

Trafod y Broses o Gasglu Tystiolaeth

Discussion of Evidence Gathering

[1] **William Powell:** The petition under discussion is P-04-432, Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools. We have the opportunity to discuss evidence that was previously gathered from Cymdeithas y Cymod and its colleagues. We also had a really useful informal session this morning with a group of year 10 and year 11 pupils here at Prestatyn High School. It would be useful if any of those of you who were present or, indeed, those of you who were not present but would like to contribute, feel able to do so. Do we have a roving microphone? I see not. However, there is an opportunity for folk to step up if they would like to make a contribution. I will ask Bethan to kick off on this issue. There was a particularly strong response this morning to the issue, and it was really useful to hear from pupils in years 10 and 11 about their experience of the public service qualification that you are pursuing. It would also be useful to hear about the Kinmel camp and some of the experiences that you have had there, and some of the benefits that we heard about this morning.

[2] **Bethan Jenkins:** There are a few people here from this morning. It was good to have the debate, and it would be really good if we could talk to lots of different schools, but we do not have the time. I thank the pupils. It was interesting that some people thought that they had been influenced by the army coming in to schools, but others thought differently, and just said 'As long as I'm aware of what the army is saying, I'm able to make my own decision'. Some people thought that they were too young to make a career choice at 16, but others thought that they were able to, so we had varying opinion. It was interesting that, when the army comes into the school, it was more glossy, telling people how great it is, but when questioning the soldiers who were talking to them, they were able to ask more probing questions about conflict and how it would affect morale. What students would potentially benefit from is more of a balanced approach at the start, from when the army comes in, so that they know exactly what they are doing. We also found that pupils might want to talk to other professions within the public sector, such as firemen, policemen or other professions, so that they could understand what other job prospects they had, instead of just the army. I am not sure that they all enjoyed the gruelling sporting exercises.

[3] **William Powell:** No, I think that there was a touch of the boot camp about some of the things that they had to do.

[4] **Bethan Jenkins:** That is what they have to do. I have my own views on this, but what is most important is that the young people feel that they are not being told something that is not a reflection of reality. We need to look at that within the whole educational structure, so that if one profession is given precedent over another, how the school and the school management team would cope with that and how they would make sure that all students are given a balanced approach, because when we go in as politicians we cannot be party political in schools. So, you would expect the army to take a more pragmatic approach in saying, 'Yes, conflict happens and mental health problems happen when people go into the army.' Children do not want to be patronised and be told that it is all perfect when it is not. I think it was a really useful session to have.

[5] **William Powell:** It was very useful indeed. I think the message we heard was that there was a clear sort of aura of glamour around some of the people going in, dressed in their fatigues, talking about some of the travel opportunities that they had and the world that it had opened up. However, there was a sense that if there had been input from either the British Legion or Combat Stress or a more rounded picture given, it would have been more valid. Having said that, when there was a vote taken—I think there were about eight or nine people in the room this morning—we had just one expressing concern about the army coming in. Otherwise, it was pretty much unanimous that that focus group of young people that we were

speaking to this morning was strongly in favour of the army having the opportunity to come to set out its stall. However, as Bethan said, there was a feeling that it would be great to have a wider slice of people across public services and, indeed, as you pointed out or maybe you want to open up now, Russell, opportunities to meet people with an entrepreneurial background to look at other career paths and opportunities.

12:00

[6] **Russell George:** I want to thank the students who were in the meeting this morning. I was very grateful for your time as well. However, from my perspective, what I picked up is that all the students we met this morning wanted to take part in the exercise. They wanted to take part, but, for me, it was a bit of an eye-opener, in terms of where the other professions are. Why are they not coming into schools? To my mind, perhaps, I would be more persuaded to say that rather than it being a negative campaign highlighting that the army should not go to schools, there should be more of a positive look at this and at where the other professions are. Perhaps there is a role for us as a committee to contact the Minister on those grounds and ask him to state that there should be a balanced approach in getting all professions in to give their views, really.

