

# Responding to military engagement in schools

How can schools meet their responsibility for the best interests of children and young people when engaging with the armed forces and weapons industry?

Safety and wellbeing | Educational impartiality

Freedom of conscience | Promoting peace & nonviolence



*Although the consent of parents is required before enlistment, few are aware of the facts... Schools should actively ensure that children up to the age of 18 are educated about the risks involved in a military life. 'Some instructors were simple bullies... [recruits were] singled out for weakness, humiliated, and isolated'.*

James Florey, infantry, 1999–2000

*The UK should "include the subject of peace education and human rights as a fundamental subject in the education system" and "intensify its efforts to tackle bullying and violence in schools".*

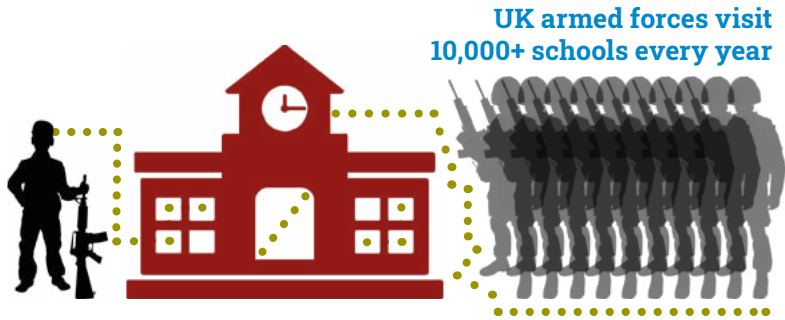
UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

16 and 17-year-olds make up 25% of the army's annual intake

Army



# Introduction



The armed forces visit more than 10,000 schools in England, Scotland and Wales every year to introduce their work.<sup>2</sup> The visits introduce career opportunities, but present military life as a road to adventure and an income. The risks and realities tend to be missed out.

The weapons industry visits a British school for every day of each school term. Companies such as BAE Systems, Raytheon MBDA, Leonardo and Rolls-Royce<sup>3</sup> engage students in technology and

*When I explained to them [the students] that BAE Systems provides weapons to Saudi Arabia they were shocked.*

Secondary school teacher following  
BAE Systems Schools Roadshow

engineering, but are seldom transparent about the impact of their products in ongoing armed conflict.

Schools have a responsibility for the best interests of their students. Whether you are a teacher, student, parent/carer, governor or

trustee, it is important to consider how military engagement affects safety and wellbeing, educational impartiality and freedom of conscience. Beyond that, there is an obligation to promote peace, tolerance and nonviolence (UN Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 29).

*Despite assurances by the Ministry of Defence and the three armed services that the armed forces do not recruit in schools, it is evident that many of the activities provided by members of the armed forces in schools are recruitment-related and the recruitment potential of visits is a key purpose of many, if not most, of their visits to schools.<sup>4</sup>*

*Armed forces visits to secondary schools in Scotland  
Forces Watch, 2014*

## Safety and wellbeing

### Under-18 recruitment: concerns

The British armed forces say they need to recruit under-18s to keep going.<sup>5</sup> Advertising is targeted at young people from poorer backgrounds.<sup>6</sup> The Ministry of Defence maintains that early enlistment offers opportunities that young people would not otherwise have. Here are some concerns:

**From 18 recruits are locked in for the next four years.**



- According to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, all military enlistment below the age of 18 contravenes human rights standards centred on the children's welfare, rights and interests.<sup>7</sup>
- The UK is one of the few countries worldwide that still routinely recruits people aged 16. Three-quarters of countries allow only adults from age 18 to join up, which is becoming the global norm.<sup>8</sup>
- A recruit who joins at 16 cannot leave the army in the first six weeks. From the day they turn 18 they may be sent to war. They are then locked in for the next four years.<sup>9</sup> Terms this restrictive could not be imposed on a civilian worker of any age.
- The British army is unique in relying so heavily on 16- and 17-year-olds to fill the ranks. The age group makes up a quarter of the army's annual intake.<sup>10</sup>
- The UK's Children's Commissioners believe this should change,<sup>11</sup> as do the National Education Union,<sup>12</sup> children's organisations<sup>13</sup> and health professionals.<sup>14</sup>

