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IS IT COUNTERPRODUCTIVE TO ENLIST MINORS INTO THE ARMY?

DAVID GEE AND RACHEL TAYLOR

As most states now restrict military enlistment to adults from the age of eighteen, the UK's policy of recruiting from the age of sixteen is unusual. In this article, David Gee and Rachel Taylor discuss whether the policy effectively meets the needs of young people and the army itself, and examine the feasibility of a transition to an all-adult force.

In the 2015/16 financial year, 2,250 recruits to the British armed forces were still legally children, under the age of eighteen.¹ Of these, four-fifths were enlisted for the army, particularly to make up for shortfalls in the infantry.²

The UK's longstanding practice of recruiting minors for military service is the subject of an intensifying debate. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) argues that without these young recruits, the army in particular would be unable to fill its ranks. Ministers point out that the youngest trainees, who can apply at fifteen and enlist at sixteen, must first have their parents' formal consent, and cannot be sent to war until they turn eighteen and until then they have a statutory right to leave.³ They add that the army supports young people to develop, and is particularly successful with those from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁴ Among the policy's detractors are a wide range of children's rights advocates, including the Children's Commissioners in the four countries of the UK.⁵ These critics argue that while sixteen and seventeen year olds are still developing emotionally, cognitively and physically, they should not be put through military training, which conditions them psychologically to obey all orders without question, including the order to kill. The practice is incongruous, say the critics, when the same age group is not yet permitted to attend screenings of graphic war films or purchase the eighteen-rated *Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare* video game. They further argue

that enlisting from the age of sixteen encourages young people to leave full-time education early, leading to poor long-term outcomes, and it ought to be possible to recruit only adult volunteers, since most states now do so.

This article explores the two questions at the heart of this debate. First, is early enlistment beneficial or detrimental to the young people who opt for it? Second, is it the most effective and sustainable way for the armed forces to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of capable personnel? The discussion focuses on the army, which is responsible for the large majority of minors enlisted.

Context

Recruiting from the age of sixteen into state armed forces is now unusual internationally. The policy is unique to the UK in the EU and shared only with Belarus in Europe as a whole.⁶ A handful of economically developed states, notably France and the US, still permit enlistment from the age of seventeen, but rely less on doing so. In the US, 6 per cent of armed forces recruits are minors at enlistment; in France, it is 3 per cent.⁷ In the UK, the figure is 17.9 per cent (22.3 per cent in the British Army). Table 1 (overleaf) provides further information.⁸

From this perspective, the UK is the clear outlier among its economic and military peers. As more states have transitioned to all-volunteer, all-adult armed forces, a consensus of support has developed for the 'Straight 18' standard: the restriction of military employment to

adults only. Of the 28 EU member states, for example, 22 now rely wholly on volunteers, of which eighteen allow only adults to enlist.⁹ Around two-thirds of states worldwide now meet the standard in law and/or practice, the majority without the help of adult conscription.¹⁰

The MoD is facing pressure to follow suit. Parliamentary committees, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, faith groups and individual veterans have joined children's rights and welfare advocates in calling for a review of the enlistment age.¹¹ When Ipsos Mori polled the public in 2014 with an open question about what the minimum enlistment age for the British Army should be, 77 per cent of those who expressed a view said it should be eighteen or above; only 14 per cent said it should be sixteen or below.¹²

In defence of the policy, ministers and the army employ a two-pronged narrative of youth opportunity and military necessity.¹³ Chief of the General Staff General Sir Nick Carter has said that the army's youngest recruits are not so much being trained as soldiers as being educated for their 'betterment'.¹⁴ Ministers frequently argue that raising the enlistment age to eighteen would 'deny' young people the benefits of a forces career.¹⁵ At the same time, the army's recruiters are falling short of their targets for new enlistees, last year by 16 per cent.¹⁶ The army blames a falling unemployment rate, demographic changes, the prevalence of teenage obesity and the rising number of sixteen



Junior soldiers march on to the parade square during their graduation parade at the Army Foundation College, Harrogate. *Courtesy of PA Images/Anna Gowthorpe.*

year olds who now stay on in school.¹⁷ Faced with these anxieties, the army would rather get sixteen and seventeen year olds through the door than wait for them to reach eighteen.

This article intends to show that these arguments, although superficially appealing, do not stand up well to scrutiny. There is no evidence to show that enlisting at the age of sixteen benefits young people in ways that adult enlistment, from eighteen, cannot. Nor is there evidence that the policy better enables the army to recruit and retain personnel than would be the case in an all-adult army. On the other hand, a substantial body of evidence now indicates that early enlistment leads to inferior outcomes for young people while also jeopardising the army's ability to staff itself adequately.

Youth Outcomes

Although ministers do not want to deny young people a career in the armed forces, raising the enlistment age would not do this; it would only defer the decision to adulthood, as is already the case for the emergency services. Nearly four-fifths of army recruits are aged eighteen or above; self-evidently they have not been denied a military career.

The question is not whether young people should be able to join the armed forces, but when. Specifically, are the interests of young people better served by a minimum enlistment age of sixteen or eighteen?

In order to rebut the concerns of children's rights advocates it would be necessary to demonstrate that enlisting from sixteen leads recruits towards more advantageous outcomes, and without significant detriment, than would enlisting from eighteen. Ministers are unable to do this, but they hold that military life and training are generally beneficial. They point to two factors: the education given to the youngest recruits; and supportive testimonials from soldiers themselves.¹⁸ These merit discussion.

