

## A CRITICAL RESPONSE TO 'THE BRITISH ARMED FORCES: LEARNING RESOURCE 2014'

*ForcesWatch*,<sup>1</sup> March 2015

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 2 September 2014 the Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Defence launched *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014*.<sup>2</sup> The document is framed as a History, English and Citizenship resource for Key Stages 1-4 (5-16 year-olds) 'to educate children about the work of the UK armed forces', and has been promoted to all schools by the Department for Education.<sup>3</sup>

A number of substantial concerns are raised by *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014*. It is a largely one-sided and politically-directed presentation of the British armed forces, covering topics that ought to be considered controversial - from the British Empire to nuclear weapons - in a simplistic and partial way, without acknowledging important areas of debate around them. No teachers were involved in its production, and it was completed within a month.<sup>4,5</sup>

This critical response to the resource has been compiled by ForcesWatch with contributions from a number of educationalists and others specialising in learning materials. This response does not aim to be a comprehensive critique; it is hoped that others will conduct their own analysis, using this response as a reference. A video has also been made to accompany this report (see Other Resources).

#### Key concerns:

- The resource was initiated by the Office of the Prime Minister and has key sections written by government ministers including the Prime Minister. Other sections are written by current or former high-ranking military personnel. No teachers were involved its production. Its content is politically-driven, seeking to generate public acceptance of government policy and the use of military intervention, and it presents personal and political opinions as fact.
- It is poorly conceived as a tool for learning. For example, the language it uses and the complexity of the subject matter make it unsuitable for many of those it is aimed at. Many of the questions that it asks are introduced in a leading way and the material that would be required to explore them fully is not provided.
- The resource makes a one-sided case for the existence of the armed forces and the arms industry and provides no room for debate on alternatives to armed conflict. It presents a sanitised view of war and glorifies "military values".
- The resource includes material that promotes recruitment to the armed forces and champions the government policy of promoting military-led activities in schools.
- It presents a partial and uncritical history of British involvement in war, ignoring debate over the morality and legacy of such conflicts.

These educational and ethical concerns strongly indicate that *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014* should not be used in schools as a learning resource, or should only be used in conjunction with alternative materials, and it should not be promoted as a learning resource by third parties.

Furthermore, we consider that the document amounts to political interference in children's education. The Department of Education is failing in its legal duty, under the Education Act of 1996, to safeguard children from the promotion of partisan political views within schools and to offer a balanced presentation of opposing views; local authorities that promote the resource, and schools that use it as it stands without presenting alternative viewpoints, would be doing the same.

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## INTRODUCTION

On 2 September 2014 the Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Defence launched *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014*.<sup>6</sup> The document is framed as a History, English and Citizenship resource for Key Stages 1-4 (5-16 year-olds) 'to educate children about the work of the UK armed forces'. It is the most substantive resource on the armed forces produced for schools in several years, and seems to mark a new phase in the armed forces and Government's strategy of 'engaging' with young people. This programme also includes around 11,000 armed forces visits to UK schools each year, and the Department for Education's 'military ethos in schools' programme, one part of which is the expansion of the Combined Cadet Force in state secondary schools in England.<sup>7</sup>

The resource provokes a number of substantial concerns. It is a largely one-sided and politically-directed presentation of the British armed forces, covering topics that ought to be considered controversial - from the British Empire to nuclear weapons - in a simplistic and partial way, without acknowledging important areas of debate around them. This raises questions as to its value as a learning resource. Its lack of support of critical debate, in terms of materials and context, leads to further questions about its pedagogical usefulness.

Don Rowe, Citizenship Education consultant and former Director of Curriculum Resources at the Citizenship Foundation, says of the resource:

*Its aims, judging from the text, appear to be to present a positive, sometimes sanitised, view of the armed forces, to boost recruitment, and advocate for more Combined Cadet Forces in schools. These aims are entirely consistent with the government's current strategy to promote a 'Military Ethos in Schools'.*

*Two government ministries, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Education, have collaborated with the Prime Minister's office to produce a demonstrably biased educational resource and have promoted it to all schools in furtherance of a political programme of the current government.*

*I believe this is completely unacceptable, and that the document should be withdrawn and re-developed in such a way that students can be enabled to learn about the role of the military in our society and in national and international affairs in a way which is educationally-sound, balanced, and which respects the rights to freedom of belief of students and their families.<sup>8</sup>*

