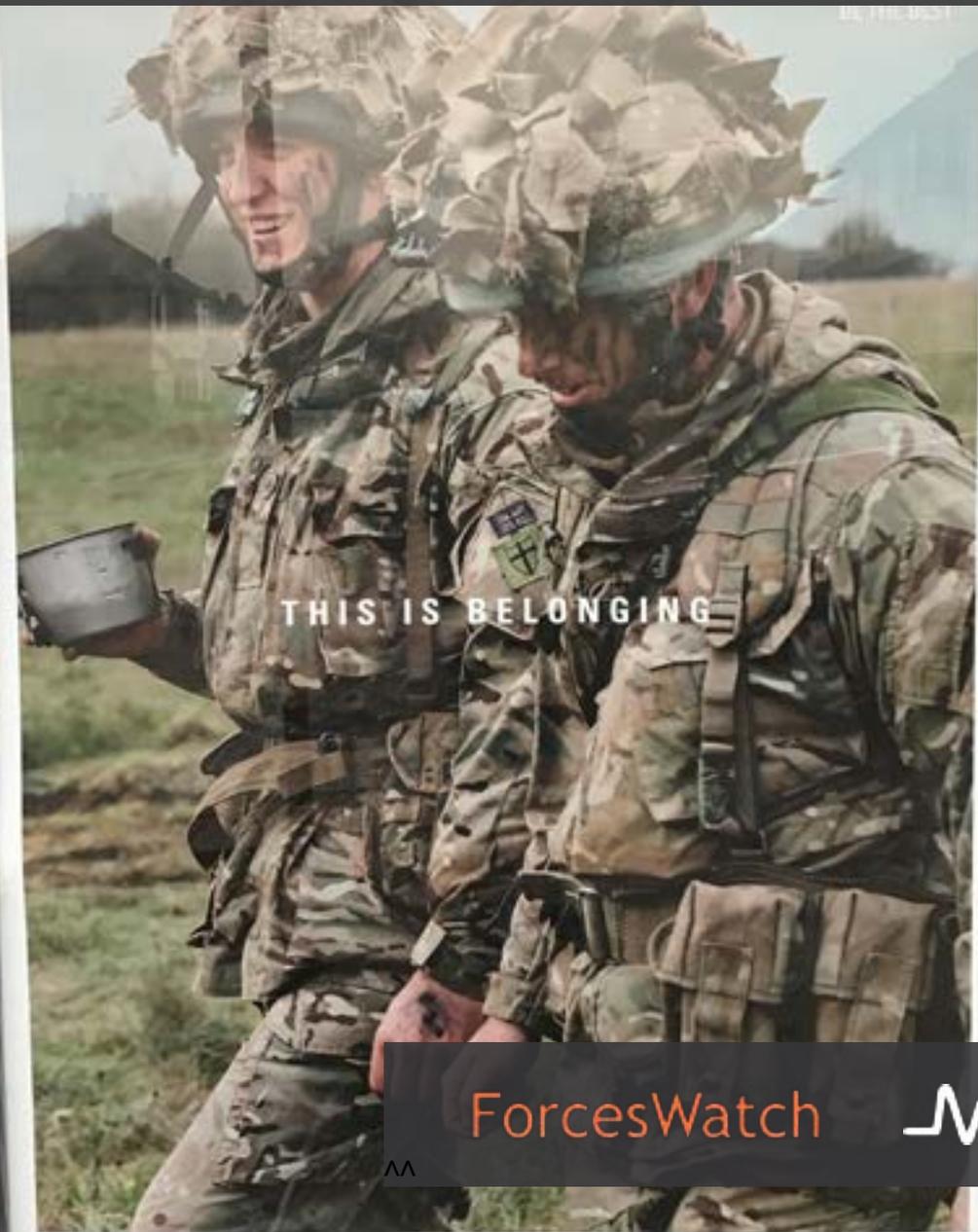




Selling the Military

a critical analysis of contemporary recruitment marketing in the UK

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About ForcesWatch

ForcesWatch is an independent research and campaigning organisation which scrutinises armed forces recruitment practices in the UK and challenges efforts to embed militarist values in civilian society.