Education Provision

The youngest army recruits, aged between 16 and 17.5, undertake their Phase One initial training at the Army Foundation College (AFC) in Harrogate, usually over twelve months. This long training period allows the AFC to offer marginally more education than do training centres for older recruits.¹⁹ The apt comparison, however, is not between education provision for younger and older recruits, but between the

provision for its youngest recruits and the education that civilians of the same age are now required to undertake.

The Education and Skills Act 2008 now lays a duty on all young people to continue part- or full-time education until they turn eighteen.²⁰ According to the Department for Education, 82 per cent of sixteen and seventeen year olds in England now meet this requirement through full-time study.²¹ As an alternative, the act allows young people to begin full-time work from sixteen, provided that they are released for at least one day per week to study towards accredited qualifications until they turn eighteen.²² In this case, study normally takes place at a local college, which is required to provide GCSEs in English and maths to students who do not hold good passes in these subjects, and Level 3 qualifications, such as A Levels and BTECs, to students who do.²³

By the standards of the civilian system, the AFC's offer is rudimentary. Despite the institution's name and the emphasis that recruitment brochures place on its education programme, GCSEs are not offered at the AFC.²⁴ Instead, recruits are given short, elementary courses in English, maths and ICT. (These are delivered as Functional Skills

Table 1: Intake to the British Armed Forces, with Intake Aged Under Eighteen, By Service Joined (FY1999/00 to FY2015/16, Enlisted Personnel Only).

	Army			Navy/Marines			Air Force			All		
	Total	Aged <18 (n)	Aged <18 (%)	Total	Aged <18 (n)	Aged <18 (%)	Total	Aged <18 (n)	Aged <18 (%)	Total	Aged <18 (n)	Aged <18 (%)
FY99/00	16,485	7,018	42.6%	4,953	1,574	31.8%	4,104	714	17.4%	25,542	9,306	36.4%
FY00/01	14,714	6,384	43.4%	4,623	1,405	30.4%	3,632	784	21.6%	22,969	8,573	37.3%
FY01/02	14,780	6,465	43.7%	5,010	1,550	30.9%	3,785	855	22.6%	23,575	8,870	37.6%
FY02/03	16,555	6,930	41.9%	5,225	1,555	29.8%	4,445	980	22.0%	26,225	9,465	36.1%
FY03/04	15,190	6,210	40.9%	4,115	1,075	26.1%	4,160	930	22.4%	23,465	8,215	35.0%
FY04/05	11,690	4,855	41.5%	3,695	915	24.8%	2,175	395	18.2%	17,560	6,165	35.1%
FY05/06	12,685	5,130	40.4%	3,935	905	23.0%	1,430	140	9.8%	18,050	6,175	34.2%
FY06/07	13,785	4,870	35.3%	3,750	785	20.9%	1,825	155	8.5%	19,360	5,810	30.0%
FY07/08	14,535	4,750	32.7%	3,865	830	21.5%	2,925	400	13.7%	21,325	5,980	28.0%
FY08/09	14,510	4,135	28.5%	4,005	865	21.6%	4,255	780	18.3%	22,770	5,780	25.4%
FY09/10	14,185	3,630	25.6%	4,150	590	14.2%	3,470	455	13.1%	21,805	4,675	21.4%
FY10/11	8,040	2,400	29.9%	2,250	280	12.4%	1,150	90	7.8%	11,440	2,770	24.2%
FY11/12	10,480	2,930	28.0%	2,490	90	3.6%	1,320	110	8.3%	14,290	3,130	21.9%
FY12/13	9,660	2,300	23.8%	2,490	130	5.2%	1,170	80	6.8%	13,320	2,510	18.8%
FY13/14	6,440	1,770	27.5%	2,890	250	8.7%	1,490	100	6.7%	10,820	2,120	19.6%
FY14/15	7,650	1,820	23.8%	2,570	240	9.3%	1,630	110	6.7%	11,850	2,170	18.3%
FY15/16	8,020	1,790	22.3%	2,630	300	11.4%	1,930	160	8.3%	12,580	2,250	17.9%

Sources: MoD, 'UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics', 1 April 2016; and predecessor publications. Note: total personnel numbers listed above exclude figures for officers.

qualifications, which the Wolf Review of Vocational Education in 2011 criticised as 'certainly not in themselves an adequate "maths and English" diet' for the age group.²⁵) Recruits are additionally enrolled on to an apprenticeship. Infantry trainees apprentice in 'Public Services', which incorporates elements of basic soldier training such as drill, fitness and map reading, but was not designed to support career progression outside the army.²⁶ Recruits who already hold good

GCSEs when they arrive at the AFC are not routinely offered progression to Level 3 qualifications.²⁷ Although Ofsted inspects the AFC's duty of care arrangements, the quality and suitability of the education provided is not part of its remit at military training establishments.²⁸

In these ways, the education provided at the AFC is substantially inferior to the range and quality of options available to the same cohort in full-time education or civilian work.

