

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 in UK schools?

- 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?

In 2011-12, there were around 11,000 visits to secondary schools and colleges.

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 - that's 15% of that age group (more than one in seven).

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 (from 72% in Oxfordshire to 96% in Edinburgh); 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 numerous times each year.

The government's new 'military ethos' programme for schools

The Department for Education's 'military ethos' programme encompasses a number of initiatives to give, 'young people the opportunity to develop teamwork, self-discipline, resilience and leadership'.

Combined Cadet Force

New CCF units are being set up in all state schools that want them (see box).

Troops to Teachers

This is a scheme to encourage ex-forces personnel to become teachers. Between 2013-15 the government is due to spend £10 million on the scheme. Ex-forces training as teachers are paid a salary while they study and pay no tuition fees for their education. 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 for 'pupils who are either disengaged with education or at risk of becoming disengaged'. One example is Challenger Troop, which runs military-style, military-uniformed outdoor activities for pupils in school time.

Another is the Military to Mentors scheme run by Skillforce - ex-Armed Forces personnel run activities in school time and on school premises, with students able to gain qualifications such as BTECs and First Aid certificates.

Military academies and free schools

The government 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.

Military-focused teaching resources

The armed forces provide free curriculum resources for teachers based on military activities and careers. The resources cover geography, history, citizenship, PE, assemblies and skills such as leadership, and age groups from 7-11 to 18+. Resources for events such as Armed Forces Day are also available.

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 260 CCF contingents and the government is funding a programme of expansion.

CCF members do weekly parades in school, and whole day and weekend training events (from weapons to navigation and adventurous training).

The headteacher appoints the Contingent Commander and identifies staff members who are willing to be adult volunteers.

The Ministry of Defence provides uniform, weapons and ammunition, training advice and assistance, loans of equipment, access to military transport, and remuneration to School Staff Instructors and officers.

Sixth form scholarships

Army, navy, and RAF Sixth Form scholars get paid by the MoD during Year 12 and/or 13, and 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 army gives scholarships of £1500 for each year with one year officer training at Sandhurst. In 2011-12 there were 100 Sixth Form scholars (270 students applied). There is also an Army Further Education bursary, which is similar, but for students studying the equivalent level to GCSEs at college (there were 130 Army FE scholars in 2011-12). The Navy gives £1050 for each year and the RAF gives £1000 in Year 13.

*"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."*

The government's new 'military ethos' programme for schools

One-sided picture of the Armed Forces

The MoD 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 the military's activities aren't doing this. For example, the army's Armed Forces Day resources claims to develop various types of thinking, but critical thinking is not among them.

In presenting a positive view of the armed forces, emphasis on the risks and legal obligations it involves is minimised in favour of presenting the forces as an exciting career option. The effects of war are sanitised.

Supporters of military activities in schools suggest that they are the best way to give pupils skills such as self-discipline and teamwork, ignoring that many other activities could also provide these.

School pupils aren't encouraged to explore the ethical issues concerned with military action, such as killing (including the killing of civilians).

Serving other interests

Are armed forces visits to schools and the 'military ethos' programme serving the interests of children or those of the armed forces? The MoD identify *recruitment* and *raising positive awareness of the armed forces* as the reason to visit schools. The benefits of the 'military ethos' programme include employment of ex-service personnel and recruiting young people to the reserve forces. Is school an appropriate environment for these activities?

Not in the best interests of students

Armed Forces recruitment focuses on young people, often from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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 in the sections most exposed to combat, such as the Infantry. The youngest and most disadvantaged recruits are especially at risk because they are over-represented in these sections.

The armed forces are the only employer where you can face a criminal conviction if you break your contract.

Armed forces visitors to schools, and the resources they offer, do not talk much about these downsides to military life. However, because parents and guardians have little say over what their children do in school, it is difficult for them to question whether this is appropriate.

Programmes such as Troops to Teachers are based on the belief that ex-military teachers will be better able to instil discipline than other teachers and they possess qualities unique to the forces. 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 be have a learning ethos, not a military one.

What you can do

It is possible to get the military out of 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. In Germany, since 2010, six schools have become 'military-free', thanks to a teachers' union and pupils themselves calling on their parent-teacher-pupil 'conferences' to ban the military from their premises. In the US, one school got their Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (like the CCF) disbanded in 2012, after a few years of speaking at school board meetings and writing letters.

In the UK, headteachers decide whether they want 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 your 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, you could demand that at least there be a balanced point of view, for example by inviting those with other perspectives (including

veterans) to speak alongside military personnel, and the provision 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, to raise the issue of the armed forces visiting schools and the government policy promoting 'military skills and ethos' in schools. 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. 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.