

campaigning on armed forces recruitment practices and challenging efforts to embed militarist values in civil society

Raise the age of recruitment into the military

The UK is the only country in Europe that still recruits 16 year olds into the armed forces. In fact, young people can start the process when they are just 15. This is out of step with the growing international consensus towards recruiting only adults.

Last year the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child repeated their call for the policy to be changed. All four of the UK's Children's Commissioners, and many others, support a change in policy and for children's rights to be put before defence interests.

Over three-quarters of the public are in support of raising the recruitment age to 18 but many parliamentarians are more concerned about recruitment targets and do not want to challenge the idea that the armed forces offer opportunities for young people who don't have many other options. Recent research by ForcesWatch, Child Soldiers International and Medact has found that far from being a guarantee of social mobility, joining the armed forces at a young age has many risks attached.

It is time for a change

A recent House of Commons debate, led by Liz Saville Roberts from Plaid Cymru, shows that there is support for raising the age of military recruitment in the UK. **Please take a few minutes to contact your MP or MSP at this crucial time to engage them in this debate. See our website for what you can say.**

Health implications

A report by the public health charity Medact, *The Recruitment of Children by the UK Armed Forces: A Critique from Health Professionals*, looks at the psychological and psychosocial vulnerabilities of adolescents in the context of military recruitment marketing strategies and making long-term risky decisions. It examines the evidence that recruits aged under 18 face greater risks to health than adult recruits, across the course of an armed forces career.

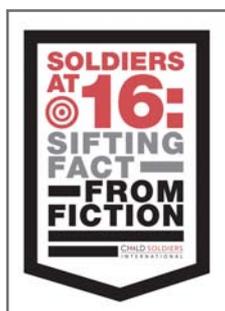


Is it counterproductive to enlist minors into the army?

This RUSI Journal article explains how raising the UK enlistment age would bring benefits to both young people and the British armed forces.

Parliamentary briefing

Child Soldiers International have written a short briefing outlining the arguments in favour of raising the age of recruitment. **Please send to your MP.** Their booklet, *Soldiers at 16: Shifting fact from fiction* debunks the myths around continuing to recruit at 16 (available from ForcesWatch).



Our response to the Army's new recruitment campaign

In January, the British Army launched their 'This is belonging' marketing campaign. Read our response *Army Life: the other side of the story* published by The Huffington Post. Suggesting to adolescents that they can resolve their need to belong by joining the Army is simplistic and one-sided. The reality is that many aspects of army life are potentially harmful, especially to vulnerable individuals.



'By appealing to the adolescent child's need to belong, the army have latched onto a very popular recruitment tool, powerful in particular among those who feel isolated or marginalised, or who have a sense of non-belonging and potentially low self-esteem.' Forceswatch

The other side of the story

Ten 2-minute films about one army recruit's experience have been released by Child Soldiers International. The films present Wayne Sharrock's story, from his enlistment at 17, through basic training to Afghanistan, where he was injured and saw his comrades killed, and his struggle to adjust to civilian life. Wayne wants the films to show young people that the army is nothing like a recruiter's brochure. **Screen these films at a public meeting.**



A web version of this newsletter, with links to all the references and resources, can be found at www.forceswatch.net/news0317

'Dozens of religious, military, legal and policy organisations, alongside unions and trusted military professionals, have expressed concerns about this policy.'

'The UK Government must put a stop to enlisting children and bring the UK into the modern world.'

Liz Saville Roberts MP

The military in education and our communities

Armed forces activities in schools

The armed forces are involved in schools and colleges in many different ways. This encourages uncritical support of military approaches to conflict resolution and is part of a wider integration of military-led activities into national education policy that we are encouraging people to challenge.

We have been working with Quakers in Scotland to challenge this in the Scottish Parliament. The Public Petitions Committee has received a wide range of submissions for our petition calling for more scrutiny and guidance on armed forces visits to Scottish schools. Parents, teachers, child rights and young people's organisations, veterans and others have responded. Recognising the strength of views, the Committee recently stated, 'Its a big issue and has to be looked into thoroughly'. See our online blogs for more.



Rhianna from ForcesWatch with Quakers at the Scottish Parliament

Cadets and 'military ethos' in schools

In recent years, the Government have pledged large amounts of funding for the Cadet Expansion Scheme as part of their promotion of 'military ethos' in schools. This focuses on state schools and will raise the number of cadet units in all schools to 500. The MoD also intends to develop a special cadet scheme for schools in Scotland, where the Scottish Government have previously resisted it.

'With the stated policy objectives of student and social development and its promotion by the DfE, it is easy to lose site of the ways in which school cadet forces allow the MoD to pursue its defence agenda amongst a captive audience. Why otherwise would the Government be particularly keen to support new cadet units in "areas where the MoD wants to raise awareness of the armed forces"?' ForcesWatch

Armed forces and arms industry sponsorship of schools

We are currently researching the involvement of the armed forces and the arms industry in employer-led education. University Technical Colleges (UTCs) provide state funded education for 14-18 year olds covering academic and technical subjects. Nearly half of the UTCs that are currently open have some involvement from the armed forces or arms industry or, in some cases, both. Watch out for our research paper coming out soon.

Armed forces in the curriculum

The military and arms industry are also putting significant resources into science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) activities in schools, such as BAE Systems' 'Education Roadshow', run with the RAF and Royal Navy. These activities have a recruitment and marketing agenda and present a sanitised view of the purpose and consequences of military activity. **Science4Society Week** takes place in March and is co-ordinated by Scientists for Global Responsibility. A range of science education activities, designed to inspire young people, provide an alternative to STEM activities funded by the arms, military and fossil fuel industries.

Armed forces in the community

Many local councils will be facilitating Armed Forces Day events on Saturday 24 June (17 June in some places). Look at our website for some ideas for how to make a response to what is happening in your area.

Take Action On Militarism - resources and event

We are working with Quaker Peace & Social Witness to produce a resource pack for individuals and groups who want to challenge militarism in their local community, schools and colleges, and to encourage alternative ways of approaching security issues. The pack will be launched at a day conference at Friends House in London in October. Register your interest by sending us an email.



This new Facebook group is for people to share examples of militarism they see, and any actions they are taking to disrupt its message. It is a great source of ideas and solidarity. Also, please use #EverydayMilitarism to keep the conversation going on Twitter!

Articles about our work on the military's influence in schools

Who goes there? Campaigners fight to keep military away from UK schools

The Guardian, 30/08/2016

Britain is the only EU country to enlist 16-year-olds into the armed services and, say objectors, it starts with access to the classroom.

The militarisation of schools

The Independent, 23/01/2017

The UK is one of few countries that allow minors to enlist. Despite calls to cease the recruitment of under-18s the Army is digging in to hold its ground.

ForcesWatch - what we do

- research armed forces recruitment and the promotion of the military in civil society
- publish reports, education resources and other materials
- educate young people and help get their voices heard
- campaign on our concerns, engaging with decision-makers, media and the public
- support and work with others who are concerned about the impact of the military on the lives of young people and wider society

Become a **Friend of ForcesWatch** and support our work. Get in contact if you would like us to **speak at a meeting or run a workshop**. See more information and sign up to our **email newsletter** at www.forceswatch.net/stay_in_touch or contact us: 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DY; office@forceswatch.net; 020 7837 2822



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