The disparity is made possible because armed forces trainees are exempt from the Education and Skills Act provisions that specify the minimum standards of education participation for the age group.²⁹ The standards applied to civilian colleges are also more rigorous; for example, a civilian college would have its funding withdrawn if it failed to provide GCSEs to sixteen to seventeen year olds or restricted the scope of its Ofsted inspections.³⁰

Senior officers have argued privately that, since the youngest recruits tend to have disadvantaged backgrounds, without the army they would be unemployed, rather than in school.³¹ There is no evidence to support this suggestion, which overlooks the substantial development of opportunities for this social group in the past two decades. While the proportion of 16–24 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) remains high, at 11.7 per cent across the UK in 2016,³² relatively few of these are under eighteen. In England, 3.9 per cent of sixteen to seventeen year olds were NEET at the end of 2015, down from 8.5 per cent a decade earlier.³³ Even the most disadvantaged sixteen to seventeen year olds – those who were eligible for free meals at school – are now much more likely to be in full-time education than NEET.³⁴ Data from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales further indicate a falling NEET rate and rising education participation rate across the UK as a whole.³⁵ Consequently, encouraging minors to enlist means, for the majority, encouraging them to leave education, rather than saving them from unemployment.

The assumption that joining the armed forces reduces the risk that a young person will become NEET is not supported by evidence. One-third of minors who enlist in the army, amounting to several hundred individuals per year, leave or are discharged before they complete training.³⁶ They are then left with the daunting prospect of either rejoining the education system or finding alternative employment, often without having acquired basic qualifications. Currently, the MoD does not monitor the destinations of these young ex-recruits and so has no knowledge of how they fare.

A related assumption is that recruits from the most disadvantaged backgrounds gain the most from joining the army early. In practice, this group faces the highest risk of early discharge, defined as leaving the army within four years of enlistment. Research by the now defunct Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in 2012 found that recruits who joined the army without

GCSEs, with underdeveloped literacy skills, or because they did not know what else to do, were much more likely than other recruits to be early leavers.³⁷ The study also found that recruits who had trained at the AFC – that is, the youngest – were much more likely than others to leave within four years. Some 48 per cent of the AFC's trainees had left early, versus 33 per cent of older recruits who had trained at the Infantry Training Centre in Catterick, for example.³⁸

These data indicate that, rather than rescuing vulnerable young people from disengagement, early enlistment is more likely than adult enlistment to compound the risk. Overall, encouraging sixteen year olds to continue their education as civilians, full or part time, and later enlist as adults, has more to recommend it as a strategy to promote their best interests.

Soldiers' Testimonials

In addition to their claims for the army's education, ministers rely on soldiers' personal testimonials to suggest that the policy is working for young people. A now oft-cited example is that of Second Lieutenant Kidane Cousland, who enlisted at sixteen and achieved such a high level that he was selected for officer training and won the Sword of Honour at Sandhurst in 2016.³⁹ Cousland is reported as saying that, had he not enlisted in the army, difficulties handling his anger could have landed him in prison.⁴⁰ His story is offered as an example of the army's policy to 'maximise talent' from all personnel, whatever their social background.⁴¹

Endorsements like this show that at least some soldiers recognise the narrative of opportunity that ministers promote, but other soldiers' stories show the opposite. Wayne Sharrocks, who joined the infantry at seventeen and left after seven years, writes that his military training led to mental health problems later.⁴² The training is designed to 'reprogramme' the brain, he says, which damages young minds.⁴³ Individual testimony of either kind is valuable in its own right, but does not represent the whole population from which it comes. In particular, it throws no light on the question guiding this discussion: whether enlisting at sixteen confers benefits that enlisting at eighteen does not.

Risks Following Early Enlistment

While there is no evidence that early enlistment brings benefits that later enlistment could not, there is evidence that the policy carries substantial risks of detriment to young people. This is well rehearsed elsewhere⁴⁴ but may be summarised here briefly in three categories: risk of harm; risk to social mobility; and diminished rights.

Elevated Risk of Harm

It is MoD policy to enlist minors 'particularly for the infantry', to which it is relatively difficult to attract older recruits.⁴⁵ It is also policy to bar army enlistees aged under 16.5 from all roles other than front line and driving jobs,⁴⁶ which in practice channels the very youngest recruits into the infantry. As a consequence, minors are more likely than adult recruits to join the major component of the army that carries the highest risk of harm in warfare over the course of their careers.⁴⁷ The risk differential is substantial. In Afghanistan, for example, infantrymen were seven times as likely to be killed or injured in comparison to the rest of the armed forces as a whole.⁴⁸ A study commissioned by Child Soldiers International and ForcesWatch in 2013 found that sixteen year olds who enlisted in the army (for any role) and completed their training were approximately twice as likely as those who enlisted as adults to die or be injured in Afghanistan.⁴⁹ Among the plausible explanations are the MoD's policy of directing minors into infantry roles, as well as their tendency to have slightly longer army careers than adult recruits, and thus more deployments.