About Medact

Medact is a global health charity that uses evidence-based campaigns to support health workers to take action on structural barriers to health equity and justice, in an effort to bring about a world in which everyone can access their human right to health.

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Executive Summary

This report discusses how military marketing campaigns create powerful messages that attract young people. The armed forces and the marketing agencies who work on the campaigns employ an understanding of adolescent psychology that works to embed positive ideas about military life, exploiting developmental vulnerabilities and social inequality.

The report draws together findings from three avenues of inquiry – author analysis; contributions from academics, health campaigners and veterans; and target audience reflections.

Contemporary military marketing takes place within the context of what is perceived as a ‘crisis’ of recruitment that has come about through a variety of social, demographic and policy factors. At the same time, research into health issues associated with adolescent recruitment to the armed forces has deepened our understanding of what could be damaging for young people within a military environment.

Understanding of marketing messages and practices which target adolescent psychologies more generally also informs our thinking about how the military create powerful messages that are potentially very attractive to young people. The scale and reach of armed forces marketing, and the resources put into developing highly resonant brands and messaging, and efficient targeting through numerous media channels, means that this has become an effective tool for capturing potential recruits.

The report describes the videos which are at the core of current advertising campaigns of the British Army, Royal Navy and RAF - *This is Belonging*, *Made in the Royal Navy* and *No Ordinary Job* respectively (see Annex).

Three traits of contemporary armed forces marketing stand out.

1. The armed forces are *the* means by which we can ‘be the best’ and by which our best selves will be ‘made’.
2. That the camaraderie of the group – the sense of ‘belonging’ – in the military is unique.
3. The military is a place where individual self-fulfilment can be pursued without concern for the wider purpose of military institutions.
4. The Army’s *This is Belonging* campaign in particular has caught public attention, partly because of the novelty of the adverts – introducing influential filmic and animated aesthetics – and also because parts of the campaign attempt to address concerns that potential recruits may have. The 2019 *Your Army Needs You* adverts played on more divisive themes, and can be seen as perpetuating harmful stereotypes. The Army’s high-profile launches suggest not only a willingness to push boundaries, and even to court controversy, but also to have an influence in society that is far wider than the recruitment target audience.

The *Made in the Royal Navy* and RAF’s *No Ordinary Job* adverts target not only those attracted to adventure, but also those who want to ‘better themselves’. The armed forces are presented as the escape route from a lack of opportunity towards the achievement of self-fulfilment and respect.

Exploring the key elements and messages, we have identified five main themes from across the recruitment campaigns that may be cause for concern:

1. ***Life in the armed forces is portrayed as superior to civilian life***
In enabling belonging and self-development, the armed forces are depicted as superior to civilian occupations. This constructs an idealised image of life in the armed forces for potential recruits.
2. ***They gloss over the reality of an armed forces career***
There is an absence of information on the risks, legal obligations and reality of military life in the promotional material relating to military careers. Far from ‘having it all’ as a number of the adverts depict, evidence shows that levels of satisfaction and morale are not high in the armed forces. Retention is a significant issue, and problems associated with leaving the forces can mean that veterans struggle to readjust to civilian life.
3. ***Diversity is tokenised and groups are often stereotyped***
Despite being an important dimension of the advertising briefs, the Army has a tokenistic approach to diversity,

with a focus on male bonding. While the Navy and RAF are more successful at creating a sense of equality, the adverts tend to echo and exploit existing stereotypes, while failing to acknowledge the continuing issue of diversity in the armed forces.

4. *Emphasising camaraderie exploits adolescent vulnerability and masks feelings of isolation within the armed forces*

Using 'belonging' and camaraderie as key selling points capitalises on vulnerabilities that young people may have due to social isolation and conformity involved in the formation of a military identity can lead to people hiding aspects of their personal identity. Ultimately, many who join feel out of place and leave; the adjustment back into civilian life, to a state of not 'belonging', can be hard or impossible for veterans. Loneliness and isolation also affect the serving armed forces community.

5. *Promoting self-development in the context of conflict depoliticises military purpose*

The focus on seeking individual fulfilment in the context of conflict or preparing for conflict distracts from an awareness that military action is inherently political. For some recruits, a lack of awareness about the nature of military life and the moral dilemmas that military action poses will have important consequences in later life. For society more generally, we must not let narratives of development, fulfilment, and diversity distract from the scrutiny of the legitimacy of military action and the awareness of all its consequences. We must also be aware how the marketing of the military acts as propaganda to influence the perception of the armed forces, and of military action, among the general public.

