

Written evidence submitted to the Education Select Committee Inquiry: The Purpose and Value of Education in England.

1. Summary

- 1.1 A key purpose of education is to connect with the spirit of enquiry within each child. True education draws out the wisdom which will guide children to seek the truth - to look at different points of view and weigh up evidence. This should be evidenced by the exploration of moral topics and opportunities to live out values, including peace and human rights, throughout their school life.
- 1.2 This purpose is being undermined by an increasing promotion and involvement of the armed forces within schools. This apparent policy has lacked public scrutiny but raises serious ethical, qualitative and even constitutional questions which require proper debate.
- 1.3 We recommend a re-evaluation of the priority given to armed forces involvement in education, allowing schools to instead promote instead a spirit of enquiry and balance in schools.
- 1.4 We recommend that peace education be strongly supported in schools, having been neglected by the UK Government despite recommendations from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the success of a range of peace education projects often led by the voluntary sector such as Peacemakers¹ in Birmingham or Leap Confronting Conflict².

2. About Quakers in Britain

- 2.1 This submission comes from the national umbrella body of Quakers in Britain³. It focuses on our concern that the increasing role of the armed forces in schools in England is undermining the purpose of education, and upon the need for peace education to be mainstreamed. The select committee will also have received a submission from another Quaker group, Quaker Values in Education.
- 2.2 This submission is informed by our belief that everyone is equal in the eyes of God and by the experience of members of the Quaker community. Quakers' concern about education has been tested, and response has evolved, over many decades, rooted in our faith. Quakers understand that every human being is given the gifts to pursue truth in the universe and education lies at the heart of improving the human lived experience.
- 2.3 Quakers have been actively engaged in education for over 300 years. We believed from the outset that education can nurture 'that of God' in everyone, and should therefore be available to all - girls as well as boys. It also meant that education, like faith, should be relevant to daily life, and put to good use. Quaker testimonies to equality, truth and integrity, community and peace permeate this understanding. Equality inspires an effort to develop the potential of every student, and emphasises respect for the ideas of everyone. Truth and integrity entail respect for evidence, rigorous inquiry, and open minds. This motivates respect for everyone, non-violent approaches to disagreements, and support for the vulnerable.

¹ Peacemakers, www.peacemakers.org.uk

² Leap Confronting Conflict, www.leapconfrontingconflict.org.uk

³ This submission is written by the Peace Education Programme of Quaker Peace & Social Witness, which forms part of the centrally managed work of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. Registered with charity number 1127633. Around 23,000 people attend 478 Quaker meetings in Britain.

- 2.4 Informed by the Peace Testimony, Quakers have also long been proponents and pioneers of what is called “peace education”.

3. The purpose of education

- 3.1 A spirit of enquiry in education can help children and young people be truth seekers. A meaningful pursuit of truth needs balance and honesty about opposing views, as reflected in the 1996 Education Act⁴.
- 3.2 Engagement in moral and topical issues should not be narrow or reductive, but rooted in a context of values. It is through active engagement that values can flourish. Citizenship and Personal Social, Health and Economic education can both contribute greatly to young people’s ability to engage with the world around them and require more significant support.
- 3.3 This is reflected in Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that “education must develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child’s respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.”⁵
- 3.4 We therefore welcome the continuing value placed on, Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development in schools in England, though practical guidance from government is haphazard.
- 3.5 Values flow from lived experience. Hence moral and spiritual questions need to be encountered as part of young people’s journey to seek truth about themselves and about the world; they should explore both ethical and political issues relevant to their lives as well as understanding the truth of others’ experience.
- 3.6 Social relationships in schools should be built on truth and fairness. Purely punitive responses to conflict in schools do not model the skills young people will need as democratic citizens. Young people should experience the richness of varied cultures to understand what they think and feel about them.
- 3.7 The bringing together of these different dimensions are enhanced by the corpus of practices widely described as “peace education”. This covers layers beginning within ourselves and emotional and mental wellbeing, extending outwards interpersonal conflict and relationships⁶ and peace and justice in the wider world. Education is enriched where conflict resolution and restorative practice are practised in schools, allowing young people to exercise the values of peace in their day to day lives.
- 3.8 Seeking truth in these ways depends upon good teaching, which cannot be reduced to technique or a narrow focus on attainment. Good teaching comes from the teacher’s integrity and ability to connect with students and connect them with the subject. This is best evidenced by the wellbeing of teachers and students and the quality of relationships in the classroom.

