

APRIL 2021

RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN TO THE MILITARY IN WELSH SCHOOLS

A report by Cymdeithas y Cymod,
ForcesWatch and the Peace Pledge
Union.

peace pledge union



This report is the result of a joint piece of work between Cymdeithas y Cymod, ForcesWatch and the Peace Pledge Union. Whilst the report and its recommendations are supported by all three organisations, each will have its own particular view on some of the topics raised herein and may hold different views about how best to address the challenges set out.

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CONTRIBUTING ORGANISATIONS

Cymdeithas y Cymod, the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Wales, is part of an international, spiritually-based movement composed of people who, from the basis of a belief in the power of love and truth to create justice and restore community, commit themselves to active non-violence as a way of life and as a means of transformation – personal, social, economic and political.
cymdeithasycymod.org.uk / @Cymod

The Peace Pledge Union is the oldest secular pacifist organisation in Britain. Since 1934, it has been campaigning for a warless world – from anti-bombing campaigns during WW2, to protesting at the remote-controlled military drone assassinations of today. The PPU also distributes white poppies which represent remembrance for all victims of war, a commitment to peace and a challenge to attempts to glamorise or celebrate war.
ppu.org.uk / @PPUtoday

ForcesWatch is a UK organisation dedicated to investigating militarisation, military ethics and human rights concerns. They expose and challenge unethical military recruitment practices, issues affecting personnel and veterans, and initiatives that aim to build support for war.
forceswatch.net / @ForcesWatch

This report examines the issue of military recruitment activities in schools in Wales – an issue steeped in controversy and on which the Welsh Government made a series of commitments in a report published in June 2015¹, following a public petition submitted in 2012. As this report demonstrates, little tangible progress has been made against those commitments, yet military recruitment visits to Welsh schools have continued.

This report makes two arguments against the military recruitment of children. The first is based on research findings pointing to worse health / mental health outcomes for child recruits to the military, and the second is that the tactics (particularly advertising) associated with child recruitment are based on misleading and inaccurate portrayals of military life. Both arguments should be of concern in Wales, where the Welsh Government has consistently emphasised² its commitment to both the letter and the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has consistently recommended that the UK stop recruiting under-18 year-olds and that military visits to schools be 'strictly limited'.

Although the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces themselves claim that they do not carry out recruitment *per se* in schools, there is significant evidence to suggest that military activities in schools are part of a strategy for reaching young people with activities to create interest in an armed forces career, and are therefore part of a longer-term recruitment process. Our own FOI requests for this report (see Appendix 4) elicited data which suggested that over half of visits to schools are about careers in the armed forces. Even if young people are not directly recruited to the armed forces, they are still “recruited” to pro-military attitudes, too often without hearing countervailing voices and arguments.

The army, who are responsible for 75% of recruitment of 16 and 17 year-olds, rely on enlistment of children to fulfil intake targets, particularly into higher-risk frontline roles. The education system is a key site for generating recruits from this age group. There is also evidence to suggest that poorer communities, including those in Wales, and children from lower income households or who are at risk of failing due to other vulnerabilities, are targeted for such military recruitment. We argue that this situation requires further analysis with full datasets provided by the MoD, and a child rights-based policy response from the Welsh Government with recognition of the link between recruitment of under-18s and military recruitment activities in schools.

We welcome some of the progress that has been made in peace education linked to the new Welsh curriculum, but these noble aspirations to develop ethical, informed citizens and to promote non-violent conflict resolution need to be set against data which show regular visits by the armed forces to schools across Wales.

With the Senedd elections due in May 2021, there is a unique opportunity for the next Welsh Government to embrace these challenges and to draw a line in the sand about Wales’ status as a peace-loving nation, and one which will not uncritically allow its children to be the target of military recruitment.

A summary of our recommendations is given below.

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- 1 National Assembly for Wales (2015) [Written Response by the Welsh Government to the Report of the Petitions Committee entitled Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools: report on the consideration of a petition](#), Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.
 - 2 Welsh Government (2019) [Children’s rights in Wales](#), Welsh Government website (accessed 6 March 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendations for the Welsh Government

- 1) The evidence in this report should be used by the Welsh Government to guide a formal review into military recruitment activities in Welsh schools.
- 2) Guidance should be issued to headteachers and careers teachers in relation to inviting the armed forces into schools to take account of their unique nature as a career and the need to encourage an open and honest exchange of views with learners about their role.
- 3) In line with the new Welsh curriculum, learners should be encouraged to approach presentations regarding prospective careers, including military marketing campaigns, with an open and inquiring mind, critically exploring the impact of potential career choices on their health and well-being as ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.
- 4) Child Rights Impact Assessments should be utilised to examine visits to schools and colleges by the armed forces for recruitment activities, and consideration should be given to introducing further oversight, regulation and guidance to support these.
- 5) The Welsh Government should seriously consider the role of peace education programmes in supporting schools to enable learners to develop as healthy, confident individuals and ethical, informed citizens and assign some resources to supporting and developing these programmes in Welsh schools.

Recommendations for the Children's and Future Generations Commissioners:

- 6) We ask the Future Generations Commissioner and the Children's Commissioner to consider military recruitment activities in Welsh schools as an issue relating to children's rights and wellbeing.

Recommendations for the armed forces:

- 7) The armed forces should proactively publish annual data on military visits to schools, with data on individual visits and collated by local authority, national and UK level. Doing so will allow much more robust analysis of the pattern of visits so that there can be clarity over whether, for example, visits are being targeted at disadvantaged areas.

Recommendations for the UK Government:

- 8) The UK should raise the minimum age of armed forces recruitment to 18 in order to safeguard many of the most vulnerable recruits.

INTRODUCTION: MILITARISM IN WALES

Wales has a proud history of opposing militarism and armed conflict³ with roots within both the Nonconformist movement and the Independent Labour Party at the turn of the 20th Century. Yet, along with other parts of the UK, Wales has been subject to numerous initiatives aimed at developing interest among young people towards a military career or to inculcate a positive attitude towards the military in younger age groups. Activities aimed at engaging children and teenagers include: visits by the armed forces to schools for careers and curriculum activities; 'military ethos' and 'military preparation' activities and cadet provision within education; military-themed activities in the community; and sophisticated recruitment marketing designed to exploit adolescent vulnerabilities.

This report looks at two intersecting areas of concern relating to the relationship of the military to young people in Wales: the recruitment of under-18s into the armed forces, and the activities within the education system which aim to develop an interest in this or promote the military more generally. Military recruitment from the age of 16 is a policy determined at UK level which has been contested by civil society groups who wish to see the UK honour its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, what happens within the education system is a devolved matter, and the Welsh Government has powers and responsibilities to guide and regulate activities and policy within schools.

Activities provided by the armed forces within schools are seen by the military as an important part of a pre-recruitment process that channels 16 and 17 year-olds towards a career in the armed forces. The relationship between armed forces activities in schools and recruitment has been noted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child⁴ and the UK's Children's Commissioners⁵. If the Welsh Government is fully committed to implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it must not only actively seek for the age of recruitment to be increased, but must also take action that is within its power to limit unregulated access to young people for recruitment activities.

As the authority that is responsible for education policy and young people's welfare within the education system and outside of it, we argue that the Welsh Government must actively engage with concerns raised in this report (and elsewhere) that the education system is being utilised for furthering the recruitment agenda of the military against the recommendations of the UN and the best interests of young people.

Recruitment of young people to the UK military – and why it is problematic

In the UK, children are permitted to begin the enlistment process at the age of 15 years and seven months. The UK is the only country in Europe that still recruits 16-year-olds to its armed forces.⁶

3 Eirug, A. (2018) *The Opposition to the Great War in Wales 1914-1918*, Wales: University of Wales Press.

4 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) [UN CRC Committee's Concluding Observations](#), Children's Rights Alliance for England website (accessed 6 March 2021).

