces may not actively target schools in areas of deprivation, more emphasis is put on schools with certain demographics.

The location of Armed Forces Careers Offices and bases will influence which areas and schools are most visited, as will established relationships with individual schools and a significant armed forces presence within the community. This is confirmed by evidence from the witnesses.

When considering links between deprivation and those students of most interest to armed forces recruiters, it is also important to take account of the differing backgrounds of, and available opportunities for, students *within* a school. Evidence suggests that the armed forces present themselves as an option for those with lower attainment levels.

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths)

The armed forces are active in the provision of free STEM resources to schools, including partnerships with other providers. Two particular concerns arise: STEM activities occur with pupils across a wider age range, including in primary school. We consider that this curriculum-based engagement should not be happening with primary and younger secondary age groups. We also note that, regarding the STEM roadshow, it was not mentioned that the 'third party', with the RAF and Navy, is BAE Systems, the third largest arms company in the world. We refer the Committee to a recent example of parental concern about this.⁶ We also refer to the submission made by Scientists for Global Responsibility regarding ethical concerns that this raises.

Guidance to armed forces personnel going into schools and evaluation

6 Parents' fury as defence giant BAE delivers pupil workshop, *The National*, 16/09/2017, http://www.thenational.scot/news/15539169.Parents__fury_as_defence_giant_BAE_delivers_pupil_workshop/

It is unclear what guidance the forces give their own staff on how to conduct activities in schools. Based on Major Scott's response, there appears to be no method of collecting feedback after the activities have taken place. The assessment of whether a visit is 'appropriate' seems to only consider if the visit is a good use of the Army's time.

It may be instructive here to consider comparable industries and contexts. For example, guidance from the General Medical Council is used to curb the promotion of certain products within medical education by the pharmaceutical industry. In schools, the unchallenged promotion by a company of their product which may have risks attached to it such as fast food, would be considered unacceptable.

Primary schools

Witnesses confirmed that visits are made to primary schools although it was suggested that they are not always recorded because they are arranged through other, more familial or community-based, channels. The 'double-hatted' nature of these staff attending primary schools is particularly problematical, and stresses the importance of having full transparency data.

Special schools

Visits to special schools were not mentioned during the evidence session. Our analysis shows that three visits were made to special schools within one year. While this is a small number, the pupils at these schools are likely to have particular vulnerabilities that makes these visits unacceptable.

Equipment

A mention was made of 'equipment' being brought into schools, but it is not clear if weapons and military vehicles are included in this. We consider the use of military hardware to spark an interest in young people is completely inappropriate within the school environment as it is likely to override any attempts to create a balanced discussion. With the attempts of schools and other authorities to stop young people carrying weapons and to inform them about the dangers, it is vital that no excitement or undue interest in military hardware is created by armed forces activities with schools.

We suggest any equipment, including weapons, brought into schools should be detailed in transparency data available to the public, and parents, guardians and pupils are fully informed beforehand.

Going further, we consider that education authorities recommend to schools that no weapons or military hardware are brought into schools. The example of Argyll and Bute Council's attempt to prohibit weapons being shown to primary schools children during a visit, and the subsequent criticism they faced (including from some of the councillors) indicates that firm guidance around this would be useful and welcome.⁷

'Getting the right person'

⁷ Outcry as marines banned from taking guns on annual school visit, *Herald Scotland*, 24/09/2017, http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15553376.Outcry_as_marines_banned_from_taking_guns_on_annual_school_visit/

The MoD agreed with a Committee member that the quality of recruits is more important than high numbers. Not only does this look at the issue from the perspective of the needs of the armed forces, but the detail shows a different picture.

While Wing Commander Garnett stated the average age of RAF recruits is increasing, the Army still relies on recruiting at a young age. Over one third of recruits into the UK Army are under 18. Recruits into the Army are more likely to be 16 at enlistment than any other age.⁸ The UK is the only country in Europe and the only major military power to recruit at 16.⁹

One third of under-18 year olds who enlist into the Army leave or are discharged before completing training.¹⁰ Almost half of those who join the Army at 16 have left it within four years. Around one quarter of adult recruits leave early.¹¹ This suggests that a significant number of recruits into the Army, particularly those who are very young, are not the 'right people' and leave early, damaging their prospects at a time when most young people are staying in full-time education.

Young ex-soldiers are more likely than their civilian counterparts to be unemployed or, if employed, are less likely to find their previous job experiences useful.¹² More effort should be made to ensure that those who enlist are fully informed so that they will be more likely to stay through training and have a successful Army career.