[7] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that is where the word ‘recruit’ comes in. I know that there has been a dispute around it, but if one profession gets more access to children it surely then will lead to them considering that prospect, because we were talking to the children about careers options and some people had not accessed the careers service in the school. So, if they are not, perhaps, yet thinking about alternatives, such as looking into the science professions or other things that might interest them, then there may be a skew in the statistics showing that more young people join the army, if that is the main option for them in the school structure. That would be the concern, because it is not something to take lightly. At the end of the day, it is a very serious profession in terms of the fact that you go into combat. It is not to be shunned. I think, as a committee, we need to look at all the implications of when these professions come into school and how that impacts on different children, because some young people have formulated opinions and they know what they want to do when they are older, while others do not have a clue and want to be guided and to have that advice. It is a really important time for them. It is something that we have to take really seriously, I think.

[8] **Russell George:** What came out of it was that nobody felt that they were being recruited, which is very much the wording of the petition, although I take the points that Bethan has raised now about what recruiting means if no other professions are coming in. I think it would be good, Chair, if we offered that invitation again to any students, young people or teachers here who want to give their views on this. We would very much welcome, would we not, Chair, their views?

[9] **William Powell:** Absolutely, I wonder whether you could help us at this point, as you facilitated the session this morning.

[10] **Mr Barons:** I am Alex Barons, an associate senior leader in the school. I completely agree with a lot of the points that you have raised about getting other groups in to promote their professions. The school has a lot of freedom in terms of how much it gets people in to do things. The army is very willing and keen to come in; therefore, there is a lot of opportunity to come in because it is willing to do so.

[11] **William Powell:** It also has a budget appropriate for that.

[12] **Mr Barons:** Absolutely, whereas getting other services in—especially other public services—can be trickier. If businesspeople have to give up their time, it costs them money and that can be difficult. In this school, particularly, we have good relationships with a lot of

local entrepreneurs who come in and provide entrepreneurial workshops for the pupils before they go out to work experience and things like that. Those are often very successful. So, they have some opportunities. However, it would be very helpful for people who work as careers advisers and those who co-ordinate 'Careers and the world of work' in schools to have guidance or framework from the Government to say which people should be coming into schools.

[13] **Russell George:** What other professions did you have in—for example, the police and so on?

[14] **Mr Barons:** All pupils have regular contact with our police liaison officer. She comes into the school regularly. It is the difference between someone coming in to recruit or coming in to give information. Even when the army is in doing its army day, it is not so much, 'Here we are, come and join us', but it is more that it provides information.

[15] **William Powell:** It is an informational, promotional role.

[16] **Mr Barons:** Mainly, we have local entrepreneurs and businesspeople coming in as part of the Dynamo project. Have you come across that?

[17] **Russell George:** I was a Dynamo role model in my previous life.

[18] **Mr Barons:** So, we have the Dynamo project, which brings people into our school to talk to pupils about life in business and how they have got to where they are. They are usually successful people talking about how they have achieved that success. It tries to build that entrepreneurial spirit among pupils. It can, otherwise, be tricky to get people to come in to promote their professions.

[19] **William Powell:** Do you sometimes have a careers-focused day, every year or second year, where you try to get a wide range of people from different walks of life in, or is there no space for that within the curriculum?

[20] **Mr Barons:** It is certainly not something that we do in this school at this time. Maybe it is something that we could look into. It can be difficult in terms of fitting everything in—in terms of time in the curriculum—to get a specific careers day in, but it is certainly something that we can look into.

[21] **William Powell:** It is certainly something that I saw working well in other schools when I was in the profession, so it is worth taking that on board.

[22] Excellent, we have another contributor. Could you introduce yourself?

[23] **Ms Major:** I am Daisy and I am a year 11 pupil. I have not taken the public services diploma so I have not done the army day, but before we went on work experience last year, we had a day when we had people from different career backgrounds coming in. As part of that, we had somebody from the ambulance service coming in. I think that it was in year 7 or 8 when we had a day with the Crucial Crew, when police officers and firemen came in and we spoke to them. So, we have had access to other communities, apart from the army.