5 UK Children's Commissioners (2016) [UK Children's Commissioners recommendations to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Examination of the Fifth Periodic Report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#), Children's Commissioner for England / Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland / Children's Commissioner for Wales / Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

6 Child Rights International Network (2020) [The British armed forces: why raising the recruitment age would benefit everyone](#), London: CRIN.

These 16 and 17 year-old British recruits are fully enlisted, with all the legal obligations that entails, and must serve until they are 22 years old, with limited opportunities for leaving.

military training⁷ as well as longer term negative outcomes associated with recruitment at a young age. There are also a number of concerns around whether a child's decision to enlist is fully informed, such as the promotional nature of material provided to potential recruits and their parents, and inadequate levels of parental involvement in the application process. A briefing by Child Rights International Network (CRIN) outlines key areas of concern.⁸

In the year to the end of March 2020, there were 1,600 children aged 16, and 1,660 aged 17 who were recruited across the UK (see Table 1). Most of the recruitment of under-18s is to the army where it makes up to 26% of all recruits into the army's non-officer ranks. Figures suggest that after a steady decline⁹ in the number and proportion of military recruits aged under 18 over the last 15 years, both number and proportion have recently increased. This trend is likely to continue as the number of applications to the army doubled from 2014 to 2017¹⁰; while more recent data is not available, reports in the media suggest that the army is experiencing record numbers of applications driven by their high-profile recruitment marketing.¹¹

Table 1: Recruits (intake) to the UK armed forces April 2019 to March 2020¹²

Intake during 12 months to 31 March 2020	All armed forces		Army (officers and other ranks)		Army (other ranks alone)	
	number	% of all ages	number	% of all ages	number	% of all ages
Aged 16	1,600	10%	1,350	13%	1,350	14%
Aged 17	1,660	10%	1,070	11%	1,070	11%
Under 18	3,260	20%	2,430	24%	2,430	26%
All ages	16,340	100%	10,160	100%	9,490	100%

Researchers¹³ have argued that adolescents lack the critical faculties to make reliable judgements about danger, characterising the period of adolescence as a 'window of vulnerability'. The younger end of the 16-24 year-old audience targeted by military marketing are therefore particularly vulnerable to persuasion by marketing. Furthermore, the heightened risks^{14,15} of poor health and poor mental health as a result of recruitment at a young age are rarely (if ever)

7 Gee D. (2017) [The First Ambush? Effects of army training and employment](#), London: Veterans for Peace UK.

8 Child Rights International Network (2020), [The British armed forces: Why raising the recruitment age would benefit everyone](#), London: CRIN.

9 Gee, D & Taylor, R. (2016) "[Is it counterproductive to enlist minors into the army?](#)", RUSI Journal, vol. 6, no. 161, pp36–48.

10 Ministry of Defence (2021) [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 January 2021](#), UK Government website (accessed 6 March 2021).

11 Karmarama (2020) [Army Confidence Lasts a Lifetime: Karmarama launches fourth evolution of 'This is Belonging' campaign for The British Army](#), Karmarama website (accessed 6 March 2021).

12 Ministry of Defence (2020) [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 October 2020](#), UK Government website (accessed 6 March 2021).

13 Baker, K., Den, M., Graham, B. & Richardson, R. (2014) "[A window of vulnerability: impaired fear extinction in adolescence](#)", *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory*, vol. 113, pp90–100.

14 Gee, D. (2013) [The Last Ambush? Aspects of mental health in the British armed forces](#), London: ForcesWatch.

15 Abu-Hayyeh R. & Singh, G. (2018) "[Adverse health effects of recruiting child soldiers](#)", *BMJ Paediatrics Open*.

explained to potential recruits. All of this gives cause for concern, because “*although personnel aged under 18 are not normally deployed to war zones, they are exposed to elevated risks over the course of their career*”.¹⁶

The Welsh context here is important, as there are strong socio-economic factors which draw young people towards the armed forces, particularly from Valleys communities in South Wales. Those areas have therefore been particularly important targets for recruitment campaigns, both historically and in the present day:

*In previous eras, joining the army had been seen by some young men from the valleys as a preferable alternative to going ‘down the pit’ and working in the coal mines that dominated the local economy. More recently, military service is looked to by young men and, increasingly, women as a way to avoid unemployment or escape the drudgery and meagre reward of work in dead-end jobs in the local service sector*¹⁷

This cultural militarism in Wales has been shaped and supported by the Welsh Government, not just through support for the military as an institution, but also by a concerted effort post-devolution to persuade “defence” companies to relocate – particularly along the M4 corridor – creating jobs in industries dependent on the military. Even amidst the planned closure of some bases, the defence industry is thriving¹⁸ and Wales is home to some of the world's largest arms companies, such as Raytheon and General Dynamics, reflecting this “*unreflective embrace of a massive arms industry investment*”¹⁹ by Welsh Government.

The health impacts of recruiting at a young age

The huge impacts on recruits’ health and mental health have been detailed by Abu-Hayyeh & Singh who note²⁰ three primary clinical reasons why the recruitment of children is considered inadvisable:

- 1) It denies the rights of the child, in particular the right to the ‘highest attainable standard of health’ and safeguarding from ‘physical or mental violence’, as well as the right to have their best interests as primary consideration in all actions related to them, including by lawmakers.
- 2) Military service during adolescence causes specific health harms during this critical period of development.
- 3) The arguments for child recruitment are unfounded and unsubstantiated in the face of the evidence.

They also highlight that young recruits are more likely to suffer illness and poor mental health (including PTSD), as well as worse educational attainment. This built on previous evidence²¹ from Medact highlighting the increased risk of death and injury for those recruited under the age of 18, and revealing the long-term impacts of the British military’s recruitment of children under the age

16 Child Rights International Network (2020) [The British armed forces: why raising the recruitment age would benefit everyone](#), London: CRIN: p1.

17 Tannock, S., Burgess, S. & Moles, K. (2013) [Military Recruitment, Work & Culture in the South Wales Valleys: a local geography of contemporary British militarism](#), Cardiff: WISERD: p6.

18 House of Commons Library (2020) [Wales’s contribution to the UK armed forces](#), UK Parliament website (accessed 6 March 2021).

19 Tannock, S (2009) “[Knowledge for what? Wales, militarisation and the endless promotion of the knowledge economy](#)”, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, vol. 7, no. 3, p258.

20 Abu-Hayyeh R. & Singh, G. (2018) “[Adverse health effects of recruiting child soldiers](#)”, *BMJ Paediatrics Open*.

21 Louise, R., Hunter, C. & Zlotowitz, S. (2016) [The Recruitment of Children by the UK Armed Forces: a critique from health professionals](#), London: Medact.

of 18. In particular, the report presented evidence linking ‘serious health concerns’ with the recruitment of adolescents (see Figure 1, below) and called for a rise in the minimum recruitment age.

