

Take
action on

Militarism

Challenging militarism:
a resource pack

ForcesWatch

www.forceswatch.net/takeaction



Contents

Introduction to militarism

Military influence in education

The expansion of cadets

Recruiting bodies and minds

Armed Forces Day and other military events in the community

Remembrance

The arms trade drives militarism

Creating public debate through media action

Militarism in Scotland and Wales

Resources

Get involved

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Introduction to militarism

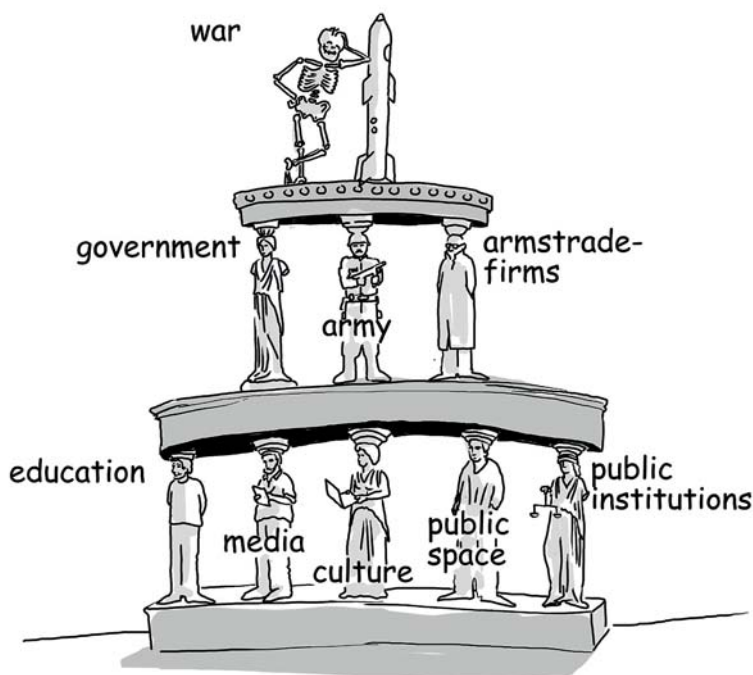
Militarisation: the action of making military in character or style; spec. transformation to military methods or status, esp. by the provision or expansion of military forces and other resources.

Oxford English Dictionary

“To become militarised is to adopt militaristic values and priorities as one’s own, to see military solutions as particularly effective, to see the world as a dangerous place best approached with militaristic attitudes”.

Cynthia Enloe, Globalization and Militarism, 2007

Militarism is ever-present in British society. Soldiers have always marched at state events, cadet forces are an established part of the education system, and armed forces’ recruiting offices can be found in many town centres. Successive governments have been under constant pressure from arms manufacturers to buy weapons. But a new and different tide of militarisation has developed recently. The general public does not seem to be aware of it, and it is not being discussed or scrutinised.



For war to occur, the military, arms companies and the government need to be in a position to support it. In turn, they need to have enough support from the general public to make this happen. The military, arms companies and the government seek to influence society in order to make sure the public supports military action.

Since Britain’s unpopular involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, there has been a concerted effort made by the government and the armed forces to promote the military and to make sure it has enough support to go to war. A government report on National Recognition of the Armed Forces noted in 2008 that, “public understanding of the military and recognition

of their role will always determine the climate within which the Forces can recruit, and the willingness of the taxpayer to finance them adequately”.

As a result the armed forces have become more visible across society: in schools, in parliament, in churches, in sport, in culture, on special occasions, during Remembrance, in the media, on public transport, and in local government and other public bodies. We are encouraged to think well of the armed forces and uncritically accept what they do.



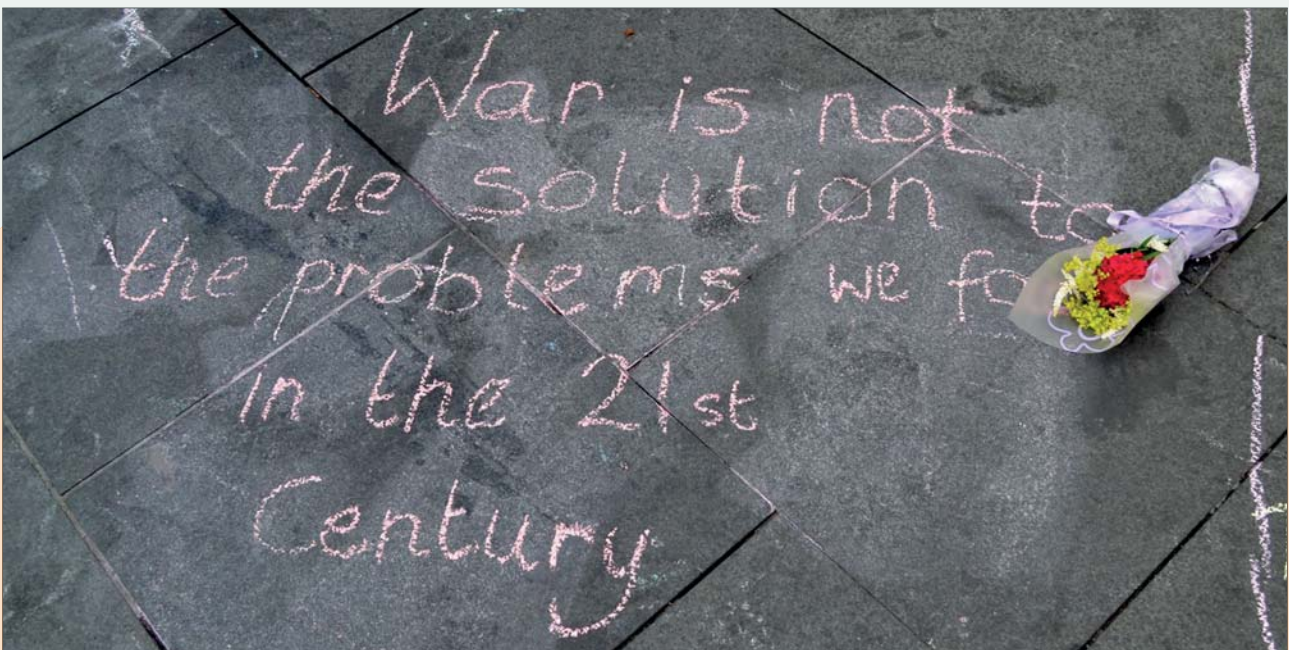
Activists from Merseyside Peace Network prepare for Liverpool Armed Forces Day, 2017

This raises many potential problems:

- bias where there should be none, and lack of critical debate – in the media, in schools, in parliament and local government
- stifling of criticism of war and the military and too little support for those who work for peace
- glossing over the negative aspects of the armed forces and glamorising military action
- encouraging young people to take up a career in the armed forces without understanding the consequences
- military-style approaches are presented as applicable to complex social problems without making clear the underlying purpose

- a democratic deficit as the military uses its influence to promote increased defence spending and wider political policy
- weapons and a military presence in civil society becomes normalised and society accepts the violence that is an integral part of the military approach
- society becomes less able to critically judge military action and is more accepting of it
- support for members of the armed forces and veterans is conflated with support for military institutions.

