



Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE01603](#)

Main Petitioner: Mairi Campbell-Jack and Douglas Beattie on behalf of Quaker in Scotland and Forces Watch.

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

Calls on the 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.

Background

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) say that they do not recruit to the armed forces in schools (i.e. they do not 'sign people up'). Rather, the purpose of school visits is to provide information about what a career in the armed forces involves. For example, the [army website details](#) how they can provide workshops, presentations and curriculum support.

Information at school about careers in the armed forces would be provided within the general framework of Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG). This is the responsibility of schools, local authorities and Skills Development Scotland. Services to school pupils from SDS include one-to-one careers coaching support, facilitated group sessions, drop in sessions, and supported access to [MyWoW](#) (my world of work). MyWoW contains information on a large range of careers. For example, its 'top line' [description of a career in the army](#) is:

"You would be sent to fight, protect and rescue people in dangerous situations and disaster zones at home and abroad."

Education Scotland has created a new [Standard for Career Education](#) which is intended to improve young people's ability to make informed decisions about future pathways. In addition, all secondary schools are also expected to develop partnerships with employers by 2018/19 and [guidance](#) has been issued on this. These documents provide general information rather than discuss specific careers.

Link to deprivation

The petitioners are concerned that schools in deprived areas are being targeted although they say that there is, "not a straightforward link between number of visits and levels of deprivation" and suggest further research is needed. [Press reports](#) have claimed that visits are more likely at affluent schools.

Number of visits to schools

There have been a number of FOI requests about armed forces visits to schools. Asked about army visits to Scottish schools, the MoD stated:

"As part of the Army in Education outreach programme, the Army has continued to maintain a presence in educational establishments, with the aim of providing advice to young people in academic Year 9 and above on careers in the Army. Activities include careers presentations; curriculum support activities (such as Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics, preparation for the world of work, mock interviews, and human rights presentations); attendance at Careers Fairs, and Personal Development Activities. The Army does not recruit in schools. The Army only visits educational establishments when specifically invited to do so."

The names of schools and purpose of visit are listed in the reply at: https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/army_school_recruitment

Welsh Assembly Petition

In 2015, the Welsh Assembly's petitions committee [published a report](#) on armed forces visits to schools. This recommended:

- further research on whether schools in deprived areas receive more visits
- that guidance should be produced on Careers and Curriculum take account of the unique nature of armed forces careers
- that the government consider how a diverse range of employers can be encouraged to visit schools

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has (UN Committee) recommended that the age of joining the armed forces be raised to 18. (See [concluding observations on optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict](#)).

In May this year the UN Committee is due to consider the fifth report on the UK's implementation of the UNCRC. Prior to the hearing, the UK [provided the following information](#) on the recruitment of under 18's to the armed forces:

“Increasing the number of personnel recruited prior to their 18th birthday is one of the many measures the Army Board endorsed to alleviate the risk of undermanning. [...] The UK Government takes duty of care towards all recruits seriously, in particular for those under 18. All recruits aged under 18 receive key skills education in literacy and numeracy, should they need it, and are enrolled onto apprenticeships. Effective and independently verified safeguards are in place.”

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government sets the general framework for careers advice, mainly through the implementation of [Developing the Young Workforce](#). Most of this work is taken forward by Skills Development Scotland and Education Scotland. The Scottish Government has stated that:

“...it is primarily a matter for local authorities and schools to consider the most appropriate local arrangements for careers advice to pupils, including any visits by potential employers.” ([Herald 16th February 2016](#))

The Scottish Government has responded to the UN Committee's concern about the recruitment of under 18's to the armed forces. The following extract is from the [Scottish Government's report](#) on the implementation of UNCRC in Scotland.

“Whilst defence policy is reserved to the UK Government, the wellbeing of children is not. As such we would want to be assured that any recruitment of children to the UK military takes full cognisance of all aspects of their wellbeing. We have therefore requested from the UK Government further detail on the Army Board's proposal to increase the number of personnel recruited prior to their 18th birthday, including with regards to recruitment from Scotland, and reassurance from the UK Government that it has no intention to change current policy which seeks to prevent the involvement in hostilities of UK Service personnel under the age of 18.”

Scottish Parliament Action

The issue has not previously been discussed in the Parliament.

Camilla Kidner
Senior Research Specialist
19 April 2016

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP
www.parliament.scot