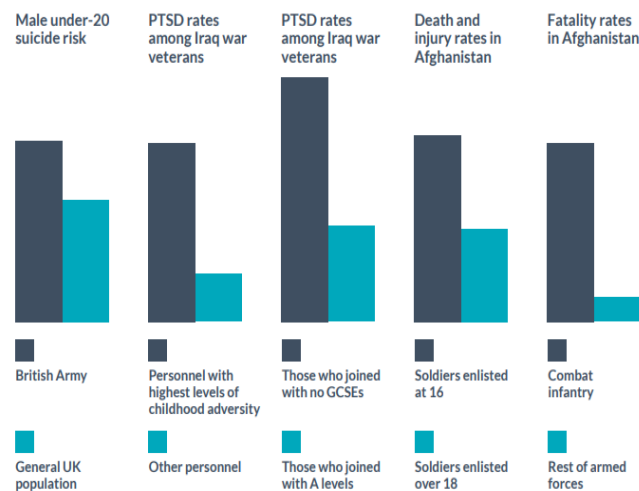


Figure 1: Impacts on young recruits²²

This same argument has been supported by ForcesWatch’s research. A 2013 report²³ examined aspects of mental health in the British armed forces by considering over 150 sources, including 41 British military mental health studies, as well as testimony from veterans. The report showed:

- Certain defined mental health-related problems in the current and ex-armed forces community are more common than the MoD suggest.
- The prevalence of mental health-related problems is highly unevenly distributed across the military population, with certain groups facing markedly different degrees of risk.
- The epidemiological methods used to assess the mental health of military personnel underrepresent the true prevalence of veterans with clinically significant symptoms of mental health problems.

ForcesWatch have since argued²⁴ that more independent research, in anonymised conditions, needs to be carried out in a number of areas, including:

- The relationship between early enlistment (especially junior entry), prior vulnerabilities such as socio-economic disadvantage, and short and long-term health impacts;
- The connection between military training and mental ill-health;
- Developmental issues that affect adolescents in particular, for example in assessing and appreciating long-term risk and making an informed decision to enlist;
- Moral injury and how issues of conscience impact mental health.

22 Louise, R., Hunter, C. & Zlotowitz, S. (2016) [The Recruitment of Children by the UK Armed Forces: a critique from health professionals](#), London: Medact: p9.

23 Gee, D. (2013) [The Last Ambush? Aspects of mental health in the British armed forces](#), London: ForcesWatch.

24 ForcesWatch (2018) [Armed Forces and Veterans Mental Health Inquiry: ForcesWatch submission to the Defence Committee](#), London: ForcesWatch.

They have also urged that steps should be taken to improve legal procedures by which claims of harassment and bullying are investigated and incidents are reported within the military, and argued that, in order to avoid mental health risks to young soldiers, junior entry recruitment of those under 18 should end.

The health impact on young recruits can therefore be judged to be a significant one, which can be characterised as follows: *“Military service during [adolescence] has long-lasting and complex effects on health... As child recruits are more likely than adult recruits to end up in frontline combat roles, they are more likely to experience physical or psychological trauma and to be killed.”*²⁵

Military marketing and its conflict with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

There is no doubting that the UK military have deliberately targeted the recruitment both of young people at a vulnerable period in their lives, and from more economically deprived areas of the country.

A *Guardian* investigation²⁶ in June 2018 revealed that the Army had been deliberately targeting recruitment advertisements on Facebook at vulnerable 16-year-olds awaiting GCSE results. The investigation noted that military marketing utilises data-driven targeting of advertising towards certain audiences as well as more informal and opportunistic messaging (including around GCSE results day on Facebook).

In 2019, a Child Rights International Network report²⁷ on recruitment patterns in England found that army recruitment was targeted at the UK’s poorest towns and cities, particularly neighbourhoods where annual family income is around £10,000. Previous recruitment campaigns had also identified the key audience as being 16-24 year-olds in the lowest three social and economic groups²⁸ and had targeted recruitment to specific geographic areas accordingly, including Cardiff and Swansea²⁹.

These examples follow a familiar pattern³⁰ of recruitment reflecting class division, whereby the British army visits English universities and private schools in the search for future officers, while targeting poorer neighbourhoods for enlisted personnel, particularly in poorer areas of the UK, including in Wales.

Yet it is not just the targeting of adverts alone that gives cause for concern. Analysis³¹ of the adverts themselves, and the wider advertising tactics adopted by the armed forces, has suggested five main themes from across recent recruitment campaigns, all of which are problematic:

- 1) Life in the armed forces is portrayed as superior to civilian life
- 2) The recruitment campaigns gloss over the reality of an armed forces career
- 3) Diversity is tokenised and groups are often stereotyped

25 Abu-Hayyeh R. & Singh, G. (2018) [“Adverse health effects of recruiting child soldiers”](#), *BMJ Paediatrics Open*: p1-2.

26 Morris, S. (2018) [“British army ads targeting 'stressed and vulnerable' teenagers”](#), *Guardian*, 8th June 2018.

27 Child Rights International Network (2019) [Conscription by Poverty? Deprivation and army recruitment in the UK](#), London: CRIN.

28 Morris, S. (2017) [“British army is targeting working-class young people, report shows”](#), *Guardian*, 9th July 2017.

29 Louise, R. & Sangster, E. (2019) [Selling the Military: a critical analysis of contemporary recruitment marketing in the UK](#), London: ForcesWatch / Medact.

30 Gee, D. (2017) [The First Ambush? Effects of army training and employment](#), London: Veterans for Peace UK: p6.

31 Louise, R. & Sangster, E. (2019) [Selling the Military: a critical analysis of contemporary recruitment marketing in the UK](#), London: ForcesWatch / Medact.

- 4) Adverts which emphasise camaraderie run the risk of exploiting adolescent vulnerability and masking the reality of feelings of isolation within the armed forces
- 5) Promoting self-development in the context of conflict depoliticises military purpose³²

As noted in the same report, army recruitment campaigns are unlike marketing for most consumer products because the decision to enlist will have life-changing consequences, and yet there is very little debate about whether or not this is an appropriate activity. It is precisely for this reason that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has consistently recommended (most recently in 2016³³) that the UK should 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. The committee also stated (p23):

Safeguards for voluntary recruitment are insufficient, particularly in the light of the very low literacy level of the majority of under 18 recruits and the fact that briefing materials provided to child applicants and their parents or guardians do not clearly inform them of the risks and obligations that follow their enlistment.

In 2020, the Child Rights International Network questioned³⁴ why the UK Government has not implemented the UN Committee's recommendations, noting that the number of under-18s enlisted annually is increasing and that children enlisted into the army are still required to serve a minimum term of service up to two years longer than adult recruits. They also highlighted that there were 50 formal complaints between 2014 and 2017 of violent behaviour by staff at the Army Foundation College, which most under-18 recruits attend, and three suicides of army recruits in this age group reported in 2020. This calls into question the compatibility of enlisting children with Article 19 of the Convention which states that children must be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse.

In addition, the justification for enlisting under-18s has also been questioned by the four Children's Commissioners in the UK, who remain unanimous that 18 should be the youngest age for military recruitment (see Appendix 3).

In light of this, we would argue that the Welsh Government must acknowledge the link between armed forces promotional activities in schools and the wider concerns around under-18 military recruitment; it must not refuse to act because the age of recruitment is not a devolved issue. One tangible step the Welsh Government could take in this respect is to utilise Child Rights Impact Assessments to examine unregulated visits by the armed forces for recruitment activities and consider whether oversight, regulation and guidance to schools should be introduced. Doing so would ensure that young people in Wales are fully informed about the options available to them.

In the light of research on the elevated risks of military training and service for the youngest recruits, the myth that the army is the best place for disadvantaged and disaffected children is one that clearly has to be challenged. A 2018 survey³⁵ found that over 70% of people in Wales do not agree with recruiting 16 and 17 year-olds. Government at both a Welsh and UK level have a

32 The last area is a particular concern in the context of the growing narrative around 'everyday militarism' (for examples, see [this section of the PPU website](#)). Allowing advertising messages depicting self-development, self-fulfilment and diversity within the armed forces to be promoted unchallenged makes it harder to properly scrutinise the legitimacy of military action and public awareness of all its consequences.

33 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) [UN CRC Committee's Concluding Observations](#), Children's Rights Alliance for England website (accessed 6 March 2021).

