

MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN UK SCHOOLS & COLLEGES WHAT ARE THE ISSUES AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

Visits to schools by the armed forces

What kind of activities do the armed forces do with students in education?

- careers related activities (careers events, presentations etc)
 - curriculum related military-focused materials • student development (team building, leadership, interview techniques etc) • physical activities • interviews for Insight (pre-recruitment) courses at armed forces bases
- sessions with staff • visits to bases and military museums
 - work experience....

How many visits do they make?

The armed forces make around 11,000 visits to secondary schools and colleges each year.

Approximately 900,000 young people come into contact with the armed forces in the education system each year. Most of them are aged 8-19.

Data for 2011-12 indicates that a disproportionate amount (22%) of visits were made to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (which only represent 16% of the UK population).

Statistics for specific areas between 2010-12 show that the majority of state secondary schools were visited by the armed forces (from 72% in Oxfordshire to 80% across Scotland); a far lower proportion of private schools are visited. On average state schools were visited around 4 times and independent schools were visited less frequently. Some state schools were visited on numerous occasions each year, some as many as 10 or 15 times.

The Department for Education's 'military ethos' programme for schools

The Department for Education's 'military ethos' programme encompasses a number of initiatives which claim to give, 'young people the opportunity to develop teamwork, self-discipline, resilience and leadership'. The government has spent over £45 million on military ethos projects since 2012.

Combined Cadet Force

New CCF units are being set up in all state schools in England that want them, with a preference for disadvantaged schools (see box).

Troops to Teachers

This is a scheme to encourage ex-forces personnel to become teachers. Ex-forces who train as teachers are paid a salary while they study and pay no tuition fees. Those who already have a degree only have to study for a further year and those who have no degree only have to study for 2 years.

Alternative provision

This is primarily for 'pupils who are either disengaged with education or at risk of becoming disengaged'. Providers include Challenger Troop and Commando Joe, which run military-style, military-uniformed outdoor activities for pupils in school time. They also offer school or class-wide activities for both primary and secondary schools.

Military academies and free schools

The government encourages academies and free schools to be sponsored by a part of the military such as the Reserves and Cadet Associations. Such schools would have a high proportion of ex-forces staff and have military-led activities for students. Currently, only University Technical Colleges, for 14-18 year olds, are sponsored by either the Army or Navy. Some UTCs (and one primary school) are also sponsored by the arms industry.

Military-focused teaching resources

The armed forces and Ministry of Defence provide free curriculum resources based on the military. They cover geography, history, citizenship, PE, assemblies and skills such as leadership, and primary and secondary age groups. The Army offer resources about the First World War, send 'soldiers to schools' to support teachers and place a soldier on each coach of school children visiting WW1 battlefields. Resources for events such as Armed Forces Day are also available.

In 2014 the MoD and Prime Minister's Office published *The British Armed Forces Learning Resource*, which was promoted by the Department for Education.

Combined Cadet Forces

The CCF is a cadet organisation based in state and independent schools and colleges. Each CCF 'contingent' is made up of one or more units from the Army, Navy, and RAF. There are currently around 350 CCF contingents and the government's Cadet Expansion Scheme, focusing on disadvantaged state schools in England, will increase this to 500 by 2020. There are also around 170 'community' Air, Sea or Army Cadet units operating in schools.

CCF members do weekly parades in school, and whole day and weekend training events. The headteacher appoints the Contingent Commander and identifies staff members who are willing to be adult volunteers. The MoD provides uniform, weapons and ammunition, training advice and assistance, loans of equipment, access to military transport, and remuneration to School Staff Instructors and officers.

Scholarships & bursaries

The Army, Navy, and RAF offer Sixth Form scholarships and undergraduate bursaries. In exchange they have to serve in the relevant branch for at least three years after sixth form or university. Scholars can only avoid this commitment if they pay back the money.

*"The three Services each run or part-fund very comprehensive external engagement operations with children and young people in schools and communities. This external engagement should meet two clear Defence outcomes: An **awareness** of the Armed Forces' role in the world and the quality of its work and people, in order to ensure the continued support of the population; and **recruitment** of the young men and women that are key to future sustainment and success."*

MoD Youth Engagement Review, 2011

Whats the problem with military activities in education?

One-sided picture of the armed forces

The MoD and armed forces admit that they 'provide positive information to influence future opinion formers', yet the 1996 Education Act states that pupils must be given a 'balanced presentation of opposing views' when looking at 'political issues'.

