

The British armed forces: Why raising the recruitment age would benefit everyone

Read time: 5 min.

Introduction

The British armed forces recruit approximately 2,400 16- and 17-year-olds each year, three-quarters of whom join the army.¹ This briefing makes the case for a minimum enlistment age of 18 on grounds of the health, welfare, and rights of young people, and outlines the economic and military benefits of a transition to all-adult armed forces.²

The UK: an international outlier

Worldwide, three-quarters of armed forces now only recruit adults from age 18.³ The UK is one of only sixteen states⁴ that still formally allow enlistment of 16-year-olds;⁵ it is the only major military power, the only country in Europe, the only NATO member, and the only Permanent Member of the UN Security Council to do this,⁶ recruiting more soldiers at 16 than at any other age.⁷

Widespread criticism

The UK's policy has been challenged by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child,⁸ Parliament's Defence and Human Rights committees,⁹ the Children's Commissioners,¹⁰ the Equality and Human Rights Commission,¹¹ the major British children's organisations and human rights groups, health professionals, faith groups, trade unions, and veterans.¹² A 2018 ICM poll found that 72 per cent of respondents who expressed a view said the enlistment age should be 18 or above; 19 per cent thought it should be 16.¹³

Adolescent susceptibilities, weak safeguards

The army's recruitment strategy specifically targets socio-economically deprived young people, particularly in families earning around £10,000 per year,¹⁴ and its youngest recruits tend to come from deprived areas.¹⁵

Young people in mid-adolescence, especially those with a background of adversity, have reduced capacity (relative to adulthood) to make consequential decisions responsibly.¹⁶ Responding to evidence that three-quarters of 16-year-old recruits have a reading age of 11 or less,¹⁷ and that recruitment materials¹⁸ glamorise military life while omitting its risks and complex legal obligations, the UN has warned that the UK is not meeting its legal duty to ensure that a child's decision to enlist is fully informed.¹⁹

Despite recruiters' legal duty to ensure that parents fully understand the consequences of enlistment for their child, they are not required to meet with parents. A signature on a form, sent by post, is the only indication that parents understand and consent to their child's enlistment.²⁰

Binding terms of service

After an initial voluntary discharge window, enlisted minors are obliged from the day they turn 18 to remain in the army to the age of 22, having completed an obligatory minimum service period up to two years longer than is required for adult recruits.²¹ Certain fundamental rights are suspended upon enlistment, such as the right to free speech and the right of association.²²

High-risk roles

The army wants its youngest recruits 'particularly for the infantry',²³ where they are consequently over-represented.²⁴ In war, infantry troops suffer several times the rate of fatality found elsewhere in the armed forces²⁵ and twice the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).²⁶ Hence, although personnel aged under 18 are not normally deployed to war zones, they are exposed to elevated risks over the course of their career. For example, soldiers who joined at age 16 and completed training were twice as likely to be killed in Afghanistan as those who enlisted as adults.²⁷

Mental health impact

Children under the age of 18 have a legal right to be safeguarded against conditions prejudicial to their health and development.²⁸ The stress of military employment, particularly during initial training, carries multiple risks to mental health. Research by King's College has found that personnel across all ranks and ages are twice as likely as civilians to suffer from anxiety and depression and 50 per cent more likely to experience PTSD.²⁹

Young people in mid-adolescence,³⁰ especially if they have had a stressful childhood,³¹ are neurodevelopmentally more vulnerable than adults³² to the prolonged stress associated with basic soldier training.³³ Indeed, younger enlistees are more likely than both civilians of the same age and older enlistees to suffer stress-related mental health problems³⁴ and to drink heavily.³⁵ Among personnel who leave the forces within four years – those who enlisted under 18 are over-represented in this group³⁶ – 20 per cent have screened positive for PTSD.³⁷ The multiple risks associated with military employment have led the Trades Union Congress to state that it meets the definition of ‘hazardous work’ under the Child Labour Convention.³⁸

Contrary to a common assumption that joining the army reduces behaviour problems among young people, the available evidence shows the opposite. A 2013 study by King’s College found that military personnel across the age range were more likely than their civilian peers to commit violent, sexual, and drug-related offences.³⁹ The study found that the rate of violent offending among enlistees increased after they joined up, and increased again after their first deployment, reaching twice the pre-enlistment rate.