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## BACKGROUND: MILITARY-FOCUSED LEARNING RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

*The British Armed Forces Learning Resource 2014* is the latest in a series of military-focused curriculum resources for schools. The Ministry of Defence operated the website *Defence Dynamics* which provided military-focused resources for schools; the site is no longer operational, but the three armed forces continue to provide schools with their own curriculum resources, and they also provide 'curriculum support' through visits to schools with 'activity designed to inform young people about the Armed Forces and their role in the world'.<sup>9,10</sup> School materials about the armed forces have also been produced by the Ministry of Defence about the Iraq war, by the British Army to promote Armed Forces Day, by the British Legion to promote the Poppy Appeal and by the Foreign Office to promote the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014.<sup>11</sup> While the latter two go further in exploring some of the relevant debates and controversies, the resources largely present students with a narrow, exclusively British or even nationalistic perspective and overlook some very important issues, such as the impact of military action on those involved in it and alternative approaches to armed conflict. Chris Waller, Professional Officer at the Association for Citizenship Teaching says of *What to do in the classroom when NATO comes to Wales*:

*What is offered is not a powerful learning experience - it is more akin to an uncritical fact sheet with random and passive student activities tacked on the end. It does not enable students to critically understand what NATO is, its role or why it is an important political and military force and how NATO is connected to forms of world governance and collaboration.*

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*Given the current conflict in Ukraine and the continuing instability in Libya, any attempt to promote understanding about NATO should relate more closely to exploring the way international governance and conflict resolution/military intervention works, including responsibility for failure and the impact of conflict after withdrawal.<sup>12</sup>*

The provision of curriculum materials is one part of the military's policy of 'youth engagement' in schools and colleges and also accords with the wider government policy of promoting the armed forces in civil society.

The Ministry of Defence's *Youth Engagement Review* of 2011 makes a clear link between raising awareness of the Armed Forces in schools and its own 'defence outcomes'.<sup>13</sup> It states,

*'It is in Defence's interest to ensure that as many young people as possible are aware of the Armed Forces' role in the world and have a favourable impression of how they operate. This background understanding, nurtured by gatekeepers, is important both to wider public support and as the foundation from which to encourage interest in an Armed Forces career.'*

An array of recent government policy to promote the interests of the armed forces has also had an impact on education. *The National Recognition of the Armed Forces* report of 2008 recommended over 40 measures for 'increasing visibility', 'improving contact', 'building understanding' and 'encouraging support' for the armed forces, including within schools.<sup>14</sup> These aims are being furthered by policies such as the Armed Forces Community Covenants and Corporate Covenants, which are increasing the influence of the armed forces within civil institutions such as local authorities, businesses and the third sector.<sup>15</sup> In 2012 the Department for Education announced a series of initiatives to promote 'military ethos in schools'; these include military-style alternative provision for children at risk of failing, Troops to Teachers, the expansion of cadet forces into state schools in England, and the development of military-sponsored academies and free schools.<sup>16</sup>

The Education Committee have noted that nearly half of the funds recently committed by the Department for Education for programmes that deliver 'character', 'resilience' and 'grit' amongst pupils, have been allocated to agencies that provide 'alternative provision with a military ethos' (£4.8m out of nearly £10m).<sup>17</sup> Since 2012, over £36 million has been given towards the 'military ethos in schools' programme.<sup>18</sup>

## BACKGROUND: A SCHOOL'S DUTY OF CARE

Schools are legally required under the Children's Act 1989 to act 'in loco parentis', assuming a duty of care for children and acting as a 'reasonable parent' in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of its pupils.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, in its recent report on the provision of Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE) within schools, the Education Committee notes the argument that PSHE can be defined as a right under UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in which Article 17 states that, 'children and young people have a right to information that is important to their health and wellbeing'.<sup>20</sup>

The emphasis on the promotion of the military and its values in schools could present a danger to students if they decide to join the armed forces as a result of an overly-positive impression given to them by materials such as *The British Armed Forces Learning Resource 2014*. Such an approach has been criticised for failing to equip students to make an informed choice, particularly about enlistment in a career that carries such a high risk.<sup>21</sup> Recent research has shown that the youngest recruits are significantly more at risk of being killed or psychiatrically injured and that the educational offer for under 18 year-olds in the armed forces is inferior to civilian education, which has long-term significance for the future prospects of the youngest recruits.<sup>22,23,24</sup>