Many people may assume that we have always celebrated Armed Forces Day (which was established as late as 2009), and that the military has always been involved in state education. The gradual creeping militarism in our society has gone largely unnoticed or unmentioned. But people from across Britain are becoming concerned about it, and have been taking action. This resource will share their experiences and ideas, and share our understanding of how the military is influencing key parts of civil society. We hope it will inspire and support you to take action on militarism.



A message chalking on the pavement at one of the weekly Leicester Peace Vigils.
Photo: Ambrose Musiyiwa / CivicLeicester

Military influence in education

If you want to build public support for the military it makes sense to start by influencing young people. The education system, both state and private, can provide the armed forces with a captive audience for activities related to recruitment and for developing future public support.

Armed forces activity in schools and colleges takes many forms and is on the increase. There are thousands of military visits to schools for presentations and careers events. The armed forces run personal development activities and offer courses providing a taste of military life¹.

The Department of Education's policy of promoting 'military ethos' has seen the expansion of cadet units in state schools and the provision of military-themed activities by private organisations. This is focused on deprived areas or young people who are not achieving well².

The curriculum provides opportunities for armed forces involvement, such as supporting teaching around the history of World War I and school trips to former battlefields. The current focus on technical and careers education means that the provision of STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) activities by the armed forces and arms industry has gone unchallenged. The government has also sought to directly promote the UK armed forces and military involvement overseas with *The British Armed Forces Learning Resource*³.

The changing structure of the education system also provides openings for the military. For example, many University Technical Colleges, a new type of employment-focused free school for 14- to 18-year-olds, are sponsored or partnered by the armed forces and arms companies.

Military activities are often presented as character-building, as the solution to poor discipline and attainment, or as a source of skill and knowledge development.

The military and arms companies also have considerable influence in higher education through its recruitment, marketing, research and teaching activities, and university service units.

What is the problem?

The military is involved in schools to fulfil a defence agenda rather than an educational one, yet this has received little scrutiny. Military presentations in schools give a one-sided picture of life in the armed forces and the realities of war. The armed forces can also direct more resources at education than most other employers, including uniformed services like paramedics or police.

Military activities are not necessarily compatible with school policies on equality, tolerance, compassion and respect. Not all aspects of 'military ethos' are positive and the hierarchy and obedience can be a source of bullying.

The classroom should not be a place for uncritical propaganda or bias. It should be a space for development of critical awareness about human rights, different approaches to conflict resolution and long-term peace and security. Education for, and about, peace is not being promoted by the government, despite recommendations from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child⁴.

Military activities in schools are often targeted at young people whose options are more limited. The best interests of all students must be considered by schools.

Although activities such as military cadets provide positive experiences for many, they do so within a narrow military framework. Given the limited funding in education, expansion could come at the expense of more universal provision, accessible to all students regardless of their interest in military activities.

There are many moral questions raised by military activities in schools, so participation should be questioned and not assumed. There should be consultation, prior notification and the opportunity to question and even stand aside from a particular activity.

1 www.forceswatch.net/resources/peace-education-and-promotion-armed-forces-uk-schools

2 www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jul/09/british-army-is-targeting-working-class-young-people-report-shows

3 www.forceswatch.net/content/armed-forces-learning-resource

4 'Concluding observations', October 2008, section 67(f).

Answering questions

Isn't it good for young people to hear about the military and what war is really like?

It is important that young people study the causes and consequences of modern warfare but this learning must come from a variety of sources. Armed forces activities in schools are primarily about marketing and will not be unbiased.

But the armed forces say they don't recruit in schools.

Just because young people are not formally asked to sign up to serve in schools does not mean a military themed activity isn't about recruitment. Recruitment is a process, not a single event. The military is also trying to directly influence young people's opinions. This could be seen as propaganda.

Doesn't a 'military ethos' help children with teamwork and discipline?

There are many ways to build teamwork and self-discipline. In reality, schools are pioneering a great range of non-militarised projects, with strong outcomes, and these should be supported and promoted.

Facts

The MoD's *Youth Engagement Review* identified recruitment and "the continued support of the population" as two 'defence outcomes' of activities in schools.

Between 2012 and 2016, around £90 million new funding was given to the Cadet Expansion Scheme and other schemes promoting 'military ethos' in schools.

Over one third of 49 University Technical Colleges open in September 2017 are sponsored or partnered by part of the military. More than half have the involvement of either the armed forces or one or more major arms company. Some have the involvement of both.

BAE Systems has partnered with the RAF and the Royal Navy to deliver its STEM roadshow to 400 schools during 2017.

Following public petitions, the Welsh government has accepted the need for oversight and guidelines around armed forces visits to schools and the Scottish Parliament is now considering it.





Young soldiers from *War School*, a new feature-length documentary challenging militarism, produced by activist filmmaker Mic Dixon, Pow Productions

The expansion of cadets

What's happening?

Cadet units are youth groups funded and supported by the Ministry of Defence. Community Cadet units are either Army, Sea or Air Training cadets. The school-based Combined Cadet Force contain one or more sections from the Navy, Marines, Army or RAF.

A young person can join the cadets aged 12, although Sea cadets can join as young as 10 years old. The units are run by adult volunteers who may or may not have a military background.

Combined Cadet Forces (CCF) have traditionally operated in private schools. As part of the government promotion of 'military ethos' in schools, the Cadet Expansion Programme was launched in 2012 to establish 100 new cadet units in state secondary schools in England.

In 2015, the government announced a further £50 million for expansion to 500 cadet units in state schools by 2020, specifically targeting areas of economic deprivation.

A number of state schools in Scotland have a 'linked detachment programme' which is run in partnership with the Army Cadet Force. The Scottish government maintains that this cadet model contributes to the curriculum and is therefore different to cadet units in England.

"We are committing £50 million to expand the number of cadet units in our state schools to 500, prioritising less affluent areas."

George Osborne, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, July 2015

What's the problem?

The cadets are an effective tool to influence young people and build public support for the military. They normalise the use of weapons and provide a direct pathway to recruitment for some.

The Ministry of Defence has said the cadets are not about recruiting into the armed forces but has also called the cadets, "a powerful tool for facilitating recruitment"! The MoD is keen that the cadets are seen primarily as a youth organisation and this is facilitated by presenting the cadets as addressing wider government concerns around attainment in schools, character development and social mobility.

The importance of cadet units for recruitment is evident most recently in the 2017 report to the prime minister, 'Filling the Ranks', which recommends that the Cadet Expansion Programme is extended, and that more information is given to cadets to encourage them to enlist.

Cadet activities may provide positive experiences for some, but they do so within a narrow, military framework, which will not appeal to



Children get a taste of military life at an army stall.
Photo: Ambrose Musiyiwa/CivicLeicester

many. Expansion of cadets comes at a time when other youth work has experienced huge cuts.

With fun and adventurous activities, a risk-laden career is made to seem enjoyable and exciting. There is also substantial evidence of bullying in the cadets.

While schools are ultimately responsible for safeguarding and investigating concerns in the CCF, Community Cadets utilise the armed forces chain of command structure for investigating allegations. This can lead to mishandling of cases and cover ups.²

“Bullying and ‘hazing’ were fairly institutionalised within the CCF particularly during camps.”

Former cadet

Answering questions

The cadets are a youth organisation – it’s not about recruitment.

The MoD present the cadets as primarily a youth organisation for the development of young people but they would not invest so much time and money into them if it did not have a value to defence interests.

