



House of Commons
Defence Committee

**The Armed Forces
Covenant in Action?
Part 4: Education of
Service Personnel:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Fifth Report of Session
2013–14**

**Seventh Special Report of Session
2013–14**

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The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

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The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the internet at www.parliament.uk/parliament.uk/defcom.

The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in a printed volume. Additional written evidence may be published on the internet only.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Alda Barry (Clerk), Dougie Wands (Second Clerk), Karen Jackson (Audit Adviser), Ian Thomson (Committee Specialist), Christine Randall (Senior Committee Assistant), Rowena Macdonald and Carolyn Bowes (Committee Assistants), and Sumati Sowamber (Committee Support Assistant).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Defence Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5745; the Committee's email address is defcom@parliament.uk. Media inquiries should be addressed to Alex Paterson on 020 7219 1589.

Seventh Special Report

The Defence Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2013–14 on *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel* on 18 July 2013. The Government's response to this Report was received on 17 September 2013. This is appended.

Government Response

The Government welcomes the House of Commons Defence Committee's inquiry into *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel* and the findings set out in the Committee's report published on 18 July 2013. The Government recognises the importance of its commitment which states that Service personnel should expect to receive appropriate training and education for both personal and professional development, including the opportunity to gain nationally recognised qualifications, in order to support them through their Service career and to prepare them for life after leaving the Services. We welcome the Committee's acknowledgement that the training of personnel to deliver operational capability is paramount for the Armed Forces. We also welcome the Committee's belief that the Services provide challenging and constructive education and employment opportunities for young people and its acknowledgement of our apprenticeship expansion.

Building upon the expansion of apprenticeship schemes for new recruits and trainees and the improvements seen in the ratings awarded by Ofsted, the Government acknowledges the Committee's desire to ensure that more establishments providing apprenticeship schemes and courses are rated as 'outstanding'. We also note the need to increase the number of areas where personnel can acquire a civilian qualification that can help their transition to a career outside the Services.

The Government notes the Committee's view that the MoD should encourage more recruits to undertake English and Maths academic qualifications to stand them in good stead for the future.

We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Committee in September 2013 with our progress update against its recommendations.

The Government recognises the detailed work the Committee has undertaken. Our formal response to its recommendations and conclusions is set out below. Where appropriate, we have grouped together related conclusions and recommendations to respond with a single coherent narrative that addresses both the specific recommendation and the wider underpinning arguments. The Committee's findings are highlighted in bold, with the Government's response in plain text. For ease of reference, paragraph numbering follows that in the 'Conclusions and Recommendations' section of the Committee's Report, including the paragraph reference to the report itself.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Requirements for the education of 16 and 17 year old recruits

1. We support the Armed Forces' provision of challenging and constructive education and employment opportunities for young people. But we would welcome further information on why the Army is so dependent on recruiting personnel under the age of 18 years compared to the other two Services, and whether steps are being taken to reduce this dependency. (Paragraph 13)

3. The MoD should carry out a thorough cost-benefit analysis of the policy of recruiting Armed Forces personnel under the age of 18 years old. It should provide us with this cost-benefit analysis. (Paragraph 24)

In offering challenging and constructive education and employment opportunities to those who have reached the school leaving age (16), the Armed Forces are mindful of the requirement to provide a supportive environment which takes account of the care and welfare needs of young people whilst offering them the opportunity to discharge up to the age of 18 years. Intake into the Armed Forces is spread across the eligible age range, however the Government agrees that the Armed Forces should undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the recruitment of U18s and work has been set in hand with the Army to look at this.

Ofsted

2. We welcome the expansion of apprenticeships for new recruits and trainees and the improvements in the ratings given by Ofsted. The Armed Forces should build on these improvements to ensure that more establishments providing apprenticeships are rated as outstanding by Ofsted. The MoD should provide us with its plans to address the areas for further improvement identified by Ofsted and its recommendations. (Paragraph 19)

All establishments involved in the delivery of apprenticeships seek to be graded as 'good' or better by Ofsted. In the light of the recent Ofsted assessment of the Army apprenticeship provision in 2013, the single Services will review their own areas. The Army will incorporate the Ofsted findings into its continuous improvement planning. The MoD is particularly interested in the assessment made relating to instructor capability and will ensure that the ongoing review of instructor training considers the Ofsted findings.

8. We support the use of Ofsted inspections, which bring an independent assessment of the performance of training and education within the Armed Forces, in particular, for recruits and trainees under the age of 18 years. The Armed Forces should share the results of the inspections across establishments to help them improve. (Paragraph 47)

Ofsted reports are published which enables the outcomes from inspection to be shared. Additionally units are encouraged to make contact with each other in order to share good practice. For example those involved in initial military training meet twice annually, each Service taking it in turn to host the event. Earlier this year (12/13 March 2013) the Royal Marines hosted the forum at Lymptone with the stated aim: To provide the opportunity for staff from initial training establishments to share best practice and discuss opportunities for continuous improvement. The next initial training forum is planned for October 2013 to be hosted by the Army at Pirbright.