## BACKGROUND: OBLIGATIONS IN RELATION TO POLITICAL MATERIAL IN SCHOOLS

The Education Act 1996 forbids the 'promotion of partisan political views' and demands that students are given a 'balanced presentation of opposing views' whenever they encounter 'political' issues.<sup>25</sup> Guidance from the Citizenship Foundation states that,

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*Where political or controversial issues such as the situation in Iraq are brought to pupil's attention, they [should be] offered a balanced presentation of opposing views. In practice, this means: giving equal importance to conflicting views and opinions; presenting all information and opinion as open to interpretation, qualification and contradiction; establishing a classroom climate in which all pupils are free to express sincerely held views without fear.*

*It also means teachers seeking to avoid unintentional bias by: not presenting opinions as if they are facts; not setting themselves up as the sole authority on a subject; as far as possible, not giving their own accounts of the views of others, but, rather, letting the actual claims and assertions of protagonists speak for themselves; not revealing their own preferences in unconscious ways, e.g., facial expressions, gestures or tone of voice; not implying a correct opinion through their choice of respondents in a discussion; not failing to challenge a one-sided consensus that emerges too quickly in the classroom.<sup>26</sup>*

In 2008, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) criticised the MoD's 2008 booklet for schools on the Iraq War, intended for General Studies or Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons, and designed by the marketing company Kids Connections.<sup>27</sup> The NUT's then-general secretary Steve Sinnott said, 'When you are dealing with something as controversial as Iraq and different events which led up to the invasion, teachers are under an enormous duty to present material which is balanced.' They noted several severe omissions in the booklet, including the failure to mention civilian casualties of the war or that the war was not supported by the United Nations.<sup>28</sup> The NUT made a complaint to the then-Secretary of State for Education Ed Balls, who distanced himself from the publication, stating, 'I am sure you are aware my department does not promote or endorse specific resources or methods of teaching for use in schools'. He added that he had instructed his officials 'to take this matter up' with the MoD.

The NUT referred to a high court ruling in 2007 that found that the government could only send the film *An Inconvenient Truth* to schools if accompanied by guidance giving the other side of the argument.<sup>29</sup> The climate change film was found to contain a number of statements not supported by scientific consensus although its central thesis was unproblematic. The judge ruled that without the guidance the government would be breaking the law and stated that teachers should point out controversial or disputed sections.

Regarding the Iraq war booklet, the MoD claimed that they 'consulted widely with teachers and students' during the development of the 2008 resource. The 2014 resource had no such input; in a parliamentary written answer, Minister for Education, David Laws MP, stated that, 'The Department for Education has not had specific discussions with representatives of the teaching profession about the British Armed Forces Learning Resource 2014.'<sup>30</sup>

The Education Act states that, 'The local education authority, governing body and head teacher shall forbid the promotion of partisan political views' amongst junior pupils.<sup>31</sup> *The British Armed Forces Learning Resource 2014* is, however, aimed at children as young as 5.<sup>32</sup>

## THE RESOURCE: POLITICALLY-DRIVEN

*Britain's Armed Forces have an incredibly proud history...every single one of us benefits from the freedom they secured...I hope this will be the beginning of your interest in Britain's Armed Forces - the finest and bravest in the world.*

David Cameron's Foreword to *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014*

The *British Armed Forces* resource was initiated by the Office of the Prime Minister and has key sections written by government ministers including the Prime Minister. It is unclear how much it cost to design and edit, and who paid for it; the Ministry of Defence stated that it 'had not incurred any cost' apart from £600 it spent on printing copies to give to delegates at the NATO summit in Newport in September 2014, as the resource was 'produced and edited independently.'<sup>33</sup> The resource, which was 'launched to coincide with the 2014 NATO summit', is described by the company who designed it, Brand+Soul, as 'A special commission for Prime Minister, David Cameron'<sup>34</sup>

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The resource has been promoted to all schools in a Department for Education email; it is available through the websites of the Government, the Army, and Armed Forces Day, and some MPs and local education authorities are encouraging schools in their areas to use it.<sup>35</sup>

According to Professor Ian Davies of University of York's Education Department, Cameron's Foreword, 'seems to bring dangerously into play the possibility of the transmission of a political message that is to be accepted uncritically by young people'.<sup>36</sup>

Don Rowe states:

*Culturally, this is the kind of resource one gets in countries with less-than-democratic structures where civic education (education affecting people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions) is used by governments to manipulate citizens into an uncritical attitude towards the state. In the UK we used to have a system of education which was 'at one remove' from the government and one of the reasons for this was precisely to prevent the possibility of authoritarianism through control of the education system.*

*Here we can see that the breaking up of Local Authorities, the 2012 removal of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) as an independent curriculum adviser, and the centralisation of control in the hands of the Secretary of State for Education has seriously eroded this vital distance. Now it is possible for the Secretary of State for Education to allow such a propagandist booklet to be promoted to every primary and secondary school in the country.<sup>37</sup>*

### THE RESOURCE: A BIASED AND PARTIAL VIEW

The majority of contributors to *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014* are or were senior figures in the military. The editor and producer is Tom Tugendhat, a former Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Reserve and now a Conservative Parliamentary candidate for the 2015 election. No teachers were involved in the production of the resource, and it was completed within a month.<sup>38,39</sup>

A YouGov poll in December 2011 found that 79% of the British public agreed with the statement that, 'Teaching should contain a mixture of positive and negative aspects of British history, with no attempt made to persuade pupils to be either proud or ashamed of the way Britain has evolved'.<sup>40</sup> Michael Hand, Professor of Education at the University of Birmingham, argues that, 'The most defensible policy on patriotism in schools is to teach it as a controversial issue'. His research found that 94% of teachers and 77% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that, 'When teaching about patriotism, schools should give a balanced presentation'.<sup>41</sup>

*The British Armed Forces*, however, has a simplistic and strongly patriotic tone, which Don Rowe calls:

*[I]ndulging in nationalistic self-congratulation about the purity and integrity of Britain's military actions now and in the past. The tone and content is so one-sided that teachers would breach the legal guidelines on bias if they were to use it in its current form.<sup>42</sup>*

Another author of citizenship textbooks, who is also a teacher, states that the resource:

*[F]ails to distinguish between PR and education. It verges on propaganda through omission and lack of balance.<sup>43</sup>*

Professor Ian Davies states that:

*The resource does include some interesting and valid comments and some of the questions that are posed would encourage people to think about the rights and wrongs of various situations. It is important to emphasise that no reasonable person would wish to oppose patriotism in the context of a democratic country and it must always be right to respect the courage of the individuals who play key roles in the armed forces of such countries. However, this is a very poor educational resource... The lack of connection between a professional and*

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*academically respectable form of citizenship education and this resource is extremely disappointing. Shallow historical comments and wide ranging political assertions should not be accepted as being of educational merit.*<sup>44</sup>

Chris Waller, Professional Officer at the Association for Citizenship Teaching, states that the resource, 'seems unbalanced and would not be a resource that ACT would commend to teachers in Citizenship.'<sup>45</sup>

### A sanitised view of war

There are no descriptions in the resource of the activities that those in the armed forces undertake on a daily basis or are expected to carry out in armed conflict. There are very few images of armed combat, and none of casualties; most of the images show a sanitised view of the experience of armed forces personnel. For example, on page 29 there is a photo of a young-looking soldier allowing a child in Sierra Leone to look down the sight of his rifle - an image portraying a benevolence far removed from the grim reality of armed combat. The images from the First World War feature smiling troops marching before their deployment to the battlefields, and soldiers with minor injuries.

## THE RECRUITING MESSAGE BEHIND THE RESOURCE

*The resource aims to help teachers introduce students to the work of the Armed Forces in Britain and abroad, exploring their role, history, current operations and what it is like to work as part of the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force. It includes background information, views and different perspectives from many longstanding members of the Armed Forces and includes lesson ideas, areas for discussion and links to other publications and information.*

David Laws, Minister for Education, in response to a Parliamentary Question about *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014*<sup>46</sup>

Although presented as a learning resource, *The British Armed Forces* appears to be promotional in its aims and uncritical in its approach. As such, it is consistent with the aims of the military's wider 'youth engagement' programme. The Ministry of Defence's *Youth Engagement Review* of 2011 makes a clear link between armed forces activities in schools and recruitment into the armed forces which, in tandem with raising 'awareness of the Armed Forces' role... in order to ensure the continued support of the population', make up the two 'defence outcomes'.<sup>47</sup>