4 Concerns about the militarisation of our education system

⁴ Education Act (1996) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents>

⁵ United Nations (1989) http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf

⁶ Bower, Sue; Leimdorfer, Tom (1984): ‘The personal roots of conflict and education for peace, 24.54, Quaker Faith & Practice’

Quakers in Britain (January 2016)

- 4.1 Both the purpose and quality of education are under threat from a disproportionate military involvement.
- 4.2 Under successive Labour, coalition and Conservative governments, the armed forces have been given an increasing role in education. Since 2011, this agenda has received £95 million in new funding. This emphasis from the Department for Education and beyond is additional to the existing youth engagement pursued by the Ministry of Defence.
- 4.3 This is evidently a deliberate departure⁷ from the limited role previously played by the armed forces in schools. Until recently, most armed forces activity in schools was coordinated locally between individual schools and recruitment units or cadet associations rather than as a matter of national strategy.
- 4.4 The shift in agenda has led to the policy and funding prioritisation for cadets in state schools, 'troops to teachers', 'military ethos' providers and frequent visits to schools by armed forces personnel. In some cases, arms manufacturers and the military are sponsoring University Technical Colleges and influencing what they teach⁸. We have received reports of primary school children being given replica guns whilst taking part in armed forces activity days and of older students in the combined cadet forces shooting at human shaped silhouettes.
- 4.5 This is counter to the purpose of education as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention), the recommendations given by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to the UK Government and the content of CRC General Comment No. 1 which specifies that education must promote non-violence in school and ensure that children have the skills to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner⁹.
- 4.6 As the military becomes ubiquitous in young people's lives, balance in the exploration of moral questions becomes harder. A one-sided presentation such as that seen in *The British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014*¹⁰ impairs young people's ability to evaluate the ethical questions arising from the role of the armed forces in society.
- 4.7 These ethical questions are for all democratic citizens, and would be an excellent topic for the citizenship curriculum. They should be duly explored with the education system in a way that allows young people to make their own moral assessment.
- 4.8 The growing partnership between the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Education raises constitutional questions. The armed forces are separate from government in the UK for the sake of democracy; the military works for the civilian government not the other way round. Moreover, the UK government

⁷ Ministry of Defence, (2008) 'The Government's Response to the Report of Inquiry into National Recognition of our Armed Forces'

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/28287/govt_response_recognition_armed_forces.pdf

⁸ South Wiltshire UTC (2015) explains that the "The organisations supporting the UTC are some of the biggest employers in the area such as QinetiQ, Public Health England, the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust, Chemring, Serco... They will work with the UTC to plan what we should teach and how to make the learning come to life with real world examples." <http://www.wiltshire-utc.co.uk/who-will-teach-me/>

⁹ Forces Watch (2015), *Peace education and the promotion of the armed forces in UK schools*, <http://www.forceswatch.net/resources/peace-education-and-promotion-armed-forces-uk-schools>

¹⁰ This resource, launched by the Ministry of Defence and supported by the Department for Education and Prime Minister's Office was promoted to all schools in England in the Department of Education's Autumn 2014 termly email. To see a critical review of the resource visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wB9JD6P1RCM>

states it does not prescribe what schools should teach¹¹. The increasing influence of the armed forces in education blurs these distinctions.

- 4.9 Cross-party support for citizenship education was crucial to its acceptance by the political establishment, school governors and parents. Once its neutrality is compromised, the subject itself will be less than worthless and will actively undermine the democratic basis of our constitutional democracy. Don Rowe, Co-Founder of the Citizenship Foundation and former teacher observes: *"In the UK we used to have a system of education which was 'at one remove' from the government and one of the reasons for this was precisely to prevent the possibility of authoritarianism through control of the education system."*¹²
- 4.10 At the heart of military ethos is following orders without question¹³. This contradicts a central purpose of education - the fostering of enquiry and critical thought. As Brian Lightman of the Association of School and College Leaders points out, "A 'military ethos' is not a learning ethos"¹⁴.
- 4.11 Indeed we know the Ministry of Defence's main priority is *not* learning, having in its own words identified "recruitment" and "awareness... to ensure the continued support of the population" as the principal outcomes of military engagement with young people¹⁵. These goals undermine the purpose of education and do not belong in schools.
- 4.12 The Welsh Government is sufficiently concerned to accept recommendations calling for new *'guidance in relation to inviting the armed forces into schools take account of their unique nature as a career and the need to encourage an open and honest exchange of views with pupils about their role'*¹⁶, a concern that equally applies in England.
- 4.13 Britain has a proud history in terms of leading the way in the recognition of freedom of conscience on issues like military service. For many parents, armed forces activities will contravene ethical and religious beliefs about the sanctity of life.
- 4.14 Secondary school Principal Chris Gabbett puts it well, writing: *"Adolescence is a time for learning, questioning, receiving pastoral and academic guidance and growing as inquisitive, confident global citizens. Militarisation by stealth is not the best way to support our children, and neither parents nor school leaders have had a say in its validity"*.

