

Everyday militarism in FE and HE

Peter Glasgow investigates a worrying trend.

Between April 2016 and March 2017 the Army made 8,635 visits, and the RAF 1,700 visits, to schools across the UK. A target of opening 500 new cadets forces in state schools by 2020, focused in deprived areas, has nearly been reached, and a new target has recently been announced by the Defence Secretary.

These initiatives are part and parcel of a drive to promote militarism within the state education system.

In the July 2016 issue of *PSE* an article from the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) expressed significant concerns about the increasing involvement of the armed forces in the state education system. It drew attention to the fact that, following opposition to the disastrous and unwelcome invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, subsequent governments have been trying to improve the popularity of the armed forces.

Bulwark

Pushed to the forefront of the media as one of the cornerstones of British society, the armed forces are portrayed as an essential bulwark in the defence

of freedom, democracy and 'British values', in what is viewed as an ever-increasingly volatile and dangerous world.

What underpins and characterises these initiatives is the promotion of an uncritical acceptance that the armed forces, their interventions across the world, the behaviours and unquestioning discipline implicit within a military ethos, are all, *per se*, good things, and that that ethos should be rolled out to young people across the country, whether in schools, further education or higher education.

And what of the situation in FHE? Anecdotally, it is clear that the armed forces have, in the last decade, had an increased presence at freshers fairs. It is difficult to obtain actual figures, as requests under the Freedom of Information Act often result in '*not being able to answer your request as presented without exceeding the limit for FOI responses*'.

Freshers fairs are often used by the armed forces to promote University Officer Training Corps, organisations originally introduced in the nineteenth century, primarily for 'patriotic gentlemen' from public schools, then further developed during World War One, and now further championed, with the help of taxpayers' money, as

one of the ways of combating young people's antipathy to involvement in militaristic pursuits.

The University Officer Training Corps (UOTC) make clear their intentions, having previously stated:

'The UOTC has two key roles. Firstly to provide a positive military experience to those Officer-Cadets who ultimately go on to civilian employment, so that they are minded to act as positive advocates for the Army, and secondly to aid in and facilitate the recruiting of regular and reserve officers.'

Corrosive

Current armed forces involvement in colleges gives us insights, sometimes of a harrowing nature, into the potential corrosive impact of militarism in FE.

The Army Foundation College (AFC) in Harrogate is where all 16-year-old, and most 17-year-old, recruits to the army are sent for their initial training. It was set up in part to answer critics who objected to people under 18 going into the army, so it is supposed to be a caring environment.

Staff were accused of 50 cases of assaulting or mistreating teenage

recruits between 2014 and 2017, and it was AFC recruits who were allegedly mistreated by 16 army instructors a few years ago; the trial collapsed because the Military Police hadn't investigated properly, partly because of pressure from so-called 'more urgent enquiries'. At the time, Symon Hill, PPU spokesperson, said:

'the collapse of the Harrogate inquiry was further evidence that the armed forces should not be allowed to police themselves and to try alleged abusers in their own courts. It is sickening to think that they do not regard investigating the alleged abuse of 16-year-olds as a priority. Imagine if teachers accused of abusing 16-year-old pupils were investigated by their school's own police force and tried by a jury of teachers. In a democracy, every organisation must be open to public scrutiny, but the armed forces continue to behave as if they are above the law.'

Lincoln College is host to the Air & Defence College (ADC), and according to the website it provides '*an amazing opportunity to pursue a career with the RAF, or the wider aerospace industry*'.

Apart from students having to undertake 30 hours of work-related activity linked to the Defence industry, participate in 3 days of activity around Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) led by the RAF, participate in RAF base visits and week-long residential developed by the RAF, a couple of things stand out that may ring alarm bells for those of us who espouse the educational principles of PSE's 'Where We Stand' statement. Students on ADC courses will participate in the Industrial Cadets Gold programme

and 'will be assessed against the Basic Recruit Training Course (BRTC) Attitude Goal requirements at Grade A throughout their study'.

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The Industrial Cadets programme was introduced by Prince Charles and states that 'as an Industrial Cadets employer you can have direct influence in the development of skills in young people, helping to build a future talent pool, raise aspirations and careers awareness'.

It's difficult to pin down exactly what BRTC actually consists of, but participants are expected to fully embrace the RAF's core values - values that amongst other things expect loyalty to the Crown, military superiors, subordinates and comrades.

Opportunities

The PPU is very concerned about all these developments, but its position is not just one of opposition, believing that there are other ways to improve educational opportunities and ways of

teaching and learning than those that are being peddled and promoted within an opaque and obscure notion of '*military ethos*'.

There is a long history of student opposition to military involvement in UK universities, and only recently the PPU has supported campaigns in Abertay, Manchester and Essex Universities.

The PPU believes that education should develop critical awareness and the challenging of people's 'commonsense' notions of the world. At its core, educational provision should develop learners' disdain for considering violence as a way of resolving difference at local, national or international levels.

The PPU is the oldest secular pacifist organisation in Britain. Since 1934 it has been campaigning for a warless world, from anti-bombing campaigns during WW2 up to recent protests at remote-controlled military drone assassinations, as well as opposing the militarisation of Remembrance and society today.

The PPU has developed a range of teaching and learning materials, including those relating to Conscientious Objection in WW1, Pacifism, Genocide, Non-violence in WW2 and Remembrance, all of which can be easily accessed at www.ppu.org.uk/.