

ForcesWatch

Model motion on military and defence industry influence in education

This party/union/branch/council notes that every year thousands of visits are made by the armed forces to schools across the UK to promote military careers and the armed forces.¹

We further note that there are some areas where almost every school is visited, often a number of times each year, with visits mainly in secondary schools, but also primary and special schools.

The armed forces and also the defence industry, including global arms companies, provide extensive curriculum resources and sponsorship within education, particularly around STEM. In addition, a number of schools and colleges are now sponsored or partnered by the armed forces and/or the defence industry.

We also note that, since 2012, 'military ethos' has been promoted in schools, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, initiated and supported by the Department for Education and the Ministry for Defence at the cost of tens of millions of pounds. The Cadet Expansion Programme and 'alternative provision with a military ethos' have developed significantly as a result.

This party/union/branch/council believes these developments raise a number of concerns around marketing and recruitment activities by military interests within the education system.

1. The Ministry of Defence's engagement with young people in schools and elsewhere is designed to influence future decision-makers to support the military and its operations, and to encourage young people to enlist.² A growing body of research suggests encouraging recruitment at an early age is not in the best interests of young people.^{3 4}
2. There are many reasonable and diverse opinions about the activities of the armed forces and of arms companies, with attendant legitimate concerns and diverging viewpoints. The British public is clearly concerned about the role of arms companies in conflict and repressive regimes.⁵ Promoting military activities, military ethos and allowing arms companies to be involved in education risks marginalising individuals or groups.
3. The significant and growing military influence in schools could be detrimental to the educational imperative of balanced learning which is not unduly influenced by outside agendas,⁶
4. The National Youth Agency has expressed concerns that military ethos activities in schools are favoured over other youth work which could yield similar benefit.⁷ In the same timespan that tens of millions of pounds have been granted to military ethos projects and cadet units, education and youth services have faced damaging cuts.^{8 9}

This party/union/branch/council is also concerned that for over ten years the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have advocated that the UK should cease its recruitment of young people who are under 18 years of age into the armed forces.¹⁰ These calls have been backed by organisations which support human rights and children's rights. The UN and the UK's four Children's Commissioners have also called for military activities in schools which have a recruitment purpose, to be stopped.¹¹

This party/union/branch/council supports calls for oversight and regulation of military activities in schools, including for careers and curriculum purposes, and for military-themed activities or perspectives to be balanced by activities focusing on peace and human rights.¹² We call for activities run by arms companies in schools to cease.

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1 For details of all military-related activities within education referred to in this motion see the ForcesWatch briefing 'Military involvement in UK education and youth activities in the UK', <https://www.forceswatch.net/resources/military-involvement-education-and-youth-activities-uk>

2 ForcesWatch, 2015, *The recruitment agenda behind the UK armed forces' engagement' with students in schools and colleges*, <https://www.forceswatch.net/resources/recruitment-agenda-behind-engagement-schools>

3 Child Soldiers International, 2016, *The British armed forces: Why raising the recruitment age would benefit everyone*, <https://www.child-soldiers.org/shop/the-british-armed-forces-why-raising-the-recruitment-age-would-benefit-everyone>

4 ForcesWatch, 2019, *Selling the Military: A critical analysis of contemporary recruitment marketing in the UK*, <https://www.forceswatch.net/resources/selling-military-critical-analysis-contemporary-recruitment-marketing-uk>

5 Campaign Against the Arms Trade, 2017, '76% of UK adults oppose the promotion of military exports to human rights abusers', <https://www.caat.org.uk/media/press-releases/2017-09-12>

6 Education Act 1996, sections 406 and 407, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/407>

7 National Youth Agency, 19/01/2015, 'Military ethos – where's the evidence?', <http://nya.org.uk/2015/01/blog-military-ethos-wheres-evidence/>

8 ForcesWatch, 2016, 'Government funding for 'military ethos' in schools', <https://www.forceswatch.net/news/government-funding-military-ethos-schools>

9 <https://schoolcuts.org.uk>; <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/2004653/youth-service-cuts-deeper-than-predicted>

10 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016, *Concluding Observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/GBR/CO/5

11 *UK Children's Commissioners' Recommendations May 2016 to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Examination of the Fifth Periodic Report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/ufiles/UK-Childrens-Commissioners-final-recommendations.pdf>

12 The Scottish Parliament have recently considered the issue of armed forces in schools and published a number of recommendations for oversight, guidance and consultation: Scottish Parliament, 2018, *PE1603: Ensuring greater scrutiny, guidance and consultation on armed forces visits to schools in Scotland*, <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/Committees/Report/PPC/2018/6/4/PE1603--Ensuring-greater-scrutiny--guidance-and-consultation-on-armed-forces-visits-to-schools-in-Scotland>