

Written evidence submitted by ForcesWatch

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 ForcesWatch welcomes the Education Committee's inquiry. We strongly believe that a key purpose of education in England should be to equip students with the ability to think critically. This will help students make informed decisions about issues and institutions which is both a crucial life skill, and will aid them to contribute to the improvement of our democracy and our society.
- 1.2 Currently, the UK military has significant, and growing, influence in the UK education system which raises a number of concerns around critical thinking about the military, armed forces careers, and issues of peace and conflict resolution. These pro-military messages are not balanced by the inclusion of a structured framework for peace education within the curriculum, and the UK government is failing to implement recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as a result.
- 1.3 We outline a range of general educational and more detailed concerns and questions that need to be addressed in the wake of the growing influence of the military in education.
- 1.4 We make a number of recommendations for ensuring wider public debate and consultation around these developments and increasing the monitoring and oversight of military involvement in schools.

2. ForcesWatch

- 2.1 ForcesWatch critically scrutinises the ethical basis of the recruitment of young people into the armed forces. We raise public awareness of the issues, challenge the armed forces on their recruitment practices - especially those aimed at the youngest and most disadvantaged groups, and advocate changes to Government policy. See <http://forceswatch.net>.
- 2.2 We are concerned by the growing influence of the military in the UK education system. We welcome the Committee's inquiry into the purpose and quality of education in England. A key purpose of education should be to develop students' critical thinking skills, thus aiding them to make informed decisions on all issues. The current nature of the military's influence in schools and colleges seems incompatible with this. There is a lack of peace education within the curriculum to balance the pro-military messages.
- 2.3 A number of other concerns are raised by the military's growing influence in education including effectiveness in relation to educational claims, policy

oversight, and the targeting of schools in disadvantaged areas for military ethos provision.

3. The increase in military influence within education

- 3.1 The UK military has a significant – and growing – influence in the English education system. The armed forces have for some years made thousands of **visits to schools** in England each year, and offered curriculum resources to teachers, military bases and museums have hosted thousands of students annually, and around 250 schools (mostly private) have had a Combined Cadet Force.¹
- 3.2 In addition, since 2012, the Department for Education's '**Military Ethos in Schools**' policy has created a number of military-led programmes in state schools in England, with a focus on disadvantaged areas. This includes the expansion of the **Combined Cadet Force** to 500 cadet forces in state schools by 2020. Government figures indicate that, since the Military Ethos in schools projects were announced in 2012, £45.2 million of new funding has been awarded to them. Most of this new funding comes from the Department for Education. A further £50 million was pledged by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the July 2015 budget for expanding cadet units in schools up to 2020, creating a total of **£95 million of new funding** for military ethos projects.²
- 3.3 Nearly £12 million of this new funding since 2012 has been given to eight external providers employing former armed forces personnel to provide '**alternative provision**' in education for students who are either 'disengaged with education or at risk of becoming disengaged'. More recently, this programme has been associated with '**character building**' and these agencies now also provide whole-school or whole-class activities, are present in primary as well as secondary schools, and are being used by schools to generally support teachers with discipline issues.
- 3.4 The DfE are encouraging 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. Although no such school has yet been set up, around half of the University Technical Colleges (UTCs) now open, which offer specialist education for 14-18 year olds, are sponsored by part of the armed forces. Sponsors have significant influence on the ethos and direction of the school or college and will have access to students within them.
- 3.5 The Ministry of Defence and the armed forces provide free **curriculum resources** for teachers based on military activities and careers. The Army also now offer resources about the First World War, sends 'soldiers to schools' to support teachers with the curriculum and places a soldier on each coach of school children visiting WW1 battlefields. In 2014, the Department for Education promoted *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014* to all schools. The resource was produced by the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Defence and was promoted to all schools by the Department for Education. The resource was criticised for

being both very politicised and of little pedagogical value.³ Schools were also sent materials about the NATO summit in Cardiff in September 2014 and free resources are also available for national events such as Armed Forces Day.

