



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01603

Name of petitioner

Mairi Campbell-Jack and Douglas Beattie on behalf of Quaker in Scotland & Forces Watch

Petition title

Ensuring greater scrutiny, guidance and consultation on armed forces visits to schools in Scotland

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that:

- 1.Guidance is provided on how visits to schools by the armed forces should be conducted so that information presented to children takes account of the unique nature of armed forces careers, ensures political balance, and offers a realistic representation of the role of the armed forces and what a career in the armed forces involves.
- 2.Information is collected to enable public monitoring of the number and location of visits, the purpose and content of visits, and comparison with the number of visits by other employers.
- 3.Parents/guardians are consulted as to whether they are happy for their child to take part in armed forces activities at school.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

We have raised these issues and our concerns with Scottish education authorities at government and local level, and with other education bodies and various MSPs. The responses from the Scottish Government and local authorities show there is a lack of clarity regarding the nature of armed forces visits to schools, and who is responsible for overseeing them, which makes it impossible for our concerns to be addressed.

Education Scotland told us that there was no government policy or guidelines regarding armed forces visits to schools, as this is for local authorities to decide. They also told us that they "provide support for teachers, and identify and share good practice...it is up to the school, working with its local authority, to decide how political discussions will take place with learners. Our political literacy resource considers the sensitive handling of controversial issues." However, our research has found that this provision for balanced discussion is inadequate.

We made Freedom of Information requests to all 32 local authorities, asking for information on their stance on armed forces visits to their schools, on how they ensure students encounter a balance of views during the visits, and on whether parents/guardians are always consulted on whether they are happy for their child to take part in the visit. 27 local authorities responded, 26 acknowledging that the armed

forces visited schools in their area. None had a specific policy on the visits; many said it was down to schools or headteachers to develop their own. Several local authorities stated or implied that the visits had no recruitment or political element. Few provided any detail on how their schools ensured that students encounter a balance of views. Only Glasgow City claims to issue its schools with guidance, and this guidance is in fact very generic, simply stating "The public expects all employees to carry out their duties in a politically neutral way." Given that our research clearly demonstrates the recruitment agenda behind the visits, the political nature of some of the engagement, and that students are not always encountering a balance of views on the armed forces, this vagueness and inconsistency of practice is unacceptable. Around a third of the local authorities either do not consult parents/guardians about the visits, or leave this to headteachers' discretion, whereas given the concerns that the visits raise, parents/guardians must always be consulted.

Our correspondence with MSPs from a variety of parties, and with the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, and the National Union of Students Scotland, revealed substantial concern on the issues. One MSP, and the first two bodies, have publically stated their concerns, but the Scottish Government and local authorities have not acted on them.

Lastly, individual Quakers in Scotland sympathetic to our petition have written to various local authorities and schools to raise our concerns, with mixed responses.

Petition background information

EVIDENCE OF CONCERN

Concern in Scotland among teachers, students, parents and others regarding the nature of armed forces visits to schools in Scotland is demonstrated by:

- * The Educational Institute of Scotland has opposed armed forces recruitment in schools and colleges since 2007, and sponsored ForcesWatch's report on the issue in 2014.

- * The National Union of Students Scotland decided in 2015 to oppose armed forces recruitment in colleges and universities.

- * The Scottish Parents Teacher Council worry that students are encountering a sanitised image of the armed forces, and state that parents must be consulted about the visits.

In 2015, the Welsh Government acknowledged concerns with armed forces visits to schools in Wales and accepted recommendations to increase scrutiny of the visits, ensure schools receive guidance on how to facilitate the visits in a balanced way, and widen the range of employers making visits.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

There are five key areas of concern regarding armed forces visits to schools:

- * Level and distribution of the visits
- * Types of activity – careers awareness or recruitment?
- * Students aren't always encountering a balance of views on the armed forces
- * Insufficient consultation with parents/guardians; and
- * Lack of transparency

1. LEVEL AND DISTRIBUTION OF ARMED FORCES VISITS TO SCHOOLS IN SCOTLAND

Number of visits

State secondary schools in Scotland receive a high number of visits from the armed forces with some schools and areas visited disproportionately. The number of visits has increased significantly since 2003. Schools in Scotland receive more visits than schools in England. Some Scottish primary schools and nurseries are also visited.

