

# THE UNSEEN MARCH

Questioning the militarisation of education in schools  
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Quaker Peace  
& Social Witness

## Militarisation of education

**Since 2011 the government has slashed education maintenance allowance (EMA), disabled students' allowance (DSA) and mental health services for young people. Meanwhile, £45 million of new military programmes targeting young people have been introduced.**

### Recent history

Military involvement in British schools is not new, but it has escalated in recent years. The armed forces have long run activities including careers marketing, presentations, assemblies, 'student development workshops' and visits to bases. The Combined Cadet Force (CCF) has a long history in British private schools, where the majority of contingents are still based. However, until recently most armed forces activity in schools was coordinated locally between individual schools and recruitment units or cadet associations. What has changed, and gone virtually unquestioned, is that military-led activities are now being integrated into national education policy, with the Department for Education promoting a 'military ethos' within education.

*Every child can benefit from a  
military ethos*  
Michael Gove, 2012

Former Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove said that "Every child can benefit from a military ethos" and diverted funding for a 'military skills and ethos programme'. This encompasses:

- expanding the CCF into state schools (100 new cadet units by 2015 with further investment expected across all military cadet programmes<sup>1</sup>)
- the 'Troops to Teachers' scheme, which fast-tracks ex-forces personnel (including non-graduates) into teaching
- the development of military-sponsored free schools and academies
- 'alternative provision' with a 'military ethos' – education programmes for young people who are disengaged or at risk of becoming disengaged, run by ex-armed forces personnel.

*"All secondary schools should have a military cadet force in the  
drive to raise standards."*

Liz Sidwell, University Technical College (UTC) Advisor and Educational  
Consultant, 2012, reported in *The Telegraph*, 2012

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-fund-to-expand-cadet-units-in-state-schools>

“Teenage girls from single-parent families who have ‘never experienced the love of a man’ could be deterred from forming ‘unsuitable relationships’ if they enroll in a cadet unit.”

Lord Nash, Schools Minister, *The Telegraph*, 2015

Michael Gove’s successor, Nicky Morgan, has continued to champion military projects to engage ‘disaffected’ young people. ‘Military ethos’ providers, run by former armed services personnel, have received over £11 million to build ‘character’.

### Political interference

The armed forces are separate from government in Britain for the sake of democracy; the military works for the civilian government, not the other way round. Equally, the British government states it does not prescribe what schools should teach.<sup>2</sup> New policies centrally imposed on schools are blurring these distinctions.

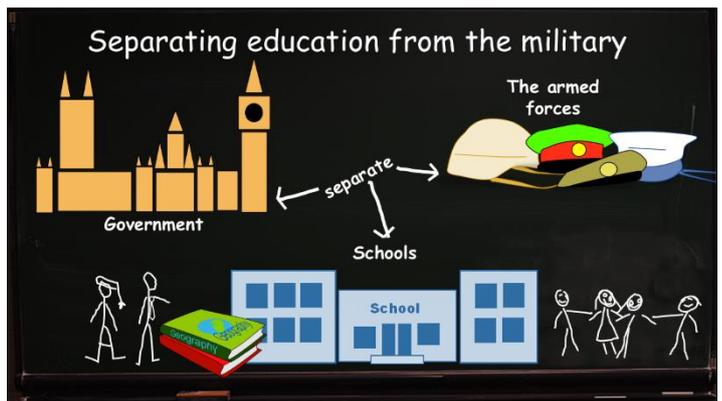
A recent example is *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014*. This resource, launched by the Ministry of Defence and supported by the Department for Education and the Prime Minister’s Office, is a partisan presentation of the armed forces and covers politically controversial topics in a simplistic and partial way. The resource was promoted to all schools in England in the Department for Education’s autumn 2014 termly email.<sup>3</sup>

### University Technical Colleges

A further example of militarisation is the University Technical Colleges (UTCs) – state-funded academies for 14- to 18-year-olds.



Image from *The Unseen March*



“Culturally, this is the kind of resource one gets in countries with less-than-democratic structures, where civic education is used by governments to manipulate citizens into an uncritical attitude toward the state.”