Military marketing thus constructs a version of reality based on what will market well, which may bear little resemblance to the lived experience of serving personnel. In particular, recruitment advertising glosses over the moral complexity of serving in the armed forces. Moral injury has gained recognition as psychological harm resulting from an act of transgression of one's moral code during military service; the concept of moral exploitation explores how service personnel must shoulder the risk and burden of undertaking morally-dubious tasks on behalf of the military institutions and the state. Moreover, the exploitation is heightened given the targeting of young people whose decision to join up is likely to be influenced by their socio-economic or age-related demographic or other vulnerability factors.

Creating a new framework for assessing military marketing

Recent developments in understanding are important for rethinking the impact and appropriateness of military marketing:

- Adolescence as an extended period of neurological development, creating a 'window of vulnerability' that affects individuals' behaviour, decision-making and response to stress. This is particularly acute for those who have faced adversity in childhood and can have long-term consequences.
- Mental and physical health issues associated with military training and service. Very young recruits and those who have experienced childhood adversity are particularly exposed and susceptible, even if they are not deployed until aged 18.
- Vulnerability of certain groups to sophisticated marketing strategies and need for regulation and oversight to ensure young people are making fully informed decisions.
- The development of processes and resources to help public authorities protect the long-term well-being of young people who have experienced childhood adversity and the rights and well-being of young people in general.

The decision to enlist in the armed services has life-changing consequences, yet there is little debate about whether or not it is appropriate to target audiences on the basis of their youth and other vulnerabilities, including socioeconomic status. We argue that this new understanding must be used to inform an examination of military recruitment advertising – assessing it not just in terms of success in attracting applicants, but also by ethical and health criteria, in the same way as addictive substances and junk food.

Concern about the vulnerability of the youngest recruits and the need for young people to be in an environment that is conducive to their development are fundamental to the measures outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which address children (under 18s) and armed conflict. In 2016 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child again recommended that the UK reconsider its active policy of recruiting children into the armed forces. This

call has been echoed by several organisations working in the field of children's rights and welfare, in addition to other parliamentary and civil society organisations.

This debate must develop if we are to prioritise the best interests of young people over those of military institutions, and if we are to move away from the 'recruitment at all costs' mindset that currently prevails amongst policymakers, in the context of the 'recruitment crisis' narrative.

Recommendations

The following principles should be adopted in relation to military recruitment practices in general:

1. Prioritise the best interests of young people over recruitment needs of the armed forces.
2. Recognise the link between early recruitment, childhood adversity and negative health outcomes.

We make the following recommendations:

1. The UK should raise the minimum age of armed forces recruitment to 18 in order to safeguard many of the most vulnerable recruits.
2. Critical perspectives of military marketing campaigns should be disseminated to educators and others in a position to guide young people.
3. Policy makers should recommend measures to ensure that marketing practices are developmentally appropriate and accountable to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.
4. Policy makers should consider regulation and guidance to ensure greater transparency in armed forces recruitment information, including accessible and detailed information for potential recruits and their parents/guardians that address issues not presented in recruitment adverts.
5. More research should be conducted on how marketing campaigns impact young people and the most effective ways to increase protection against potentially unhealthy marketing messages.

Introduction

Pupils in British secondary schools often learn about the ways propaganda has been employed with respect to the domestic population, particularly during World War One. These recruitment adverts encouraging people to enlist in the war are often critiqued for their deception and for stoking up nationalism and militarism.

Although propaganda is commonly understood as biased information, in particular that promotes a political cause, the Government Communication Service (GCS) uses the term in this description of the history of the organisation as if it is uncontroversial:

*'2017 marked the centenary of centralised government communications in the United Kingdom. In February 1917, a memo submitted to the War Cabinet urged the unification of hitherto disjointed propaganda functions under one directorate with ministerial oversight. From an initial wartime contingency, the ideal of an integrated communications department has evolved through departmental guises, changing political and diplomatic, wartime and peacetime priorities into the Government Communications Service of today.'*¹

Yet contemporary military recruitment advertising campaigns are not readily referred to as propaganda. While military marketing has changed in many ways since world war one, in many others it is similar, and an examination of it is warranted given the central role it plays in leading young people towards a career in the armed forces and the subsequent impact this can have on their health and well-being.