**Three-quarters of states worldwide no longer enlist under-18s into their armed forces**



*It basically involved taking a civilian with their own free will and creating brutal men – well, brutal boys.*

Ben Griffin, former Parachute Regiment and SAS soldier

*The armed forces ... employ an understanding of adolescent psychology that works to embed positive ideas about military life, exploiting developmental vulnerabilities and social inequality.<sup>15</sup>*

*Selling the Military  
Medact, 2019*

## Risks faced by under-18 recruits

Marketing for military jobs promises young people excitement, belonging and economic security, encouraging students to join up from 16. Here are some facts about the risks:

- Most recruits aged under 18 join the army, particularly the infantry, which carries the greatest risks in war.
- 30% of army recruits under 18 leave or are dismissed before they finish training, which leaves them immediately unemployed and out of education.<sup>16</sup>



- Under-18 recruits have worse long-term mental health outcomes than civilians of comparable age and background.<sup>17</sup>


- Training makes routine use of ‘beastings’, group punishments and humiliation – conditioning techniques that would be unlawful in civilian work.<sup>19</sup>
- All 16-year-old army recruits train at the Army Foundation College, which has a long record of formal complaints of abuse by staff, including assault, battery and sex offences.<sup>20</sup>

*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.<sup>18</sup>*

*Recruitment of children to the military in Welsh schools,  
Cymdeithas y Cymod, ForcesWatch  
and Peace Pledge Union, 2021*

## **Educational impartiality**

Some schools are enthusiastic about military engagement while some treat it with caution. Whatever the attitude, teachers have a duty to deal with ‘partisan political issues’ with impartiality, and learners must be offered a balanced presentation of different political views (Education Act, 1996). Despite the clarity of these requirements, professional judgement is required to determine what constitutes ‘partisan’ and ‘political views’. The governments of England, Scotland and Wales have each called on schools to ensure they offer an impartial picture for young people.



*Together welcomes recommendations made by the Scottish Parliament... [calling] for greater scrutiny, guidance and consultation around armed forces visits to schools in Scotland.<sup>21</sup>*

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Department for Education guidance (2022), for **English** schools, defines 'partisan political views' to mean those that concern social issues about which more than one reasonable perspective may be held. Different perspectives on violent conflict overseas is cited as an example. This issue is inescapably raised by military engagement with young people. The age of recruitment and the behaviour of the weapons industry are also issues about which there is considerable public debate.

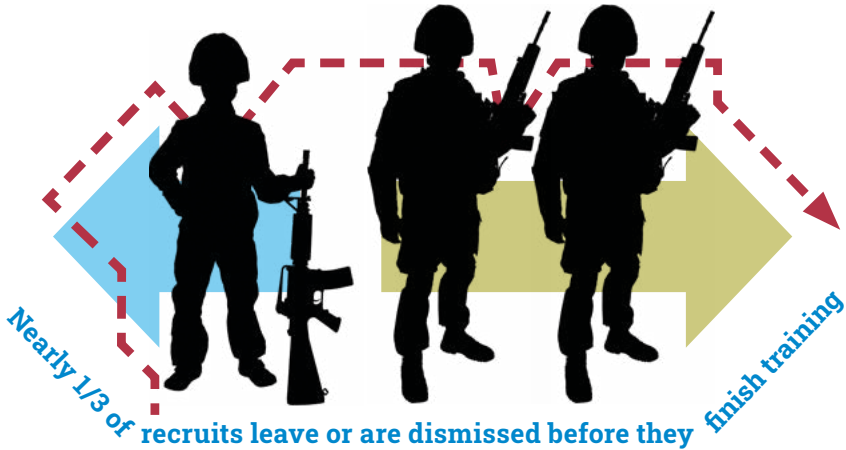
**Welsh** government advice likewise stresses the need to promote balanced teaching.<sup>22</sup> One of the four purposes of the Curriculum in Wales 2022 is to develop ethical, informed citizens, enabling young people to exercise critical thinking, moral reasoning and empathy for others. Learning about the diversity of opinions around war and the military is central to democratic understanding.