Substandard education

The army’s youngest recruits train at the Army Foundation College (AFC). The centre’s ‘outstanding’ Ofsted grade was awarded under a specially designed inspection regime that explicitly excludes the standard of education from its scope.⁴⁰ The AFC is exempt from both the supervisory care standards⁴¹ and the education standards⁴² that a civilian college has a legal duty to meet. GCSEs, for example, which civilian colleges are required to offer as resits, are not available at the AFC,⁴³ which instead enrolls 16-year-old recruits onto short, sub-GCSE courses in three subjects⁴⁴ and an apprenticeship based entirely on basic soldier training.⁴⁵ Recruits receive a maximum of four hours contact time per week towards accredited qualifications.⁴⁶ The army has decided not to increase its education provision on the basis that it ‘risks discouraging and therefore reducing the main recruiting pool’.⁴⁷

Socioeconomic impact

It is sometimes suggested that young people from deprived backgrounds would be unemployed if they could not enlist until age 18. In fact, four out of five of the most disadvantaged 16-year-olds now continue in full-time education.⁴⁸ Recruiting from this group is therefore less likely to rescue them from unemployment than to bring an early end to their full-time education. Of recruits aged under 18 who do enlist, 32 per cent drop out of training;⁴⁹ the drop-out rate among the same age group in a civilian college is nine per cent.⁵⁰ Of those who are still in the army after ten years, recruits who enlisted under the age of 18 are half as likely as those who enlisted as adults to have reached higher ranks (Sergeant or above).⁵¹

There is no evidence to show that the army helps disadvantaged young people to develop skills for later civilian employment. Veterans across the age range are no more likely than non-veterans to be in work and their jobs are more likely to be unskilled.⁵² The re-employment rate of infantry veterans, among whom the younger enlistee group is over-represented, is particularly low.⁵³

Unnecessary and expensive

A one-fifth reduction in the army’s personnel requirement has brought transition to modern, all-adult armed forces within reach.⁵⁴ As examined elsewhere,⁵⁵ the change would require only a small increase in adult intake, since a large proportion of those who now enlist as minors would still have done so as adults.⁵⁶ An all-adult army would benefit from soldiers who are more mature, less likely to leave during training, deployable immediately, and who do not need the duty of care arrangements required for younger personnel. The transition would also save money. It costs £53,000 to train an adult for the infantry, but £103,500 to train a minor for the same role to the same standard,⁵⁷ for an army career that is only one-third longer on average.⁵⁸

Make it 18

Raising the enlistment age to 18 would put an end to the risks associated with joining the armed forces prematurely, while leaving open the option of a military career in adulthood. More 16-year-olds would stay in education or training for longer to gain fundamental education and skills for lifelong employment.

The growing global consensus that only adults should be enlisted has already benefited countless children. While the British armed forces recruit from age 16, they lend legitimacy to other states and armed groups that still use children in armed conflict. In view of the UK’s influence in the Commonwealth and UN Security Council, the transition to all-adult forces would be a major step towards a global end to child recruitment.

