

Petitions Committee

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

Response from Dr Gwyn Williams

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the petition opposing army recruitment in schools.

As you know, Britain recruits 16 year-old children to the army. This has been condemned by the United Nations, and Britain is the only country within NATO that allows this. Indeed, only some 20 countries in the world do this and they are usually oppressive governments.

The main way that the army recruits these children is by visiting schools. These children who are targeted (who are too young to vote) are attracted by tempting resources and exhibitions that give them a false impression of the army's main purpose. Little, if at all, is mentioned of how many young lives are lost or injured. According to one army officer, the exhibition is aimed at children in years 9, 10 and 11. The officers are trained as skilled salesmen even using video games to make the work of a soldier appear attractive. Influencing children in this way is immoral.

Our country's deprived areas are targeted. According to figures that I have seen, there were 50% more visits to schools in these areas (using free school meals figures). About 50% of children who are recruited have a reading age of an 11 year old or younger. Many of the children recruited do not recognise the significance of the contract that they sign. There is no means of leaving the army after six months without special permission and this is very rarely given. Therefore, a number of them will be in the army against their wishes until they are 22 years old. It is no surprise, therefore, that the number of suicides among these young people is 50% higher than those who are not in the army. However, many also have disabilities or suffer from trauma, facts which are not mentioned much during the recruitment process.

The economic situation is sure to influence the decision of some to join the army and some think that they might have opportunities that would not otherwise be available to them. This should not be true because everybody has the right to an education until they are 18 years old. These opportunities should be available without asking children to sacrifice their lives to have them. I read that £80 million is spent on recruitment. This money should be used to provide them with work opportunities and training.

Children under the age of 18 were sent on active duty until that was banned by international law recently. Hasten the day when recruiting children under the age of 16 is also banned. On average the percentage recruited to the army from Britain is 5%, but in Wales this figure is 9%. Does the Assembly think that this is acceptable? This is achieved by allowing the army to recruit in schools. According to the officer whom I referred to already, going to schools is more effective than any

other means of recruiting children. How young they are or how one-sided the method used do not seem to count for much.

I urge you to refuse the army permission to visit schools in Wales.

Dr Gwyn Williams