



Questioning the presence of the military in schools

MILITARY & ARMS INDUSTRY ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

The armed forces engage with schools and colleges in many ways – they visit thousands across the UK each year providing teaching resources and activities, career presentation teams and careers events, student development activities and away days. The number of cadet forces in secondary schools has expanded. Arms companies also have a presence in primary and secondary schools providing learning resources, activities and work experiences, particularly for STEM education.

The armed forces and defence contractors invest in education so that they can interest new recruits and employees, and to create positive awareness among young people. **Is this in the best interests of children and young people and should schools provide a captive audience for defence agendas?**

School students, parents and others responsible for young people must be able to express concerns about military presence in schools and the weight given to militaristic approaches, whether this is based on their beliefs, learning values or their future wellbeing.

Schools should not facilitate unbalanced promotion by military employers and must encourage an honest portrayal of the complexity of military issues, helping young people to develop critical awareness and make their own informed choices.

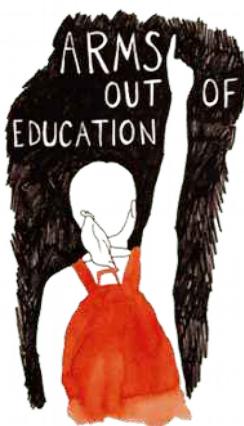
RAISING CONCERNS

An initial meeting with the headteacher is helpful to raise your concerns and provide an opportunity to encourage a more critical approach. There may be other parents or school staff who share your concerns, allowing you to raise the issue as a group.

As military activities are often not questioned in wider society, the school may be unaware that parents will have concerns. It is important that these are shared so that the school is informed of differing opinion on the issue. This may influence how they deal with it in the future.

Many people feel that military activities should not be allowed in schools on the basis of their own political beliefs. Others feel that they simply do not want these activities to be part of their, or their child's, education. It can also be useful to raise other arguments. These include: the inappropriateness of promoting risky careers or companies that make a profit out of conflict within an education environment; the need for students' critical awareness and their ability to make informed choices to be prioritised; and, the facility for students to opt out of activities they don't agree with on principle. See overleaf for more.

Other actions: Contact the local council or councillors with your concerns about military influence in local education, and ask them questions about the need to provide balance and support peace education. You can also speak to school governors or academy trust leaders. You could raise the issue in local media or organise a public meeting. Contact us for ideas.



CONCERNS ABOUT MILITARY IN SCHOOLS

Promotional activities rarely mention **physical and mental health risks**, and **legal obligations** associated with enlisting. Other risks include high rates of drop-out and unacceptable behaviours, and difficulties adapting back to civilian life. There are **ethical concerns** as service personnel face moral burdens and dilemmas. Child rights groups have identified many **duty of care concerns** relating to the youngest recruits.

School-based military activities and recruitment marketing are targeted towards **disadvantaged communities**. Military personnel from these backgrounds can be more impacted when things go wrong.

Misleading recruitment advertising is deliberately designed to attract young people by focusing on personal development and camaraderie. The reality is unlikely to match the marketing and many find service life difficult or unsatisfactory.

The UK is the only country in Europe to recruit 16 year olds and under-18s make up around one quarter of new army recruits. In **refusing to adapt to widely accepted child rights norms**, the UK military puts its own interests above those of young people.

While cadet forces are seen to offer discipline and excitement, there are dangers in **normalising militarism** within schools.

Those struggling with academic subjects may be **discouraged from achievement at school** by the possibility of leaving education early for an army career. A high proportion of applicants to the armed forces end up not enlisting.

Although the armed forces deny that they recruit in schools and colleges because enlistment does not happen there, **access to young people at an impressionable age** is clearly an important part of their recruitment strategy. **Weapons and other military hardware** are often brought into schools.

Arms companies are often involved in supplying weapons, military hardware and surveillance equipment that **fuel conflict and implicate them in war crimes and human rights abuses**. Young people have the **right to be informed** about the core business of companies that are involved in their education or promote their careers to them.

Has the school **consulted parents, staff or governors**? Does it offer the opportunity to **opt-out**, alternative activities and the chance for students to discuss differing opinions?

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SCHOOL

- **The school's duty of care:** It should ensure that presentations and activities are educational rather than promotional, give students the opportunity to discuss related issues and access alternative sources of information about enlisting. It should ensure that weapons are not brought into schools.
- **Educational balance:** The school should offer activities that examine different perspectives on, and approaches to, conflict, reflecting civil society initiatives on peacebuilding, disarmament, human rights and human security. Is learning about the effects of war and diverse experiences of military service available to students?
- **Promoting peace and human rights:** The school could organise a peace day or week, and/or include activities and materials from organisations in the Peace Education Network.
- **Freedom to choose:** The school should send out information in advance of activities and provide an opportunity to opt-out.



peace-education.org.uk



Thinking of joining the armed forces?

Get the facts first from:

www.beforeyousignup.info

Independent information service

Information for potential recruits, parents and those who want to leave the armed forces.
beforeyousignup.info

More information and resources can be found at forceswatch.net

You can also **contact us** for more advice.