Irrespective of the effects of later deployment, a military environment carries its own elevated risks. In 2016, 6 per cent of enlisted soldiers reported having been bullied in the previous twelve months.⁵⁰ The army's most recent study on sexual harassment, published in 2015, found that 13 per cent of women in the army had had a 'particularly upsetting' experience of sexual behaviour directed at them in the previous twelve months (examples are sexual bullying, blackmail and assault).⁵¹ Despite the determined initiative of the Chief of the General Staff to reduce and manage the

problem, its prevalence as recorded in these anonymous surveys has increased from a rate of 8 per cent in 2009.⁵² The armed forces also have a culture of heavy drinking. The most recent study by the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR) in 2010 found that 26 per cent of personnel aged under 30 were drinking alcohol at levels deemed to be harmful – approximately three times the rate for the same age group in the general population.⁵³ Contrary to a common assumption that incidence of violent offending reduces after joining the armed forces, another study by KCMHR in 2013 found that the rate of convictions for violent and sexual offences increased after enlistment and increased again after personnel had been deployed to war.⁵⁴

That military employment can be tough and carries risks of harm is not news. The salient question for this discussion is whether it is an appropriate environment for young people who are still legally children – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – whose vulnerability to these risks is relatively greater.⁵⁵

Risks to Social Mobility

As noted earlier, since one-third of early enlistees drop out of their training,⁵⁶ joining the army at sixteen or seventeen carries an appreciable risk to long-term social mobility. In effect, the early enlistment of these discharges brings their full-time education to an end only to subject them to a risk of long-term unemployment. Early enlistees who do complete their training are less likely than adult recruits to be promoted through the ranks.⁵⁷ When they leave the army, usually after an average career of ten years, they will compete for jobs with the 82 per cent of their civilian peers who stayed in full-time education from age sixteen.⁵⁸ Research by the British Legion has found that the unemployment rate among working-age veterans is approximately twice the civilian rate;⁵⁹ a lack of transferable, accredited qualifications acquired in service is a common complaint.⁶⁰

Diminished Rights

Certain fundamental rights, which the Convention on the Rights of the Child

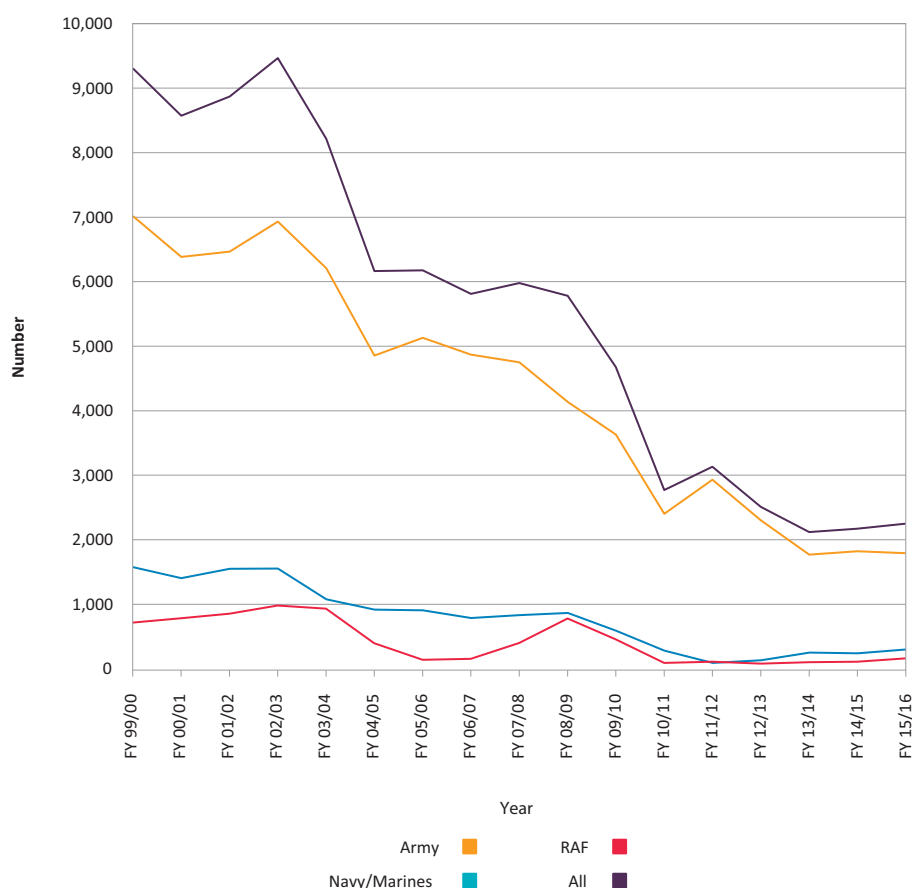
and other treaties exist to preserve, are suspended during military employment. These include the right to free speech, to full union representation, not to be subject to forced labour, to be tried for alleged offences in the juvenile justice system, and to freedom from discrimination.⁶¹ Minors and their parents consent to waive these rights at enlistment, whether or not they are aware of doing so.

This can have far-reaching consequences for the army's youngest enlistees. On the day an enlisted minor turns eighteen and can be sent on operations for the first time, he or she has no legal right to leave the army until the age of 22 at the earliest. At enlistment, a minor therefore makes a consequential decision about the first four years of their adulthood before he or she has reached the age of majority,

at which point the choice becomes irreversible. The risk is compounded by the army's regulations, which do not recognise service undertaken as a child when calculating minimum service terms. Accordingly, whereas an adult recruit is entitled to leave after four years' service, an enlisted minor is not, and must serve for up to two further years before exercising the same right.⁶² In civilian employment, such age discrimination would be unlawful under the equal treatment provisions of the Equality Act 2010, from which the armed forces are exempt. Soldiers who are satisfied with army life may not experience these rules as oppressive, but unhappy personnel are effectively trapped for a period of years once their initial discharge window has passed.