Don’t the cadets benefit young people who join them?

Being in the cadets may benefit young people, but so too would any well-funded youth programme. Opportunities are biased towards military activities at the expense of universal provision.

Isn’t it just a bit of fun?

Activities involving the military can be fun and alluring to children and young people but that doesn’t mean that they are appropriate in the education system. The reality is that war is always damaging to those directly involved and should not be trivialised or glamorised.

It doesn’t do you any harm does it?

For many, the cadets is not a safe environment. As well as routine low-level bullying and humiliation, hundreds of serious historical and current sexual abuse allegations have recently come to light. Dozens of instructors have been dismissed and over £2 million paid out by the Ministry of Defence in settlements.²

But it’s not about war and violence is it?

Many cadet activities ape warfare, with the use of guns, simulated enemy fire and war games. Combining these experiences with fun and excitement and young people’s desire to succeed makes war seem normal.

Cadet membership

In 2017, there were 84,000 Community Cadets and 42,000 cadets in Combined Cadet Forces units.³

1 See Ministry of Defence, 2005. Strategy for Delivery of MOD Youth Initiatives

2 Sex abuse was covered up at cadet forces, Panorama finds, 4 July 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-40457123>

3 MOD Sponsored Cadet Forces Statistics 2017



Children playing on military equipment at Liverpool Armed Forces Day, 2017.
Photo: John Usher

Recruiting bodies and minds

In the past few years, there have been reports of a 'recruitment crisis' facing the British military, particularly the army. Following cuts made to the regular army, the government put forward the 'Future Reserve 2020' plan, to double the size of reservists by 2018 in order to fill the gaps left by cuts.

Yet numbers are still dwindling among both regular and reserve elements of the armed forces despite

extensive and expensive marketing campaigns. Military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq has been largely unpopular, with growing public cynicism about its objectives and success. This has had a negative effect on armed forces recruitment.

To ensure the recruitment of personnel and the public's support for the forces and their operations, militarisation is on the rise in public spaces and education. Meanwhile, costly and sophisticated recruitment initiatives are romanticising life in the military, while drawing attention away from the causes and consequences of violent conflict and our need to rethink our security approach¹.

These recruitment initiatives target working class children² and young people in particular. The UK recruits children from age 16, and is the only country in Europe to do so.

What is the problem?

Marketing campaigns present a sanitised and romanticised version of life in the military. They focus on the benefits of an armed forces career with little mention of the risks, obligations or ethical challenges involved.

Recruitment materials and activities particularly target children and young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds and with fewer alternative opportunities. They focus on personal development and comradeship that will particularly appeal to those who are most vulnerable.

Armed forces activities within education are designed to interest young people in a forces career, yet the military denies this. The display of weapons and military vehicles hooks young children in to the idea of a military career many years before they are able to consider it with critical awareness. At a time when the number of weapons on the street is increasing³, it is irresponsible of the armed forces to create a sense of glamour around military hardware, and of the local authorities to allow this.

BEFORE YOU SIGN UP

Thinking of joining the armed forces?

Get the facts first from:
www.beforeyousignup.info

independent information service

Enlisting in the military is a decision with serious moral, health and legal implications. Young people and their parents/guardians must be given the opportunity to make a fully informed choice. Many of the risks associated with an armed forces career, including training, combat and after service, are exacerbated for the youngest recruits. Targeting young people for recruitment before they are 18 encourages them to leave mainstream education. Many of these young people will leave training or service early and face unemployment due to a lack of transferable qualifications. Adolescents have a greater vulnerability and susceptibility to external pressure, marketing and influence and this is exploited by armed forces marketing.

The UK's policy of recruiting at 16 goes against the international consensus that the minimum age should be 18. It contravenes recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and many other organisations.

Answering questions

Aren't the armed forces an alternative to crime and poverty for many young people?

Not everyone fares well in the armed forces. The youngest recruits, and particularly those from a disadvantaged background, are more at risk of threat to their long-term physical and mental health, educational outcomes, career options, future relationships and quality of life.

Why is recruiting children an issue when we don't deploy them until they are adults?

While not deployed until they turn 18, 16- to 18-year-old recruits enter a training environment that can be brutalising and dehumanising, and involves learning to kill. They tend to be channelled into the lowest paid and most

dangerous roles. Many leave training or service with few skills and opportunities to fall back on.

How do we recruit people to the armed forces then?

The welfare of children and young people should not be secondary to the military's recruitment needs. Young people should be given a balanced view of life in the military and should only be allowed to join once they become an adult and are able to make a more informed choice.

"When I was in the Army I remember seeing the Army adverts, and even then you just sort of have a laugh, and think that's basically a load of rubbish, what they're saying. When you're 16, 17 - 15, even, you are massively vulnerable to these things... In my time it was Afghanistan and Iraq, when you see these things glorified you want to be there doing it as well. They're just easy prey for the army to get hold of. And they know what they're doing... they've obviously got smart people from marketing involved, they're going to put all this stuff out and make it look really cool."

Wayne Sharrocks, who was enlisted at 17, did two tours in Afghanistan, where he suffered serious facial injuries. Wayne now campaigns with Veterans for Peace for the minimum recruitment age to be raised to 18.

Facts

The campaign to raise the age of armed forces recruitment to 18 is supported by the UK's Children's Commissioners as well as many children's rights, faith and youth organisations.

A review of the current policy has been called for by the House of Commons Defence Committee and Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights.

Raising the age of recruitment to 18 would:

- safeguard children's rights and welfare
- encourage children to fully consider what's best for them
- still allow young people to join the military when they are 18.
- set a good example to other countries to stop recruiting under-18s into the military.

1 See rethinkingsecurity.org.uk

2 www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jul/09/british-army-is-targeting-working-class-young-people-report-shows

3 www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/gun-and-knife-crime-soaring-in-london-official-figures-show-a3513366.html



Liverpool Armed Forces Day, 2017. Photo: John Usher

Armed Forces Day and other military events in the community

Since 2009 Armed Forces Day celebrations have taken place in June across the UK. Each year a different city hosts the national event. Local authorities play a primary role in organising and funding these events. Schools and community organisations are encouraged to take part.

Outreach events are one part of a concerted effort to build public support for the military. The civil-military partnerships created under

the Armed Forces Covenant are another. Many local authorities and other organisations have now pledged to encourage public support of the military.

Recruitment stalls with military vehicles or weapons are common in local public spaces. Major events such as the 2012 Olympics and top-level football matches increasingly have an armed forces presence.

Why is this a problem?

While the military have become more visible through events such as Armed Forces Day, other recent developments are harder to see. Through armed forces partnerships with public authorities, business and other organisations, support for the military is becoming further embedded into wider society.

Local authorities support Armed Forces Day, and other events such as Reserves Day and recruitment displays, to fulfill their commitments under the Armed Forces Community Covenant. Many businesses, charities and community organisations have pledged support through the Armed Forces Corporate Covenant. While the stated aim of the Covenant is to remove disadvantage for serving members of the armed forces in accessing services, and to facilitate employees to be reservists, the Covenants also promote the military as an institution and as a career option.

As military action has become more controversial and recruits numbers have fallen, the armed forces have had to reach further into civil society to maintain public support.