Education should encourage critical thinking, but military activities and resources present an unbalanced and sanitised version of military action. Military-related learning resources have been criticised by educationalists for being one-sided and poor quality tools for learning. They also promote armed forces careers.

School pupils aren't encouraged to explore the ethical or emotional issues involved with military action, such as killing or seeing civilians or colleagues suffering or being killed.

Serving other interests

Are armed forces visits to schools and 'military ethos' programmes serving the interests of children or the military? The MoD identify *recruitment* and *raising positive awareness* as the reason to visit schools (although they publicly deny that recruitment takes place in schools). The benefits of the 'military ethos' programme include employment of ex-service personnel and recruiting young people. Is school an appropriate environment for these activities?

Prioritising the status of the military

'Military ethos' programmes are based on the belief that those with a military training are better able to instil discipline than other teachers and possess qualities unique to the forces.

The presence of the military in education normalises military approaches and war, and reduces the space for alternatives to armed conflict to be explored in a learning environment.

Diverting resources from non-military activities

Military ethos projects alone have received over £45 million of funding since 2012. The CCF costs around £180 million each year.

Not in the best interests of students

Career activities in schools focus on adventure and personal development with little information on the risks and obligations it involves. The military is sometimes presented as the only option for young people in economically deprived regions yet no-one should feel they are forced to join as a last resort.

Being in the armed forces can involve a significant risk of death, serious physical injury, mental health problems (such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) - especially for those most exposed to combat, such as in the Infantry. The youngest and most disadvantaged recruits are especially at risk because they are over-represented in these sections. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds should not be the target of armed forces recruiting.

Once enlisted, the opportunities to get out are limited; the armed forces are the only employer where you can face a criminal conviction if you break your contract.

Teachers' unions' have expressed concerns about the fast-tracking of non-graduates into teaching jobs, that military discipline is very different to civilian discipline, and that schools should have a learning ethos, not a military one.

No consultation or scrutiny

Schools provide a captive audience for the pro-military message; parents and guardians have little opportunity to question if it is appropriate. There has been no public consultation about the 'military ethos' programme or parliamentary scrutiny.

What you can do

It is possible to have military-free schools. After all, there are still many schools that don't have visits from the armed forces although they will have been invited to do so. Headteachers decide whether to allow the armed forces to visit the school, and whether to have a CCF contingent, so your best bet is to talk to them.

If military activities happen in your school

Before trying to arrange a meeting with your headteacher, it's best to find others who share your concern so you can approach the head together. You could also speak to a teacher you know well - even if they don't see it as a problem, they might be able to suggest other teachers you could contact, and how to do so most effectively - and speak to parents (ask them to bring it up at the Parents and Teachers Association or with the Governors).

Meeting with headteacher: Find out whether parents/guardians, teachers, governors and pupils were consulted about having the armed forces activities in the school, and what arguments there are have to support these activities. Then raise your concerns.

If they insist on allowing military activities to continue, ask that alternative points of view are represented, for example by inviting those with other perspectives (including veterans) to speak alongside military personnel, and the use of alternative resources (such as those provided by the Peace Education Network).

No meeting with the head: If your headteacher refuses to meet with you, you could write a letter to them, and the school governors, and get it signed by as many pupils, teachers, and parents/guardians as possible. You could use social media, and banners etc to promote the campaign, and contact local press.

Don't take part in military activities: You can ask difficult questions at military presentations and stalls. You can ask to be exempted from military activities, and if you are told you have to take part, you can refuse to do so, and let your reasons be known.

Other activities

Letter-writing: You can contact MPs, councillors and other local politicians (using writetothem.org), and publicise your concerns in local papers and using social media. Base your letters on local examples if you can - has a school near you started a cadet force or does it have military-led activities?

Freedom of Information (FOI) requests: You can make an FOI request to find out how many armed forces visits to schools there were in your area in the most recent academic year for which data are available, and what types of activity they did.

Contact ForcesWatch for information and sample letters, press releases and FOI requests.

Get in touch with us at ForcesWatch for further help and advice. Look at our website for more resources. Let us know your experiences of the armed forces in your school, and what you would like to do about it - we can help you!

education@forceswatch.net, 020 7837 2822

www.forceswatch.net

ForcesWatch

other resources

beforeyou signup.info - pros and cons of joining the armed forces with useful information for young people and their parents.

veteransforpeace.org.uk - a group for British veterans who are committed to opposing war through nonviolent means. They are available to speak at schools and events.

peace-education.org.uk - a network of organisations providing resources for education for peace.

www.unseenmarch.org.uk - watch and share the film about 'military ethos' in education and take action!