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Notes and references

- ¹ Between 2015-16 and 2018-19, the armed forces recruited an average of 2,358 minors per year, of whom an average of 1,775 (75 per cent) joined the army. MoD, *Biannual diversity statistics*, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-2019>.
- ² For a discussion of the evidence favouring an end to child recruitment by state armed forces worldwide, see Child Soldiers International, *Why 18 matters: A rights-based analysis of child recruitment*, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/t9uw7hq> [shortened link].
- ³ For sources and detail, see Child Soldiers International, *Child Soldiers World Index*, 2019, <https://childsoldiersworldindex.org>.
- ⁴ Other than the UK, states that still formally allow enlistment from age 16 are: Bangladesh, Canada, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, India, Iran, Mauritania, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago, United Arab Emirates, and Zambia. *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ MoD, *Biannual diversity statistics*, 2019, *op cit.*
- ⁸ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (CRC/C/GBR/CO/5), 2016, <https://bit.ly/2Qx1zE5> [shortened], pp. 23-24.
- ⁹ House of Commons Defence Committee (HCDC), *The armed forces covenant in action? Part 4: Education of service personnel (Fifth Report of Session 2013-14)*, 2013. The Committee's predecessors also called on the MoD to 'examine the potential impact of raising the recruitment age for all three Services to 18', in HCDC, *Duty of care (Third Report of Session 2004-5)*, 2005. See also Joint Committee on Human Rights, *Children's rights (Twenty-fifth Report of Session 2008-09)*, 2009, which is the Committee's most recent inquiry to date into children's rights.
- ¹⁰ In January 2015, the outgoing Children's Commissioner for England, Maggie Atkinson, said that 16 was too young to be joining the armed forces and that the minimum age for recruitment should be raised to 18. In May 2016, the Children's Commissioners for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland co-signed a letter to the Ministry of Defence calling for the enlistment age to rise to 18, available here: <https://tinyurl.com/rcnphc2> [shortened]. In the same year, the present Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, communicated her own support for the same position by email to Child Soldiers International.
- ¹¹ EHRC, UK Government UPR Mid-term Report: Report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010, p. 5.
- ¹² Co-signatories of a letter sent in 2016 to the MoD, calling for the enlistment age to rise to 18, included: Amnesty International UK, Children England, Children in Scotland, Liberty, Medact (a health professionals' organisation), National Union of Teachers, UNICEF UK, and the Who Cares? Trust (a care leavers' organisation), among others. The letter is available here: <https://tinyurl.com/rcnphc2> [shortened]. The Children's Society has communicated its support of the campaign directly to Child Soldiers International. For details of faith groups' support, see an open letter to the MoD in 2013, available here: <https://tinyurl.com/v9cympa> [shortened]. Examples of MPs' support for the campaign to raise the enlistment age include: John Glen MP, 'John Glen MP: Recruiting under-18s to the Armed Forces isn't good for them or taxpayers', *Conservative Home*, 22 March 2014, <https://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2014/03/john-glen-mp-recruiting-under-18s-to-the-armed-forces-isnt-good-for-them-or-taxpayers.html>; Alex Cunningham MP, Hansard, HC Deb, 21 May 2013, col. 108WH ff.; and Liz Saville Roberts MP, 'British Army targets Welsh teenagers – it must stop', *Nation Cymru*, 18 January 2018, <https://nation.cymru/opinion/the-british-army-is-targeting-teenagers-in-wales-it-must-stop>. In 2019 the Trades Union Congress raised concerns about the military employment of children under the age of 18 in the UK's reporting process for the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (ILO Convention 182), and recommended that the UK transition to all-adult armed forces. Trades Union Congress, 'UK Compliance with major ILO Conventions 2019', 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/rwvayho> [shortened]; Trades Union Congress and Child Rights International Network, 'Annex 3: Armed Forces Recruitment and Convention 182', 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/vry9n2h> [shortened].
- ¹³ ICM poll conducted in July 2018 on behalf of Child Soldiers International. Poll question: 'Regardless of what you believe the current minimum age to be, what do you think should be the minimum age to join the British Army?' Figures extrapolated from poll data, excluding 5% 'don't know'.
- ¹⁴ See, for example, H Agerholm, 'British Army targets recruitment of young working class, military document reveals', *Independent*, 10 July 2017.
- ¹⁵ Over a five-year period from 2013 to 2018 in England, the rate of recruitment of 16- and 17-year-olds into the British army was 57 per cent higher in the most deprived fifth of constituencies than the least deprived fifth. C Cooper and D Gee, 'Youngest British army recruits come disproportionately from England's most deprived constituencies', 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/yx8osqhz> [shortened]. The army recognises that 'the majority of the current JE cohort' have a 'tendency to live in poorer areas'. British army, 'Junior Entry Review – Final Report', 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/rq33o8t> [shortened], p. 2. For a full discussion of the relationship between military enlistment and socioeconomic deprivation for the youngest recruits, see Child Rights International Network, *Conscription by poverty? Deprivation and army recruitment in the UK*, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/y2w8nzhy> [shortened].
- ¹⁶ During childhood and adolescence, certain brain structures that drive short-term, emotionally-driven, reward-oriented behaviour develop before those that provide capacity to anticipate long-term consequences. In mid-adolescence, around the age at which minors are enlisted, this second type of structure usually remains underdeveloped. In particular, complex decision-making functions, such as those needed for long-term planning and the capacity to defer gratification, only begin to develop from around age 16. Consequently, it is more difficult for a young person at 16, than as an adult, to weigh the potential downsides of an appealing career option. The developmentally limited ability to make consequential decisions is particularly marked among those living in conditions of stress, such as those associated with socio-economic deprivation. R Louise, C Hunter, S Zlotowitz, 'The recruitment of children by the UK armed forces: A critique from health professionals', 2016, <https://www.medact.org/2016/resources/reports/recruitment-children-uk-armed-forces>; K D Baker, M L Den, B M Graham, et al., 'A window of vulnerability: Impaired fear extinction in adolescence', *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory*, 2014, 113, pp. 90–100; J N Giedd, M Keshavan, T Paus, 'Why do many psychiatric disorders emerge during adolescence?' *Nature Reviews, Neuroscience*, 2008, 9(12), pp. 947–957; A Galván & K M McGlennen, 'Daily stress increases risky decision-making in adolescents: A preliminary study', *Developmental Psychobiology*, 2012, 54(4), pp. 433–40; M M Kishiyama, W T Boyce, A M Jimenez et al.,