In **Scotland**, where teachers must also be 'well versed in ensuring a balanced approach to exploring political issues',<sup>23</sup> there is growing recognition that educational institutions must allow young people to express their views and for these to be given due weight (Article 12, UNCRC). The Scottish government is funding every state school to apply for a UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award,<sup>24</sup> putting them on course to promote democracy, peace and tolerance through education.



## Freedom of conscience

The UK is committed to respecting children's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14, UNCRC). Some children are raised in faith traditions that believe war is unacceptable or only



acceptable in very narrow situations. Students and their families need to have the right to exercise their conscience around weapons companies and military-themed activities.

Many children and families in Britain have fled war. Unless handled well, events such as Remembrance can be marginalising if they seem to glorify war or sanitise its effects.



## A culture of peace and nonviolence

Peace education enriches school life. Peace education resources and programmes help children to:

- think critically about war and its human cost
- learn about human rights, nonviolence and climate justice
- develop inner peace
- resolve conflict and develop skills of empathy and listening
- discover local peace heritage
- practise active citizenship.

*The whole school is happier, more tolerant and more respectful as a result of becoming a Peace School.<sup>25</sup>*

Deputy Head, Peace School in Wales

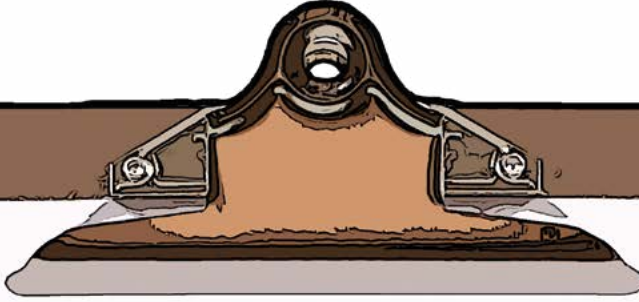
Intrinsic to peace education is the development of critical thinking, creative problem-solving, cooperation, active participation and reflection.

For more on how schools are building a culture of peace and nonviolence, read **Peace at the heart: a relational approach to education in British schools<sup>26</sup>** at [www.quaker.org.uk/peace-education-case](http://www.quaker.org.uk/peace-education-case).



## Next steps

Whether you are a student, teacher, parent or carer, governor or trustee, we encourage you to use this leaflet to start conversations and find out more.



### Checklist for schools

- ✓ Actively ensure the risks of joining the armed forces are adequately explained, especially for 15- to 18-year-olds.
- ✓ Give prior notice of any military engagement (including arms companies and cadet forces) and provide an enriching alternative for students who do not want to participate.
- ✓ Identify and discuss the political issues raised by visits by the military/weapons companies and enable critical thinking by providing opposing viewpoints.
- ✓ Develop a policy to uphold students' right to freedom of conscience and expression relating to war and military engagement.
- ✓ Use national events such as Remembrance and Armed Forces Day to enable reflection and avoid glorifying war.
- ✓ Use curriculum opportunities (Citizenship, RE, PSHE, History, SMSC) to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence.
- ✓ Provide active opportunities for pupils to develop conflict resolution and peacebuilding skills through peer mediation/restorative approaches.

## Resources and advice

Websites offering a range of perspectives on military jobs/ issues that can help with balance and critical thinking:

- Independent information for young people considering joining up: <https://beforeyousignup.info>
- Information on military enlistment at 16, human rights and welfare of young people: <https://home.crin.org/military-recruitment>
- Information on militarisation, military ethics and human rights concerns: [www.forceswatch.net](http://www.forceswatch.net)
- Information about the arms trade: <https://caat.org.uk>
- Watch *The Unseen March* (10 mins) or feature-length documentary *War School* at [www.quaker.org.uk/militarism](http://www.quaker.org.uk/militarism)

## Resources to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence:

For an approach to Remembrance that focuses on remembering all victims of war and creating a more peaceful world, see the Peace Pledge Union's white poppies and education materials at <https://tinyurl.com/ppu-wp-edu> or [www.ppu.org.uk](http://www.ppu.org.uk).