4. Lack of peace education

- 4.1 In 2008 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child made the following recommendations to the UK Government regarding peace education: 1. *To intensify its efforts to tackle bullying and violence in schools, including through teaching human rights, peace and tolerance.* 2. *To develop and implement training programmes and campaigns to promote the values of peace and respect for human rights and include the subject of peace education and human rights as a fundamental subject in the education system, in collaboration with civil society organisations.*
- 4.2 The importance of utilising education for peace is detailed within the Convention: *The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.*⁴
- 4.3 In responding to the UNCRC recommendations about peace education, the UK Government's only referenced the citizenship programme in England which was described as 'emphasis[ing] democracy and the rights and responsibilities of citizens'.⁵ In relation to peace education, the UK Government states that, 'it does not prescribe what schools should teach, leaving it to them to raise issues with pupils according to their age, needs and interests'.
- 4.4 Leaving schools with the choice of whether or not to include peace education within lesson content does not satisfy the UNCRC's recommendations. Furthermore, the UK Government actively promotes a number of military-related resources to schools. It therefore appears that there *are* some areas in which the Government are willing to suggest what 'schools should teach'. Not only does this contravene the spirit of the Convention on a number of counts but it also creates an imbalance in that pro-military resources are promoted and peace resources are not.
- 4.5 Citizenship and Personal, Health, Social and Economic (PSHE) education are both important areas for developing critical awareness for and about peace, and about the realities of involvement in armed conflict. However, there is no mention of peace education within the curriculum overview. Instead it focuses on gaining an understanding of the political system, governance, the role of law and financial matters. Material covering the issue of bullying and violence in schools, peace and tolerance, and basic life skills such as the ability to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner, are not included within the curriculum. PSHE is not statutory, though the Education Committee has recently made a convincing case for changing this.

5. Questions of concern

- 5.1 ***Is the education system an appropriate place for the armed forces to pursue its own agenda?*** The armed forces are visiting schools in order to pursue its own aims of raising positive awareness amongst young people and to recruit to the armed forces.⁶ While the armed forces identify that cadet forces also serve a personal development function, this is alongside a longer-term function of increasing recruitment to the armed forces.⁷
- 5.2 ***Should military activities become an established part of the education system?*** As cadet forces expand into state schools and alternative provision with a military ethos becomes established in certain areas, it will become more difficult for students to avoid significant exposure to the influence of the military on their education. For many parents, this involvement is not something they feel comfortable with, yet there is little recognition that it is a divisive issue.
- 5.3 ***There are concerns that armed forces careers information does not give students adequate information to make an informed choice.*** Schools must not allow the armed forces to present information to students in an unbalanced way that sanitises or glamourises a career in the forces. As recently acknowledged by the Welsh Government, the armed forces face unique risks, legal restrictions, and ethical dilemmas. Therefore if school students encounter information about the armed forces in school-time, they must experience, 'an open and honest exchange of view[s]...about their role'.⁸ Are schools fulfilling their duty of care and acting in the best interests of young people by allowing the armed forces to promote their careers in schools?
- 5.4 ***Some curriculum materials provided by the armed forces, and also the Government, present information in a partisan and sanitised way.*** The military's engagement with schools will inevitably involve students encountering party-political issues such as the Iraq war, the UK's possession of nuclear weapons, and the recruitment of minors into the armed forces. There is considerable evidence to show that the armed forces often give students a partial and unrealistic view of military action, and that controversial issues are not being discussed in an adequately balanced way.⁹
- 5.5 ***Should the 'military ethos' provision be focused on schools in disadvantaged areas?*** In reviewing the UK's position on recruiting under-18s into the armed forces the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the UK Government, 'reconsider its active policy of recruitment of children into the armed forces and ensure that it does not occur in a manner which specifically targets ethnic minorities and children of low-income families'.¹⁰ The DfE's military ethos programme is explicitly aimed at schools in disadvantaged areas and, within each school, those students more at risk of failing. Whilst it is not the stated aim of the military ethos programme to promote a career in the armed forces, there are significant elements of it that expose young people to the possibility of a forces career. More generally, is it acceptable that students in some areas, perhaps where there are less alternatives available to them, are considered in need of militarised education provision instead of provision with more universal appeal?