34 Child Rights International Network (2020), [Submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for the adoption of the List of Issues prior to reporting](#), London: CRIN.

35 ForcesWatch (2018) [Public poll on minimum age of armed forces recruitment](#), ForcesWatch website (accessed 6 March 2021).



duty to equip them with the information and provide them with a future that safeguards their welfare. The next section examines the recent history of opposition to military recruitment activities within Welsh schools and the Welsh Government's response to it.

THE 2012-15 PETITION

In 2012, Cymdeithas y Cymod lodged a public petition on the website of the National Assembly for Wales³⁶. The petition text called on the (then) National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to recommend that the armed forces should not go into schools to recruit, highlighting specifically that the armed forces target their recruitment in schools in the most deprived areas of Wales. In total, the petition received over a thousand signatures.

The petition was first considered by the Petitions Committee on 6th November 2012, and this kick-started a lengthy process of correspondence between the Committee, the petitioner, the Education Minister (Leighton Andrews AM, later replaced by Huw Lewis AM) and his Deputy (Jeff Cuthbert AM), as well as a consultation³⁷ to which 30 individuals or organisations responded.

The Committee's full report³⁸ provides a comprehensive overview of the petition process and associated consultation. Below is a summary of the key points in relation to this research and report³⁹.

The Committee inquiry and recommendations

As could have been anticipated⁴⁰, following the call for evidence, the Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association for Wales said in their consultation response that none of the Armed Forces visit schools for recruitment purposes. However, there was an acknowledgement from consultees that a significant proportion of armed forces visits to schools include careers related events and activities, such as presentations about the work of the armed forces.

In this respect, perhaps the most significant response to the public consultation came from the then Children's Commissioner for Wales (Keith Towler), who stated that there was a contradiction between the Ministry of Defence's statements that the armed forces do not recruit in schools and the UK state party's submission in 2008 under Article 8, paragraph 1, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. This states that the armed forces recruiting initiatives include presentations in schools by Army careers advisers, a variety of Army youth team and Army recruiting team activities, attachments and visits to units, school fairs, Combined Cadet Force, advertising and marketing initiatives, membership of the Army's Camouflage Club. The Children's Commissioner said:

This contradiction needs to be resolved. I believe clarity is needed so that headteachers, pupils and parents are aware of the nature of MoD activity and can make informed decisions on whether or not they wish to be exposed to any presentations in school... In

36 Throughout this report, we have used "National Assembly for Wales" and "Assembly Member / AM" in reference to the institution and its members at the time of the original petition and for matters predating [the name change in May 2020](#), but "Senedd" and "Member of the Senedd / MS" when discussing the existing institution and our calls for future action.

37 National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee (2013) [Consultation letter: stop the army recruiting in schools](#), Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

38 National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee (2015) [Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools: report on the consideration of a petition](#), Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

39 Where this chapter makes references to consultation responses, these can be found in the [Committee report cited above](#).

40 Tannock *et al* have written previously of how "recruiters... maintain the façade that the outreach work they do in schools is entirely about communication, information and education, and has nothing to do with their recruitment agenda" – see Tannock, S., Burgess, S. & Moles, K. (2013) [Military Recruitment, Work & Culture in the South Wales Valleys: a local geography of contemporary British militarism](#), Cardiff: WISERD: p8.

presenting career options, the MoD has a responsibility to present a balanced and accurate picture... I do have some reservations regarding the MoD's ability to offer a balanced picture of military life.

Data on army visits to schools from 2009 to 2012 which was analysed by ForcesWatch identified that the greatest number of visits were focused on Personal Development Activities (generally outdoor, team-building activities) and interview techniques. However, over a quarter of visits did involve general presentations about the army and activities exclusively focused entirely on careers (such as stalls at careers fairs, presentations about early entry to the military, etc).

The Committee acknowledged that these statistics “appear to show that general presentations (which includes a general overview of army work with a section on the types of careers available in the army) and specific career focussed activities accounted for 28.5 per cent of visits to schools in Wales”.

The Committee also heard evidence about recruitment being targeted at deprived communities, with ForcesWatch stating: “Within Wales, schools with a more disadvantaged demographic... were not visited a significant number more times than those with less deprived demographics. However, the high average number of visits during a year compared to other areas in the UK suggests that there is increased engagement of the armed forces with local authority schools in Wales as a whole compared to, for example, the South East of England where the number of visits is substantially lower”. ForcesWatch data from 2010-11 and 2011-12 showed that the army had visited 74 per cent of state secondary schools in Wales; this was in contrast to less than 30 per cent of state secondary schools in London by all three services.

In the preamble to its recommendations, the Committee acknowledged the uniquely risky nature of a career in the armed forces, stating:

Any employer will legitimately target their recruitment efforts in the way they consider most appropriate to meet their needs. However, the armed forces are unique in that they are the only employer where recruits accept, as a normal function of their employment, that they may need to harm or kill other human beings. Relatively high risks of injury or death are not unique to the armed forces but asking recruits to deliberately put themselves in positions where these risks are maximised is also different to most other jobs. From this perspective, inviting the armed forces into schools should perhaps be treated with considerably more care than other potential employers.

The Committee then made three recommendations:

- 1) We recommend that the Welsh Government considers whether further research is needed into the reasons for the apparently disproportionate number of visits to schools in areas of relatively high deprivation.
- 2) We recommend that the Welsh Government reviews the Careers and the World of Work Curriculum Framework to ensure that guidance in relation to inviting the armed forces into schools takes account of their unique nature as a career and the need to encourage an open and honest exchange of views with pupils about their role.
- 3) We recommend that the Welsh Government gives further consideration to how schools, businesses and employers can best be supported to ensure that a diverse range of businesses and employers visit schools to provide pupils with information about the career opportunities they offer.

The Committee acknowledged that these recommendations did not go as far as the petitioners would have liked, but argued that the case had not been successfully made for an outright prohibition of the armed forces from schools in Wales at the present time.

The Welsh Government's response

On 30 September 2015, the Committee report and Welsh Government official response⁴¹ were formally noted by the Assembly at Plenary.

The Welsh Government accepted all three recommendations (in principle or entirely), noting that there would be no financial barrier to implementing them. The Education Minister at the time (Huw Lewis AM) did offer the following commentary on each recommendation:

- 1) *The Committee found that despite anecdotal evidence, there was no compelling evidence that schools in relatively high areas of deprivation are deliberately targeted by the armed forces.*

I do not believe the findings are sufficient to undertake further research urgently. School engagement with, and visits from, the armed forces can be looked at as part of the roll out of the Enhanced Employer Engagement project. Schools based in areas of relatively high areas of deprivation, including schools involved in the Schools Challenge Cymru programme, will be included in the target group for early engagement in the project. We will consider whether further research is needed in light of experience of the project.

- 2) *Professor Donaldson's review of the curriculum, 'Successful Futures', identified one of the key purposes of the curriculum in Wales should be that people develop as enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work.*

Professor Donaldson's recommendations have been accepted in full by the Minister for Education and Skills. Curriculum changes will be taken forward as part of the implementation of 'Successful Futures', but we will provide further guidance to clarify roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in delivering the careers and the world of work curriculum framework; and aim to provide tools and resources (for example best practice studies on work experience) to help schools deliver this aspect of the curriculum.