Outreach events display an uncritical acceptance of



military approaches and portray war-making as entertainment. Many Armed Forces Day events are marketed as 'family fun', without acknowledging the negative consequences of war. Public displays of weapons and military vehicles are used to promote the armed forces as a career to children.

Schools are encouraged to show support on Armed Forces Day by using assembly and curriculum resources which portray a sanitised image of military activities. Their promotional emphasis does not facilitate critical thinking among young people.

Answering questions

What is wrong with showing support for men and women in the armed forces?

Events such as Armed Forces Day aim to create public support for the military as an institution as well as recognising the service of those in the armed forces. Celebrating the military risks promoting an uncritical acceptance of its approaches at the expense of security approaches that aim to build long-term peace.

Why shouldn't the council support these military events?

Local councils and other public bodies should not be obliged to create support for the military. These councils risk alienating parts of the local community by aligning themselves with the armed forces in a celebratory way. One part of the community is celebrated while services to others are cut and other public services are not given the same level of public recognition. Local councils should not be facilitating the unrealistic and sanitised view of military life portrayed in armed forces marketing.

Kids love military vehicles and weapons.

What is wrong with them being on display?

Armed forces recruiters know that if they create an interest in a child from an early age, they are more likely to be able to recruit them later on. Public events provide the opportunity to develop this interest by presenting young people with exciting things like weapons and military vehicles and highly persuasive advertising.

What's wrong with companies and charities showing support for cadets and Armed Forces Day?

Many organisations are being asked to support the armed forces and defence policy, such as the recruitment of reserves, which is unrelated to their actual business. Not only is this potentially divisive, it creates a privileged status for the

armed forces that could be harmful to the long-term societal goals of democracy, equality and peace.

Isn't it important for the general public to understand more about the work of the armed forces?

While it is important that individual service personnel, veterans and their families do not face hostility or disadvantage, public outreach activities are about far more than developing understanding. They serve to create acceptance of military approaches and to generate new recruits. It is easy to lose sight of the terrible effects of military conflict when armed intervention by the state is seen as normal.

Facts

Far from being just a reflection of respect for serving personnel, public support of the armed forces has intensified alongside the promotion of Armed Forces Day¹.

Armed Forces Day was established after the *National Recognition of our Armed Forces* report of 2008, which made many policy recommendations to make the armed forces feel "morally and materially supported" by society.

The Armed Forces Covenant was recognised in law in 2011. Every local authority in Great Britain has now signed an **Armed Forces Community Covenant**. Many partner organisations have also signed. As well as committing them to work towards removing disadvantage in access to housing, healthcare, education, and employment for the armed forces, it also pledges them to encourage support through public events such as Armed Forces Day. Many local authorities have appointed one or more **Armed Forces Champions**.

The **Armed Forces Corporate Covenant** has been signed by many hundreds of companies, charities and other organisations, including schools, colleges and universities, pledging workplace support of reservists, military spouses and veterans and support for cadet forces and Armed Forces Day.

¹ The British Social Attitudes (29) report "Armed Forces: The UK's Armed Forces: public support for the troops but not their missions?" (2012) stated that: "We have also found evidence from two different sources that people's respect for the military is likely to have increased in recent years."

Photo, left: North Wales Armed Forces Day.
Credit: Wrexham Peace and Justice Forum



Veterans For Peace marching to the The Cenotaph © 2017 Guy Smallman



Remembrance

Armistice Day was intended to mark a day of intense sadness and grief at the enormous cost of war and the failure of humanity to prevent it. But the nature of Remembrance in Britain has changed over recent years. The Remembrance period has become elaborate and lengthy and co-opted by military interests and promotional messages. Official Remembrance ceremonies have a narrow focus on British servicemen and women, with little recognition of the effects of war on service personnel and civilians from other parts of the world.

We all have a part to play in the public debate around Remembrance. Individual or community acts of rethinking the Remembrance message are vital to counter the inherent militarism of official ceremonies.

Poppy politics

Remembrance is a broad concept. While some emphasise the importance of saying 'never again' to loss and suffering, others see no reason to question the morality of the wars in which it happened.

While the poppy can signify both these positions, the official act of memorialising war tends to glorify and sanitise it. The focus on honouring members of the armed forces can become blurred. Official messaging by the Royal British Legion, the military, the government and public authorities has increasingly included elements that emphasise demonstrating support the armed forces rather than reflecting on the suffering of war or acknowledging it as human failure.

A sense of obligation to demonstrate uncritical support for marking the day has developed. TV presenters and other public figures are instructed to wear a red poppy for many days before Armistice Day, sporting events in November are heavily branded with the poppy and some schools even require all their pupils to wear one.

Although a charity, the Royal British Legion has developed a style of operating that is reminiscent of a large corporation. It has commercialised Remembrance by heavily pushing the sale of red poppies and related merchandise and claims a legal ownership over the poppy brand. Some of its ventures – poppy-themed pop bands and jewellery – speak more of commercial logic than of sensitivity to the issue of war, death and killing.

Its fundraising through corporate partnerships should also raise major concerns. The Remembrance Centre at the National Memorial Arboretum is sponsored by arms companies, including BAE Systems and Boeing Defence UK (see www.thenma.org.uk/about-us/new-



In memory of all who have suffered in all wars.
Photo: Nik Dadson for Britain Yearly Meeting

remembrance-centre for the full list). Surely this has to be challenged?

The language used during Remembrance is euphemistic, glorifying and sanitising the consequences of warfare. Narratives around the nobility and sacrifice of fighting to protect our freedoms mask the reality of the causes and impact of war and create a sense of uncritical acceptance.

In recent years, there has been more public debate about the character of Remembrance as many people have grown uncomfortable with aspects of it. Many question the imbalance between the act of remembering and the focus on fundraising and promotion of the armed forces. White poppy sales are high as people seek to express their desire for peace through Remembrance.

Answering questions

Won't talking about white poppies for peace show disrespect for the armed forces?

A white poppy signifies remembering all the victims of wars. It can be worn without showing any disrespect for individuals in the armed forces or offending those who may be mourning the loss of loved ones. Many veterans and others who have lost friends and family through conflict wear a white poppy.

What is wrong with honouring those who have suffered in war?

Remembrance ceremonies can sometimes reinforce the view that war is acceptable and natural, however regrettable it may be. While

it is very important to remember all those who have suffered as a result, it is also important to question why it happens and not allow Remembrance to be used to sanction military action.

Why do you want to challenge the way Remembrance is held?

Remembrance ceremonies are not set in stone. They change over time to reflect the interests of the institutions that organise them. The military is currently concerned about public promotion of the armed forces and recruitment and Remembrance has become another opportunity for this. It is also an opportunity to raise funds, which can lead to tensions between the core message and maximizing income. The public debate around how we remember the causes and consequences of war is very important for future generations and it is vital that those who work for peace are part of that debate.

How can school students explore Remembrance?

Exploring Remembrance in schools is an opportunity to encourage critical thinking about the causes and consequences of war and to understand that this essential critique in no way dishonours or disrespects those who have suffered. Learning activities should look at warfare from different perspectives and avoid euphemistic language or ideas that glorify or sanitise warfare. Schools could also be encouraged to explore the meaning of the white poppy and non-militarised solutions to conflict that emphasise peacebuilding and long-term security.

The white poppy

The white poppy is a symbol of Remembrance. It explicitly says "No more wars. No more killing. Let us work for peace." It was introduced by the Women's Cooperative Guild in 1933. The white poppy represents those on all sides who have died, been injured or still suffer in conflicts across the world.