[24] **William Powell:** That is good, because in the group that we met this morning, there were potentially two or three recruits to the police service, or people who would be keen to go that way.

[25] I ask those of you who have just joined us to take a seat and to introduce yourselves so that we can hear your views.

[26] **Mr Collings:** I am Sebastian Collings. I am a pupil at this school and I am on the school council.

[27] **Ms Hinson:** I am Holly Hinson and I am one of the head girls at the school. I am in the sixth form and I am on the school council.

[28] **Mr Collings:** While we are on the issue of stopping army recruitment in school—

[29] **William Powell:** That was the wording drawn from the petition.

[30] **Mr Collings:** Personally, I think that it is a good thing, because it would not be as strong as it is today if it did not recruit. It has to go somewhere to find people to go in the army. I agree with what you are saying in that it should not be forced upon students, but it should be providing a realistic view of what the army will be like. I have done it myself as I used to take part in the combined cadet force in Ruthin and we went to train with the territorial army and things like that. I think that they should do more realistic forms of army recruitment, giving people the choices in schools to go to experience it themselves, as I did. We camped with the proper TA, which opened my eyes to see that it was not for me, but if other people had the opportunity to do that, they could decide for themselves whether it would be for them, instead of just doing a day on the field that does not really show you what the army is really about.

[31] **William Powell:** I believe that the CCF can lead to away days and opportunities of field trips over two or three days, and can involve a meaningful range of activities.

[32] **Mr Collings:** Yes, there are promotions and real-life sorts of scenarios and so on, which are really helpful.

[33] **Ms Hinson:** I think that it is really good because not everyone learns in a classroom. I do not know what it is, but I now see people getting on the bus wearing army clothes.

[34] **Mr Barons:** It is the Kinmel camp.

[35] **William Powell:** Perhaps they are the Kinmel camp cadet contingent.

[36] **Ms Hinson:** Yes, they do that. They get GCSEs and qualifications out of it, which they would not normally get in school, so it is really quite helpful. Also, in our sixth form, we are taken on days. For example, I did a Pure Potential course. You had to sign up for if you thought that you could meet the target grade. That had different workplaces. People can go to the sixth form to get A-levels, but they still do not have to go to university. We realise that you can use them to start school-leaver programmes and so on. I want to study accounting at university, but people on the course told me that if I met their grade, I could leave school straight away and go with them and get the qualifications and stuff. So, it does help. School does take us on a lot of things. I do not think that the army should stop recruiting because it is really handy.

[37] **Mr Barons:** It is important to actually have a range. I think that having the army in can be quite helpful, but I think that the main point that seems to come out a lot in this discussion is that there has to be a realistic view; it cannot be glamorised. It has to be a kind of open and honest thing. I think that that is very true, but I think that that is also very true of all professions. Anyone who comes into a school tries to promote their profession. I tell them all how wonderful teaching is, and how it is the best career in the world and that they should do it. I love my job, but it is not going to be for everyone. We all have a tendency to glamorise what we do, and that will be difficult to rule out completely. However, there has to

be guidance on who should come in to promote their career choices in school.

[38] **Russell George:** To what extent are teachers present on the course, because they should do the check and balance? Were you a part of the careers lesson when the army came in, or were you on the course? There is no doubt that you must have a responsibility and feel that the young people must also have a balanced view.

[39] **Mr Barons:** Absolutely. I do not teach the public services course and I have not been on the army day to see this, but obviously I think that there is a responsibility on us as teachers to provide a balanced view. I agree with that.

[40] **Russell George:** So, you have to tease that out. So, if you feel that they are not being balanced, it is your duty to tease that out. Is that how you would feel that the teaching profession should police it?

[41] **Mr Barons:** When you are dealing with teenagers, you will know that they are quite savvy at teasing it out for themselves. That has to be said. They are quite good at it. Given that we are in an era of such mass media, people and teenagers can either see the glamorous side of the army or they can make a judgment for themselves from things that they can see on the internet or television about the not-so-glamorous side of the army.