9. We welcome the continuing improvement in the Ofsted ratings of Armed Forces initial training establishments. The MoD should work to improve all establishments so that they reach the minimum acceptable Ofsted standard of 'good' in a timely fashion. In particular, the MoD should focus its attention on those weaker establishments whose

performance has not improved. The MoD should tell us how it intends to achieve this improvement and in what timescale. (Paragraph 52)

A continuous improvement culture within the Armed Forces initial training environment has developed over time supported by Ofsted inspection. Whilst Ofsted undertake a limited number of inspections each year, the published results are used to inform the wider training and education community including units, training HQs and the MoD. Each Command has responsibility for the delivery and management of its training and education, including monitoring and improving performance, and all would wish to be rated at least 'good' or better. All units are encouraged to learn from areas that are rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' and together with support from their HQs reasonable improvements can be made in a relatively short time. The need for the Command chain to focus its attention and support on those establishments needing the greatest improvement will be reaffirmed. The Ofsted inspection programme is risk based and does include revisits to check on improvements to assess the impact of change but the timing of such revisits is solely a matter for Ofsted.

Basic level entry requirements

4. If as the MoD states, it has to recruit personnel at whatever level of attainment is available, then it should boost remedial action when recruitment entry standards are particularly low. In the light of changes brought about by Future Force 2020, it may be that recruiting personnel with higher levels of attainment would better meet the future needs of the Armed Forces. The MoD should identify how it might raise the basic entry level and still recruit sufficient personnel. (Paragraph 27)

Literacy and numeracy support

5. The Armed Forces have a good record of improving the literacy and numeracy of recruits and trainees who enter the Armed Forces with low levels of attainment. We welcome the introduction of literacy and numeracy support throughout Phase 1 training. The MoD should consolidate this recent improvement by reviewing their support for literacy and numeracy to ensure that it meets best practice as set out by Ofsted. (Paragraph 35)

6. Whilst we recognise that some recruits may not have done well in their previous academic careers and may not be eager to take further academic exams, the MoD should encourage more recruits to undertake English and Maths GCSEs which would stand them in good stead for future employment. (Paragraph 37)

Basic educational qualifications are just one of the requirements that must be fulfilled in order to be eligible to apply to join the Armed Forces, which have a need to recruit from across the educational spectrum seen within wider society. As the composition and role of the Forces, and the nature of the tasks they perform change over time individual personnel requirements are adjusted. Entry standards are set by each Service and specialisation, and are kept under review to capture changing requirements. Whilst Future Force 2020 may modify the entry requirements over time the Armed Forces will continue to develop specialist skills and enable the attainment of role related qualifications across more than 300 specialist employment areas for the more than 14,000 young people we recruit every year.

Support for functional numeracy and literacy skills commences during phase 1 training and Ofsted believe the instructor has a vital role to play in delivering improvement to this area. The review of instructor training is ongoing and will take account of the good practice findings for teaching and learning from the Ofsted reports ‘Removing barriers to literacy’ and ‘Tackling the challenges of low numeracy skills in young people and adults’.

The Armed Forces also continue to promote personal development through learning credit schemes which help personnel complete recognised qualifications, including English and Maths GCSEs, to support their career development in-Service and employment prospects beyond Service. Whilst this encouragement remains, it must be accepted that not all personnel are able to reach higher academic standards.

Defence instructors

7. The MoD should ensure that all instructors complete the ‘Defence Train the Trainer’ course before they take up their appointments. The MoD should also institute a system of observation and feedback to all instructors in line with the recommendations made by Ofsted in its recent work for the MoD. In response to this Report, the MoD should set out its plan and timetable to implement these recommendations. (Paragraph 42)

Following the Wolf and Lingfield reports and the subsequent review of further education and skills teaching qualifications, the Defence requirements for instructor training are being revised to ensure that we remain in-step with emerging practice in the Further Education sector.

Learning Credits

10. In response to this Report, the MoD should inform us of the results of its investigation into the fall in the take-up of Standard Learning Credits. If appropriate, the MoD should encourage greater take-up amongst Armed Forces personnel. (Paragraph 57)

We continue to publicise and guide personnel on the merits of the Standard Learning Credits scheme and to ensure that the scheme remains accessible. We will continue doing this and will also seek to identify ways for increasing the take-up in conjunction with the single Services,

Funding and the time available for education

11. The MoD should not reduce funding for education as a result of the 2013 Spending Review. The MoD should promote education in the Armed Forces and encourage the chain of command to find time for personnel to engage in such activities. (Paragraph 62)

The Committee’s support for the continued funding for education is noted. Promotion of the education and training opportunities offered to Armed Forces personnel remains critical in the development of operational capability, is important to the chain of command as a means of enabling retention and supports successful transition to a civilian career.