Each year more and more people wear white poppies or lay a wreath of them at their local war memorial. Some choose a mix of red and white poppies. Some choose to wear neither. Many find a white poppy prompts conversation around war, peace, Remembrance and hope.



Children playing with an M134 Minigun at Farnborough International Airshow.

The arms trade drives militarism

It isn't just the state that benefits from militarism. The arms trade also stands to gain from public acceptance and increased awareness among young people and opportunities to recruit them. Arms companies profit from a more militarised society where weapons and military might are accepted as necessary and even symbols of prestige. Their social license to operate is also strengthened by their role as employers and their involvement in the public sector and public events.

Arms companies sponsor military events such as Armed Forces Day and fundraising events for Remembrance. They benefit from the support given by the public to these events and an image of public respectability.

Along with the military, they are also increasingly involved in education, through direct sponsorship of schools and involvement in their curriculum, as well as widespread provision of learning activities related to STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) education. They also sponsor careers events, national STEM awards and challenges, undergraduate programmes and activities for youth organisations.

The benefits to arms companies of this involvement in education are many. Not only does it steer interested and work-ready students towards a career in the arms industry and provide mechanisms for directly recruiting them, it helps to create an acceptance of them among young people and society at large. Their role as providers within education and other activities for young people masks their primary purpose and blurs the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable, ethical and immoral. This is aided by the association of communities with companies which bring jobs and economic security. The government heavily promotes the message that the defence and security sector is vital for employment.

Universities are fertile recruiting grounds for the military and arms companies and both have numerous links and partnerships with universities across the UK. Military interests tap heavily into the intellectual capital of university communities as students and staff are channelled into military research and employment.

Not only do the military and arms companies have common interests, they have a very close working relationship. Campaign Against Arms Trade has researched the corrupt 'revolving door' for powerful figures between the arms trade and government which gives the arms

industry a huge amount of political influence.¹ A close relationship between commercial interests, the military and political decision-making is a key factor of militarism.

Like the military, arms companies present a sanitised image which skirts around the reality of what their products are actually used for. BAE Systems' promotional video for students and parents as a partner of Portsmouth University Technical College fails to mention that it is a company that manufactures weapons systems.

However, as they directly profit from conflict, arms companies lack the legitimacy of the military, and can sometimes be easier to challenge and oppose.

Answering questions

Don't we need to be able to defend ourselves and have the technology to do it?

The damage the arms trade does is a root cause of so many of the world's problems. Many of its practices are highly unethical. The more this is normalised, the more difficult it is to change.

Isn't arms company influence on universities relatively small?

Some universities have strong partnerships with arms companies and some university departments receive a large proportion of their funding from military research. This will shape their priorities and perspectives.

Whats wrong with arms companies passing on engineering skills to young people?

Whether the activities are about armed drones or not directly related to the defence industry, the delivery of exciting learning activities by arms companies normalises weapons technology and legitimises the company's operations.

Why shouldn't arms companies provide STEM activities free to young people?

Science, engineering and technology activities and careers advice are weighted towards industries with agendas and outputs that contribute to some of the very threats the STEM community must answer. We need STEM graduates to transition the defence economy towards more socially useful production.

Shouldn't arms companies put something back into the community?

Arms companies should not be able to

whitewash their involvement in war and all the dubious moral questions that raises by funding local services and events. Human rights and other ethical concerns about a company's operations can not be ignored, particularly if they are involved in the education of the next generation.

BAE Systems

BAE Systems is the UK's largest arms company and almost all of its profits come from selling arms.² The company fuels conflict with its production of fighter aircraft, warships, nuclear missile submarines, armoured vehicles, missiles and small arms ammunition. It is also developing new weapons systems including lethal autonomous weapons and laser directed energy weapons which it claims will change "the nature of warfare". BAE Systems is the main company implicated in the supply of arms from the UK used by Saudi Arabia to attack the civilian population of Yemen. Its armoured vehicles were used by Saudi Arabia in Bahrain to support the repression of democracy protests in 2011.

While the House of Lords ruled in 2008 that corruption investigations against the company should be stopped for national security reasons, BAE Systems has paid fines or settlements in corruptions cases elsewhere.

The National Memorial Arboretum, the Royal British Legion's centre for Remembrance, is sponsored by BAE Systems and Boeing Defence UK among others.

BAE Systems partners with the RAF and the Royal Navy to deliver its STEM roadshow to hundreds of schools each year. The company sponsors a school in Barrow in Furness, where it is a major employer, as well as four university technical colleges.

BAE Systems has many collaborations with UK universities for research projects. It recently announced five partnerships with specialist universities, where a BAE employer will be embedded in the university.

The 'Big Bang Fair', which attracts groups of students from primary and secondary schools, is sponsored by some of the world's top 100 arms companies: BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce, Airbus, Leonardo and Thales – as well as the army, navy, RAF and MoD.

1. See more information on political influence at <https://www.caat.org.uk/issues/influence>

2. Information about BAE Systems and other arms companies is available at www.caat.org.uk/resources/companies

Creating public debate through media action

Media coverage – whether that be on radio, TV, newspapers, social media, either locally or nationally – is a vital way of creating and informing public debate and influencing policy and practice. A council that has received criticism for allowing weapons on display at a recruiting stand is more likely to reconsider next time. Parliamentary representatives use the media to stay informed about their constituents' concerns.

The media plays a huge role in increasing the influence of the armed forces in society. Parts of the media have actively campaigned to this effect while other parts largely report public events such as Armed Forces Day, or policy decisions which favour the military, with little balance. By challenging media bias and introducing other perspectives, we help to change what is regarded as mainstream public opinion and create more balanced debate. As a result of sustained work by campaigners, the campaign to raise the age of armed forces recruitment is now recognised within the media and is regularly the subject of interviews or talk-shows.

With the diversification of media outlets and the rise in social media, there are more possibilities for adding our own voices to the debate. We can also use these channels for distributing our own media. With a little effort you will have the reward of seeing your message out there.



Media interventions

Make a response when you hear something that concerns you.

- Be alert to coverage in national and local papers, TV and radio. You can often

comment on associated webpages or send in a clear and concise letter to the editor in response. A letter to a local paper about a local issue is very likely to be published and will reach people across your community and add to, or help create, local debate.

- Use Facebook and Twitter to share articles or tweet news outlets with responses to stories they have run or should be running.
- If you feel there is a clear case in which the media is not providing balance, make a complaint! The BBC in particular has a licence to do balanced reporting.
- Take part in local or national phone-in radio shows if something relevant is being discussed.

Becoming the story

If you are holding an event, action or project, think about using the mainstream and social media to promote it early on. It takes some effort, but can really pay off.

What's the story?

Decide what is going to be your media hook. Is there an aspect that may be of particular interest, such as an anniversary or association with local events or people? Think about how you will frame the story, who the protagonists are and what perspectives they bring. Make sure the language you use is clear and accessible and that your concerns are expressed in a way that people are more likely to relate to. For example, emphasise your concern about the marketing of armed forces careers to young children at Armed Forces Day rather than your worries about the increase of militarism.

