

The Armed Forces

Impact issue sheet - with Pax Christi

See—what's the reality?

Activity: In the hot seat

You need one person in the group to imagine they are in the armed forces—they could be a soldier, pilot, doctor, driver, officer, engineer—anything they like. Get the rest of the group to ask them questions. Why did they join? What skills do they have that are useful for a career in the armed forces? What are the benefits of an army career? Is there anything they don't like? What made them choose that career?

? Discuss

Do you know any young people who are in the armed forces? What do they think of it? Are you or your friends thinking of joining? Make a list of all the reasons young people join the armed forces. What do you think are the main risks?

Did you know...

- In 2007-8 there were nearly 6000 young people under 18 serving in the UK armed forces¹.
- Three times as many troops aged 20 to 24 kill themselves compared to civilians the same age; 19 year olds were twice as likely to take their own lives. (The Independent, 2 March 2009).
- The average reading age of recruits, who join on average at the age of 18, was just 11. (The Telegraph 26 February 2008).
- Britain is the only European country which recruits youngsters into the armed forces from the age of 16, though they cannot be deployed on operations until they are 18 (The Guardian, 7th January 2008).

Judge – what do you think?

Agree or disagree?

Read out the following statements and ask people to stand on an imaginary line between agree and disagree. When everyone has moved, ask people to say why they have stood where they have.

- The armed forces give young people a great start in their careers.
- The age at which you can join the British armed forces should be raised to 18.
- Having an armed forces day is a good idea—we should be proud of our armed forces and the work they do.
- Potential recruits to the armed forces are given a misleading picture of military life.

For many young people joining the armed forces can offer opportunities for travel, adventure, training and a good career. But life in the armed forces is not easy; it involves risks and moral dilemmas, and once you've joined it can be difficult to leave.

What effect does armed forces life have on young people? How do the armed forces recruit young people? What effect have wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had on young people's opinions of the armed forces? With the increasing levels of violence amongst young people should they be encouraged to join the armed forces?

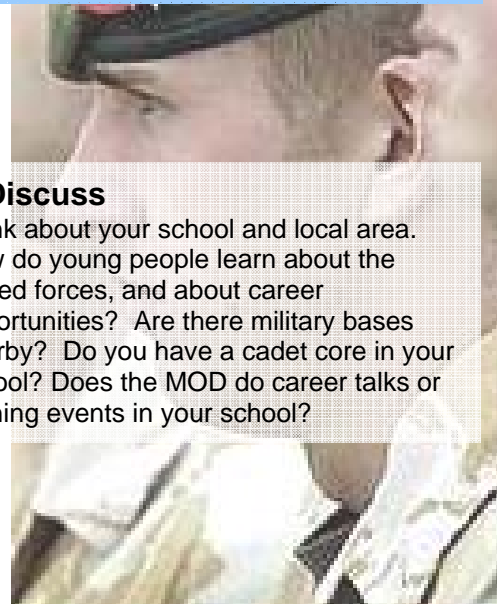


Activity: online recruitment

Visit the Ministry of Defence Camouflage website for 13-16 year olds www.camouflage.mod.uk and try out some of the free games and other online resources—what impression do you get of the armed forces? Do a quick 'mind map' with words or images that come into your mind. Do you think this website gives an accurate picture of armed forces life? What do you think is the aim of the website?

? Discuss

Think about your school and local area. How do young people learn about the armed forces, and about career opportunities? Are there military bases nearby? Do you have a cadet core in your school? Does the MOD do career talks or training events in your school?



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that *"all children have the right to special protection in time of conflict and should not take a direct part in hostilities."*

What do you think? Do you think this is referring to child soldiers and children caught up in wars and violent conflict? Should this also apply to the armed forces in the UK?

No other option?

When you left/leave school, what career options did/will you have? Why? What qualifications did/do you need for your chosen career? Is there anyone you know who has fewer options than you—why? Do you think some young people join the armed forces because they feel they have no other options?

ARMY SHOP OUTRAGE Hackney Gazette 12 March 2009



A campaigner against youth violence has branded an army showroom opening in Dalston [Hackney, North London], in which teenagers can handle a replica gun, an "insult" to people who have died from gun violence in the borough. The army showroom, which opens in the Kingsland Shopping Centre on Saturday, will be home to a virtual battlefield simulator, which gives visitors a chance to use their friends as target practice with a replica AF80 hand gun. But the outraged founder of the

campaign group, Mothers Against Guns, Lucy Cope, said it was grossly insensitive to house the showroom in a borough that has been plagued by gun violence. She said: *"The store is an absolute disgrace and an insult to all the people who have died in Hackney."*

However, the commander of regional recruiting for London, Colonel Paul Meldon hit back at his critics. He said: *"They are being over sensitive. It's no more than they can do in the arcade, only it's more realistic."*

? Discuss

What do you think? Is there a connection between armed forces recruitment and gun crime?

What does the Bible say?

"They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." Isaiah 2:4

? Discuss What is this passage telling us? What does this mean for us today? How does this call us to act?

What does the Catholic church say?

"Those who are sworn to serve their country in the armed forces are servants of the security and freedom of nations. If they carry out their duty honourably, they truly contribute to the common good of the nation and the maintenance of peace." Gaudium et Spes 79.

"It seems right that laws make humane provision for the case of those who for reasons of conscience refuse to bear arms, provided they agree to serve the human community in some other way." (Second Vatican Council, The Church in the Modern World, 1965, # 79.

? Discuss What does it mean to 'carry out their duty honourably'? Are there any orders you would refuse to follow as a member of the armed forces? Are there opportunities for young people to 'serve the community in some other way'?

Act Look back at the first 'See' section. What will you take action about?

You have spent time looking at the armed forces and its affect on young people. You have looked at positive and negative aspects of army life and at what the bible says about the morality of warfare. Now its time to take action!

Help

- Do you know anyone who is thinking of an armed forces career? Would it help them to have someone to talk through their ideas? Maybe a school chaplain or career advisor?

Tell it

- Do you think young people need more information before they sign up? If yes, what would enable them to make an informed choice?
- Do you think people know how army life affects young people? Can you think of a way of raising awareness of the issue you have chosen?
- Does your school have a policy on armed forces recruitment in the school? If not, do you think they should, and what should it say?

Stand up for

- How could you stand up for someone who is suffering as a result of their experiences in the armed forces?
- Do you know anyone who is worried about a friend or relative in the armed forces? What support is there for them? Could you put them in touch with someone who could help?

For more information go to www.beforeyousignup.info



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