The risks that attend military employment, the suspension of

Figure 1: Intake to the British Armed Forces Aged Under Eighteen, By Service Joined (1999/00 to 2015/16, Enlisted Personnel Only).



Sources: MoD, 'UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics'; and predecessor publications.

fundamental rights, the legally binding terms of service, and the relative immaturity of children in their mid-teens place a heavy burden on recruiters to ensure that the formal consent provided by enlistees and their parents is fully informed. In practice, the salesmanship of recruitment practices militates against this. Recruiters are not required to have direct contact with parents.⁶³ Their 'guides' to military life vigorously proffer the putative benefits while omitting an explanation of the obligations and risks.⁶⁴ The formal enlistment papers, which briefly summarise the terms of service, are not publicly available and are not given to recruits until the point of enlistment itself. The language of these papers, which is pitched at GCSE level, puts them beyond the reach of most of the youngest recruits, three-quarters of whom have a reading age of eleven or younger; in March 2015, 7 per cent had a reading age of five.⁶⁵ In June 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child told the UK that its arrangements for seeking informed consent from armed forces recruits and their parents were 'insufficient'.⁶⁶

Ministerial Responses

In response to repeated, evidenced challenges to current enlistment policy over recent years from children's rights experts and parliamentarians, the MoD and the army have resisted discussion of the issues,⁶⁷ declaring instead that the merits of the current policy are beyond doubt.⁶⁸

Military Need

The principal rationale for early enlistment rests not on the armed forces' putative value as an extension of social services and the Department for Education, but on the assumption that they could not fill their ranks from adult recruits alone.⁶⁹ The House of Commons Defence Committee asked the MoD to provide evidence for this assumption in 2013, but the request went unanswered.⁷⁰ The final section of this article intends to show that there is no such evidence and that the current recruitment model is counterproductive on its own terms.

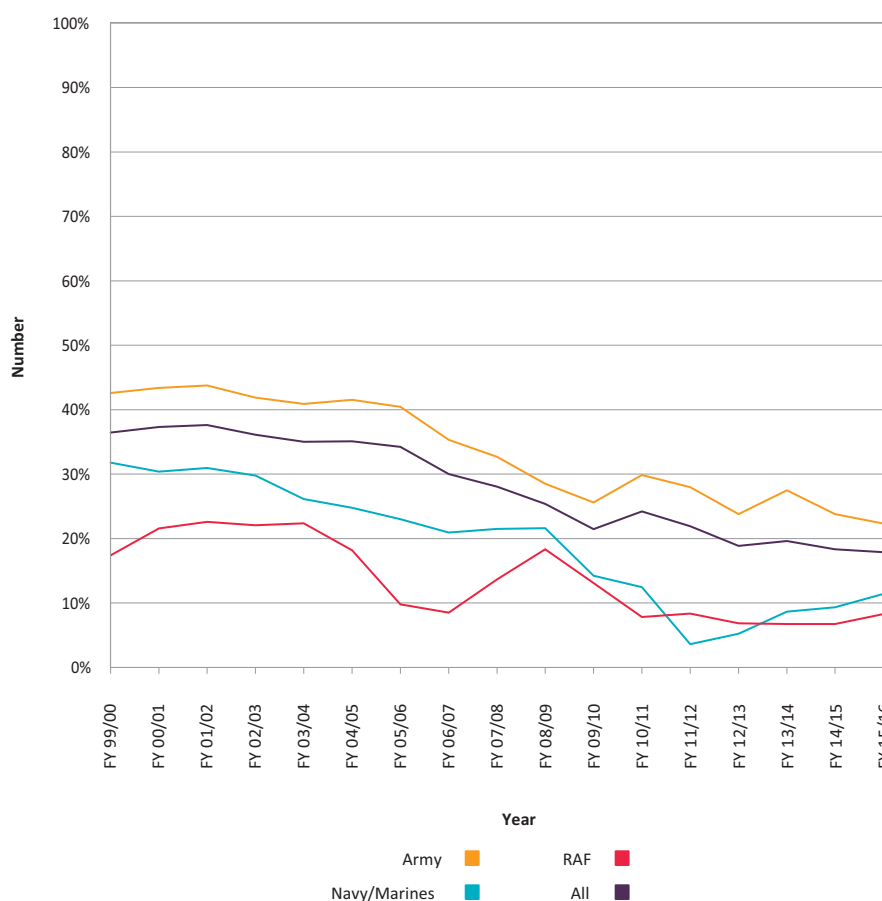
As Table 1 shows, reliance by the RAF and Royal Navy on recruiting from sixteen is now relatively low; in the 2015/16 fiscal year they enlisted 460 minors between them, which taken together accounted for 10 per cent of the total enlisted intake, down from 19 per cent a decade earlier. If they chose to do so, both services could begin to recruit only adults forthwith. The same transition in the army would require a careful assessment of its feasibility. As a contribution to such a review, the following discussion aims to establish three points in turn, using publicly available official data: enlistment from sixteen is demographically unsustainable and increasingly cost ineffective; an adult-only army would have multiple advantages; and the transition appears to be feasible using existing resources.