Have a strategy

If you are going to do media, your media strategy should be a central part of organising a project, event or campaign, rather than an afterthought. Make sure you develop public interest in what you are doing as you go along. Social media is useful for building towards an event, with a press release for mainstream media and one or two articles available online nearer the time. If you don't feel confident with social media or setting up a website, ask someone to help start things up and show you how to use them. You may wish to allocate one or two people to focus on the media work.

Writing a press release

It is important to have a clear and concise press

release to send to local or regional papers or TV and radio. It can also help you get your statement clear about what you are organising, and why. Include a concise summary about what is happening with date, times and location. A quote from one of the main people involved explaining in their own words why the event is taking place will help bring things to life. Put background information in a notes section at the end. Include your contact details so journalists can verify the information and request an interview. Finally, send the text in the body of an email with a clear subject line. News desks look at numerous emails every day so make sure your message is immediately clear.



Liverpool Armed Forces Day, 2017. Photo: John Usher

Making contact with journalists

Follow up your email with a phone call to make sure it has got through to the right person and to highlight why the story is important. If you are running a longer-term campaign, make early contact with any local or regional journalists who may be interested in what you are doing and develop their interest.

Develop your media skills

Interacting with the media can be daunting but a little preparation will help overcome that. Practice delivering your message quickly and clearly and write a short list of main points that all those involved can refer to. Media training for activists and community groups is available.

Make your own media

With social media and simple websites it is easy for every campaign or project to have the online presence needed for people to find out about, and promote, what you are doing.

Be sociable!

Social media has become a powerful tool for campaigning. For many, it is the communication channel of choice for reading and sharing news and opinion. Facebook and Twitter are easy to set up and help you to develop and respond to your audience. If you have articles or other material to post and want a longer-term web presence, consider setting up a simple website, such as a free Wordpress blog. Whatever you choose, make sure you post regularly to build up your audience.

Document what you do

An interesting photo can go a long way on social media and is a great way of communicating what you have done. Use social media to report on how things went and send a short account with images to the local paper or news websites. Your documentation will build up a picture of what you have achieved and be inspiring for others.

Become a filmmaker

Film is possibly the most effective way of getting a message across. You can easily make short videos using your own mobile phone or camera footage, and adding pictures and text, either online or with downloadable software. Put your films on YouTube or Vimeo and then embed the film in your website, or link to it using Facebook and Twitter. Audio podcasts are effective for talks or interviews.



Submit

Alternative online media outlets or blogs will consider well written news and comment. Try regional or local websites with a history of publishing more radical material or websites which support grassroots activism.

Info

For more information and advice on these topics, contacts for the press and activist media training, sample templates and other help, see the website.



The Scottish Peace Network protest at Armed Forces Day in Stirling in 2014.
Photo: Scottish Peace Network

Militarism in Scotland and Wales

Militarism has a distinct history in Scotland and Wales and ties to the armed forces remain strong. Voices for peace have also been strong, and effective campaigns have been waged against aspects of militarism that have an impact locally, such as Trident and the shelved plans for a defence academy in St Athan, Wales.

As with England, areas of deprivation in Scotland and

Wales have been an important source of new recruits. The armed forces are active in visiting schools and colleges.

With devolved parliaments in charge of education, campaigners have been able to challenge the promotion of the military in Scottish and Welsh schools. A petition led by Cymdeithas y Cymod, the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Wales, resulted in the Welsh Assembly agreeing to provide more guidance and scrutiny around military activities in schools. In Scotland ForcesWatch and the Quakers are petitioning the Scottish Parliament to introduce greater transparency, parental and student choice, and guidance around armed forces visits to schools.

“The petition provides an excellent first step towards ensuring that school visits by the armed forces are more closely monitored and regulated. I do not believe that the decision about whether such a visit should take place, and what such a visit should entail, should be left to local discretion.”

Letter from the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland, 2016

As many people have a connection to the armed forces, it can be difficult to get beyond entrenched positions to move the debate forward. These campaigns have raised awareness and the level of public conversation around militarism.

There is now more political activity and press coverage about military activities in local schools, the introduction of more cadet activities in Scottish schools, and the campaign to raise the age of military recruitment. The work and support of grassroots activists, youth organisations and networks concerned with child rights as well as peace and justice, has made this progress possible.

“As a secondary school student I have witnessed militarism towards myself and my classmates. This is one of the most important issues affecting young people and our education system. We deserve the truth not a glamorised version of the military”

Jay Sutherland, student and founder of Scotland against Militarism

Resources

For links to all these resources and many others, see www.forceswatch.net/takeaction

The Unseen March

This short film questioning the creeping militarisation of schools brings together voices from education, the armed forces and public life.

See Quakers in Britain resources on militarism at www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace.

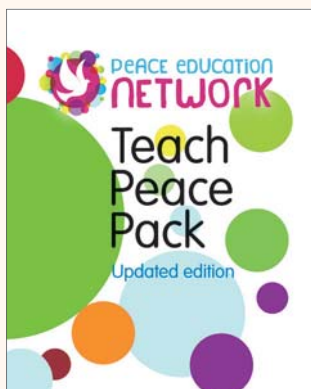
Soldiers at 16 – The other side of the story

A series of short films about one young man's experience of being in, and then leaving, the army.

See resources on raising the age of recruitment from Child Soldiers International at www.child-soldiers.org/dontenlistat16.

CAAT News

To read the latest from Campaign Against Arms Trade and for many other resources see www.caat.org.uk.



Teach Peace pack

A peace education resource for primary schools.

See other peace education resources from the Peace Education Network and its members at <http://peace-education.org.uk>.

Science4Society Week

Science4Society Week is a collection of science education activities and designed to inspire young people, coordinated by

Scientists for Global Responsibility.

See www.s4s.org.uk and www.sgr.org.uk for more on ethical science, design and technology.

Peace Week pack

A whole-school Peace Week to help schools explore the kind of society their students want to live in.

See Quakers in Britain resources on peace education at www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace/peace-education.

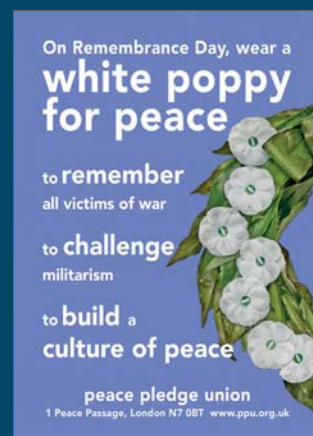
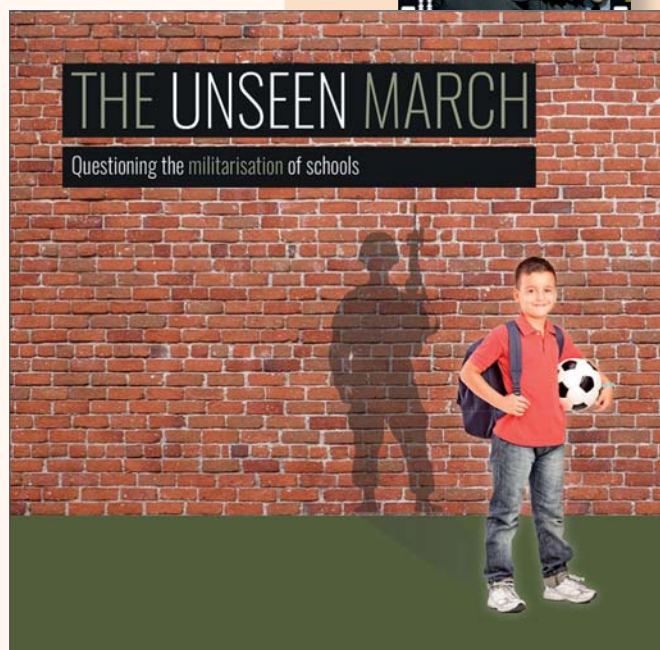
White poppies for a culture of peace

See more about the white poppy and how you can order them from the Peace Pledge Union at www.ppu.org.uk/whitepoppy.