Strand and Berndtsson argue that military recruitment in western liberal democracies, which now conduct expeditionary 'wars of choice' rather than defensive 'wars of necessity' has become marketised.² Recruitment the entirely voluntary force is now focused on what the military can offer to individuals enlisting, rather than what the military itself does. They are not attempting to sell themselves so much as selling 'the dreams of the consumers.'

This consumer-led military recruitment creates a number of concerns. One relates to the gap between what is advertised and reality. Since recruitment discourses focus on the 'dreams and aspirations of the individual soldiers and the societies from which they are recruited', rather than 'organisational realities or the needs of the armed forces', there is an inherent risk that soldiers will find a gap between the reality of military life and what they were sold in the recruitment campaigns.

Another concern relates to the ethics of using war and violence as a means to personal development and fulfilment. A career in the military should be understood not simply as a personal and voluntary act, but as 'an expression of power and politics.' This is to say that portraying a military career as if it is solely about individual fulfilment distracts from its inherently political nature – it must be understood as about the goals of the state, not the goals of the individual. Military recruitment messaging is problematic not only for individuals in the armed forces, 'but also for societies affected by external military interventions. Humans in societies affected by armed conflict are unlikely to perceive wars as arenas for the self-fulfilment of foreign soldiers.'

This report explores these concerns through an examination of current military recruitment campaigns and the narratives that they employ within the context of armed forces recruitment pressures. It draws upon developments in understanding around adolescent behaviour and vulnerability in relation to marketing and health and wellbeing issues around military service. It aims to encourage debate around the ethics of recruitment campaigns and to explore how and why policy makers should respond to them with appropriate oversight and regulation.

Structure and methodology

This report draws together findings from three avenues of inquiry – author analysis; contributions from academics, health campaigners and veterans; and target audience reflections.

- The author analysis places military marketing campaigns in the wider cultural context, presenting an in-depth exploration of the videos that are at the core of the campaign and mapping out the potential impact.
- Academics, health campaigners and veterans have been invited to provide evidence and/or reflect on military marketing messages in order to identify the common themes and to explore the different ways in which military marketing messages impact target audiences.
- A small-scale survey was conducted to explore how young people (the target audience) respond to the messages of *This is Belonging*, *Made in the Royal Navy*, and *No Ordinary Job*.

We start, in chapter 3, by examining how social, demographic and policy factors have created a narrative of a ‘crisis’ in recruitment which provides the context for aggressive marketing campaigns. In chapter 4 and 5, we explore the mechanics of armed forces marketing – its scale and structure, key branding messages and target audiences – as well as its potential effectiveness in capturing consumers.

In chapter 6, our partners at Medact explore health issues associated with adolescent recruitment to the armed forces and how military recruitment marketing intersects with adolescent psychologies – utilising developmental vulnerabilities and taking advantage of social inequality to create powerful messages that are attractive to young people.

To view the adverts and associated material from the marketing campaigns see:

This is Belonging - <https://www.youtube.com/user/ARMYjobs/playlists>^a

Made in the Royal Navy - <https://www.youtube.com/user/RoyalNavyRecruitment/playlists>

No Ordinary Job - <https://www.youtube.com/user/royalairforce/playlists>

<https://www.army.mod.uk>

<https://www.navy.mod.uk>

<https://www.raf.mod.uk>

^a The Army’s animated adverts referred to in this report are no longer available online as of January 2019.

With this context in mind, we then consider key elements and messages of current recruitment campaigns and have identified five main themes from across the recruitment campaigns, looking at what is said and what is not. (See the Annex for an analysis of the videos that are core of the campaigns: the British Army's *This is Belonging*, The Royal Navy's *Made in the Royal Navy* and the RAF's *No Ordinary Job*.)

The five themes are:

1. the portrayal of life in the armed forces as superior to civilian life
2. the glossing over of much of the reality of an armed forces career
3. the tokenisation of diversity and the reinforcement of unhelpful stereotypes
4. the emphasis on camaraderie that exploits adolescent vulnerability and masks experience of isolation within the armed force community
5. the promotion of self-development in the context of conflict depoliticises military purpose.