Early Enlistment is Becoming Unsustainable

Although internationally the British Army is unusual in relying heavily on minors, it now recruits markedly fewer than a decade ago. In the 2005/06 fiscal year, 40 per cent of the army's enlisted intake was aged under eighteen: 5,130 individuals.⁷¹ In 2015/16, the proportion had fallen to 22 per cent: 1,790 individuals (see Figures 1 and 2).⁷²

Among the drivers of this change, one stands out: the rising rate of participation by sixteen and seventeen year olds in full-time education, both academic and vocational. In 1990, half of the age group was studying full time; in 2005 the proportion had risen to 70 per cent and by the end of 2015 had reached 82 per cent.⁷³ The rate continues to rise as young people and their parents

Figure 2: Proportion of Intake to the British Armed Forces Aged Under Eighteen, By Service Joined (FY1999/00 to FY2015/16, Enlisted Personnel Only).



Sources: MoD, 'UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics'; and predecessor publications.

become acutely conscious of the importance of formal qualifications in today's employment market. The merits of completing GCSEs and possibly further qualifications before the age of eighteen incentivise recruits and their parents to defer enlistment until adulthood. In theory, the army could try to redress this by providing education on a par with that available in the civilian system, but this would require a major investment, driving up the already-high costs of Junior Soldier training. It would also keep recruits in the army classroom for longer, detracting from their military training. In 2016, the army explored the possibility of providing GCSE resits to recruits who arrive at the AFC without A*–C grades in English and maths, concluding that GCSEs could be provided only to some recruits, if at all, and that the change would be 'expensive'.⁷⁴

As education participation rates continue to rise, the de facto age at which secondary education ends is becoming eighteen. By actively recruiting at sixteen, the army is not only working in direct opposition to the societal and governmental forces dedicated to keeping as many young people as possible in education until eighteen, but also trying to recruit the same number of minors from a continually diminishing pool of individuals. For both reasons, recruiting from sixteen is becoming an increasingly unsustainable policy.

The problem is compounded by the high – and increasing – cost of recruiting minors. In 2016, the MoD revealed that it costs £90,000 for each trainee at the AFC who successfully completes Phase One of infantry training, but only £28,000 for an adult recruit to be trained to the same standard.⁷⁵ There are a number of reasons for this disparity. Phase One training for most of the AFC's Junior Soldiers takes twelve months; at the Infantry Training Centre in Catterick, older recruits complete Phase One and Two infantry training in a combined course taking half that time. The high dropout rate among the youngest recruits also pushes up the cost per successfully trained recruit. Since AFC recruits also benefit from extra duty of care arrangements, such as additional welfare provision, this further adds to the cost of training them.

The army has countered that the youngest recruits tend to stay in the army for around one-third longer than adult recruits, which adds to their value as an investment, but this far from reverses the wide cost differential. The cost-benefit disparity is so substantial that the army would save around £50 million per annum if it recruited only adults.⁷⁶ Some of this saving could be redeployed to boost adult recruitment before the number of available minors dwindles to an unsustainable level. Until then, the subsidy provided to early enlistment stands out against a background of fiscal austerity.

These various factors indicate that it will become increasingly difficult to sustain and fund the policy of early enlistment. The army could anticipate this by planning for a transition to an all-adult force, but in 2015 decided it would attempt to increase its annual intake of Junior Soldiers at the AFC from around 1,300 to 1,800.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, ministers are having to defend a policy that is increasingly unsustainable demographically and financially, and increasingly controversial.

An All-Adult Army Would Bring Significant Benefits

Apart from the financial savings already mentioned, an all-adult army offers multiple advantages over the current model. Recruits aged eighteen and above are, on the whole, more mature and better educated. They are also

better able to anticipate the realities of army life before they enlist, and have a lower dropout rate during training. Unlike a sixteen year old, an adult recruit can be trained in as little as six months and deployed in combat or peacekeeping operations immediately thereafter. An all-adult army would no longer have to remove underage soldiers from its units prior to deployment, nor would it have to maintain the additional duty of care arrangements that are required for minors. As discussed earlier, most states worldwide, including most of the UK's European neighbours, have already adopted the 'Straight 18' recruitment model as one which is better for both their armed forces and young people.

Transition to an All-Adult Army is Feasible

The fundamental feasibility question is whether the army could attract enough adult recruits to compensate for the loss of the sixteen and seventeen year olds that it enlists now. Table 2 shows that 1,790 new army enlistees in FY2015/16 were under eighteen. Of these, 1,199 would be expected to progress to the trained strength based on the known trainee dropout rate for the age group, at 33 per cent.⁷⁸ In order to achieve the same inflow to the trained strength last year, but without recruiting minors, the army would have had to enlist an additional 1,578 adult recruits. (This figure accounts for the known, lower

Table 2: Transition to an All-Adult British Army: Estimated Additional Adult Intake Requirement. Base: FY2015/16 (1,790 Minors Enlisted).

	A	B		C
	Enlistees	Expected dropout rate based on five-year average		Remainder expected to join trained strength (C=A–B)
		(%)	(n)	
Intake of minors (actual)	1,790	33%	591	1,199
Adult intake required to compensate for loss of enlisted minors	1,578	24%	379	1,199

dropout rate among adult trainees of 24 per cent.⁷⁹⁾

In practice, the army would not need to find these 1,578 new adult enlistees from the general population, because a proportion of recruits who now sign up as minors would still have joined at eighteen if that were the minimum enlistment age. Recruiters know this group as ‘core intenders’: those who have long intended to join the army and will probably do so once they become eligible. Their proportion of the army’s current intake of minors is not publicly known, but it is possible to base estimates on plausible scenarios.

