



Ministry
of Defence

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MSU/4/8/1/2/ap

17 December 2020

Dear Tobias,

Thank you for your letter of 1 December 2020 about the recruitment to the Armed Forces of personnel aged under 18. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide the requested expansion of my previous response of 3 September 2020.

As you will be aware, the Department's original response to the Committee's recommendation outlined the impact that raising the recruitment age would have on all three Services; the need for any further analysis was not accepted. However, I was pleased to be able to provide an updated assessment when I wrote to you on 3 September.

Current figures from the Department for Education show that 87%¹ of Key Stage 4 (GCSE stage) students choose to go on to further education, up from 60% in 2003-4, underlining the strength of the competition for talent within the UK. That the Armed Forces are successful in attracting significant interest in this environment reflects the strength of our 'Offer'. All three Services rank within the top ten of Apprenticeship Employers, offering a wide range of specialisations and top-quality training, and the Armed Forces as a whole are in the top 100 of women and LGBT employers.

Whilst we do not intend to further review under 18 recruitment, the Committee may be interested to note that the Armed Forces have been broadening their approach to recruitment to include re-joiners and lateral entrants. This broader approach seeks to attract people who already possess valuable skills, training and experience, whether from previous military service or civilian careers. Such talent is likely to be drawn from an older cohort.

Turning to your Army-specific points, I would challenge your view that the recruitment of under 18s is a matter of dependence; rather, it is one of opportunity. The Army

¹ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-destination-measures/2018-19>

The Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP
Chair, House of Commons Defence Committee
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Foundation College, Harrogate (AFC (H)), which accounts for the vast majority of under 18 recruiting in the Army, delivers the most comprehensive and best resourced soldier Basic Training course in the world. No other Army invests as much in their soldier training as we do through AFC (H). The College delivers a transformational experience with over 80% of trainees successfully graduating to the next stage of training. On average, these junior soldiers stay in the Army longer and go further than their standard entry peers. The Army is proud of the fact that AFC (H) maximises the talent of the individual to the mutual benefit of the individual, the Army and Society as a whole.

Equally, AFC(H) was assessed by OFSTED as 'Outstanding' during the last inspection in October 2017 in all three categories (Outcomes for Recruits and Trainees, Quality of Welfare & Duty of Care, and the Effectiveness of Leadership & Management). It meets all the requirements of the Education and Skills Act 2008, offering a first-class education programme that results in many young people gaining qualifications that they would not have obtained otherwise.

To that end, there is no appetite to phase out what is a successful and mutually beneficial part of the Army's recruitment programme. Quite the reverse in fact; we are very proud to offer young people such exceptional training and education on their way into a rewarding career in the service of our nation.



JAMES HEAPPEY MP



Defence Committee

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1 December 2020

Dear James.

Thank you for your letter of 3 September, responding to mine about the recruitment of personnel aged under 18 to the United Kingdom's Armed Forces. I am sorry to have to come back to you on these issues, but they are of concern to the Committee, as is shown by the repeated reports addressing them, and I would be grateful for a more substantive response to what I see as the key questions:

- Why the Army is so dependent on recruiting personnel under the age of 18, and what steps are being taken to reduce this dependency?
- Whether the Department has examined the potential impact of raising the minimum armed forces recruitment age to 18?
- Why the Army could not phase out the recruitment of minors without detriment to manning requirements?

Yours.

Rt Hon. Tobias Ellwood MP
Chair of the Defence Committee