The sanitised view of war presented by the resource suggests that it also aims to generate both prospective recruits and wider support for the armed forces amongst the young. Such an approach has been criticised for failing to equip students to make an informed choice, particularly about enlistment in a career that carries such a high risk.<sup>48</sup> A 2007 internal MoD report on 'Engagement with UK Schools' states that, 'many schools are uncomfortable about taking in personnel from MoD/Armed Forces because of their links with recruiting and unpopular activities in Iraq and Afghanistan...Thus some recruiters package their work as citizenship programmes rather than pure recruiting.'<sup>49</sup>

General Sir Nick Parker notes in the *British Armed Forces* resource that, 'In the 18th and 19th centuries a significant proportion of soldiers were recruited from deprived backgrounds seeking a new life'. This is, however, still the case, and the Ministry of Defence fall back on the argument that an armed forces career can particularly benefit those from a disadvantaged background when challenged that the UK is the only country in the EU to recruit 16 year olds.<sup>50,51</sup> A similar emphasis is given in the resource by General Sir Peter Wall in his description of the benefits of an Army career: 'training all over the world...always challenging and fun...Later on you will be able to get a good job if you have done well in the Army.' General Wall continues to point students in the direction of the Army recruiters, saying, 'There is a lot of information available about the Army. There is an Army facebook page, and Youtube channel and a website - see the links. You can also go to your local careers office and personally speak to a soldier.'

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## Promoting military activities in schools

*The British Armed Forces* resource explicitly endorses the government's 'military ethos in schools' programme developed by the Department for Education; this suggests that the resource aims to promote the armed forces to teachers, governors and parents as well as students. The Duke of Westminster states in the resource that, 'Through the Troops to Teachers programme many men and women are bringing their culture to the classroom and beginning to deliver impressive results.' This is despite the concerns that teachers' unions have raised about the fast-tracking of veterans into teaching and the low numbers completing the scheme.<sup>52,53</sup> The resource mentions school cadet forces a number of times; the Cadet Expansion Programme in state schools is perhaps the most significant and ambitious aspect of the 'military ethos in schools' agenda.<sup>54</sup> Michael Fallon, Secretary of State for Defence, claims in the resource that, 'Headteachers report time and again that having a Combined Cadet Force in the school is good not just for the cadets, but for the whole school.' The Duke of Westminster adds that, 'The Cadet movement is not about recruiting', and General Sir Peter Wall claims that, 'You can be an Army Cadet and find out what life as soldier [sic] is like'. However, not only has it been acknowledged by the Ministry of Defence that cadet forces are considered to be an important recruiting tool, but there is evidence to suggest that cadets are not informed about the serious risks and downsides of being in the armed forces.<sup>55,56</sup>

### “Military values”

*This pack demonstrates the values our Armed Forces embody. Their focus on duty, service, integrity and teamwork - these are the British values we hold dearly. Reservists reflect these in their workplaces. Cadets reflect them in their schools. And around the world, the Royal Navy, British Army, Royal Air Force and Royal Marines stand for freedom, fairness, tolerance and responsibility.*

David Cameron, Foreword to *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014*

The resource champions and glorifies “military values”, suggesting that those in the military are the best proponents of the highest values in society. Workers in other public services are rarely honoured to such a degree despite their daily displays of 'duty, service, integrity and teamwork'. Michael Fallon, Secretary of State for Defence, claims in the resource that, 'The military ethos is a golden thread that can be an example of what is best about our nation and helps it improve everything it touches.' This overblown and conceptually incoherent rhetoric obscures numerous instances where the armed forces have not lived up to values that are widely-accepted in society within their own ranks and as an institution has failed to address abusive and criminal behaviour.<sup>57</sup>

## THE RESOURCE: AN UNCRITICAL PRESENTATION OF ARMED FORCES OPERATIONS

### Historical conflicts

The tone of the resource is one which celebrates and simplifies British military history and overlooks the many injustices that it has brought about. One teacher and citizenship author told us that the resource gives,

*[A] particularly one-sided view of British history which seems to suggest that the British army was always in the right and fighting for liberal values... Whatever view you take of the Empire - for good or ill - and it is a mixed picture, no-one can dispute that the British army did some unpleasant things to people in the countries we controlled... This has to be part of the information and discussion, however unpalatable it may be for the image of the British Army.<sup>58</sup>*