5 Recommendation: Re-evaluating militarisation of education

- 5.1 We recommend a re-evaluation of the disproportionate financial and policy emphasis on increasing the role of the armed forces in education.
- 5.2 When budgetary support to schools and young people is available, we call on the government to consider a genuine range of interventions that can help fulfil

¹¹ UK Government report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2014)

¹² http://forceswatch.net/sites/default/files/ForcesWatch_response_British_Armed_Forces_Learning_Resource.pdf

¹³ "I swear by almighty God that I will be faithful and...obey all orders ... of the generals and officers set over me." The Oath of Allegiance of the British Army, Values and Standards of the British Army, January 2008

¹⁴ Lightman, Brian, Association of School and College Leaders (2015), in *'The Unseen March'* <https://youtu.be/OgJ83yYIR1g>

¹⁵ Ministry of Defence (2011) 'Youth Engagement Review'.

¹⁶ ForcesWatch (2015) Forces Watch welcomes 'Welsh Government stance over military visits to schools' <http://www.forceswatch.net/news/forceswatch-welcomes-welsh-government-stance-over-military-visits-schools>

their purpose for young people, and to interrogate the assumption that a military solution is superior or even appropriate for fostering a spirit of enquiry.

- 5.3 With respect to school visits, we call on England to follow the Welsh Government's groundbreaking step and prepare clear guidance to schools in terms of armed forces visits and how to ensure more transparency and balance in terms of the role of the armed forces in society.
- 5.4 Where they take place, school visits by the armed forces should also be balanced by children learning about different perspectives which promote nonviolence in accordance with the 1996 Education Act.
- 5.5 Children should receive accurate and rounded information about the military, both in lessons and careers advice. For example, children should be aware that, if recruited at 16, they face the greatest risks once deployed.¹⁷
- 5.6 Where armed forces activities are offered, schools should be encouraged to consult with parents and governors to allow debate of any increase in the role of the armed forces.

6 Recommendation: Prioritising peace education

- 6.1 Few would question the value in educating for peace, but peace education should therefore receive due emphasis. As observed by Quaker educators Tom Leimdorfer and Sue Bowers, "the way in which young people learn to respond to conflict will have a pervasive effect on the quality of their personal lives and the prospects for society as a whole."¹⁸ This principle still needs prioritisation.
- 6.2 We call on the UK Government to implement the recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). These include intensifying its efforts to tackle bullying and violence in schools, including through teaching human rights, peace and tolerance, developing and implementing training programmes to promote the values of peace and respect for human rights, and including the subject of peace education and human rights as a fundamental subject in the education system, in collaboration with civil society organisations.¹⁹
- 6.3 Teachers should be more fully supported in their inward intellectual, spiritual and emotional journeys, empowering them with the security to make themselves vulnerable, to enable the creation of the conditions for learning.
- 6.4 Where schools improve the quality of education through peace education, be it through mindfulness, peer mediation or critical exploration of moral issues, government has a role in promoting and sharing these models.

Contact Details

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk/CEO | RC@quaker.org.uk | 020 7663 1122

Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London N1 2BJ

¹⁷ Child Soldiers International (2013) 'Youngest army recruits pay highest price in Afghanistan, new report shows' http://www.child-soldiers.org/news_reader.php?id=700

¹⁸ Leimdorfer, Tom and Bowers, Sue (1990) Quaker Faith & Practice Fifth Edition, 24:54

¹⁹ 4 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008), 'Concluding observations on the report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict', UN Doc: CRC/C/OPAC/GBR/CO/1