*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.*

*Recruitment of children to the military in Welsh schools  
Cymdeithas y Cymod, ForcesWatch,  
and Peace Pledge Union, 2021*

## Resources about conscientious objection and pacifism:

*Conscience* (primary) and *Conviction* (secondary) – teaching materials that support critical reflection on the moral dilemmas faced by men and women in World War I.

You can order hard copies from <https://bookshop.quaker.org.uk> or download both packs for free from [www.quaker.org.uk/teaching](http://www.quaker.org.uk/teaching).



*Conviction is a great resource... It asks questions that may usually be avoided or marginalised. It requires pupils to think deeply about, and investigate critically, authentic issues from the past that resonate in communities today.*

Chris Waller, Association of Citizenship Teachers

## Books and teaching guides

**Books** for young people with themes of conscientious objection, confronting fear and difference, and standing up for what you believe in:

### World War I

*Across the divide*\* (2018) by Anne Booth.  
Reading age: 11+

*Cowards: The true story of the men who refused to fight* (2003) by Marcus Sedgwick.  
Reading age: 10+

*Remembrance*\* (2002) by Theresa Breslin.  
Reading age: 13+

### World War II

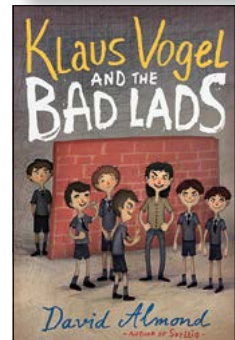
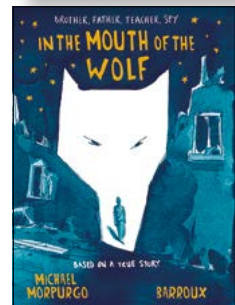
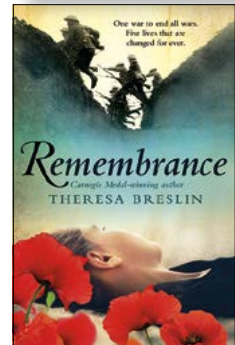
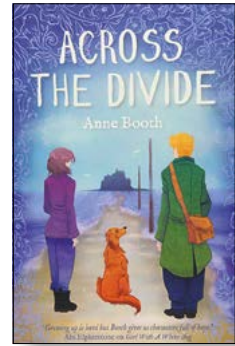
*In the mouth of the wolf*\* (2018) by Michael Morpurgo. Reading age: 7+

*Run rabbit run*\* (2015) by Barbara Mitchelhill. Reading age: 9+

### Aftermath of WWII

*Klaus Vogel and the bad lads* by David Almond. Reading age: 7+ (interest age: teens, particularly suitable for struggling/reluctant readers)

\*Can be ordered from the Quaker Centre bookshop by calling 020 7663 1000 or visiting <https://bookshop.quaker.org.uk>.

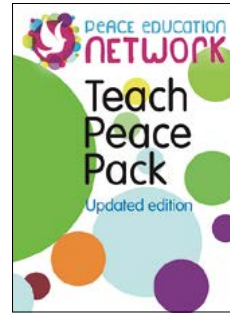
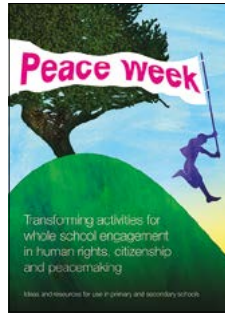
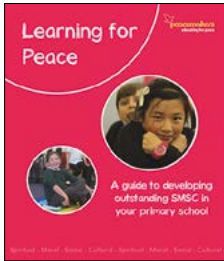


## Teaching guides:

*Learning for peace: A guide to developing outstanding SMSC in your Primary School:* [www.peacemakers.org.uk](http://www.peacemakers.org.uk)

*Teach Peace pack* – a collection of practical assemblies and resources to support educators taking a peace education approach: [www.peace-education.org.uk](http://www.peace-education.org.uk)

*Peace Week pack* – deliver a week of peace education in your primary or secondary school. Available in English and Welsh: [www.quaker.org.uk/peaceweek](http://www.quaker.org.uk/peaceweek)



*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.*

*Recruitment of children to the military in Welsh schools  
Cymdeithas y Cymod, ForcesWatch  
and Peace Pledge Union, 2021*

