

PE1603/Y

WILPF Letter of 12 January 2017

I am writing on behalf of the Scottish Branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). WILPF has sections in 33 countries worldwide, with agreed policy on many issues by all countries. One of these international policies is that those under 18 years of age are not actively encouraged to join the armed forces. Eighteen being recognised by the United Nations as the age of majority. In the United Kingdom active recruitment by the military occurs via visits into schools.

There is evidence from accounts given by young people and those who have visited schools on behalf of the armed forces that a balance of views and information is very often lacking. Presentations focus on the benefits of a military career and are unlikely to discuss the risks or legal obligations. Emphasis is put on adventure, fun and a good salary rather than mentioning the realities and ethical considerations involved in military life and combat; this has the effect of sanitising and even glamorising the armed forces. Some activities with schools involve displaying weapons or military vehicles; this is likely to obscure a more nuanced and balanced view of the military that the education system should encourage. Some students have felt uncomfortable with gender-related stereotypes or by not wanting to take part in activities involving the military. Finally, there is evidence that the armed forces sometimes talk about controversial issues, such as recent conflicts or nuclear deterrence, in a way that does not ensure political balance.

There is also evidence that equal access is not given to other career providers. The data suggests that no other public service or business employer visits schools to the same extent as the armed forces and a recent study suggests information about apprenticeships is not distributed well in schools in Scotland. As well as providing careers information, the armed forces are involved in a significant number of STEM-based curriculum activities, which could further skew knowledge about available opportunities in their direction.

Furthermore, the risks to health and wellbeing are greater for those recruited as children than those recruited as adults. The recently published Medact report details the disproportionate health risks faced by child recruits. It also examines psychological and psychosocial research showing that teenagers are less likely than adults to have all the faculties that would equip them to be guarded against persuasive and unbalanced information and to make informed and well-processed choices involving long-term personal risk.

There is evidence to show that military visits to school are targeted at schools in areas of high economic and social deprivation. A large proportion of early enlistees decide to drop out of training (one-third). Their options are then either re-joining the education system or finding alternative employment without having acquired basic qualifications. Their early enlistment therefore brought their full-time education to an end only to subject them to a risk of long-term unemployment. Early enlistees who do complete their training are less likely than adult recruits to be promoted through the ranks. When they leave the army they will compete for jobs with their civilian peers who remained in full-time education post-16. 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.

Data suggests that the armed forces make visits to special schools (for pupils with learning difficulties or pupil referral units) and primary schools. The army has stated that it only engages with students in S3. We consider that all parts of the armed forces should commit to not providing career or curriculum information for all school age pupils.

Parents are frequently not consulted by the Local Authorities to say if they agree to their children participating in military visits to schools. In addition these visits are targeted towards young males and frequently leave female students feeling uncomfortable. No other employer or recruiters of young people are allowed as frequent access to schools. Well recognised and respected organisations advocating a peaceful and better world find it extremely difficult to be allowed to engage with schools and their pupils.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom therefore urge the Petitions Committee to seriously consider the ending of Military visits to all primary, secondary and special needs schools.