Questioning the presence of the armed forces in schools

A briefing to help those raising concerns about the involvement of the military in their schools.

See other ForcesWatch resources at www.forceswatch.net.



Get involved

These national organisations are challenging militarism in schools and elsewhere:

Campaign Against Arms Trade

www.caat.org.uk

Challenging Militarism of Youth in Scotland

<http://peaceandjustice.org.uk/peace-organisations/challenging-militarisation-of-youth-in-scotland>

Child Soldiers International

www.child-soldiers.org

Conscience: taxes for peace not war

www.conscienceonline.org.uk

Countering the militarisation of youth -

<https://antimili-youth.net>

Cymdeithas y Cymod / The Fellowship of Reconciliation in Wales

www.cymdeithasycymod.org.uk

Fellowship of Reconciliation

www.for.org.uk

ForcesWatch

www.forceswatch.net

Medact

www.medact.org

Pax Christi

<http://paxchristi.org.uk>

Peace Pledge Union

<http://www.ppu.org.uk>

Quaker Peace & Social Witness

www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace/challenging-militarism-1

Scotland Against Militarism

<https://www.facebook.com/MilitarismScot>

Veterans for Peace UK

<http://vfpuk.org>

Useful networks

Network for Peace

www.networkforpeace.org.uk

Scottish Peace Network

www.scottishpeacenetwerk.org.uk

Wales for Peace

<http://walesforpeace.org/wfp>

War Resisters' International

www.wri-irg.org

For organisations doing education for peace and conflict resolution work with young people see the **Peace Education Network**

<http://peace-education.org.uk>

Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Registered charity number 1127633
Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ

Follow us on Twitter @BritishQuakers or find us on Facebook.

www.quaker.org.uk

0508.QPSW.1016

Education

Bringing balance to a school

My daughter came home from a Year 8 assembly with a recruiting leaflet for the cadets. Worried, I didn't know whom to contact at first, but finally the head teacher arranged to meet.

Before we met, the school held a careers fair and invited parents to run stalls alongside other organisations, which included several military recruiters. We decided we could offer some balance.

I pulled together an exhibition on peacebuilding opportunities. With some research, we made a handout packed with examples of learning and training for peace and human rights, building skills employers really value.

The school printed them for us and 500 were taken by pupils.

Researching this prepared me for a very positive meeting. The head teacher was influenced by my argument that conflict

resolution skills support the school's priorities and Ofsted requirements.

I was invited to put suggestions to the Governors. They responded by proposing that the school sets up a student-led ethics committee to consider requests from the military and others to talk directly to students and ensure balance. They also strongly supported teaching conflict resolution. The school is now planning taking this forward and my friends and I are offering support for a whole school Peace Day!

Gill Alcock, Cheshire

Tips for action Talk to schools

Often they just won't have thought about the results of military involvement. Here are some key arguments you can make with schools:

Safety

If the school cares about the safety of its students, it should

make sure young people are aware of all the risks a military career involves for their physical and mental health.

Choice

If you're a student or a parent, your view is important. The right to freedom of conscience and religion might lead you to choose not to participate in an activity you feel promotes war or violence.

Balance

When dealing with controversial issues, schools are meant to provide a balance of perspectives. If only the military is invited to speak, only one side is heard. Connect the school with other organisations like

Veterans for Peace who can provide that different voice.

Benefits of teaching peace

As Gill successfully argued, schools can reap enormous benefits from investing in skills like conflict resolution, building resilience and helping them meet the school's obligation to support the social and moral development of its students.

Encourage the school to sign the Inspire Peace Charter (see insert in this pack), which commits schools to promoting peace education and providing balance when discussing war, the military and armed violence.

Talk to others in the school community and beyond.



Recruitment

Challenging street recruitment

Leicester is targeted for recruitment, since many children are poor. We've been concerned about the frequent presence of the army on the streets for some time, 'we' including Leicester CND, Leicester Quakers and those who gather at the clocktower every Friday night for a peace vigil, inviting passersby to chalk peace messages on the pavement.

One of the motivating factors for me was seeing the army one Saturday in the city centre with weaponry. I challenged them but felt I was not achieving much. So I contacted Ambrose who had previously filmed them. We did some research with ForcesWatch, produced a leaflet and contacted Veterans for Peace.

Twelve of us were there next time. It was great having Veterans for Peace as the army can't dismiss them easily. It was



rewarding to have parents say how pleased they were to see us, some of whose children were thinking of signing up. They talked to veterans and took 'BeforeYouSignUp' cards.

We launched a charter on the reduction of the militarisation of young people and we're lobbying the council to put a minimum age on children handling weaponry on the streets.

Penny Walker,
Leicester Against War

Tips for action

Monitor and share

Leicester Against War filmed and photographed the recruitment initiatives of the army on their streets, showing

young kids handling big guns and talking to recruiters. They then shared this on social media and with national organisations that challenge militarism. This on-the-ground evidence is really important and useful.

Get help and resources

Leicester Against War wanted to be more prepared and effective when challenging on-street military recruitment, so they got help from Veterans for Peace and ForcesWatch. You can get support with resources, research, publicity, strategy and more.

Engage with the council

Think of tangible requests for council members that counter problematic recruitment initiatives, such as the Leicester request for a minimum age on children handling weapons on the streets. Make it easy for other people to join the campaign, like the online signable Leicester charter.

'Before You Sign Up' cards are available from ForcesWatch.



Children playing on military equipment at Liverpool Armed Forces Day, 2017. Photo: John Usher

Alternatives to cadets

Many areas of the UK are seeing cuts to youth activities and spaces for young people, while cadet units are multiplying, particularly those attached to schools. Military-themed activities should not be the only option available to young people.

Lobby your local council to increase funding for local youth groups. Emphasise that they build confidence, self-awareness and communication skills.

You can increase knowledge of, and support for, alternative activities, providing information for schools, and asking them to share it with their pupils.

Woodcraft Folk, Scouts and Guides

These national organisations provide an array of exciting activities for children and teenagers, such as kayaking, learning survival skills, photography, first aid, computer programming, learning about body confidence, and leading camps. The Woodcraft Folk helps to develop children's awareness of society and world issues.

www.woodcraft.org.uk

<http://scouts.org.uk>

<https://guides.girlguiding.org.uk>



St John's Ambulance Cadets

10- to 17-year-olds can volunteer by providing first aid cover at public events. They learn leadership and public speaking skills, and have residential camps and first aid competitions. www.sja.org.uk/sja/young-people/cadets.aspx

Local Youth Action projects

These give young people spaces and resources to work out what matters to them and take meaningful action, building them and their community.

Local conservation groups and animal shelters

Many conservation organisations, groups and initiatives engage young people in outdoors work. Local animal shelters also often take on young volunteers.