[42] **William Powell:** On the news also.

[43] **Mr Barons:** Therefore, the pupils are very aware of the non-glamorous side of it. If they want to ask about it, if they have a concern over it, and if they are seriously considering a career in the army and are thinking, 'This is a concern', teenagers are savvy enough to ask.

[44] **Russell George:** The reason I ask is because I was a Dynamo role model, and I noticed that there would be differences between schools and teachers. If they felt that the young people were not taking a balanced view, or if they felt that I was not giving a balanced view, some teachers would help to tease that out of me. However, in some schools a teacher would sit at the back and not seek to be involved. I felt that that was wrong on their part, because they did not know who I was. They could have been there to do the checks and balances—

[45] **William Powell:** To kind of moderate the session, really, in a sense.

[46] **Mr Barons:** If it was me, as a teacher, I would be interrogating, trying to push you to kind of tease these things out. That is what we would call an effective model of how to do it in terms of careers. It would be effective of the teacher to push these points.

[47] **Russell George:** That is good to hear.

[48] **Bethan Jenkins:** I suppose that the issue on guidance is what I agree with because we know from research that we have done before that the army will go into certain areas of Wales, or certain schools. We know from freedom of information requests that we have done before that it would go into more deprived areas. Whether you think that is a political decision or not is something for another day, I suppose, but it is about cautious approaches. We want to make sure that people from all schools and children from all backgrounds get the same treatment and the same access to information as everyone else, and that the army is not ringing you up, saying, 'We want to come to your school', because it knows that there is a facility nearby that will make it easier to recruit people afterwards, potentially. That is my concern as a politician.

[49] **Mr Barons:** That is, I think, why it is really good that this petition has come before

this committee, because, hopefully, as a result of that, there may be some guidelines as to what schools should do in terms of the army, but maybe also other public services in terms of them coming in. That would be something that, as schools, we would appreciate.

[50] **Bethan Jenkins:** Did you want to say something on that?

[51] **Mr Collings:** I was just going to say that the army, as far as careers go, is the only one actually pushing it, actually going for it—the police, the ambulance and fire services do not seem to be pushing it to try to recruit people into their professions. However, the army seems to be doing it a lot more than—

[52] **William Powell:** That is going to be guided partly by its need for new recruits.

[53] **Mr Collings:** It is clearly doing it a lot more than any other profession out there, which is good in some respects, but I think that the other professions should be enlightening students like us as to what the roles are, because I do not know of half of them, and we should really know of them, should we not?

[54] **William Powell:** Daisy, do you have any reflections? You were kind enough to open the battle from the student point of view.

[55] **Ms Major:** I just think that we do have access to other things, like I said, with the ambulance service coming in for work experience day and crucial careers and stuff. However, I think that there is an aspect where the army is glorifying it and making it look like it is better than it is. If it brought along people who could explain the risks of entering the army and the things that could happen, that would make it more balanced.

[56] **William Powell:** It would be a truer picture, effectively. Maybe we should leave the last word to Holly, as one of the head girls here and part of the leadership team.

[57] **Ms Hinson:** I just do not think that they should stop, really, because the more that I go on trips and stuff and find out what more is going on, the more that I want to do stuff, so I think that it is a good thing that it is coming to school. It is good for most children. It is true that it does not show the bad side, because I remember doing Army Day on our back field and it was loads of fun—

12:15

[58] **Mr Collings:** There was a bouncy castle.

[59] **Ms Hinson:** There was a bouncy castle, was there not? It was like an assault course. We were all in teams, and we all won prizes and stuff. It was not like a real army.

[60] **William Powell:** Diolch yn fawr iawn. **William Powell:** Thank you very much. Diolch yn fawr iawn i Ysgol Uwchradd Prestatyn. Thank you very much to Prestatyn High School.

[61] Thank you to Prestatyn High School for all its hospitality this morning and for allowing us to come to invade the library. I saw a notice on the door saying that one or two activities had been postponed or relocated—