A ForcesWatch report, analysing data for the 2010-11 and 2011-12 academic years, found that 83% of state secondary schools in Scotland were visited by one of the armed

forces at least once. 1455 visits were made to 303 Scottish state secondary schools, of which 42% were made by the Army, 31% by the Navy and 27% by the RAF, equating to an average of two visits per year for every school. Many schools were visited numerous times; 31 state secondary schools were visited 10 or more times (six were visited over 20 times, and two were visited 31 times). By comparison, visits were only made to 50% of independent secondary schools. All the Army's visits were made to state schools.

Available data shows that around 20 visits were made by the Army to Scottish primary schools between 2008-10 and eight between 2011-12. Between 2010-11 the Navy recorded six visits but it now states that information on visits to primary schools is no longer recorded. Despite Ministry of Defence claims that they do not do careers activities in primary schools, some of these visits were made by careers advisors.

Change in number of visits over time

The available data indicates that the number of visits to Scotland schools has risen significantly in recent years. A Freedom of Information request in 2006 revealed that fewer than 15 school visits were recorded by the Army in 2003-4, as opposed to around 140 in 2005-6. This rose to 324 in 2010-11, and 292 in 2011-12. Less data is available for Navy and RAF visits, but they are known to have made 237 and 210 visits respectively in 2010-11, and 210 and 182 visits respectively in 2011-12.

Subsequent information from the Ministry of Defence suggests some decline in the number of visits from 2012: figures for 2014-15 suggest between 500-600 armed forces visits to secondary level schools and colleges across Scotland. However, a reliable trend is difficult to determine due to inconsistencies and unreliability of the data and it has not been possible to get current data on individual visits. In any case, the figures still show a significant increase in the number of visits since 2003.

Distribution of visits

Although Scotland only comprises 8.4% of the UK population, Ministry of Defence data for 2011-12 shows that visits to Scottish schools and colleges represented 11.2% of total UK visits.

Within Scotland, certain types of school and those in certain areas are visited more frequently. Half of Scottish local authorities had armed forces visits to all - or almost all - of their state secondary schools. Schools in Edinburgh, Fife, North Lanarkshire, Angus, Dumfries & Galloway, and Perth & Kinross received the highest number of visits.

Relationship with deprivation

There are concerns that the armed forces may be attempting to target students from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Education Scotland said in 2015 that the Ministry of Defence had requested school deprivation data, following an earlier attempt to obtain a database of sensitive student information for England in order to better-target Army recruitment. In 2013 the Army stated that its schools careers advice, "is often more tailored and directed to those at risk of disengaging with education or work, or those who struggle academically".

While comparison with Scottish deprivation indicators suggests that there is not a straightforward link between number of visits and levels of deprivation, this could be explained by a number of factors. It is possible that the high number of visits overall makes prioritisation between Scottish schools on socio-economic grounds less important. The location of armed forces careers offices is significant with the majority of these are located in the most urban parts of Scotland. A further factor is the relationship that the armed forces have built with individual schools.

Further research is needed to establish whether the visits occur more frequently in schools with a high level of disadvantage.

Comparison with other employers

The armed forces make more visits to schools in Scotland than other public sector employers, despite Ministry of Defence claims that, "Similar contributions to schools are made by the police, fire, ambulance and other emergency services". The Scottish Ambulance Service states that visits to schools are not part of their core service (with

the exception of emergency-related training for teachers), and that any visits are organised by staff on a purely voluntary basis. Police Scotland only recorded around 60 educational visits to schools and colleges for the academic year 2012-2013. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service do often visit schools for presentations and workshops, but these visits mainly relate to fire safety; only a small proportion are to promote a career in the fire service. In addition, as the Army itself has acknowledged, the scale of risk - and the ethical dilemmas - faced by the armed forces distinguish the armed forces from the emergency services.

2. TYPES OF ACTIVITY – CAREERS AWARENESS OR RECRUITMENT?

Analysis by ForcesWatch indicates that many visits are explicitly related to promoting armed forces careers, while other visits are likely to contain promotional opportunities.

In 2010-12, careers-related activities accounted for over one-third (35%) of all visits. These activities will actively promote the armed forces as a career option. Curriculum-related visits accounted for 20% of all visits. Activities that focus on the development of the students such as team building, leadership, interview techniques, and exercise and fitness accounted for 42% of all visits.