Peace education

Peace education equips children and young people with the skills and understanding to be peacemakers. Excellent peace education is delivered by organisations such as Quakers, the Peace Education Network, the Peer Mediation Network and the Peaceful Schools Movement. Get your local schools involved!

A 17-year-old's experience

"I would not be able to complete A level PE without joining the Combined Cadet Force. As a Sergeant, I hand the guns to the kids of 13 and 14 and even put the bullets into their bullet holders – even though it feels wrong."

She says that most of cadets and the trainers put on their 'Army heads' as soon as they put on their uniforms. The trainers, all ex-military, shout and bark out orders, calling the young ones "scum bags" etc. So do the sixth-formers who earn their stripes. The children shoot ten rounds at a time at human cut-outs.

She says that extra-curricular activities should be rolled out across the country and be available to all schools and pupils, including the subsidised residential courses, but not run or funded by the armed forces. "No drills! No guns!"

Photo (overleaf): Children dancing at the Woodcraft Folk London Region 90th Anniversary Pageant: © 2017 Woodcraft Folk.

Challenging Armed Forces Day

Wrexham Peace and Justice Forum sent an open letter to the local council protesting its support of Armed Forces Day and the use of a picture of a toddler in military gear to advertise it.

The letter was also sent to local councillors and the local paper. It highlighted the terrible effects of war, the inappropriateness of presenting it as entertainment, and the dangers of the recruiting messages at the event. It also raised concerns that the North Wales Armed Forces Day Ambassador (a young veteran) recommended that under-18s should sign up for the forces.

On the day of the event, the group carried banners, placards and leaflets encouraging alternative perspectives on war.

By creating public debate in the lead up to the day, activists helped to inform both the public

and the council. One parent said, “It was good to see the true side of war being represented”.

Other ideas

- Challenge your council if it hosts armed forces recruitment events or allows them in a public space.
- Find out what your council and local organisations are doing as part of the Armed Forces Covenant. Should this be challenged?
- Hold a peace-inspired event as an alternative to Armed Forces Day.



Photo: Wrexham Peace and Justice Forum

Making a Week for Peace in Nottingham

The year after 2013's Armed Forces Day event in Nottingham, local Quakers asked the local council to hold a day to reflect on peace and reconciliation. The council responded that, while they wouldn't organise the day, they would support it.

Like-minded local groups offered to organise events and the day became a Week for Peace around the UN International Day of Peace on 21 September.

Across the city there were exhibitions, church bells peeling, school groups participating, talks, films, a peace fair and a live



broadcast from the Peace One Day Celebration concert in the Democratic Republic of Congo!

State your objections!

- The council should not be facilitating recruitment activities that present a sanitised and unrealistic view of the military.
- Military vehicles and weapons help to target children for military marketing messages.
- Packaging Armed Forces Day as family entertainment obscures the terrible effects of war. It is not appropriate to recognise the sacrifices involved this way.
- Flying the Armed Forces Day flag over the town hall for up to a week sends out a militaristic message.
- Scarce public funds could be put to better use.
- Funding and support should also be given to peace events.
- The council organises public displays of support for the armed forces but not for other public services.

Challenging media bias on militarisation

In 2016, a number of listeners heard what they felt was a one-sided piece on the BBC Today Programme about the introduction of cadets in state schools. They contacted the BBC to question the uncritical depiction of militarism and found themselves on the radio too.

Tips for action

Make a response

“The idea of promoting military activities in schools and further normalising war and the arms industry seduces young minds into thinking war is an acceptable part of our culture. I wrote to the Radio 4 Feedback programme objecting to the Radio 4 Today Programme’s unbalanced reporting of cadet forces being introduced into schools.”

Sarah Sheard,
West Yorkshire

Get informed

“When the BBC’s Feedback programme emailed me asking to speak to me, I thought they would interview me, so I did some more research on the Quaker website. There I found an even more horrifying picture: that the Ministry of Defence has spent £45 million on working with the Department of Education – with no public discussion! I’ve told lots of people about this.”

Ann James,
Warwick

Be prepared for not all your messages to get across

“I was ready to talk to the BBC’s Feedback programme about all my concerns, and the fact that the UK is the only country in Europe to recruit child soldiers, but when they rang they only wanted me to read out my email! The BBC ducked the issue

by saying the piece was only about junior journalism, not the content.”

Ann James

Get your main message out in the first sentence

“I was frustrated that they cut me off after my first sentence! When I heard what I said, I felt I could have expressed myself better.”

Lucy Pollard,
Suffolk

Getting the issue aired can have surprising results

“There was one wonderful ray of hope at the end of the item about cadet forces: the boy who was acting as reporter said that he had always wanted to join the army, but that after this experience he wanted to be a journalist. It lifted the heart.”

Lucy Pollard

“It created a debate and discussion point with my three (young adult) children who are all opposed to military cadets being introduced into state schools, where children will be wearing military uniforms and marching with rifles.”

Sarah Sheard

Other opportunities for building your media profile

Make sure your local group or project has a presence on social media. Post regularly on Facebook and Twitter to build up your followers.

Write to your local paper or local news websites.

Respond to local events such as Armed Forces Day or military activities in schools.

“I emailed Feedback and got a phone call asking me to record my email.”

Lucy Pollard

White poppies for Remembrance

Many Quaker meetings have sought to find a way to respectfully express their opposition to war around Remembrance. Stevenage Quakers struggled to find a way to make a response that would unify the group, not wishing to cause controversy or suggest that conscience was exclusive to those who objected to war.

With the centenary of the Military Service Act in 2016, the Quaker meeting decided to try again.

Tips for action Making a formal request

“We wrote to the mayor, asking to be included in the Remembrance Service and giving our reasons. He said that he’d discuss it with the local branch of the British Legion. He wrote back afterwards offering us a choice: either to lay a red poppy wreath with a peace message



during the ceremony, or a white poppy wreath after the final salute.”

After discussion the group decided to lay a wreath of white and red poppies during the service.

Building a constructive dialogue with the organisers

The group was invited to a meeting. “When our Friend attended this meeting, he was

met by the mayor and, not one but three Legion committee members. His initial feeling of intimidation quickly dissolved as they were very welcoming and inclusive. As soon as he offered the white and red poppies option, and let them know that Veterans for Peace lay such a wreath each year at the Cenotaph, they agreed.”

Be prepared to compromise

A message was agreed with the mayor and local Royal British Legion: In memory of all who have suffered in all wars. The use of the word ‘victims’ had been rejected, a small concession for being able to take part in the service.

Explain the significance of the white poppy

The red and white poppies were bought and made into a wreath by a local florist. On the day, a small group from Stevenage Quakers joined the service.

“We sent the local press a short report, thanking the mayor and British Legion for including us, and saying what we had done and why. We also included a photo.”

Change takes time

While the white poppy’s part in the service was not included in the coverage of the local paper, the group felt that they had established good relations with the local council and Royal British Legion officers. They had also introduced for the florist and the wider public a variation on Remembrance wreaths. A sense of mutual respect was established: “Days later, we checked, and it was still there!”

Other ideas

Wear a white poppy!

Help sell white poppies in your community or send them to those who represent you, explaining why it is important to you.

Request that your school give students the option to buy white poppies and send them teaching materials about Remembrance.

Write to your local paper about the importance of a message of peace at Remembrance.