

Further militarisation of UK schools

By Joe Mount
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This month the UK government boosted by £5 million its Military Skills and Ethos in Schools programme, aimed at instilling military values in children.

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition claims the schemes, run by former soldiers, will “build character” by developing “resilience”, “respect” and “self-confidence”. It targets children from disadvantaged backgrounds who struggle at school.

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan said, “For pupils who may have faced challenges or difficulties in their personal life, these initiatives run by former armed services personnel can offer a sense of greater aspiration and can help build the skills and confidence they need to go on to good jobs and successful futures.”

Morgan replaced Michael Gove in this summer’s cabinet reshuffle. Gove was widely hated by teachers and Morgan was brought in to give the illusion of change before next May’s general election. In reality, she will continue where Gove left off. She supports the rapid privatisation of the education system and has publicly defended the right of parents to physically punish their children.

The £4.8 million in extra funding is for projects across England, designed and run by former armed services personnel. Challenger Troop and Skill Force were each allocated £1 million, with smaller sums for other projects.

Challenger Troop, a company linked to the cadets, operates full-time uniformed programmes for seven to eighteen-year-olds. CEO Simon Dean said, “Our programmes are underpinned by a set of very clear ‘Values and Standards’ based on those adopted by the British Army.”

Over 52,000 children participated in their projects at 460 primary and secondary schools last year.

Skill Force was set up by the army in 2000. Its board of directors includes representatives of the Church of England and investment bank J.P. Morgan. The firm operates at over 150 schools and offered 3,291 places on year-long courses in 2012.

One million pounds were given to Commando Joe’s, an

American company operating in the North West of England. It targets schools in some of Britain’s most deprived areas. The firm uses ex-soldiers to coordinate group exercises such as assault courses and military drills with children wearing military uniform. They also conduct “personal development activities” such as mentoring.

Commando Joe’s director, ex-soldier Mike Hamilton, said, “We’re so pleased to receive this extra funding as it means we can take Commando Joe’s to more schools. We’ve been based mainly in the North West so far, but now we can expand our operations across the country.”

The Military Skills and Ethos in Schools program was set up in 2012 with four projects nationally. It now reaches tens of thousands of children in Britain. The government explained: “More than 300 primary schools, secondary schools and pupil referral units are now being served by these providers with more than 8,000 of the most challenging pupils already taking part.”

The programme encompasses other schemes such as “Troops to Teachers”, which fast-tracks ex-soldiers into teaching, and the Combined Cadet Force.

Two million pounds have been spent on Troops to Teachers so far for its “start-up costs”, according to the Department for Education, with over 100 veterans without appropriate qualifications now working as teachers. Last month, it received a further £9 million to expand the project by 2018.

The Combined Cadet Force was given £1 million this summer to fund 100 new units at state schools by next year.

The government insists they have hard evidence that “military ethos” pilot schemes have “turned around” the lives of many children. However, their figures were produced by social research firm TNS BMRB, who openly stated their research was “small-scale” and “not designed as, nor intended to be, a rigorous evaluation of the Military Ethos AP projects of the programme as a whole”.

It goes without saying that the “values” of the army are

not designed to encourage learning and produce cultured individuals. The reality of the “military ethos” is strict discipline, unquestioning obedience—and being trained to kill.

Further questions are raised by the type of individuals being drafted in to run these projects. Academic Janet Batsleer warned of the “levels of rape (one a week) and sexual assault reported within the services. High levels of violent crime, including domestic assault, as well as homelessness, alcoholism and drug abuse are a matter of record.”

Many soldiers endure systematic abuse, humiliation and brutal initiation rituals during army training. Many former soldiers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health problems caused by their harrowing experience of neo-colonial war.

The opposition Labour Party fully backs the government’s measures. Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt said, “We know that cadets and having military involvement in schools and good role models can often be a good source of character development, so it’s an interesting project.”

In 2012, Hunt’s predecessor Stephen Twigg called for schools to be imbued with “Service Ethos”, echoing Tory policy. The government wants to discipline youth to accept a situation when they leave school and enter a stagnant jobs market. Morgan told Parliament that youth must “be able to make a compelling pitch for a job and to be able to bounce back if things don’t work out”.

Former Conservative Party adviser James O’Shaughnessy told the *Daily Telegraph* the measures were necessary to prepare youth for “competition for jobs, growing incidences of mental illness and unprecedented levels of debt”.

The British ruling elite responded to the 2011 inner-city youth riots in part by demanding the militarisation of the education system. In 2012, Prime Minister David Cameron backed proposals by think-tank ResPublica to use military schools as a “solution to the social ills that became manifest at the time of the riots”. (See: “UK government supports plans for military schools”)

Although the pilot scheme for military free schools fell through earlier this year, the government remains committed to the broader militarisation of the education system. (See: “Sixteen-year-olds recruited to British Army”)

Young people in Britain face mass unemployment, while education and social services are being decimated as part of the destruction of the welfare state. Instead of

being offered the prospect of a decent future and the support of specially trained youth workers, vulnerable children with impoverished backgrounds will face barracks conditions, preparing them for life as subservient workers willing to accept inferior working conditions.

The ruling class is also seeking to step up military recruitment. According to the Ministry of Defence Youth Engagement Review 2011, the main goals are the “recruitment of the young men and women that are key to future sustainment and success” and to “raise awareness of the Armed Forces role ... to ensure the continued support of the population”.

Former head of Army recruitment Colonel David Allfrey told the *New Statesman* , “Our new model is about raising awareness, and that takes a ten-year span. It starts with a seven-year-old boy seeing a parachutist at an air show and thinking, ‘That looks great.’ From then the army is trying to build interest by drip, drip, drip”.

The armed forces “youth engagement” budget is £250 million annually and £176 million is spent on the cadets. The armed forces made over 11,000 visits to state schools in 2011-12, according to *Forces Watch*. More than one quarter of the armed forces’ new recruits are below age eighteen.

A century after the outbreak of the First World War, preparations are being made to turn a new generation into cannon fodder for future imperialist wars.

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