- 3) *Qualified for Life, our education improvement plan for 3-19 year olds in Wales, sets out how we will direct Careers Wales to support the development of stronger and more sustainable partnerships between schools and employers. The Enhanced Employer Engagement Project, which will be delivered by Business in the Community and Careers Wales, is central to achieving this ambition. The project will be used to introduce a new model for facilitating school-employer links and will be rolled out from the autumn. Our aspiration is that, as a result of this project, all secondary schools are engaged in new employer partnerships by 2018 and that these partnerships are used to support a diverse mixture of activities.*

Welsh Government officials are also working in partnership with Careers Wales on project applications seeking ESF funding, aimed at reducing the number of 11-16 year olds who are at risk of becoming disengaged from education or training by engaging

41 National Assembly for Wales (2015) [Written Response by the Welsh Government to the Report of the Petitions Committee entitled Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools: report on the consideration of a petition](#), Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

them in employer-linked activities and experiences. The projects will raise individuals' awareness and knowledge of different economic sectors, of employers' expectations and provide information around potential careers within the local and regional labour market. They will also enable individuals to access role models and mentors.

The Welsh Government also sees the provision of impartial and balanced careers information, advice and guidance for young people as a key component of its lifelong learning agenda. This service is delivered through Careers Wales. Schools and Governing Bodies have a responsibility to respond to the needs of pupils and provide them with appropriate careers education provision which is laid out in the Careers and the World of Work Curriculum Framework. This is to develop in pupils the skills necessary to make informed decisions and manage their own career pathways.

Schools should also support pupils by providing access to advice and guidance on potential careers. In this respect all young people in secondary education are entitled to receive a programme of school support from the age of 11 to help them make effective transitions to post 16 learning or employment. Educational visits from a vast range of potential employers take place against this background of provision.

This response effectively closed the matter, and elections followed in May 2016. The matter of military recruitment has not so far been raised during the lifespan of the fifth Assembly / Senedd.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE?

Clearly a lot has changed since the 2015 Committee report and the Welsh Government response, not least that fresh elections have been held to the National Assembly / Senedd, prompting a change of Education Minister, as well as a change of First Minister in 2018. In addition, the appointment of a new Children’s Commissioner for Wales in April 2015, and of the Future Generations Commissioner later the same year, means that the narrative around military recruitment now takes place against a different backdrop. Finally, major changes to the curriculum for Welsh schools were also unveiled in January 2020.

It is appropriate, therefore, to not only question what action has been taken since the Welsh Government accepted the series of recommendations made in 2015, but also to question whether further action might also be required.

The Welsh Government’s view

In March 2019, following a written enquiry from Sian Gwenllian AM (Plaid Cymru, Arfon), the current Education Minister (Kirsty Williams AM) set out the Welsh Government’s progress against the recommendations of the 2015 Petitions Committee report. Her full response is set out in Appendix 1, but three main points stand out:

- 1) In response to the Petition Committee’s first recommendation about the need for further research on the disproportionate number of armed forces visits to schools in deprived areas, no further research has been undertaken. The Minister says that there was no compelling evidence that such visits are disproportionately targeted in such a way, saying this was anecdotal.
- 2) In relation to Recommendation 2 on guidance for such visits, the Minister says that the [Careers and World of Work framework](#) states that learners should “use a variety of sources to find information about their career ideas, differentiating between information and promotional material”; she goes on to say that this guidance is being reviewed.
- 3) In the final paragraph of her letter, the Minister reaffirms her belief that armed forces visits are similar to the contact schools have with any other employers, and are based on supporting the curriculum rather than direct recruitment.

On the first point, and the Minister’s claim that there is no evidence of military recruitment visits being targeted at deprived areas in Wales, it is interesting that no statistics are quoted to support the claim. The only detailed analysis of the situation was done by ForcesWatch in their response to the 2015 petition. It is worth repeating their findings that:

Within Wales, schools with a more disadvantaged demographic... were not visited a significant number more times than those with less deprived demographics. However, the high average number of visits during a year compared to other areas in the UK suggests that there is increased engagement of the armed forces with local authority schools in Wales as a whole compared to, for example, the South East of England where the number of visits is substantially lower. ⁴²

There is now further evidence that more deprived communities are targeted for recruitment activities and that army recruits come disproportionately from these communities. In evidence to

42 National Assembly for Wales (2015) [Written response by ForcesWatch to the Petitions Committee consultation on petition P-04-432: Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools](#), Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales: p2.

the Welsh Affairs Committee in 2019, Cath Possamai, head of British Army Recruiting Group, stated:

*We do target those areas because they are very traditional recruiting grounds for the Army and the Army gives both populations incredible social opportunities for better careers and social mobility.*⁴³

Furthermore, a 2019 study investigated the socio-economic background of enlisted minors in England by looking at the economic characteristics of the areas from which they came. It concluded:

*Over a five-year period, minors were enlisted into the army disproportionately from the more deprived constituencies of England, lending weight to public health and human rights concerns.*⁴⁴

In addition, there is a concern that it is the most disadvantaged within communities who are targeted with recruitment activities. The Military Preparation School operates across south Wales and in two locations in the north.⁴⁵ It is part of the Motivational Preparation College for Training (MPCT) which also operates Military Preparation Colleges and targets provision towards disadvantaged young people. It partners with schools and local authorities to provide learning for particular students, usually for between one to three days a week. Furthermore, there are now also seven cadet forces based in state and independent schools, with the Welsh Government agreeing in 2016⁴⁶ to join the Cadet Expansion Programme which is heavily promoted and funded by the UK Government, including the Department for Education in England⁴⁷. This scheme to increase cadet units in state schools is targeted towards schools in more deprived areas.⁴⁸

This important context should give Welsh Government pause for thought.

On the second point, the Minister's response came when the new curriculum was still under development, and we acknowledge some of the good work (see below) which has happened since her letter. Yet it is surprising, given the centrality of mental health in the new curriculum, that more has not been done to reflect the disproportionately high rates of PTSD amongst under-18s recruited to the armed forces⁴⁹ and the need to challenge military recruitment of school-aged children as a result.

Finally, it is extremely disappointing that the Minister likens military visits to schools as being analogous to those of any other prospective employer when they clearly are not, for the very obvious reason that pupils joining the military are far more likely to kill or be killed as a direct result of that decision, and risk a number of other harms. Failing to recognise that difference is at

43 House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee (2019) [Oral evidence: Wales and the Armed Forces](#), UK Parliament website (accessed 6 March 2021)

44 Child Rights International Network (2019) [Conscription by Poverty? Deprivation and army recruitment in the UK](#), London: CRIN

45 Military Preparation School (2020) [Military Preparation School: Wales prospectus, 2020/21](#), Cardiff: MPCT.

46 Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association for Wales (2021) [Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association for Wales website](#) (accessed 6 March 2021).

47 Combined Cadet Force (2021) [CCF locations](#), CCF website (accessed 6 March 2021).

48 Ministry of Defence (2021) [Cadet Expansion Programme reaches 500 unit target](#), UK Government website (accessed 6 March 2021).

49 ForcesWatch (2018) [ForcesWatch submission to Defence Committee inquiry into Armed Forces and Veterans Mental Health](#), ForcesWatch website (accessed 20 October 2020).

best disingenuous. Likewise, her claim that the military do not conduct recruitment activities in schools has also been comprehensively disproved by evidence⁵⁰.

The new Welsh curriculum and careers framework

Since the start of the most recent Assembly / Senedd term, the Welsh Government has been developing a new curriculum for Welsh schools⁵¹, which is set to be fully rolled out by 2022. The new curriculum aims to give pupils a set of experiences, knowledge and skills that will best-prepare them for employment, lifelong learning and active citizenship.

One of its four overarching ambitions includes the development of ‘ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world’. Important work has been done by third sector organisations in this area, including developing a Peace Schools Scheme⁵², supporting schools in developing peace as a cross-curricular theme and “promoting a positive ethos, critical thinking, creative skills and non-violent conflict resolution”. Such initiatives are extremely welcome, but we would argue that they need to happen directly alongside (and as a counterpoint to) military recruitment. Military visits to schools have continued (see below) but to the best of our knowledge, no additional oversight or guidance has been issued as part of the development of the new curriculum which would promote the questioning of militarist activities or which would ask how “ethical, informed citizens” should set militarist values against the values of “non-violent conflict resolution” which other curriculum activities have promoted.