Higher education as part of career development for senior leaders

12. We are persuaded that, as well as recruiting graduates as officers, the provision of higher education for those in command in the Armed Forces is essential and should not be reduced by the MoD as a cost-cutting exercise. The MoD should provide us with the results of the Review of the Higher Command and Staff Course when completed and the response of the Defence Training Board to its recommendations. We will return to the subject of higher education in the Armed Forces, in particular, the need to educate personnel in strategic decision-making, as part of our work on Future Force 2020. (Paragraph 69)

Noting the Committee's view of the essential nature of higher education for those in command, the MoD agrees to inform the Committee of the outcome of its review and the response of the Defence Training Board in respect of the Higher Command and Staff Course.

13. With the increased role envisaged for reservists in Future Force 2020, it is essential that the Armed Forces make Reserve Service as attractive as possible for the reservists and their employers. We see the education accreditation project as an important component in encouraging people to join the Reserves. The MoD should provide us with the results of this project and its implementation plans. (Paragraph 71)

The Accreditation Project is continuing to evolve with good progress being made by the Armed Forces, particularly in generic military skills and values and 'Command, Leadership and Management', areas which carry the greatest shared appeal to both individual reservists and their employers. The MoD will inform the Committee of the outcome and implementation plans stemming from this project.

The provision of civilian qualifications

14. Given that most Armed Forces personnel will need to have at least one further career, we support the MoD's policy of supporting the provision of civilian qualifications. We recommend that the MoD identify the potential for more pilot projects with civilian employers to develop the provision of civilian qualifications and to ensure that vital skills paid for by the MoD are not lost to the country. The MoD should tell us the results of its pilot projects on the training of paramedics. (Paragraph 75)

The Army pilot programme to provide professional recognition for its Combat Medical Technicians (CMT) is run in conjunction with Cumbria University. Existing CMTs are able to apply for a place on this programme to attain a Level 4 award in Pre-hospital Emergency Care, which bridges the gap between their military medic training and civilian professional standards. Currently 123 personnel have been selected for this training pathway and of these 81 have completed the programme and gained the Level 4 qualification. The results for the remaining 42 will be available in September 2013 and April 2014. A further cohort of 60 personnel is planned to go through this training pathway, starting in October 2013. Lessons from this pilot will inform further Defence Healthcare Education and Training.

The Army is also running a pilot programme to train individuals to achieve State Registered Paramedic status through a Level 5 Foundation degree in paramedic practice. A cohort of 30 students, who have achieved the Level 4 award in Pre-hospital Emergency Care, is currently partway through this 18 month pilot programme. This is due to end in September 2014 with a further cohort of 30 planned to start in June 2014.

Resettlement prospects

15. Most Armed Forces personnel do well in gaining employment after leaving the Services. Many employers find ex-Armed Forces personnel very employable. In particular, employers value their disciplined approach, determination and work ethic. We encourage the MoD to continue its support for the resettlement of Armed Forces personnel, particularly in this time of redundancies from the Armed Forces. (Paragraph 80)

The Government notes the Committee's observation and will continue to make, and pursue, opportunities with industry in order to optimise the value and effect of resettlement.

Conclusion

16. We recognise that training personnel to deliver operational capability is paramount for the Armed Forces. However, we believe that the Armed Forces also provide challenging and constructive education and employment opportunities for young people. We welcome the expansion of Apprenticeships for those joining the Service. Ofsted reports that performance in most training establishments is good. But we would wish to see an improvement so that all establishments are rated at least good and more establishments, apprenticeships schemes and courses are rated as outstanding. (Paragraph 81)

17. Continuing education for serving personnel is important, both for their own career development and for retention. As personnel will almost certainly go on to a further career after they leave the Services, it is also important that training leads to civilian qualifications wherever possible. We welcome work by the Armed Forces to increase the number of areas where personnel can acquire a civilian qualification and would like to see this work further extended. (Paragraph 82)

The MoD is one of the largest providers of apprenticeships in the UK. The Department recognises the benefit of external inspection by bodies such as Ofsted in promoting sustained improvement. Inspection against the common inspection framework of both the apprenticeship provision and the care and welfare provided to recruits ensures that assessment and action planning is undertaken within Units and training HQs. Both internal and external audit and inspection have enabled a greater understanding and the development of a continuous improvement culture within Armed Forces training and education establishments who all aspire to be rated as 'outstanding' in their provision.

Wherever it is practical and sensible to do so, the Armed Forces will continue to pursue the accreditation of military training with recognised civilian qualifications and to support personal development through such initiatives as the Learning Credits schemes. With approximately 40 000 achievements of different kinds every year from Functional

Skills to Masters Degrees, from Apprenticeships to personal development and across every phase of a Service career and beyond, the Armed Forces recognise the importance of training and education in developing the human capital that represents our key asset.