## Go further

To find a **Peer Mediation** training provider and organisations committed to conflict resolution and restorative approaches:  
[www.peermediationnetwork.org.uk](http://www.peermediationnetwork.org.uk)

To join the **Peace Schools in Wales** scheme:  
[www.wcia.org.uk/global-learning/peace-schools-in-wales](http://www.wcia.org.uk/global-learning/peace-schools-in-wales)

For **Global Citizenship Education in Scotland**:  
[www.ideas-forum.org.uk](http://www.ideas-forum.org.uk)

Information on **Peaceful Schools Awards**:  
[www.peacefulschools.org.uk](http://www.peacefulschools.org.uk)





## Endnotes

- 1 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under Article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict: Concluding observations, United Kingdom, CRC/C/OPAC/GBR/CO/1, 2008, <https://undocs.org/CRC/C/OPAC/GBR/CO/1>, para. 20; UN CRC, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom, CRC/C/GBR/CO/5, 2016, <https://undocs.org/CRC/C/GBR/CO/5>, para. 49
- 2 Forces Watch, 2019, '[Data on military visits and activities in schools](#)'
- 3 *Independent*, 2018, '[Arms companies spending millions each year promoting brands in UK schools](#)'
- 4 ForcesWatch, 2014, '[Armed forces visits to secondary schools in Scotland](#)'
- 5 Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), 2021, '[Has the time come for an all-adult army?](#)'
- 6 Child Rights International Network (CRIN), 2019, '[Conscription by poverty? Deprivation and army recruitment in the UK](#)'
- 7 UN CRC, 2016, '[General comment on adolescence on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence](#)'
- 8 CRIN, '[Military enlistment](#)', accessed 14/11/22
- 9 [The Army Terms of Service Regulations 2007, no. 3382 \(as amended, 2008, no. 1849\)](#)
- 10 UK Ministry of Defence, 2021 [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics](#)
- 11 Children's Commissioners of the UK, 2020 '[Report ... to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child](#)'
- 12 CRIN, 2021, [Letter to Secretary of State for Defence](#)
- 13 *Ibid.*

- 14 Medact, 2016, 'The recruitment of children by the UK armed forces: A critique from health professionals'; *BMJ Military Health*, 2022, Vol. 0 No. 0, 'Childhood trauma: a major risk factor in the military recruitment of young people'.
- 15 Medact, 2019, 'Selling the Military'
- 16 CRIN, 2021, 'British armed forces: Why raising the recruitment age would benefit everyone'
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- 18 Cymdeithas y Cymod, ForcesWatch and Peace Pledge Union, 2021, *Recruitment of children to the military in Welsh schools*
- 19 Veterans for Peace, 2017, 'First Ambush? Effects of military training and employment'
- 20 CRIN, 2022 'British army: Welfare concerns at the Army Foundation College, Harrogate'
- 21 Together Scotland, 2018, 'Together welcomes Scottish Parliament recommendations on armed forces visits to schools'
- 22 Welsh Government, 2021, 'Teaching Citizenship and Politics Education: Guidance for practitioners on remaining impartial'
- 23 Education Scotland, 2013, *Curriculum for Excellence Briefing 14, section 4*
- 24 [www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/funding-for-schools-in-scotland](http://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/funding-for-schools-in-scotland), accessed: 9 November 2022
- 25 For Peace Schools in Wales see: [www.wcia.org.uk/global-learning/peace-schools-in-wales](http://www.wcia.org.uk/global-learning/peace-schools-in-wales)
- 26 Quakers in Britain, 2022, *Peace at the Heart: a relational approach to education in British schools*



## Responding to military engagement in schools

How can schools meet their responsibility for the best interests of children and young people when engaging with the armed forces and weapons industry?

The armed forces visit more than 10,000 schools in England, Scotland and Wales every year to introduce their work. The visits introduce career opportunities, but present military life as a road to adventure and an income. The risks and realities tend to be missed out.

Quakers are led by their faith to take action for lasting peace and social justice.



Access this document and other resources online at [www.quaker.org.uk/peace-education-case](http://www.quaker.org.uk/peace-education-case).

[www.quaker.org.uk](http://www.quaker.org.uk)

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