- 5.6 ***Is there a strong evidence base for the conception that provision within education with a military dimension is more effective than more general provision in raising attainment?*** The DfE's own commissioned research points to a number of significant concerns with the monitoring and evaluation of military ethos projects.¹¹ Recent character-related grants and awards suggest that it is in fact non-military projects that are the best at developing students in this area.¹² The high level of funding awarded to military ethos projects and new cadet units would go a long way to providing more universal provision that all students and parents could participate in.
- 5.7 ***Is there adequate scrutiny of armed forces activities in schools and government policy that promotes military ethos in schools?*** The Welsh Government has recently accepted recommendations to increase scrutiny and guidance around armed forces visits to schools and the Scottish Parliament are currently being urged to do the same. We hope that the Education Committee will also see the need for more scrutiny in this area. The policy of military ethos in schools has never been examined by Parliament, yet this is now a national strategy with significant resources made available by the DfE and other Government departments.
- 5.8 ***Is there adequate education for and about peace in schools?*** 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. The long-term consequences of this on our desire and ability as a society to work towards peaceful solutions mean it requires urgent inquiry.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 In 2015, the Welsh Government acknowledged concerns with armed forces visits to schools in Wales and accepted recommendations to increase scrutiny of the visits, ensure schools receive guidance on how to facilitate the visits in a balanced way, and widen the range of employers making visits. **We recommend that the Education Committee conduct a similar inquiry and provide guidance on how armed forces visits to schools should be conducted.**
- 6.2 The Education Act 1996 and the Independent School Standards 2014, 'forbid the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject', and 'take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils...they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.'¹³ **We recommend that the Education Committee ensure that all materials related to the armed forces, including those produced by the government, fully comply with the Education Act.**
- 6.3 The UK has failed to meet UN recommendations around the provision of peace education within the curriculum. Peace education in schools in the UK is limited and under-resourced. The promotion of military within education makes a more structured approach to peace education more urgent in

order to help schools create a culture and expectation of peace. **We recommend that the Education Committee ensures that the UK complies with the UNCRC recommendations on the provision of peace education.**

- 6.4** There has been very little public discussion and consultation about the increasing involvement of the military in education. **We urge the Education Committee to rectify this and promote a wider debate about the long-term implications of this and the details of how such involvement should be monitored and what oversight should be provided.**

¹ In 2011-12 there were nearly 11,000 visit made by the armed forces to secondary schools and colleges in the UK
http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm130415/text/130415w0003.htm#130415w0003.htm_spnew10.

For an overview of military activities in schools see *Peace education and the promotion of the armed forces in UK schools*, ForcesWatch 2015, <http://www.forceswatch.net/resources/peace-education-and-promotion-armed-forces-uk-schools>

² Government funding for 'military ethos' in schools, <http://www.forceswatch.net/news/government-grants-military-ethos-schools>. This is in addition to the £180 million each year that the Ministry of Defence spend on running the Combined Cadet Forces in schools.

³ *A critical response to 'The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014'*, ForcesWatch 2015, <http://www.forceswatch.net/content/armed-forces-learning-resource>

⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2001), General Comment No.1: The Aims of Education, UN Doc: CRC/GC/2001/1

⁵ UK Government (2014), The Fifth Periodic Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, App 1, para 4

⁶ *The recruitment agenda behind the UK armed forces' 'engagement' with students in schools & colleges*, ForcesWatch 2015, <http://forceswatch.net/sites/default/files/ForcesWatch%20recruitment%20in%20schools%20evidence%20briefing%20May%202015.pdf>

⁷ For example, the Ministry of Defence stated in February 2014 that, 'cadet units are beneficial to both society and for recruitment into the Armed Forces, that is why we want to increase the number of them.' Quoted in Swinford, S. and Farmer, B. (2014), 'Public school funding for military cadet forces diverted to state sector', The Telegraph, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/10640052/Public-school-funding-for-military-cadetforces-diverted-to-state-sector.html>

⁸ <http://forceswatch.net/news/forceswatch-welcomes-welsh-government-stance-over-military-visits-schools>

⁹ See for example, <http://www.forceswatch.net/content/armed-forces-learning-resource> and http://forceswatch.net/sites/default/files/Concerns_armed_forces_visits_secondary_schools_Wales.pdf

¹⁰ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008), *Concluding observations on the report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*, UN Doc: CRC/C/OPAC/GBR/CO/1

¹¹ 'Alternative Provision with a Military Ethos' receives more funding – our response, ForcesWatch 2014, <http://www.forceswatch.net/blog/alternative-provision-military-ethos-receives-more-funding-response>

¹² Why recent developments in character education indicate there's no need for a military ethos, ForcesWatch 2015, <http://www.forceswatch.net/blog/character-education-indicate-no-need-military-ethos>

¹³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents>;
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/pdfs/uksi_20143283_en.pdf