The Commissioners’ views

Since 2015, as noted above, Wales has seen the appointment of a new Children’s Commissioner for Wales as well as the first ever Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. Cymdeithas y Cymod contacted both Commissioners to ask for their view on both the 2015 report and recommendations, as well as on the general issue of military recruitment to schools in Wales.

The response from the office of the Future Generations Commissioner (Appendix 2) essentially argues that this issue falls outside of the Commissioner’s remit.

The Children’s Commissioner for Wales responded (Appendix 3) noting that, whilst the issue of military recruitment is a non-devolved matter and therefore outwith her remit, she has discussed the matter with her counterparts for the other UK nations and “*all the Commissioners remain unanimous that 18 should be the youngest age for military recruitment*”. The Commissioner also spoke at a Cymdeithas y Cymod event at the National Eisteddfod in August 2019 where the matter was discussed and reiterated her support for the raising of the recruitment age in line with the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

It should be noted that the previous Children’s Commissioner (Keith Towler) made a submission to the Petitions Committee’s original inquiry⁵³. He specifically highlighted the contradiction between the Ministry of Defence’s claim that military recruitment did not take place in schools and the UK government’s acknowledgement elsewhere that “*Army recruiting initiatives include presentations in schools by Army careers advisers, a variety of Army youth team and Army recruiting team activities*”. He called for clarity over this contradiction, and we would urge both his

50 ForcesWatch (2018) [Military involvement in education and youth activities in the UK](#), ForcesWatch website (accessed 20 October 2020).

51 For further details, visit <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales>

52 Welsh Centre for International Affairs (2019) [Peace schools](#), WCIA website (accessed 6 March 2021).

53 National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee (2015) [Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools: report on the consideration of a petition](#), Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

successor and also the Future Generations Commissioner to consider the implications. Specifically, we believe the two commissioners should indicate whether or not they see military recruitment activities in Welsh schools as an issue relating to children's rights and wellbeing

Military visits to schools in Wales

Despite efforts (see Appendix 4) to secure responses from the armed forces under the Freedom of Information Act to ascertain current levels of visits to schools in Wales, very little reliable data was available. One key recommendation of this report is that such data should be standardised across all three forces and published, proactively, on a regular basis for public scrutiny. If the forces believe their visits to schools are entirely benign, they should see no harm in doing so.

Responses to questions raised in the UK Parliament^{54,55} indicate that significant numbers of visits to schools in Wales continue, although again the quality and consistency of the data are problematic. In response to those questions, Ministers maintain that the forces do not recruit in schools. Their definition of recruiting refers solely to the process of enlistment, rather than a common-sense definition of activities that lead to recruiting. There is an abundance of evidence^{56,57,58,59} pointing to the fact that armed forces activities in schools represent a 'drip, drip, drip' strategy to create interest in young people towards enlistment. A 2007 internal MoD document⁶⁰ about engagement with UK schools states that school visits allow recruiters to access the school environment, adding:

In gross numerical terms the main driver is recruitment...There are many other reasons given for visits but many of these have implicit careers links and any positive image created by an engagement is likely to have a positive effect in the recruiting environment.

Overall, there is clear data to suggest that military visits to schools in Wales continue to occur on a regular basis, and that a high proportion of these are for career-related activities⁶¹, and that should approach activities that clearly have a recruitment agenda. For this reason, we recommend that Welsh Government should issue guidance for inviting the armed forces into schools, to take account of their unique nature as a career.

Peace education

This report offers two examples of schemes which could be extended and developed – within the core purposes of developing healthy, confident individuals and ethical, informed citizens – to enable learners to deal with conflict constructively, learn about Wales' peace heritage and be

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- 54 House of Commons (2020) [Written question 18669: Armed Forces: Schools](#), UK Parliament website (accessed 6 March 2021).
- 55 House of Commons (2019), [Written question 286322: Armed Forces: Schools](#), UK Parliament website (accessed 6 March 2021).
- 56 ForcesWatch (2015) [The recruitment agenda behind the UK armed forces' 'engagement' with students in schools and colleges](#), London: ForcesWatch.
- 57 Armstrong, S. (2007) "Britain's child army", *New Statesman*, 5 February 2007.
- 58 Louise, R., Hunter, C. & Zlotowitz, S. (2016) [The Recruitment of Children by the UK Armed Forces: a critique from health professionals](#), London: Medact.
- 59 Child Rights International Network (2019) [Conscription by Poverty? Deprivation and army recruitment in the UK](#), London: CRIN.
- 60 Ministry of Defence (2007) [Engagement with UK Schools](#), UK Parliament website (accessed 6 March 2021): p15.
- 61 Although the numbers of visits set out in response to our FOI requests (see Appendix 4) are unreliable, we noted that of the visits listed, 57% related to careers in the forces. Such visits would be coded as a "careers presentation" "careers fair", "careers event", "getting ready for work day" and so on, with an obvious focus on a future armed forces career.

actively involved in bringing about a more peaceful, just and sustainable society in Wales and beyond.

The first – the **Wales Peace Schools Scheme** – was developed out of the Wales for Peace project, a Heritage Lottery funded project which, during the centenary period of WWI, explored and shared stories from Wales' rich peace heritage during the intervening 100 years. A key aim of that project was to engage and inspire young people in learning about Welsh peacemakers and internationalists, and to support them in taking that heritage on into the future.

The Wales Peace Schools Scheme supports schools in taking a whole-school approach to peace, actively embedding a peaceful ethos as well as learning and activities related to peace into their everyday lives. Peace Schools aim to be places where:

- Everyone feels safe, respected and valued
- There is a school ethos based on cooperation, respect for difference and problem-solving
- Peace is a common thread in learners' everyday lives – in the way they learn and live together
- The curriculum contains opportunities to learn about and reflect upon stories of peacemakers – from Wales and beyond
- Learners are encouraged to be critical active citizens of Wales and the world

The scheme is flexible so that it can be adapted to particular school settings and also to different ages and stages. Some schools have developed cross-curricular projects looking at specific pieces of Welsh heritage, such as the women's peace petition of 1923-4 or to particular issues such as conscientious objection; others have developed work around overcoming prejudice, stereotypes and bullying; others have developed work with and for their local community. There is, however, a very clear emphasis on children's rights, and on learners themselves taking an active role in shaping and delivering their scheme. Schools who have attained their Level 1 award report that the Scheme lends itself very well to cross-curricular learning and to developing skills such as problem-solving, communication, critical thinking and creativity – all skills which the new curriculum aims to develop. It also supports learners' mental health and wellbeing and encourages empathy and ethical decision-making. Recently schools have tied in work on peace with looking at the Sustainable Development Goals and how peace and sustainability are linked.

The second initiative – the **Peaceful Schools Project** – is delivered successfully in many primary schools across north Powys, north Ceredigion and into south Gwynedd. It arose as a response to the culture of violence and hostility that seems endemic in society. The vision is to create an atmosphere in schools where pupils treat each other with respect, work together and learn skills to solve problems in a constructive way. In doing this, the scheme hopes to influence change from the bottom up. The scheme offers two programmes: Peace Education and Peer Mediation; both programmes have been well-received by the Estyn inspectorate.

The Peace Education programme includes themes such as: exploring peace within ourselves; safe ways of expressing anger and other difficult emotions; encouraging empathy and positive listening skills; basic conflict resolution; looking at themes of migration, asylum and human rights. New lesson plans are being developed currently around themes of racism, in light of the Black Lives Matter campaign.