Table 3 sets out three such scenarios, in which 25 per cent, 50 per cent and 75 per cent of the current intake of minors are core intenders. In the middle scenario, 895 minors who enlisted last year would still have done so as adults, had they been unable to join at sixteen or seventeen. In this case, the table shows that the army would have had to find an additional 683 adult recruits last year to assure the same projected inflow to the trained strength. This would require an 11 per cent increase in the current rate of adult recruitment, from 6,230 (in 2015/16) to 6,915. The army recruited at least this many adults in six of the last ten years, peaking at 10,555 in 2009/10.⁸⁰

Over the past two years (2014/15–15/16) the army has increased its intake of adult recruits from 4,670 to 6,230.⁸¹ This increase – 1,560 over two years – exceeds the additional 683 adults per annum that would be required in the

scenario just described. Significantly, recruiters achieved this despite a falling unemployment rate. Therefore, based on its recruitment performance both recently and over the past decade, the indications are that the army could have replaced last year’s intake of minors with adult recruits, had it chosen to do so.

The prospect of recruiters meeting their targets depends principally on deploying their resources as efficiently as possible. To this end, the adult-only recruitment model offers two clear advantages. First, while the army’s pool of potential early enlistees continues to diminish, the main adult recruitment pool, aged 18–28, is expected to remain approximately constant to 2020.⁸² Second, ceasing the recruitment of minors would liberate a substantial sum. If £25 million – half of the estimated saving – were used to enhance adult recruitment, the required uplift in adult personnel becomes still more viable. To put this in perspective, a financial injection of that size is around five times the usual cost of a major recruitment drive for the regular army.⁸³ Put another way, it is equivalent to £36,600 for each of the 683 additional adult recruits required under the all-adult recruitment scenario described earlier.

The Army 2020 reforms have further enhanced the prospects of transition by reducing the size of the regular army by one-fifth since 2012. This large drop in the trained strength has eased the army’s recruitment and retention needs for the long term, which at least partially offsets the struggle to attract new recruits.

Significantly, the one-fifth reduction is approximately proportional to the army’s current intake of minors, at 22 per cent of the total.⁸⁴

Conclusions

This article has addressed the debate about which minimum enlistment age – sixteen or eighteen – would better serve the interests of young people and the armed forces in the UK, with a focus on the army in particular. While no verifiable evidence indicates that enlistment from sixteen benefits young people in a manner that adult enlistment cannot, there is evidence of a number of risks and detrimental effects arising from the policy as it stands. The article has further argued that early enlistment is becoming unsustainable, that all-adult armed forces offer several advantages over the current model, and that a transition to this Straight 18 standard appears sufficiently viable and advantageous that it merits further investigation.

Now that most states restrict military employment to adult volunteers only, the Straight 18 principle is slowly, fitfully emerging as a global norm. This was unthinkable 20 years ago, when children were recruited and routinely deployed in hostilities, including by the UK; British minors fought and died in the Falklands and the Balkans, a circumstance widely recognised to be unconscionable today. While the use of children for military purposes remains an extensive problem worldwide, the trend towards the Straight 18 standard is helping to safeguard the rights of children and

Table 3: Transition to an All-Adult British Army: Estimated Additional Adult Intake Requirement Based on Three ‘Core Intender’ Scenarios. Base: FY2015/16 (1,790 Minors Enlisted).

A		B	C	D		E
'Core intenders' (enlisted minors who would still have joined as adults)		Additional adult recruits required	Total (C=A+B)	Expected dropout rate based on five-year average		No. of recruits expected to join trained strength (E=C–D)
%	n			%	n	
25%	448	1,130	1,578	24%	379	1,199
50%	895	683	1,578	24%	379	1,199
75%	1,343	235	1,578	24%	379	1,199

young people across the world. This has raised the possibility that, given time and persistence, the recruitment of children under the age of eighteen by state armed forces could be brought to an end. The UK's unwillingness to set this standard itself is an obstacle. The significance of the British position is underlined by the company it keeps: most of the 20 or so states still wedded to recruiting sixteen year olds are Commonwealth countries, including populous India and Pakistan. Were the UK to change, pressure would mount on the rest of the Commonwealth, and other countries, to follow.

Meanwhile, British societal expectations in respect of young people's best interests are also evolving, as

exemplified by restricting the purchase of tobacco, fireworks, glue and knives to adults only. Enlistment from sixteen stands out as incongruous. A stark example is that in order to watch online a 2016 television documentary following recruits in training at the AFC (*Raw Recruits: Squaddies at 16*),⁸⁵ viewers were required to tick a box to certify that they were over eighteen. At the same time, the armed forces' personnel policy is undergoing dramatic change, with a developing emphasis on recruiting a technically proficient workforce. These trends should provoke a serious assessment of whether enlisting minors is, as this article has argued, undermining both young people's prospects and the

armed forces' ability to recruit effectively in the long term. ■

David Gee has produced a number of research reports on military personnel issues, including 'Informed Choice? Armed Forces Recruitment Practice in the United Kingdom' (2008) and 'The Last Ambush: Aspects of Mental Health in the British Armed Forces' (2013).