The curriculum activities use the armed forces as the subject matter and the development activities are focused on skills that are needed for armed forces employment. The activities provide the armed forces with further promotional opportunities: for example, the Army's Personal Development Activity aims "to develop leadership, teamwork, confidence, and communication skills in them – whilst giving them the opportunity to speak to soldiers and officers about the opportunities available in a career in the Army."

Despite this significant emphasis on the promotion of armed forces careers, the Ministry of Defence and armed forces state that they do not recruit in schools. They employ a narrow definition of recruitment as the final act of 'signing-up', rather than as a process that takes place over a period of time, and instead refer to what the armed forces do as 'careers advice/awareness'.

There are a number of sources showing that visits to schools are viewed as an important part of armed forces recruitment, including:

- * The MoD's Youth Engagement Review (2011)
- * The MoD's Engagement with UK Schools document (2007)
- * The terms of the schools strategy that Capita is contracted to implement (Capita has conducted recruitment for the Army since 2012)
- * The House of Common Defence Select Committee's report on Recruitment and Retention (2008)

The 2007 MoD document states: 'Our overall rationale for engaging with schools is to encourage good citizenship, provide an environment which raises awareness of the MOD and Armed Forces among young people, provide positive information to influence future opinion formers, and to enable recruiters to access the school environments...In gross numerical terms the main driver is recruitment...There are many other reasons given for visits but many of these have implicit careers links and any positive image created by an engagement is likely to have a positive effect in the recruiting environment.' (our emphasis)

3. LACK OF BALANCE

Scottish legislation does not specify a legal requirement for schools to ensure a balance of views when looking at a 'political' issue at school. However, this expectation has been clearly outlined by the Scottish Government, Scottish political parties, local authorities, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, and Scottish teachers' unions.

However, while these bodies state that teachers must ensure political balance as a matter of course, this may not always be easy to do when an outside provider, especially one with the authority of a member of the armed forces, is running an activity.

Roles in the armed forces carry unique risks, legal restrictions and ethical questions in respect of the risks of injury or death, restrictive military law, the length of service to

which they must commit. We believe that the unique nature of a career in the armed forces must be reflected explicitly in guidance given to schools, and that students must encounter a balance of information on the reality of a career in the forces and a range of views on military action.

The Welsh Assembly Petitions Committee report commented on armed forces visits to schools from the perspective of unique risk, stating: “inviting the armed forces into schools should perhaps be treated with considerably more care than other potential employers...It would be naïve to believe that in visiting schools the forces have no interest in projecting themselves as providing interesting and accessible career opportunities...Schools should...be concerned to ensure that the often very necessary work of the armed forces is not overly glamorised and that the risks are clearly explained...schools [in Wales] would welcome further guidance on inviting the armed forces into schools to ensure that visits are balanced and appropriate.”

There is a growing body of evidence that young recruits, particularly those who join before they turn 18, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are subject to higher health risks and poorer long-term outcomes than older recruits. Members of the armed forces are also subject to uniquely restrictive military law. Furthermore, they can face major ethical dilemmas; the Welsh Assembly Petitions Committee noted that, “as a function of their employment they may need to harm or kill other human beings.” The public health charity Medact is currently looking at the long-term health impacts of recruiting adolescents into the UK armed forces, including the vulnerability of adolescents regarding decision-making and risk-taking.

Anecdotal evidence from armed forces personnel who have visited schools suggest a realistic picture of military life was not generally presented. For example, one former soldier who conducted Army visits to schools said in 2007 that: “The recruiters tried to sell the Army basically by using weapons...[the students would] think it was brilliant. The recruiters...sell the Army by saying ‘You’d be able to get these – I don’t know – driving courses, these HGV courses, basically all good stuff that you can get in civilian life, but they say ‘it’s all free, in the Army’...In my view no, it weren’t an honest approach. I think it’s wrong, the way that it is put over to young children”. An Army schools presentation powerpoint obtained by Freedom of Information request does not explicitly mention the risks, legal restrictions or ethical dilemmas faced in the Army. Some of the photos show weaponry and combat, but in a sanitised way.

An additional concern is that the armed forces have used their curriculum materials in England to justify certain positions on politically-controversial issues, including the UK’s possession of nuclear weapons, the Iraq war, and their recruitment of minors. In addition, we would argue that the promotion of military approaches to resolving conflict is in itself political. We are keen to see that this approach is not replicated in Scotland.