In chapters 7 to 9 we present an in-depth analysis of these themes and bring in observations from academics, veterans, and the target audience. These chapters outline how thinking, presented in chapter 10, about the impact and appropriateness of military marketing should be informed by recent developments in the understanding of:

- adolescence as an extended period of neurological development and associated vulnerability
- health issues associated with military training and service
- the vulnerability of certain groups to sophisticated marketing strategies
- how public authorities can protect the long-term rights and well-being of young people.

Finally, we identify principles that policy makers should adopt when considering military recruitment marketing to young people and make a number of recommendations.

Limitations

It is important to note that media messages are polysemic and different people will interpret the messages in different ways. We recognise that the analysis presented here views the adverts through a lens that is substantially informed by the work of our organisations. We mitigate this with descriptions of the adverts that convey different aspects of them and readers can of course watch them for themselves; that the adverts create a variety of responses is reflected in the quotes from the target audience that we present here. We have included contributions from academics, health campaigners and veterans to inform our analysis and conclusions. While not ignoring confirmation bias in our reading of the marketing messages, we nonetheless hold that the context and viewpoints we present here provide an important – and often marginalised – dimension to perspectives on military recruitment, and that considering this dimension in the context of developments relating to the health and well-being of children and young people is overdue.

Military marketing and the 'recruitment crisis'

In collaboration with Sarah Bulmer and David Gee

Dr Sarah Bulmer is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Politics at the University of Exeter; David Gee is an independent researcher and writer on military recruitment and other subjects.

In recent decades the military has faced a major recruitment shortfall. This chapter looks at how societal shifts, systemic discrimination and policy failures have combined to cause it. It concludes with an analysis of the ways in which the Ministry of Defence is attempting to tackle this 'crisis'.

Demographic and social changes are shrinking traditional recruitment pools. These include: a growing youth culture of indoor entertainment, ethnic diversity, high employment rates, a lower perception of national threat, raised participation in secondary and further education and an ageing population.³

Academics working in defence studies also suggest that military recruitment has been challenged by shifts in how individuals engage with the state and its institutions in western societies, with a move away from 'collectivist' identities to ones that are more 'individualistic and pluralistic'.⁴ There is wider scepticism of collectivist endeavours like the military, with younger people being 'less likely to belong to a political party or trade union, or to proclaim a belief in one of the established religions, than almost any previous generation in history.' Younger people in Britain are also more likely to be suspicious of having to conform to institutions like the armed forces, and are less likely to have a 'high or very high' opinion of the armed forces than older generations.

Most state militaries in the Global North are all-volunteer forces and in competition with the public and private sectors to attract and retain people. In the UK, the unemployment rate is 4.5%, the lowest since 1975, although other factors make employment precarious.⁵ Furthermore, more personnel leave the military each year than join, with the Royal Navy and RAF running at around 10% short of their annual recruitment target, and the Army running at over 30% short.⁶

The prospect of deployment can be a key motivating factor in military recruitment; so the winding down of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan has also hindered recruitment.⁷ Academics have also pointed to the contemporary 'decline in threat perceptions' amongst the population in comparison to past conflicts, which has lessened motivation for 'mobilisation' or recruitment.⁸

The current shortfall in personnel was precipitated by planned reductions, large-scale redundancies and post-conflict attrition of personnel, suggesting a major failure in Ministry of Defence (MoD) policymaking and planning. In the wake of the 2009 financial crisis the 2010 Strategic Defence Review reduced expenditure and personnel in all three branches of the armed forces and put a greater reliance on reserve forces.⁹ There has been a 23% reduction in UK Regular Forces since 2010 and more than 11,000 service members have been made redundant.¹⁰ The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan also increased the numbers of seriously injured personnel who have been medically discharged.¹¹

The outsourcing of recruitment to the private firm Capita has also been blamed for current Army recruitment failures. The closure of local recruiting offices, considerable technical difficulties and long delays in bringing adequate processes online has led to applicants being lost at various stages.¹² This is compounded by the complex nature of the process. It has been reported that whilst more than 100,000 people tried to join the Army in 2017, only 7,500 became soldiers due to frustrations with bureaucracy and an average 300 day wait from the point of expressing an interest to acceptance.¹³

The Army in particular has a high turnover and retention problems, which means it must recruit continuously.¹⁴ The Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2018 reported that 42% of personnel have 'very actively' or 'quite actively' searched for a job outside the service in the last 12 months.¹⁵ The main reasons for leaving are the impacts on personal and family life, as well as low morale, low pay and a lack of job satisfaction. Moreover, the percentage of personnel

citing service morale as increasing their intention to leave has grown steadily since 2015, and is now at 48%.

