

Petition P-04-432: Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools

Briefing points for AMs ahead of Senedd Debate on 30th September

Background:

The following petition was submitted to the Assembly's Petitions Committee by Cymdeithas y Cymod in 2012:

"We call on the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to recommend that the armed forces should not go into schools to recruit."

After a considerable amount of oral and written consultation, the Petitions Committee produced a report in June 2015, making **3 recommendations**, namely:

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

The Welsh Government provided a written response to the Report of the Petitions Committee on 23rd September, a week ahead of the scheduled debate on the matter in the Senedd. In brief, the response was as follows (*sentences in blue are my own comments*):

1. **The first recommendation was accepted in principle**, although the WG states that they do not see that further research needs to be undertaken urgently, and further says that the findings were based on anecdotal evidence. The WG will consider whether further research is needed in the light of experience. *Does this mean that – in practice – nothing is likely to happen?*
2. The second recommendation was accepted. It is stated that the WG 'will provide further guidance to clarify roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in delivering the careers and the world of work curriculum framework'. *We would wish this guidance to include something about full, honest and balanced information – including about the reality and risks of any profession.*
3. The third recommendation is accepted. As part of this response, the WG states that they see 'the provision of impartial and balanced careers information, advice and guidance for young people as a key component of its lifelong learning agenda.' *We would wish these criteria to be applied to all organisations who visit schools, including the armed forces.*

The debate on the report of the Petitions Committee will be held in the Senedd on Wednesday 30th September. It is really important that Cymdeithas y Cymod members and others who are averse to the army recruiting in schools contact their AMs before this debate, ask them to speak during the debate, and provide them with briefing points. Some points are listed below and these may be of help.

- It is important to emphasise that the petitioners asked the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to recommend that the armed forces should not go into schools to recruit. Our emphasis was on recruiting activities, which fail to present young people with impartial and balanced careers information, advice and guidance.
- The petition was also in accord with the recommendation by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2008 which states that the UK state party should 'Reconsider its active policy of recruitment of children into the armed forces.' The UK is the only country in Europe or NATO that recruits 16 year olds. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child places a responsibility on the Minister of Education and Skills to ensure that careers information in schools is balanced and complete.
- Armed forces exhibitions present an exciting picture for schools children, but there is no discussion about the effects of killing and combat risks. There should be an opportunity for pupils to obtain a balanced view – also to ask questions and raise concerns. We may also ask whether parents and guardians are aware of the nature of presentations, and whether they are given the choice to ask for their children not to attend them.
- Taken that Wales is the poorest devolved area of the UK, army visits to schools are statistically proven to be higher here, so that the claim that the evidence presented was 'anecdotal' can be refuted. According to a report published in July this year by the Wales Peace Institute Initiative using statistics released via the Freedom of Information Act visits by the military to schools in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (16% of the UK population) were 22% of all visits. In Wales 74% of 219 state secondary schools were visited by the army in 2011 – 2012, an average of 4 times. These statistics are enough to raise concern.
- We also agree that a wide range of careers' information and advice should be presented to young people, including information about employment in areas that promote sustainability and encourage young people to be active and enquiring global citizens.

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