Peer Mediation training is designed for older children (10-11 yrs) who have already completed a Peace Education programmes. It looks in detail on how to deal confidently with and resolve conflicts that may occur in school or the playground. The programme is progressive in that the pupils take ownership of and responsibility for mediation within the school community.

Both the above schemes are contributing to educational outcomes which relate directly to the four purposes of the Welsh curriculum, supporting children and young people to develop and actively use essential skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving and empathy and to engage creatively and as ethical and informed citizens with contemporary issues at the school, community and global levels. The schemes also relate to the aims of the Children's Commissioner and the Future Generations Commissioner – promoting the welfare of children and young people now and thinking critically and creatively about the future they would like to see.

Both schemes run on a shoe-string budget, relying on volunteers or minimal staff time to roll out their programmes. We recommend that the Welsh Government seriously considers the role of projects such as these in supporting schools to deliver the four purposes of the new curriculum and assigns some resources to supporting and developing peace education programmes in schools.

The report highlights the clear risks associated with military recruitment of minors, as well as the fact that recruitment activities by the military are being targeted at schools within Wales. It is obvious that very little progress has been made by the Welsh Government against the Petition Committee's recommendations in 2015.

Whilst we welcome elements of the new curriculum which promote ethical informed citizenship, critical thinking and non-violence, we would argue that more needs to be done by Welsh Government, the Children's Commissioner and the Future Generations Commissioner. Specifically, the principle of military recruitment activities in schools should be revisited and consideration given about whether they are a fundamental breach of children's rights in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

In response to our findings, the Cymdeithas y Cymod, ForcesWatch and the Peace Pledge Union make the following recommendations.

Recommendations for the Welsh Government:

- 1) The evidence in this report should be used by the Welsh Government to guide a formal review into military recruitment activities in Welsh schools.
- 2) Guidance should be issued to headteachers and careers teachers in relation to inviting the armed forces into schools to take account of their unique nature as a career and the need to encourage an open and honest exchange of views with learners about their role.
- 3) In line with the new Welsh curriculum, learners should be encouraged to approach presentations regarding prospective careers, including military marketing campaigns, with an open and inquiring mind, critically exploring the impact of potential career choices on their health and well-being as ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.
- 4) Child Rights Impact Assessments should be utilised to examine visits to schools and colleges by the armed forces for recruitment activities, and consideration should be given to introducing further oversight, regulation and guidance to support these.
- 5) The Welsh Government should seriously consider the role of peace education programmes in supporting schools to enable learners to develop as healthy, confident individuals and ethical, informed citizens and assign some resources to supporting and developing these programmes in Welsh schools.

Recommendations for the Children's and Future Generations Commissioners:

- 6) We ask the Future Generations Commissioner and the Children's Commissioner to consider military recruitment activities in Welsh schools as an issue relating to children's rights and wellbeing.



Recommendations for the armed forces:

- 7) The armed forces should proactively publish annual data on military visits to schools, with data on individual visits and collated by local authority, national and UK level. Doing so will allow much more robust analysis of the pattern of visits so that there can be clarity over whether, for example, visits are being targeted at disadvantaged areas.

Recommendations for the UK Government:

- 8) The UK should raise the minimum age of armed forces recruitment to 18 in order to safeguard many of the most vulnerable recruits.

Appendix 1: Minister for Education's position

Text of a letter from Kirsty Williams AM (Minister for Education) to Sian Gwenllian AM (Plaid Cymru, Arfon), dated 7th March 2019, providing an update on action being taken by the Welsh Government in response to the National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee Report on Armed Forces recruitment in schools.

NB, the original text of the letter was in Welsh – the text below is a close translation, but should not be relied upon as a verbatim representation of the Minister's views.

Dear Siân,

Thank you for your email of 27 February asking for an update on action being taken by the Welsh Government in response to the National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee Report on Armed Forces recruitment in schools.

The [Petitions Committee report](#) makes three recommendations, and I will deal with the three in turn.

Recommendation 1. *We recommend that the Welsh Government should consider whether further research is needed on the reasons for the disproportionate number of visits to schools in relatively deprived areas.*

In 2015, the then Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology confirmed that there was no compelling evidence that the armed forces were deliberately targeting schools in areas of high deprivation for recruitment purposes, although the Committee had found anecdotal evidence. It was also confirmed at the time that the findings were not sufficient to justify further urgent research.

Ultimately, as previously confirmed, schools (through their headteachers and governing bodies) are responsible for decisions about which organisations should be able to visit - ensuring that learners are made aware of a wide and relevant range of careers.

However, our national strategy [Prosperity for All](#) states we will ensure that schools, colleges, universities and a range of employers work more closely together to develop ambitions and better anticipate the skills needed over the coming years. To achieve this aim, we are taking forward a number of options, one of which is the 'Business Class' project which has established partnerships between schools and employers in over 80 secondary schools in Wales, and through Careers Wales.

Careers Wales provides independent and impartial information, advice and guidance on the learning and career opportunities available, and promotes links between education and business. They do not play a specific role in supporting recruitment to the Armed Forces in schools and do not promote the links between the Armed Forces and schools specifically for recruitment purposes.

Recommendation 2. *We recommend that the Welsh Government reviews the Careers and the World of Work Curriculum Framework to ensure that guidance in relation to inviting the armed forces into*

schools takes account of their unique nature as a career and the need to encourage an open and honest exchange of views with pupils about their role.

In recognition of the proposed new curriculum, Careers and the World of Work will now be identified as Careers and Work-Related Experiences. The current [Careers and the World of Work framework](#) states that learners should 'use a variety of sources to search for information about their career ideas, differentiating between information and promotional material'. The Welsh Government is currently reviewing the existing framework and creating new guidance in partnership with Careers Wales, Estyn, partners and other stakeholders. This work is intended to further develop this theme, supporting the ethos of the new curriculum. This guidance should be available for consultation later this year.

Recommendation 3. *We recommend that the Welsh Government should give further consideration to how best to help schools to ensure that a diverse range of businesses and employers visit schools to inform pupils about career opportunities they offer.*

Careers Wales has developed a proposal for secondary schools across Wales to engage with employers. One of the main developments in this area is the development of the Business Education Exchange database. The database, which is facilitated by Careers Wales, contains information on employers and businesses across Wales who have indicated their willingness to support the curriculum, and schools, in a number of areas, including:

- short periods of work experience;
- visits to curriculum-focused industries;
- master classes from employers, which support learners through vocationally focused activities;
- work simulations involving workshops with employers;
- industry days and careers fairs with different career options or targeted careers support;
- mock interviews.

Careers Wales has now placed over 13,000 employers on the Business Education Exchange and details of 2,200 employers have been fully updated to include the full range of activities they are willing to support schools to provide. In addition, 90 schools have now been trained and licensed to use the Business Education Exchange database, which continues to grow.

The Business Education Exchange provides a better opportunity for small employers who have not previously been able to contact schools to do so. The Careers Wales Business Engagement Advisors have been identified by employers, who have targeted a range of employers ranging from SMEs to large international companies and anchor companies in Wales. By the end of March 2019, at least 120 schools will be trained to use the Business Education Exchange and there are plans to train the remaining schools during 2019/20. The aim is to enable all schools to see how a wide range of local and national employers are ready to support their learners on employers' sites and in their schools.

The armed forces are recorded as a national employer and can work with schools in all local authorities in Wales. They can offer a range of business education activities, including work experience, mock interviews, master classes, presentations, taster sessions and so on. Careers Wales' links with the armed forces are therefore similar to the type of contacts it has with any other employer, and are based on supporting the curriculum rather than direct recruitment.