Admiral Sir George Zambellas states in the resource that Nelson's “big win” at the Battle of Trafalgar 'played a key part in the British Empire becoming the biggest the world has ever known - now flourishing as the Commonwealth'. He claims that the UK took the 'lead in promoting freedom, tolerance and human rights' ignoring a significant body of documentation that shows British military operations in the British Empire as often brutal and involving many atrocities; these include the actions of the British armed forces against the Zulus in South Africa in 1879, the Batang Kali massacre of 1948, against Kenyans during the

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Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s, the bombing of German cities during World War Two, and, as former Army Colonel and counter-insurgency expert David Benest details, and others elsewhere.<sup>59</sup>

In the resource's coverage of the First World War, the historian Dan Snow claims that, 'The British army performed much better than most people believe. There were terrible failures... but also dramatic successes.' He skates over the content of current debates - revitalised by the war's centenary - not only around the way the war was fought but also whether it should ever have been fought. Snow does note that, 'Although Britain won... it did not feel like a victory. Three quarters of a million Britons were killed, and many more lived with terrible injuries... Britain had almost bankrupted itself.' However, he also claims that contemporary democracy is, 'A way of life developed and exported by the British over the centuries and successfully defended by Britain and their allies against competing ideologies and worldviews in a series of wars, that were terrible, but not pointless.' This is itself strongly ideological, justifying war as a means to an end, and glossing over often contentious and self-interested motivations for war, strategies that were morally questionable, and numerous atrocities.

### Recent conflicts

The sub-section in the resource entitled *Recent Conflicts: Protecting the Peace* fails to mention the recent invasion of, and war in, Iraq; nor is Iraq mentioned in the section *The work of the armed forces today*, apart from in a photo caption reading 'A soldier from the RAF Regiment on patrol near Basrah Air Base, Iraq'. The war in Afghanistan is the focus of the section on *Operations: protecting our allies and interests*. Veterans Dan Jarvis MP and Tom Tugendhart claim that, 'The operation was too big for Britain or the United States alone but as part of NATO we have been able to create the infrastructure to allow the elected government of Afghanistan to establish order over the whole nation... a new type of warfare, not one of conquest but of cooperation'. The highly questionable legacy of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya are glossed over.<sup>60</sup> As one teacher and citizenship author commented, there is no mention of, 'The current situation in Iraq and all the issues this raises about the nature of armed intervention... it is a mistake to miss out the unpalatable actions side of modern history. This is PR not education.'<sup>61</sup> To fail to raise these issues is to ignore, or seek to override, the strong and consistently high public opposition to recent conflicts.<sup>62</sup>

The resource only mentions the war in Northern Ireland twice, despite the fact that it was a long military campaign in which more British armed forces personnel died than in Afghanistan and Iraq combined.<sup>63</sup> The war in Northern Ireland, like other recent armed conflicts, involved brutality by the British armed forces.<sup>64</sup>

Former Royal Marine Paddy Ashdown (who now sits in the House of Lords) asserts in the resource that, 'Some critics have claimed we only engage where oil is involved. But Kosovo proves them wrong - we went to war then for refugees - to get people who had been driven out by a dictator, back to their homes.' Few people would argue that the UK only goes to war for oil, but it does not follow that because military action may be taken for humanitarian purposes that the UK never enters a war for its own economic interests. Lord Ashdown also ignores the continuing problems in former Yugoslavia; he himself wrote in 2011 that Bosnia 'slides back towards the status of a failed state... [There is] a real risk that the country would break down into independent ethnic statelets'.<sup>65</sup> Observations of this kind are entirely absent from the resource.

### Protecting commercial and political interests

The resource also makes the case for deployment of the armed forces within a civilian context. General Sir Nick Parker claims that, 'Unarmed military assistance to prevent or deal with the aftermath of a natural disaster or major incident... [is] generally uncontroversial.' In fact, the deployment of armed personnel for domestic issues is often controversial, as it was during the 2012 London Olympics.<sup>66</sup> General Parker does note that, 'Unlike many other Western democracies, we have an institutional reluctance to use the Armed Forces at home... Great care should... be taken to limit the use of the military to sustaining essential services and to avoid becoming a tool of Government to promote particular policies.' In contrast, Admiral Zambellas lacks nuance in his assertion that, 'You need the Royal Navy as much today as yesterday... to protect the web of sea trading routes that criss-cross the world's oceans... [Interference to these] can damage our economy at home, upsetting trading markets and leading to higher prices for the fuel in our cars or the clothes that we wear. The country, our businesses and our families are made poorer.'