'Socioeconomic disparities affect prefrontal function in children', *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 2009, 21(6), pp. 1106–1115; D Hackman & M J Farah, 'Socioeconomic status and the developing brain', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 2009, 13(2), pp. 65–73.

¹⁷ 74 per cent of recruits enrolled onto the main training course at the Army Foundation College in March 2015 were assessed to have literacy skills at Entry Level 3 or lower (equivalent to that expected of a 9–11-year-old); 7 per cent were at Entry Level 1 (equivalent to a 5–7-year-old). Information obtained under Freedom of Information Act, FOI2015/03426, 21 April 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/tgktet5> [shortened].

¹⁸ For example, see British army, 'Infantry soldier', 2019, <https://apply.army.mod.uk/roles/infantry/infantry-soldier>.

¹⁹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC): 'Safeguards for voluntary recruitment are insufficient, particularly in the light of the very low literacy level of the majority of under-18 recruits and the fact that briefing materials provided to child applicants and their parents or guardians do not clearly inform them of the risks and obligations that follow their enlistment.' CRC, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom*, op cit., p. 23.

²⁰ MoD, *Armed Forces: Young People - Written question – 223161*, 3 February 2015, <https://bit.ly/2FntPHW> [shortened link]; MoD, *Armed Forces: Young People - Written question – 227584*, 16 March 2015, <https://bit.ly/2V0gHQO> [shortened link]; and information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, 20 May 2015, Ref. FOI2015/04176, <https://tinyurl.com/rwrs7j2> [shortened link].

²¹ Soldiers who enlist as adults and serve for four years may leave the army; those who enlist as minors and serve for four years must wait until they turn 22 before becoming eligible to leave. It is sometimes said that minors can leave the armed forces at will but they cannot; they have no right to leave at all during the first six weeks, after which a 14-day notice-period applies, and after the first six months a three-month notice period applies. The Army Terms of Service Regulations 2007, no. 3382 (as amended, 2008, no. 1849).