Qualifications and career trajectory

There is a widely-held perception that the armed forces can provide a way out of disadvantage for young people; indeed this idea is a dominant part of armed forces marketing. While this can happen, it is not the experience of many of young people who join up, who can find that, for a variety of reasons, their life chances are negatively affected.¹³ The average career length for 'other ranks' is only around 8-10 years.¹⁴

Brigadier Buttery emphasised 'the diverse range of opportunities' in the armed forces, including apprenticeships. There are a number of concerns relating to education and apprenticeships in the armed forces:

- Many recruits are enrolled on 'Public Services' apprenticeships which have little value.¹⁵

8 MoD, UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics

9 Child Soldiers International, *The British armed forces: Why raising the recruitment age would benefit everyone*, 2016

10 Child Soldiers International, 'Is it Counter productive to Enlist Minors into the Army?' *RUSI Journal*, December 2016, <https://www.child-soldiers.org/shop/is-it-counterproductive-to>

11 See 10.

12 See 9.

13 *Does the military give young people a 'leg up'? The armed forces and social mobility*, ForcesWatch, 2017

14 *One Step Forward*, ForcesWatch, 2013

15 Child Soldiers International, *Memorandum of the Education Select Committee Inquiry on The quality of apprenticeships and skills training*, January 2018, available on request.

- For the youngest recruits, the opportunity to join a trade is limited as recruits are channelled towards front line combat roles.¹⁶
- For under-18s, the education provided within the armed forces is not comparable to civilian education.¹⁷

Working with 'troubled pupils'

There is also a widely-held perception that the military rescues young people at risk of going down a pathway filled with crime and violence. This was echoed by the Major Scott's reference to 'developing team-building skills for some troubled pupils at the school' and providing 'support to the youth advantage outreach programme in support of the violence reduction unit.' Whether the Army are the most appropriate institution for providing support to troubled pupils, particularly given their recruitment agenda, is a question that should be asked.

Military service does not necessarily reduce the likelihood of offending in the long-term. A study in 2013 found that while enlistees were less likely to commit crime in general after enlistment, they were more likely to commit violent and sexual offences. After deployment, the risk is doubled relative to the pre-enlistment offending rate.¹⁸ Over 2,500 veterans entered the prison system last year, with experts warning that 'a disproportionate number were being jailed for serious violence and sexual offences.' These offences can be connected with service-related alcohol abuse and PTSD, to which those recruited as children and who have experiences of childhood adversity are most prone.

Next steps and recommendations the Committee may consider

The evidence given by the witnesses has not reassured us that the interests of young people are put before the interests of the armed forces during their activities in schools. This is not to say that there is no benefit to young people, but that there is a lack of various forms of balance (with other employers, with other perspectives, with wider discussion about armed forces careers and with what is appropriate for particular groups of pupils) and this allows a marketing approach to dominate rather than one more appropriate to schools.

We consider that more information on certain questions is required and that materials that are currently used need to be made available.

16 Instructions to recruiters state that recruits aged between 16 and 16½ must be given jobs in combat roles (or join as drivers in the logistics corps) and that those under 16¼ must only be given combat roles. See 9.

17 See 15.

18 D. MacManus, K. Dean, M. Jones, et al., 'Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan: a data linkage cohort study', *The Lancet*, 2013, Vol. 381.

We also reiterate our previous recommendations that the Committee may want to consider as next steps:

- Commission a Child Rights Impact Assessment on armed forces visits to schools in Scotland.
- Conduct an 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.
- Awareness raising amongst organisations involved in schools and school career activities about the issues surround armed forces recruitment – including dissemination of the Medact report on the health impacts of early enlistment, and from the charity Combat Stress on the long-term impacts of military service. We remind the Committee that the Deputy First Minister agreed that he would expect that careers advice would ‘highlight the issues that have been raised by Medact and Combat Stress around the long-term consequences of being in the armed forces’.
- Involvement of young people, parents, teachers and others in drawing up guidance and a consultation framework.
- Measurable commitments from the armed forces around the issues highlighted, including age groups, primary schools, special schools, balance and appropriate messaging.
- Measurable 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.
- Guidance for schools on creating balance to visits which can highlight the large range of education focused peace building organisations who provide school materials or visits on themes as wide ranging as the holocaust and racism, to peer mediation and mindfulness.