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The global inequity on which these markets are based, and the UK's right to defend national interests whatever the effect on those in other countries, is taken as a natural and unquestionable state of affairs.

### THE RESOURCE: NO DEBATE ON ALTERNATIVES TO MILITARY ACTION

*War is the greatest failure of mankind. It is the failure of politics, the failure of diplomacy, the failure of our own humanity. But tragically, it is all too often forced upon us...Quite rightly, many wish there were no need for Armed Services today, but the past century has taught us that to protect ourselves from invasion, persecution, repression and injustice we must be able to defend ourselves... the use of our Armed Forces is not taken lightly and our democracy ensures that whatever the orders, the people through their government decide, never the Armed Forces themselves... I am proud to serve with the British Armed Forces because they seek peace'.*

Imam Asim Hafiz, 'A Just War? Can it ever be right to fight?' in *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014*

Acknowledging in the resource that 'war is the greatest failure of mankind', Imam Asim Hafiz suggests that the UK has only gone to war for defensive purposes; this is a difficult statement to maintain on closer examination. His section on 'Just War' fails to expand on the how alternative solutions could be given more weight, emphasising instead the need for military solutions to conflicts.

Paddy Ashdown and Admiral Lord Boyce, former Chief of Defence Staff, separately quote the saying, 'If you seek peace prepare for war'; this could be an interesting entry point into a debate about the role of contributing factors in fomenting armed conflict, but the resource fails to encourage any such debate. Instead it promotes the factors that often lead to war: framing other countries as potential enemies (as Admiral Lord Boyce does with Russia); upholding an economic system that is imposing hardship on many people around the world; facilitating new wars by intervening militarily abroad; and, not least, selling weapons and other military hardware to other countries, as the UK has done to over 100 countries around the world.<sup>67</sup> Michael Fallon uses the resource to champion the private arms industry; similarly General Lord Richards claims that the UK has ensured "stability" in the Gulf States, failing to note that UK-made vehicles were used by Saudi Arabia to help crush pro-democracy protests in Bahrain, and that the UK continues to sell arms to the two states despite their deteriorating human rights situations.<sup>68</sup>

### THE RESOURCE: COMPETING PERSPECTIVES ON REMEMBRANCE

Remembrance is framed in the resource by Vice Admiral Peter Wilkinson, National President of the Royal British Legion, as ways that people 'declare publicly that they stand in support of those who serve.' He places the emphasis on the current armed forces, rather than those who were killed or seriously wounded in past wars. This change of emphasis towards using remembrance to encourage support of the armed forces as an institution has been evident in the British Legion's Poppy Appeal in recent years.<sup>69</sup> This is in contrast to remembrance as a publicly-shared sense of sorrow and lament of military and civilian casualties on all sides; recent debate indicates that this is what many people feel should be the dominant tone during the remembrance period.<sup>70</sup> A more nuanced perspective on remembrance is given voice in the resource by former Army Reservist turned teacher David Hart, one of very few non-officer personnel or veterans to be quoted in it, including a description of how he approaches remembrance in the classroom:

*[L]ooking into the eyes of the pupils I teach and believing that the act of remembrance will inspire them to put others before self, to be courageous, hard working, and tenacious. But above all that they understand their actions, questioning, decisions and choices may prevent the need for future wars.*

A recent pamphlet, *How Ought War To Be Remembered in Schools?*, by David Aldridge, a philosopher in the School of Education at Oxford Brookes University, opens the debate up further, questioning whether 'children should learn about the horror of war' and asking 'should we be grateful only to those on the

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winning side, or should we feel gratitude for those who fought and lost?', noting that not all those who were killed 'gave their lives willingly'.<sup>71</sup>

Noting that nearly one million British armed forces personnel were killed during the First World War, Vice Admiral Peter Wilkinson also states that, 'It is also important to remember that many more came home, many with terrible physical and psychological wounds, just as most who have recently served in Iraq and Afghanistan have returned'. That this mention of the effect of war on those who fight is brief is perhaps unsurprisingly given that the government's support for veterans suffering from serious mental health problems, whilst improved in recent years, is still inadequate, as the Defence Select Committee have recently noted, and has to be subsidised by charities.<sup>72,73</sup>

## A POOR LEARNING RESOURCE

*The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014* is based principally on the opinions and assertions of its contributors, which it fails to distinguish from fact. The main text lacks the balance of views that would be required for a proper evaluation of opposing arguments or even a satisfactory answer to some of the factual questions. Educationalist Don Rowe observes that the resource employs, 'leading questions requiring students to agree with the premise of the question before they can answer it'. For Rowe,

