

1. The Children's Commissioner for Wales, Sally Holland, has launched surveys for children, young people and adults in Wales to tell her what they think she should focus on in the near future. ForcesWatch are encouraging people in Wales to fill in the survey, ask Sally in the comments box(es) to focus on both helping to make sure the Welsh Government acts to increase transparency and balance regarding armed forces visits to schools in Wales (which it recently committed to doing), and lobbying the UK government to raise the minimum age of armed forces recruitment from 16 to 18.

Sally's predecessor Keith Towler worked on both of these issues a bit. See <http://forceswatch.net/news/tell-wales-childrens-commissioner-question-armed-forces-visits-schools-recruitment-minors> for details. I hope you'll be willing and able to fill in the survey noting these two specific issues Sally could work on, and spread the word. The surveys are only open until 1 November.

2. the transcript of the Welsh Assembly's 30 September debate on armed forces visits to schools in Wales is now available online at <http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/pages/rop.aspx?meetingid=3432&language=en&assembly=4&c=Record%20of%20Proceedings>

3. the Army's current recruitment drive in UK universities (see <http://forces.tv/36779613> and <http://armyofficers.tumblr.com/> for video and text documentation of it), whilst little different from career-focused armed forces visits to schools in Wales, in that it's promoting (in this case) Army jobs to students through exciting interactive activities and encounters with dynamic current members of the Army (rather than having students join then and there), is being openly referred to as 'recruitment'. Tellingly neither the Ministry of Defence nor the armed forces are disputing the use of the word in this case, whereas they have always done so in the last few years regarding schools visits (as you may recall from the information I've sent you), presumably because in general people will be less concerned about the recruitment of university students (most of them being legally adults and better-placed to make an informed decision on how they see the military).

4. lastly, you may have seen in the media the story of the French Army visiting a primary school and having pupils aged 10 and under try out unloaded assault rifles. Local educational authorities and the French Ministry of Defence both condemned the soldiers' action (http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/16/french-school-condemned-students-unloaded-assault-rifles?CMP=share_btn_tw). I found this very striking, as very similar things are happening on a huge scale in the UK, *driven* by the Ministry of Defence, and yet there is little outcry among the general public or educational authorities, perhaps because it has never been reported in the mainstream media in the critical way that the France story was.

The armed forces make 11,000 visits to schools in the UK each year, at least some of which involve showing students military weaponry (<http://forceswatch.net/resources/concerns-about-armed-forces-visits-secondary-schools-wales>). The growing number of schools with a Combined Cadet Force - or that host a community Cadet unit - see students as young as 12 and 13 trained to use a rifle and take part in mock battles (see for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaoFJF3c9Xk&index=25&list=PLopjtjH3GYCOZk2rSgLKmYulk2PO4h3V6>). The annual Camo Day sees primary school pupils dressed in armed forces uniform and visited by members of the armed forces, who often bring military vehicles and equipment with them (see <https://www.ssafa.org.uk/fundraise/camo-day>). And Department for Education and MoD-funded 'alternative provision with a military ethos' - such as that run by Commando Joes in England, Wales and Scotland - sees military-style activities run in primary and secondary schools, focusing on struggling students (see for example http://www.commandojoes.co.uk/schools/primary_schools/ - notably, Commando Joes have recently reframed their work, stating on their homepage that 'we do not put a military ethos into schools', though next to this they acknowledged that they have been funded by the DfE since 2010 under the Military Ethos in Schools programme).