²² Among the human rights that enlistment suspends are: the right to free speech, the right of union representation, the right to choose one's work, and the right of minors to be tried for alleged offences in the juvenile justice system. See Child Soldiers International, *Out of step, out of time: Recruitment of minors by the British armed forces*, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/v2bkwzs> [shortened].

²³ According to the MoD, Junior Entry recruitment (aged 16-17.5 years) 'presents an opportunity to mitigate Standard Entry (SE) shortfalls, particularly for the Infantry'. 'SE' refers to recruits aged 17.5 years and above. MoD, *Policy on recruiting Under-18s (U18)*, 2013, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, Ref. FOI2015/00618, 12 February 2015, p. 2, <https://tinyurl.com/wzos8xw> [shortened link]. In addition, recruiters' instructions state that recruits aged between 16 and 16½ must be given jobs in combat roles (or join as drivers in the logistics corps) and that those under 16¼ must only be given combat roles. British army (Recruiting Group), *Eligibility Quick Reference Guide*, 2015, p. 8, https://www.forceswatch.net/wp-content/uploads/UK_Army_Recruiting_Group-Eligibility_Quick_Reference_Guide.pdf.

²⁴ Each year between 2012-13 and 2015-16, an average of 768 minors joined the infantry, accounting for 34 per cent of the armed forces' enlisted minors over the period, versus 21 per cent of enlisted adults. Calculated from MoD, *Army: Recruitment - Written question – 56526*, 7 December 2016, <https://bit.ly/2CUZluj> [shortened link] and MoD, *Biannual diversity statistics*, 2018, op cit.

²⁵ Official sources show that the British infantry's rate of fatality and serious injury in Afghanistan was seven times higher than the rest of the armed forces. For sources and detail, see D Gee, *The last ambush? Aspects of mental health in the British armed forces*, 2013, p. 58, https://www.forceswatch.net/sites/default/files/The_Last_Ambush_web.pdf.

²⁶ J Sundin, N Jones, N Greenberg, et al., 'Mental health among commando, airborne and other UK infantry personnel'. *Occupational Medicine*, 60, 2010, pp. 552–559.

²⁷ Child Soldiers International and ForcesWatch, *Young age at Army enlistment is associated with greater war zone risks*, 2013, <https://tinyurl.com/qkc6r7c> [shortened]. There was no statistically significant finding regarding soldiers enlisted at age 17.

²⁸ Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 32: 'States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.'

²⁹ L Goodwin, S Wessely, M Hotopf, et al., 'Are common mental disorders more prevalent in the UK serving military compared to the general working population?', *Psychological Medicine*, 2014, 45(9), pp. 1881–1891; S A M Stevelink, M Jones, L Hull, et al., 'Mental health outcomes at the end of the British involvement in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts: a cohort study', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 2018, 213(6), pp. 690–697.

³⁰ For example, commenting on self-harm and suicide, Nicholas Blake QC noted in the *Deepcut Review* that 'being young, under or about 18, and living 24/7 within the disciplined regime of an institution such as the Army is, itself, a significant factor indicative of risk.' N Blake, *The Deepcut Review*, 2006, para. 9.34, p. 284.

³¹ M M Kishiyama et al., 'Socioeconomic disparities affect prefrontal function in children', op cit.; D Hackman & M J Farah, 'Socioeconomic status and the developing brain', op cit.