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Notes

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- 2 *Ibid.* See also Penny Mordaunt MP, response to Written Question 38550 on 'Armed Forces: Young People', House of Commons, 6 June 2016, <<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2016-05-25/38550/>>, accessed 18 November 2016. Some 32 per cent of army recruits aged under eighteen at enlistment in fiscal year 2015/16 were destined for infantry roles.
- 3 For example, see Penny Mordaunt, letter to Demelza Hauser, Child Soldiers International, 4 July 2016, <<https://www.child-soldiers.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=82b8435d-1021-4483-bd59-3f7a3766c7f5>>, accessed 29 July 2016; Earl Howe, in *Hansard*, House of Lords, 'Armed Forces Bill', Debate, 27 April 2016, Column 1210–13, <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2016-04-27/debates/16042778000205/ArmedForcesBill#contribution-16042795000083>>, accessed 18 November 2016.
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- 33 Department for Education, 'Participation
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- 34 Eligibility for free school meals (FSM)
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and employment destinations in
FY2013/14 of 561,110 people who
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schools in England in 2012/13, of
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without GCSE English at any grade, with
literacy skills at Entry Level 1, or because
they did not know what else to do, left
during their first four years. Recruits
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positive choice, were substantially more
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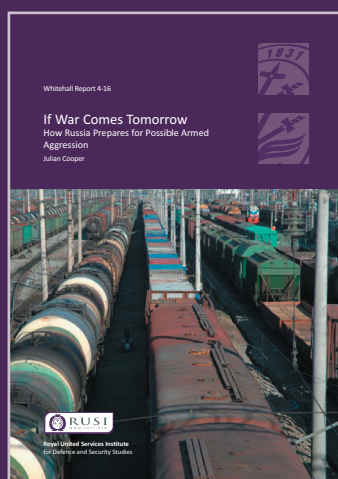
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- 74 Document released under Freedom of Information FOI2016/07827/77630, 'Action – GCSE Re-Sits for JE Recruits', 21 January 2016, <<https://www.child-soldiers.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=4ad5c52e-2ab9-4e61-81c3-d18e818c766f>>, accessed 4 October 2016.
- 75 The adult figure for Phase One training of £28,000 is derived from dividing by two the £56,000 cost of combined Phase One and Two infantry training at the Infantry Training Centre in Catterick. Earl Howe, *Hansard*, House of Lords, written answer to question on army training, HL 7675, 26 April 2016.

- 76 ForcesWatch and Child Soldiers International, 'Army Recruitment: Comparative Cost-Effectiveness of Recruiting from Age 16 Versus Age 18', September 2014, <<http://www.forceswatch.net/resources/army-recruitment-comparative-cost-effectiveness-recruiting-age-16-versus-age-18>>, accessed 31 July 2016.
- 77 See witness statement of C L Tickell in Child Soldiers International vs Secretary of State for Defence, CO/4671/2014, High Court of Justice Queen's Bench Division Administrative Court, 2014, paras 13, 16.
- 78 Based on the dropout rate for the age group averaged over a five-year period, 2009/10 to 2013/14 (33 per cent), 591 of these recruits would be expected to be discharged during training.
- 79 Based on the dropout rate among adult army recruits averaged over a five-year period, 2009/10 to 2013/14 (24 per cent), 379 of these recruits would be expected to be discharged during training.
- 80 Intake of enlisted adults exceeded 6,915 in FY2005/06 (7,555), 2006/07 (8,915), 2007/08 (9,785), 2008/09 (10,375), 2009/10 (10,555), 2011/12 (7,550) and 2012/13 (7,360). See MoD, 'UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics', and predecessor publications.
- 81 In 2013/14 the army enlisted 4,670 adults and in 2015/16 it enlisted 6,230 adults. See MoD, 'UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics', and predecessor publication.
- 82 MoD, 'Army Junior Entry (JE) Training – Cost Benefit Analysis', ITG/JESG/Trg/11/09, 14 May 2014, p. D-1, <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/defence/140514-MoD_Junior%20Entry_CostBenefit_Analysis_REDACTED.pdf>, accessed 29 July 2016.
- 83 For example, the army's 'More than Meets the Eye' recruitment campaign in 2014 cost £5.3 million. Document released under Freedom of Information Request FOI2014/07567, Defence Resources Secretariat, 30 January 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/401072/20150130_FOI2014_7567_British_Army_recruitment_advertising_campaign_O.pdf>, accessed 31 July 2016.
- 84 MoD, 'UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics'.
- 85 Channel 5, *Raw Recruits: Squaddies at 16*, 3 October 2016, <<http://www.channel5.com/show/raw-recruits-squaddies-at-16>>, accessed 7 October 2016.

If War Comes Tomorrow: How Russia Prepares for Possible Armed Aggression



Julian Cooper
Whitehall Report 4-16



If War Comes Tomorrow: How Russia Prepares for Possible Armed Aggression analyses developments in Russia's system for economic mobilisation for possible war since 1991 in order to illuminate its role in the country's present-day military capability. Its focus is on the system for preparing the economy of the country and maintaining its power structures in the event of war.

The analysis shows that it is perhaps not surprising that Russia's leadership should be prioritising an ability to respond rapidly and effectively to any possible armed attack, hoping to deter military action by the certainty of a rapid, concerted response by not only the country's armed forces, but also by institutions of government, economic agents and society as a whole, at both the federal and territorial levels.