

ForcesWatch

EXPANDING THE CADETS AND 'MILITARY ETHOS' IN UK SCHOOLS

WHAT ARE THE CADET FORCES? (1)

- Around **140,000 young people aged 13-18** participate in the Combined Cadet Force, Sea Cadet Corps, Army Cadet Force and Air Training Corps which are largely funded and under the direction of the Ministry of Defence.
- The school-based cadets, the Combined Cadet Force, involves around **45,000 young people**. The CCF offers a range of military-orientated training (including drill and weapons handling) and adventurous activities, to children who spend approximately **20-30 days a year doing cadet activities**.
- The current estimated cost of the cadet forces is **£176 million a year**. The total cost of all spending on 'youth engagement' by the UK armed forces is around £250 million.
- Approximately 26,000 adults volunteer as Cadet Force Adult Volunteers, and contribute an average of 100 days a year.
- The *Youth Engagement Review* cites **recruitment** into the armed forces as a rationale for the cadets, along with **creating awareness** "in order to ensure the continued support of the population" and "wider personal and social **development**".

HOW WILL THE CADET FORCES BE EXPANDED?

- On Armed Forces Day 2012, the Government announced that **£10.85 million would be made available to expand cadet forces** (primarily the CCF) into a hundred state schools. The scheme is being targeted at free schools and academies in particular.
- The first new cadet unit will be at City Academy London Islington; this is indicative of the government's line that establishing cadet units in schools with more disadvantaged students **will help improve discipline and help young people 'stay out of trouble'**.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING - WHO BENEFITS?

Expanding the cadet forces is part of the Department for Education's wider '**military skills and ethos**' programme – a range of initiatives employing military approaches and experience in state-funded education (2). While the stated aims of the policy include "improving pupils' behaviour, and instilling a sense of service to others", the government and armed forces also benefit:

- Earlier this year the Ministry of Defence announced a future increase in the size of the Reserve Forces. As cadets are already partially trained, they are an **important source of recruits** for both the reserves and the regular armed forces. This is also identified as a benefit associated with the government's intention to develop **military academies** in the state school sector.
- The expansion of the cadets will also serve to **increase the armed forces' everyday contact and influence with young people**. This policy was laid out in the 2008 Report on the National Recognition of our Armed Forces, which sought to increase the visibility, understanding and support of the military among the civilian population. The report stated that costs should be shared with the Department for Education (then the DCSF), local government and private sponsors.

WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM?

- The increased spending on cadet forces comes at a time of budget cuts to most state-funded youth services. Although the cadet forces provide positive experiences for many, they do so within a **narrow, military framework**. This expansion is **at the expense of a more universal provision** that is accessible to all students regardless of their interest in being involved in military activities.
- As part of the Department for Education's 'military skills and ethos' programme, the expansion of cadets into state schools is a policy based on a **one-sided view of 'military ethos'** and the **assumption that it is an appropriate solution to social problems**.
- What are the **negative aspects of the 'military ethos'**? Will promoting it in schools deter awareness of alternatives to conflict and favour military solutions? Recent media coverage on abuse of cadets away at camp raises concerns about aspects of military culture that are problematic.
- There is **little evidence that the military is better than other youth services** at helping young people develop useful life skills.
- There has been **no public consultation** on the expansion of cadets.
- The **recruitment agenda behind the cadets is underplayed** in favour of emphasising the benefits to individuals. The government cites a report from Southampton University which found that those who participate in cadets feel that it benefits them in a variety of ways, and that there are wider social benefits, including that many will consider a career in the forces. The study did not consider the impact of the **longer-term risks** to young people who may sign up after the cadets.
- Under the Education Act 1996, schools have a duty '**to secure balanced treatment of political issues**'. There are significant physical and psychological risks, legal obligations and ethical considerations to a career in the armed forces which must be considered by young people if they are to make an **informed choice** about joining up. Schools should foster that awareness rather than promote the cadets over other activities.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

As the introduction of military skills and ethos in schools is still at an early stage it is an important time to **raise concerns** about the policy and question if military involvement in education is appropriate.

- A school that is considering starting a cadet force should be encouraged to first undertake a **public or parent consultation**.
- **Creating debate** within the local community is important. Local papers can be a useful way to raise the issue.
- What is your experience of the cadets? What is your view on this issue? **We would like to hear experiences and views**. Without more public debate around this issue, only those promoting military solutions to social problems will be heard.
- **Get in touch** with us if you like more information or advice. You can contact us on office@forceswatch.net or 020 7837 2822 and find information and materials at **www.forceswatch.net**

1. All figures are from the *Youth Engagement Review*, MoD, Dec 2011
2. <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/militaryethos>

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