³² A measure of stress in adolescence is healthy, but a high-stress environment becomes harmful. Relative to adults, adolescents are temperamentally more anxious, more likely to experience depressed mood and emotional volatility, and more reactive to stressors, such that they react to stressors with greater anxiety and then remain anxious for longer. Under stress, adolescents are more likely than adults to develop anxiety-related mental health problems, such as depression. The adolescent brain is also more sensitive to repeated or prolonged stress, under which its transition to full maturation is compromised, particularly the development of brain structures involved in the regulation of emotions; there is some evidence that this can lead to lasting problems with anxiety in adulthood. L P Spear, 'The adolescent brain and age-related behavioral manifestations', *Neuroscience and Behavioral Reviews*, 2000, 24(4), pp. 417–463; J N Giedd, et al., 'Why do many psychiatric disorders emerge during adolescence?' op cit.; K D Baker et al., 'A window of vulnerability: Impaired fear extinction in adolescence', op cit.; M L Den, S R Altmann, R Richardson, 'A comparison of the short- and long-term effects of corticosterone exposure on extinction in adolescence versus adulthood', *Behavioral Neuroscience*, 2014, 128(6), pp. 722–735.

³³ For example, see J Swain, 'The effect of Phase One training on young recruits' personal and professional development in the British army', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2016, 19(1), pp. 117–132; B Griffin, 'The making of the modern British soldier', 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tHvtFibhic>; D McGurk, D I Cotting, T W Britt & A B Adler, 'Joining the ranks: The role of indoctrination in transforming civilians to service members', in A Adler et al. (eds.), *Military life: The psychology of serving in peace and combat, vol. 2: Operational stress* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International), pp. 13–31.

³⁴ L Goodwin et al., 'Are common mental disorders more prevalent in the UK serving military compared to the general working population?', op cit.; A C Iversen, N T Fear, E Simonoff, et al., 'Influence of childhood adversity on health among male UK military personnel', *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 2007, Vol. 191, pp. 506–511; A C Iversen, N T Fear, A Ehlers, et al., 'Risk factors for post-traumatic stress disorder among UK Armed Forces personnel', *Psychological Medicine*, 2008, Vol. 38, pp. 511–522; L A Hines, K Jawahar, S Wessely et al., 'Self-harm in the UK military', *Occupational Medicine*, June 2013; and D MacManus, K Dean, M Al Bakir et al., 'Violent behaviour in UK military personnel returning home from after deployment', *Psychological Medicine*, 2012, 42, pp. 1663–1673.

³⁵ N T Fear, M Jones, D Murphy, et al., 'What are the consequences of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the mental health of the UK armed forces? A cohort study' ('Supplementary webappendix'), *The Lancet*, 2010, 375, pp. 1783–1797.

³⁶ MoD, *Armed Forces: Recruitment - Written question – 127987*, 19 February 2018, <https://bit.ly/2LZv94f> [shortened link].

³⁷ J E J Buckman, H J Forbes, T Clayton, et al., 'Early Service leavers: a study of the factors associated with premature separation from the UK Armed Forces and the mental health of those that leave early', *European Journal of Public Health*, 2013, 23(3), pp. 410–415. Most ex-forces personnel with problems such as unemployment and substance abuse are those who leave within four years of enlisting. See M Ashcroft, *Veterans' transition review: follow-up report*, July 2015, http://www.veteranstransition.co.uk/vtr_final_report%202015.pdf, p. 3. See also British Army, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, *JSP 575: Early Service Leavers, Guidance notes for resettlement staff*, 2010, <http://www.ctp.org.uk/assets/x/51978>. J Buckman, H Forbes, T Clayton, et al., 'Early Service leavers: a study of the factors associated with premature separation from the UK Armed Forces and the mental health of those that leave early', *European Journal of Public Health*, 2013, 23(3), pp. 410-415.

³⁸ In 2019 the Trades Union Congress (TUC) submitted evidence to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), arguing that the military employment of children under the age of 18 in the UK constitutes 'hazardous work', and recommending that the UK make the transition to all-adult armed forces. Trades Union Congress, 'UK Compliance with major ILO Conventions 2019' and 'Annex 3', 2019, op cit.

³⁹ A study of veterans (all ages) of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars found that they were twice as likely to commit a violent crime after homecoming than before they enlisted, for example. Even soldiers who were not sent to war were found to be more likely to commit violent offences after they enlisted than before. MacManus, Dean, Jones et al., 'Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan: A data linkage cohort study', *The Lancet*, 2013, 381, pp. 907–917.