*Students in school have no less a right to their own social, moral and political views than adults and it is therefore unacceptable to ask students questions of this kind.*<sup>74</sup>

The resource is inadequate and potentially counter-productive for the History, English and Citizenship syllabuses it aims to support; these are subjects in which critical debate and the discussion of controversial issues in such a way that students are free to make up their own minds play a key part.<sup>75</sup>

The rare 'Lesson Ideas' in the resource that are not basic comprehension questions, and that therefore might encourage critical thinking, are poorly formed. For Professor Ian Davies,

*There is no evidence of a thoughtful conceptual base to the materials. Opportunities for the development of skills are weak. Ideas and suggestions about assessment are very weakly developed.*<sup>76</sup>

One teacher and citizenship author describes the lesson ideas as,

*[O]f a very low standard - random, unstructured, unsupported and lacking in context and purpose... They are spewed out without any notion of the context in which they might be used or of the materials that would be needed to support them... Ofsted inspectors would be extremely critical of these activities if used in lessons.*<sup>77</sup>

The lesson ideas also refer to material that has not been covered, for example: 'Consider deserters in the First World War and conscientious objectors in the Second World War after conscription was introduced. Look at the balance of evidence and write a persuasive argument for or against fighting in a war.' Neither deserters nor conscientious objectors are mentioned in the main text; if students have no prior knowledge they are unlikely to be able to make a balanced judgement. Moreover, the first sentence incorrectly implies that there were only 'deserters' in the First World War, and only conscientious objectors in the Second World War.<sup>78</sup>

The resource is also unsuitable for many of the target group. As Rowe observes:

*The producers claim that the resource is suitable for key stages 1-4 and beyond which is absurd. The subject matter and the reading age of the text, which is around 13 years, make it completely unsuitable to be used with primary schools... I believe very many primary school parents would object to such a subject being taught to their children and in this way.*

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## CONCLUSION

This critical response to the *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014* has identified a number of key concerns about the resource:

- The resource was initiated by the Office of the Prime Minister and has key sections written by government ministers including the Prime Minister. Other sections are written by current or former high-ranking military personnel. Its content is politically-driven, seeking to generate public acceptance of government policy and the use of military intervention, and it presents personal and political opinions as fact.
- It is poorly conceived as a tool for learning. For example, the language it uses and the complexity of the subject matter make it unsuitable for many of those it is aimed at. Many of the questions that it asks are introduced in a leading way and the material that would be required to explore them fully is not provided.
- The resource makes a one-sided case for the existence of the armed forces and the arms industry and provides no room for debate on alternatives to armed conflict. It presents a sanitised view of war and glorifies “military values”.
- The resource includes material that promotes recruitment to the armed forces and champions the government policy of promoting military-led activities in schools.
- It presents a partial and uncritical history of British involvement in war, ignoring debate over the morality and legacy of such conflicts.

These educational and ethical concerns strongly indicate that *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014* should not be used in schools as a learning resource, or should only be used in conjunction with alternative materials, and it should not be promoted as a learning resource by third parties.

Furthermore, we consider that the document amounts to political interference in children's education. The Department of Education is failing in its legal duty, under the Education Act of 1996, to safeguard children from the promotion of partisan political views within schools and to offer a balanced presentation of opposing views; local authorities that promote the resource, and schools that use it as it stands without presenting alternative viewpoints, would be doing the same.

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## CONTACT

Owen Everett on [education@forceswatch.net](mailto:education@forceswatch.net).

This report may be copied and distributed freely.

**ForcesWatch** is a British-based campaigning organisation. We seek to scrutinise the ethical basis of the recruitment of young people into the armed forces. We advocate changes to policy, raise public awareness of the issues and challenge the armed forces on their recruitment practices, especially those aimed at the youngest and most disadvantaged groups.

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## OTHER RESOURCES

This report is published in conjunction with a video created by Quaker Peace & Social Witness:

*The British Armed Forces: Propaganda in the classroom?*, February 2015 (5 mins 42 secs)

Available to watch at: <http://youtu.be/wB9JD6P1RCM>

*The British Armed Forces Learning Resource 2014* can be viewed in full at <http://www.armedforceslearningresources.co.uk>

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