4. INSUFFICIENT CONSULTATION WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS

In 2006, the head of the Scottish Parents Teacher Council said of armed forces visits to schools in Scotland: “There has to be consultation with parents about this, particularly if schools are suddenly allowing a big increase in the number of visits from the army.” The SPTC confirmed in 2015 that their stance remains the same. However, local authorities have confirmed to us that schools do not always consult with parents before the visits.

Parental consultation and consent for each activity is important to ensure that the views of parents in respect of the promotion of military careers are reflected and as parents must be able to have a say in issues which may affect the health and wellbeing of their children.

5. LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

There is limited data on armed forces visits to schools and there are shortcomings in the quality and consistency of the available data. Data on armed forces visits to schools in Scotland is not routinely published, and instead has to be obtained via Freedom of Information requests and Westminster Parliamentary Questions.

Data obtained by ForcesWatch on individual visits is not consistent with two sets of data obtained separately, which also differed from each other. There was a further

aggregation of data for Scotland and Northern Ireland making it difficult to assess the trend in the number of visits in Scotland. The Ministry of Defence state that disaggregation would have been at 'disproportionate cost'. They also note that some data was lost during shifts to computerised record-keeping, that there had been difficulties identifying visits to schools within their data, and that some data was 'incomplete'. In response to a Freedom of Information request for 2012-13 data, the Army stated that it did, "not have confidence in the consistency or completeness of individual school data for the period in question."

2010-15 figures for total visits by service and part of the UK show major fluctuations over the period, including for Scotland, with an overall decline up to 2014-15. The Ministry of Defence state this decline was due to 'a range of factors', including, 'a more focused approach to engagement through the Army in Education programme' and the RAF 'connect[ing] with pupils mainly through social media and marketing' (with a return in 2015 to 'personal contact and enhanced schools visits'). Given the qualifications about the data and its inconsistencies with other datasets, it is unclear how substantial this apparent decline in visits to schools is.

CONCLUSION

While bodies representing teachers, students and parents in Scotland are concerned about armed forces visits to schools, these concerns are not adequately acknowledged - or sufficiently addressed - by the Scottish Government or local authorities.

Furthermore, there is a lack of clarity as to who is responsible for overseeing armed forces visits to schools in Scotland; the Scottish Government, the armed forces, and ADES claim it is local authorities, but many local authorities say it is the responsibility of individual schools or headteachers. As employers become more involved in schools, safeguards are needed to ensure that greater access is not being given to those, such as the armed forces, who are well-funded and have pressing recruitment needs.

The Welsh Assembly has already investigated the issue in Wales, with the Welsh Government accepting recommendations to increase scrutiny of the visits, ensure schools receive guidance on how to facilitate the visits in a balanced way, and widen the range of employers making visits. A similar investigation and outcomes is much-needed in Scotland.

For sources and more detail on all aspects of the petition, go to <http://forceswatch.net/content/scottish-parliament-petition>.

Unique web address

<http://ww3.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/armedforcesvisitsstoschools>

Related information for petition

ForcesWatch scrutinises UK armed forces recruitment practices, advocating changes to better serve the interests of young people, and challenge efforts to increase the military's influence in civilian society, particularly within the education system.

<http://www.forceswatch.net>

Quakers, who have witnessed against war and worked for peace since the seventeenth century, are making a stand against the increasing militarisation of British society in recent years. Quakers in Scotland have been specifically concerned with preventing an increase of this militarisation within Scotland's schools and encouraging the development of peace education and work on conflict resolution.

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

20 / 03 / 2016

Comments to stimulate online discussion

The available data shows that the armed forces make a high number of visits to schools in Scotland and that this is higher, per head of population, than for England. Some schools and some areas are visited a lot more than others.

* Are the armed forces making too many visits to secondary schools in Scotland?

* Recruitment is a key reason for the visits. Is the promotion of armed forces careers in schools acceptable?

* Parents and guardians are not always consulted in advance about the visits; should they be?

* There is evidence that the visits often give students a sanitised and glamourised view of the armed forces, rather than thoroughly exploring the unique risks, legal restrictions and ethical dilemmas. Should specific guidance be issued to local authorities and schools on how visits can be used to explore the armed forces in a balanced way?

* The Welsh Assembly Petitions Committee has investigated armed forces visits to schools in Wales, and made three recommendations to the Welsh Government to increase transparency and balance, all of which were accepted. Should Scotland now do the same?