⁴⁰ See Annex B in Ofsted, 'Welfare and duty of care in armed forces initial training', 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/welfare-and-duty-of-care-in-armed-forces-initial-training>. In January 2019 the Minister of State for Education confirmed: 'Ofsted does not grade the Army Foundation College in Harrogate on the same basis as civilian colleges for the age group.' DfE, *Army Foundation College – Written question – 209858*, 17 January 2019, <https://bit.ly/2RmLu43> [shortened].

⁴¹ The army notes that moving to a 'non-enlistment' model at AFC – such as full time education or full time employment – 'would require supervisory care ratios that were higher than the current model, imposing both risk and cost. Any further education college that educates "young people" for more than 295 days pa (42 weeks) must register as a "children's home" and school. The Army is not resourced for such an establishment'. British army, 'Junior Entry Review', 2019, op cit., p. 5.

⁴² Since 2015 the Education and Skills Act (2008) has required all young people aged 16 and 17 to continue to participate in education. Those in full-time employment must complete 280 guided learning hours of education annually towards accredited qualifications. It is this part of the Act from which the armed forces are exempt. The exemption is specified in The Duty to Participate in Education or Training (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2013, no. 1205.

⁴³ MoD, *Armed Forces: GCSE - Written question – 33689*, 18 April 2016, <https://bit.ly/2RGa970> [shortened].

⁴⁴ The three subjects available at the Army Foundation College are short, Functional Skills courses in English, maths and ICT at Level 1, each graded at 45 guided learning hours, with an option to progress to Level 2 in each subject. The Department for Education describes Functional Skills as 'stepping stone qualifications' relative to GCSEs, and says that a Functional Skills Level 2 qualification is equivalent to a grade D grade at GCSE, while Level 1 is equivalent to grades E-F. See 'Point score structure' in Department for Education, 'A level and other 16-18 results (revised) : 2018/19', 2019, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/859418/2019_revised_English_and_maths_tables.xlsx. The Wolf Review of Education described Functional Skills courses as 'conceptually incoherent' and said they 'suffer from major and fundamental flaws'. It also emphasised that Functional Skills awards at Level 2 are not equivalent to GCSEs at Level 2 (grades A*-C). A Wolf, *Review of Vocational Education* (London: Department for Education), 2011, p. 170. For a comparison of education provision in the army and civilian colleges, see Child Soldiers International, 'Education in the British army: Comparison with civilian standards for the 16-17 age group', 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/vzdd8vs> [shortened].

⁴⁵ The full list of learning outcomes of the army's Public Services Apprenticeship is: Maintain competence, knowledge and standards of conduct in public service; Work safely in public service; Work as a team member to deliver public service; Administer first aid; Use and maintain physical resources; Use communication systems in working contexts; Meet physical fitness requirements; Plan and navigate a cross country route; Operate and maintain small arms and team weapons; Perform ceremonial duties. Federation for Industry Sector Skills and Standards, *HM Forces (England): Apprenticeship framework*, pp. 18-19, <http://www.afo.sscalliance.org/frameworkslibrary/downloader.cfm?FRID=FR02016>.

⁴⁶ Recruits on the long course at AFC who arrive with no recognised qualifications in English and Maths receive 80 hours of contact time for both English and Maths; a maximum of 160 hours over the 49 weeks (including eight weeks of holiday) of the course, equating to less than four hours per week. Recruits who arrive with Level 2 qualifications in English and Maths receive only 80 hours towards an ICT Functional Skill qualification, equating to less than two hours per week. MoD, Information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, 5 February 2020, Ref: FOI2020/00269/10/06.

⁴⁷ British army, 'Junior Entry Review', 2019, op cit., p. 1.

