

Petitions Committee

Consultation on petition P-04-432 Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools

Response from Jill Evans MEP

Military Recruitment in Schools

I am writing in support of the petition by Cymdeithas y Cymod to ban military recruitment in schools.

Education is a fundamental right. It prepares our young people for life, gives them the knowledge and skills ready for the world of work or further education, and hopes to create balanced and healthy individuals for life beyond the school gates. The social and psychological development of school-age young people is incredibly important in shaping individuals, and as such, needs protection from outside interests seeking to take advantage of this.

One such interest is the military. Their programme of recruitment of school-age children is widespread. It is estimated that around 900,000 young people have exposure to the armed forces within the education system in this way every single year.

For the armed forces, with promotional films, interactive games, and use of social media, schools are a vital ground for recruitment. Of the 20,000 new non-officer personnel enlisted every year, over a quarter are under 18, and without these 16 and 17-year olds, the Ministry of Defence staffing requirement could not be filled. Given that fewer and fewer are enlisting, the armed forces' marketing is becoming more aggressive and increasingly focussed on attracting younger and younger children, including those as young as seven years old.

Life in the military is portrayed to look enjoyable and educational in campaigns aimed at young people, often by incorporating the aesthetics of video games and the promise of personal growth and career development. For vulnerable school pupils, perhaps feeling alienated by the system or worrying about their prospects after school, the perceived security and excitement of life as a soldier certainly seems like an attractive offer. However, these marketing campaigns gloss over many aspects of the job such as the ethical issues, the psychological trauma, the legal responsibilities and the physical risks involved.

Armed forces recruitment concentrates on poorer schools more often, as well as on young people with low educational attainment. This, coupled with the fact that the required reading age for a new recruit is just 7, seems to suggest that the military intentionally targets the most vulnerable young people. They target those who might find it difficult to fully comprehend and assess the legal obligations and ethics of being a soldier because I believe a balanced and informed assessment would deter

many from enlisting. A survey conducted in Cardiff in 2004 found that 40% of army recruits joined as a "last resort" relating to the lack of civilian career options.

The UK is unique in that it is the only Member State of the European Union to either allow the military into schools or to employ soldiers under the age of 18. Both the United Nations and the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights have called on the UK government to raise the minimum recruiting age up from 16.

Jill Evans MEP
April 2013