Don Rowe, co-founder of the Citizenship Foundation

<sup>2</sup> UK government report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2014)

<sup>3</sup> To see a critical review of the resource visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wB9JD6P1RCM>

New UTCs will open in September 2015, sponsored by the military and arms companies. These include a UTC in Wiltshire sponsored by arms companies including Chemring and QinetiQ and the army's 43 (Wessex) Brigade, and in Scunthorpe and Chatham by BAE Systems. This is particularly worrying as the role of sponsors is described as to "help to construct the curriculum", helping them build "close links with students who will be potential future employees".

### **Whom does it affect?**

The armed forces have a growing involvement in secondary schools, colleges, and also primary schools. More publicly funded state schools are visited than private schools, and in some regions almost every school is visited, often numerous times each year. A disproportionate number of armed forces school visits are made to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.<sup>4</sup>



Whilst the Ministry of Defence states that it does not recruit in schools, specifically saying that "no pupil is ever 'signed up'", it is clear from its own policies that long-term recruitment is one of the main aims of such visits.<sup>5</sup> A third of army recruits are under 18 and educational attainment among soldiers is below the national average. In a detailed study of Greater London, more than half of all army recruitment visits to schools target the most disadvantaged fifth of schools.<sup>6</sup> In short, the poorest and most vulnerable young people are the most affected.



Images from *The Unseen March*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.forceswatch.net/resources/military-activities-uk-schools-colleges-what-are-issues-and-what-you-can-do>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.forceswatch.net/resources/armed-forces-visits-secondary-schools-scotland>

<sup>6</sup> Gee, D. and Goodman, A. (2010). Army recruiters visit London's poorest schools most often. Available at <http://www.informedchoice.org.uk/armyvisitsstoschools.pdf>

## A cause for concern?

Here are just three of the reasons why the growing role of the military in education is such a concern:

- 1. The armed forces' main priority is not education.** In their own words, “the two most important benefits to the MoD [of running activities for young people] are awareness and recruitment” (2011 Ministry of Defence ‘Youth Engagement Review’).
- 2. The reality of violent conflict and impact of war are far removed from the portrayal of the armed forces.** The current approach encourages unquestioning support of the armed forces and British military interventions. This risks the normalisation of violence and war.
- 3. Those young people who are recruited at 16 face the greatest risks.** For example, the risk of fatality in Afghanistan for recruits who enlisted in the British Army aged 16 has been twice as high as it has for those enlisting at 18 or above.<sup>7</sup> The more negative aspects of military life are also not spelt out, such as the well documented high levels of bullying and harassment<sup>8</sup> and the above-average levels of alcohol abuse and related levels of domestic violence, sexual offences and mental and physical health problems.<sup>9</sup>

The increasing role of the military in education has apparently become a key part of the government’s education policy, yet received virtually no public discussion or scrutiny. Quakers in Britain point out that character traits such as team work, discipline and leadership can be developed in a wide range of ways, by approaches not underpinned by the threat of violence. Evidence indicates that youth workers make as much difference to young people’s educational attainment as former soldiers do, yet many youth services and projects are having their funding cut.<sup>10</sup>

Young people are already surrounded by glorification of the military, through video games, films, advertisements and a growing role of the military in public life. For Quakers, schools should be the one place – more than any other – to encourage criticality and be free from militarisation. We ask for a wider critical discussion about militarisation.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.child-soldiers.org/news\\_reader.php?id=700](http://www.child-soldiers.org/news_reader.php?id=700)

<sup>8</sup> [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/feb/01/bullying-on-rise-armed-forces](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/feb/01/bullying-on-rise-armed-forces)

<sup>9</sup> [www.forceswatch.net/news/british-armed-forces-suffer-record-levels-alcohol-abuse](http://www.forceswatch.net/news/british-armed-forces-suffer-record-levels-alcohol-abuse)

[www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/british-armed-forces-suffer-record-levels-of-alcohol-abuse-9350078.html#](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/british-armed-forces-suffer-record-levels-of-alcohol-abuse-9350078.html#)

<sup>10</sup> [www.nya.org.uk/2015/01/blog-military-ethos-wheres-evidence](http://www.nya.org.uk/2015/01/blog-military-ethos-wheres-evidence)