⁴⁸ Eligibility for free school meals (FSM) is a well-established statistical proxy for socio-economic disadvantage. The most recent statistics, published in October 2018, record the education and employment destinations in 2016/17 of 541,120 people who finished Key Stage 4 in 2015/16, of whom 72,630 (13 per cent) were FSM-eligible. 79 per cent in the FSM cohort continued in full-time education for a 'sustained' period afterwards. DfE, 'Destinations of KS4 and KS5 pupils 2017 - Key Stage 4 national tables (Table NA12b)', <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/destinations-of-ks4-and-ks5-pupils-2017>.

⁴⁹ Of the 7,680 minors who enlisted in the army in the four-year period between 2012-13 and 2015-16, 2,470 (32 per cent) dropped out before completing their phase 2 training. The drop-out rate among adult recruits is lower, at 23 per cent. MoD, *Army: Resignations - Written question – 116489*, 29 November 2017, <https://bit.ly/2SDuckC> [shortened link]. MoD, *Biannual diversity statistics*, 2018, op cit.

⁵⁰ DfE, '2016 to 2017 education and training NARTs overall headline' [see table 'Headline', cell G8], 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-achievement-rates-tables-2016-to-2017>.

⁵¹ Of the 2,650 minors who enlisted in the three-year period between 2006-07 and 2008-09 and were still in the army ten years later, 290 had attained the rank of Sergeant or above (ten per cent). Of the 4,960 adults who enlisted in the same period and were still in the army ten years later, 1,130 had attained the rank of Sergeant or above (20 per cent). MoD, Information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, 12 February 2020, Ref: FOI2020/00600/04/02, https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/evidence_of_career_promotion_among_2?nocache=incoming-1524787#incoming-1524787

⁵² These figures include officers and are not disaggregated to show the re-employment rate of enlistees. 15 per cent of veterans in work are process, plant and machine operatives (vs. 10 per cent of non-veterans) and 15 per cent are in professional occupations (vs. 21 per cent of non-veterans). MoD, *Annual population survey: UK armed forces veterans residing in Great Britain 2017* [Supplementary tables, Table 5.7], 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-population-survey-uk-armed-forces-veterans-residing-in-great-britain-2017>.

⁵³ A study in 2013 found that 30 per cent of infantry veterans who had left the army within four years were not in work or education/training 18 months afterwards. M Fossey & J Hacker Hughes, *Future Horizons Programme: Final report*, 2013, <http://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/20131107-FHP-Final-Report-Nov-2013.pdf>.

⁵⁴ The army's full-time trained strength requirement in 2008 was 101,800; in 2018 it was 82,646, 19 per cent smaller. N Dempsey, 'UK defence personnel statistics', 2018, p. 17, <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7930>.

⁵⁵ See D Gee & R Taylor, 'Is it counterproductive to enlist minors into the army?', *RUSI Journal*, 2016, 161, pp. 36–48.

⁵⁶ Market research commissioned by the British army found that 56% of Junior Soldiers 'always wanted to join'; this group would be likely to still enlist at 18 if the enlistment age were raised. British army, 'Junior Entry Review – Market Research', 2018, p. 1. Enclosure to Junior British army, Junior Entry Review, op. cit.

⁵⁷ MoD, *Army: Training – Written question – 128438*, 19 February 2018, <https://bit.ly/2FqT51K> [shortened link].

⁵⁸ The average army career lengths for soldiers aged a) under 18 and b) over 18 at enlistment in non-technical combat roles are as follows: infantry <18 = 11 years, 0 months; 18+ = 9 years, 4 months (difference = 1 year, 8 months); armoured corps <18 = 11 years, 4 months; 18+ = 9 years, 4 months (difference = 2 years, 0 months); artillery <18 = 13 years, 0 months; 18+ = 9 years, 6 months (difference 3 years, 6 months). Across the three role groups, the career length of soldiers enlisted under the age of 18 ranges from 18 per cent longer than adult recruits in the infantry (the most common role) to 37 per cent longer in the artillery. Hansard: HC Deb, 25 June 2014, c223W.