

Petitions Committee

Consultation on petition P-04-432 Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools

Response from the Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association for Wales

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From: Colonel N R Beard TD DL

Mr William Powell AM
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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09 April 2013

[Dear Mr Powell]

Introduction.

1. Thank you for your letter dated 20 February 2013 inviting the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association for Wales (RFCA for Wales) to submit evidence to your committee. I am responding in my role as Chief Executive of RFCA for Wales on behalf of my Chairman and Board. Furthermore I have spoken to the Army in Wales and sought an MOD view in direct response to your letter as Chairman of the Welsh Government's Petitions Committee. I have also corresponded with Commander 160 (Wales) Brigade, Brigadier Philip Napier, who became involved with the question of Armed Forces access to Welsh schools with the Welsh Government and in particular the Minister for Education, Leighton Andrews AM.

The Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association for Wales.

2. The Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association for Wales is not a part of the military chain of command in Wales. As one of 13 autonomous Associations across the United Kingdom, we exist to provide advice and assistance to the Defence Council and the three Services on matters pertaining to the Volunteer Reserves and Services Cadet organisations. Our members consist of experienced professional people interested in Defence matters able to provide a formidable amount of local knowledge and experience across a wide range of outputs

**CYNNIG A CHYNNAL Y CYSWLLT RHWNG Y GYMUNDED FILWROL A'R GYMUNED SIFIL YNG NGHYNMRU
PROVIDING AND MAINTAINING THE LINK BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND THE CIVIL COMMUNITY IN WALES**

from the maintenance of buildings and infrastructure to recruitment. We provide an essential representative link between the military forces and the local community and this includes schools, colleges and establishments providing higher education. We raise awareness of the benefits and skills gained through part-time military service.

3. None of the Armed Forces visit schools for recruitment purposes and only attend by invitation from the school who welcome us in to support school activities that form part of the National Curriculum. As an integral part of society and an important highly valued public service these visits have proven to be of great benefit to pupils, as demonstrated by the fact that the Services attend several thousand schools each year. Equally such visits add to school career advisers collection of employment options that are on offer in order to prepare their pupils for work in the future. In simple terms it is about providing careers advice and only that. As you will appreciate the Armed Forces present significant opportunities in terms of skills and trades and future careers.

MOD.

4. I have sought a view from the MOD in direct response to your letter, which is set out below:

“School visits by Service personnel are by invitation from the school and are not part of a recruitment campaign. The Armed Forces never visit schools for recruitment purposes and would only ever visit a school after being invited by a teacher to support school activities. The Armed Forces are an integral part of society and an important, highly valued public service. School visits by members of our Armed Forces are of great benefit to pupils and the three Services have a duty to explain to children their role to protect the nation, and pass on valuable skills such as leadership, teamwork and citizenship. Similar contributions to schools are made by police, fire, ambulance, emergency and other services and professions. The Armed Forces get numerous informal and official requests from schools every year and get no special treatment or access, but neither should they be excluded or discriminated against.

Furthermore, it is not possible to sign up for the Armed Forces outside of a recruitment office and all recruitment into the UK Armed Forces is voluntary and no young person under the age of 18 years can join our Armed Forces unless their application is accompanied by the formal written consent of their parent or guardian. Comprehensive written and verbal guidance on the terms and conditions of Service and rights to discharge during the selection process are provided at various times before the parent or guardian provides their formal written consent for the individual to enter Service.”

Army in Wales.

5. I understand from the Army Commander in Wales, Brigadier Napier, that the Minister for Education, Leighton Andrews AM, replied quite clearly on behalf of the Welsh Government. You may wish to discuss issue with the Minister. As you will know this is very much a matter of policy and it is for the MOD and Welsh Government to engage directly with this matter. Although the Armed Forces in Wales do not actively recruit in schools through the Cadet Forces they do add support to the Welsh Government’s Youth Strategy in that they prepare young people with the appropriate life skills to take their place in society as responsible adults. Of course this also means that they are prepared to assume a role in the workplace which is so important in today’s competitive job market. This specific issue was raised at the Jobs Summit in Newport recently.

Specific questions.

6. In your letter you asked us to consider some specific questions which are addressed below:

a. Do you have any concerns about the Armed Forces giving career advice in schools or do you welcome such advice?

As an Association we do not have any concerns about the Armed Forces offering careers advice in schools in fact we welcome the opportunity. As a parent I would have no concerns or objections to my children being exposed to the Armed Forces who are clearly thoroughly professional in the manner that they conduct themselves.

b. What are the benefits and disadvantages of the Armed Forces giving career advice in schools?

The young people of Wales deserve every chance to understand what employment opportunities exist in the outside world. The Armed Forces are but one employer of many who should be given the chance to expose what they offer in terms of careers, skills and trades. A considerable number of Welsh men and women join the Armed Services and develop thoroughly successful careers while serving. Many of those who leave then use their experience to work and establish businesses in Wales. If Armed Forces careers advice in schools is denied this will discriminate against exactly the specific group of people that the Welsh Government are trying to support and help in terms of finding and securing employment.

c. What impact, if any, would restricting armed forces access to schools have on young people's access to information about Armed Forces careers?

Today, the Armed Forces are considered small in number and exposure to the career opportunities is limited to a handful of careers offices across Wales and advertising. I believe restricting the impact will deny young people in Wales the chance to consider the Armed Forces as an option for their future careers. Young people today are very perceptive they are confident enough to decide for themselves what is best for their future and should be given every chance to explore the wide range of employment available. That includes exposure to the Armed Forces.

d. Do you have any evidence that the Armed Forces target their activities in schools in more deprived areas?

No, I do not have any evidence that the Armed Forces target their activities at more deprived areas. One should remember that the Armed Forces are invited into the schools in Wales by head teachers with presumably the support of their governing body.

e. Do the Armed Forces work differently in independent schools than in local authority schools?

As far as I am aware the Armed Forces do not work any differently in independent schools.

Summary.

7. In summary access to schools for the Armed Forces is important for the future of our young people, as they offer a wide range of skills and trades within a career structure that might appeal to some in that age group. Employment in the Armed Forces is voluntary and adds to the options that schools careers advisers can draw on when trying to create interest to steer teenagers towards work opportunities. When visiting schools the Armed Forces do not recruit, they attend by invitation only from head teachers. Joining the Armed Forces is strictly controlled and managed requiring written consent of the parent or guardian if the applicant is below 18 years old. Finally, I believe firmly that this issue rests with the Minister as any change could well discriminate against the Armed Forces and affect the career choices for our young people that desperately need employment.

Should you require further detail or require further explanation please do not hesitate to ask.

[Yours sincerely,

Nick Beard

Original signed]

Chief Executive