I hope this information explains the situation.

Yours sincerely,

Kirsty Williams AM

Appendix 2: Future Generations Commissioner's position

Text of a letter from the office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, dated 28th March 2019, regarding recruitment by the military in schools in Wales.

NB, the original text of the letter was in Welsh – the text below is a close translation, but should not be relied upon as a verbatim representation of the Commissioner's views.

Thank you for your letter about military recruitment in schools in Wales. I have made a record of your concerns and shared your letter with the relevant members of my team.

I can see the importance of this issue, and I sympathize with your concerns.

My duties are very wide-ranging and my resources are limited to subjects that may affect the wellbeing of present and future generations in Wales, which is why I cannot carry out research and provide an informed opinion on all matters that are brought to my attention in correspondence. That is why I have chosen specific areas on which to focus my work committing to real change. These are: transport, planning, housing, skills for the future, adverse childhood experiences and better ways of keeping people healthy.

My priority areas were selected following discussions and a rigorous audit in 2017 when the office tried to identify the biggest challenges facing Wales and how best to tackle them. You can read about this [here](#). Having said that, I monitor the correspondence that I receive and that use the information this gives me to exercise my powers. To that end I have made a record of your letter.

I think that acting on adverse experiences in childhood, perhaps, is the best example of where we can make a real difference in the lives of future generations in Wales. Unfortunately, at present, military recruitment is essentially not seen as a “harmful adverse experience during childhood” (according to Public Health Wales list [here](#)). As such, I am not in a position to form and express an informed opinion on the subject, as I have not undertaken any work that is involved specifically with military recruitment and its relationship with Adverse Childhood Experiences.

I have spoken to the Children's Commissioner for Wales team about your question and they sent a letter (with partners) to the MOD on this topic in 2016. This is available [here](#). They have also told me (at the time of our communication) that they had not received your letter, so if you have not yet received a response from them, your letter may not have been reached.

Thanks again for contacting me. I will continue to monitor correspondence on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Director of Policy, Legislation and Innovation

Appendix 3: Children's Commissioner's position

Text of a letter from the office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, dated 1st July 2019, regarding recruitment by the military in schools in Wales.

NB, the original text of the letter was in Welsh – the text below is a close translation, but should not be relied upon as a verbatim representation of the Commissioner's views.

Thank you very much for your letter on military recruitment in schools. I would sincerely apologise for the delay in responding. Due to nature of government, I have been waiting to raise it at a meeting latest Network of British & Irish Ombudsman and Children's Commissioners, held in June.

It seemed the most appropriate time to respond was after the discussion at the Network, so thank you for your patience in this regard. It is my pleasure to give let you know that the Commissioners have discussed military recruitment, and that all the Commissioners remain unanimous that 18 should be the youngest age for military recruitment.

Due to the fact that this issue is outside my remit, namely devolved services, I cannot use my position as Children Commissioner for Wales to directly influence United Kingdom military policy. However, I will continue to seek to work alongside the other UK Children's Commissioners to deliver a consistent, strong message. I understand that the Scottish Children's Commissioner has done work in this area, and I'd be happy to share more information about their work with you. In the meantime, if you are not already familiar with it, the [Optional Protocol for the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involving children in armed conflict](#) may be of interest.

I assure you that I still support the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, namely that the United Kingdom should reconsider its efforts to recruit children into the armed forces, and that the recruitment age should be raised from 16 to at least 18.

I am pleased to be able to share with you an update on my progress and development work plan for 2019-2022, available [here](#). The first phase involved face-to-face consultations with a variety of professional and community groups and a separate national survey with 6392 pupils and 391 teachers from our Ambassador schemes. Using the issues raised in this initial scoping exercise, surveys have been developed for children, young people, parents / carers and professionals, seeking their views on issues that matter to them, how they think some should receive attention, and what they think should be the focus of the Commissioner's work over the next three years. Over 10,000 children and young people took part in this. Although this wealth of information has presented a wide spectrum of concerns and issues for consideration, the issue of military recruitment by children and young people and their carers has not been raised. Although that does not mean that military recruitment is not a problem, my work plan has been developed to best reflect the issues raised by children and young people in Wales. I must also note that no one has contacted my investigations and Advice Team about this.

Again, thank you for taking the time to write to me and bring this matter to my attention. Although military recruitment practices in schools are not a specific element of the three-year work plan, I will continue to monitor it through my ongoing participation and casework service, and welcome any further information and engagement on the issue.

I look forward to discussing this at your event at the National Eisteddfod in August.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Holland

Children's Commissioner for Wales

Appendix 4: notes on the use of data in this report

The report notes the huge difficulties faced by interested parties wanting to access figures relating to military recruitment, and the resultant lack of transparency. This appendix sets out the data available to us in compiling the report and the reasons why, for the most part, the figures have not been deemed sufficiently reliable for detailed consideration.

Data received as a result of FOI requests made in 2019 (Set A⁶²) show a total of 676 visits to educational establishments⁶³ in Wales during 2017-19, once a small number of wrongly-located visits had been removed. As this figure seems very low in comparison to previous years, comparative overall figures for the nations of the UK were requested from the MoD through a parliamentary question.

These figures (Set B⁶⁴) suggest that 765 visits to educational establishments in Wales had been made for the same two years. Whilst higher than Set A, the figures in Set B also look low in comparison to data provided for 2011-12 which show⁶⁵ 713 visits to educational establishments in Wales for one year alone.

It was confirmed that both Set A and Set B figures are too low by comparing them to those provided in another parliamentary answer (Set C⁶⁶). Although figures in Set C cover the UK as a whole, they show that 10,260 visits were made to educational establishments across the UK in 2017-18, which is significantly higher than the 7,965 total for the UK given in Set B.

Looking at the differences for each of the armed forces, it appears that much of this difference is in the number of visits listed by the army. Set C gives 4,710 army visits for 2017-18 across the UK, compared with 2,722 army visits in Set B. The earlier 2011-12 figures show 5,654 army visits across the UK. Comparing available army figures for Wales, the number of army visits listed in Set B is 70 for 2017-18 and 217 for 2018-19, compared to 88 and 94 in Set A.

Additionally, the figures for RAF visits in Set A show no visits from the Wrexham Armed Forces Careers Office (AFCO), suggesting that they have not been included. Army and navy figures do not give the AFCO from which the visit was made but it is possible that these also exclude visits from Wrexham AFCO. As this is the only recruiting centre in north Wales, not including it would have a significant lowering effect on the figures.

In conclusion, it is clear that detailed figures on visits by the armed forces to individual schools (Set A) are significantly incomplete. Furthermore, three datasets for the same year (2017-18) show very different overall numbers of visits. It is therefore not possible to provide a reliable picture of the extent and distribution of armed forces visits to schools without an agreement to ensure the publication of data by the MoD on a regular basis.

62 Links to the full responses can be found below:

- [Army response](#), reference 20190717 FOI07145.
- [Navy response](#), reference FOI2019 05945.
- [RAF response](#), reference FOI 2019 05947.

63 The reference to “educational establishments” is a problematic one. Data received from the MoD on armed forces visits to schools usually incorporates all educational establishments including further education colleges and universities. For analysis of individual visits, these post-secondary visits are excluded. They have not been excluded for this comparative analysis of different datasets at UK or Welsh level.

64 House of Commons (2020) [Written question 18669: Armed Forces: Schools](#), UK Parliament website (accessed 6 March 2021).

65 House of Commons (2015) [Written question UIN 13256: Armed Forces: Education](#), UK Parliament website (accessed 6 March 2021).

66 House of Commons (2019), [Written question 286322: Armed Forces: Schools](#), UK Parliament website (accessed 6 March 2021).

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