Another cause of high turnover is the UK's recruitment of a high proportion of under-18s. Although much money is spent on recruitment activities aimed at children and teenagers, the youngest recruits are most likely to leave the military early or during training.¹⁶

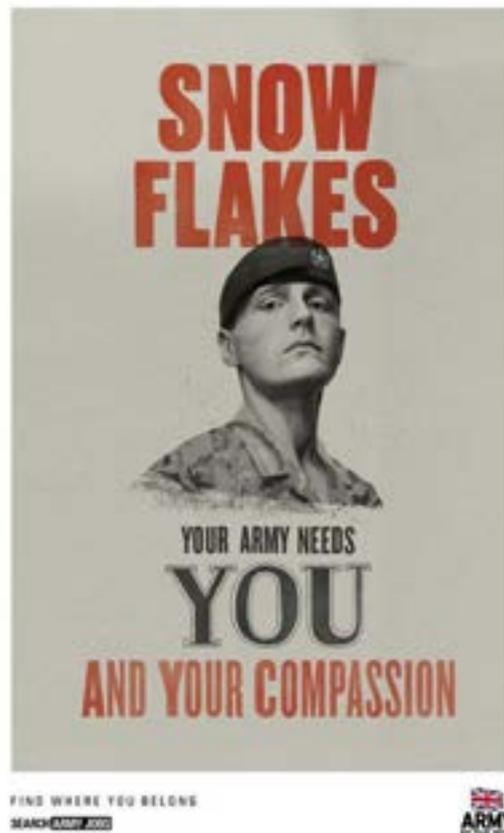
Ongoing issues with harassment, bullying and discrimination continue to undermine the retention of women and other minority personnel in particular.¹⁷ A recent survey suggested that nine out of ten serving personnel had experienced 'generalised sexualised behaviours' in the previous year and that women were more likely to find these offensive.¹⁸ Fifteen percent of servicewomen reported that they had had a particularly upsetting experience in the past year. In 2018, Service Complaints Ombudsman Nicola Williams said that she was concerned about the over-representation of female and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) personnel as complainants.¹⁹

Tackling the recruitment shortfall

The armed forces have long operated with a recruiting shortfall, reflecting the social and demographic changes outlined above; up to 2011, 'The Army had not met its recruitment targets for soldiers or officers in the previous decade, with an average shortfall of 1,500 recruits per year.'²⁰ The addition of policy and planning failures has led to a larger recent deficit which repeated media coverage, parliamentary questions and parliamentary committee reports have characterised as a 'crisis'.²¹ As of 1 October 2018, the Army had a full-time trade-trained strength of 76,130 and a workforce requirement deficit of -7.5%.²² The Royal Navy and Royal Marines had 29,160 full-time trained personnel and a workforce requirement deficit of -4.4%. The RAF had 30,070 full-time trained personnel and a workplace requirement deficit of -6.4%.

With the decline in recruits from traditional cohorts – typically 16 to 25-year-old white males – and the desire for the armed forces to identify as modern institutions which welcome and promote equality and diversity, there has been an increasing focus on recruiting non-traditional groups. The 2015 Strategic Defence Review set to increase female personnel to 15% of total intake by 2020, and BAME personnel to at least 10%, with an eventual target to 20%.²³ The MoD recognise the difficulties associated with these targets due to the 'external and internal cultural change required' and have stated that these challenges 'demand new approaches and initiatives to ensure that diversity considerations become an integral part of normal recruiting business.'²⁴

These 'new approaches and initiatives' are apparent in the sophistication and reach of marketing campaigns, as well as in the other channels increasingly used to promote the armed forces to young people – schools, youth activities, job centres, public spaces and community events.²⁵ Given the difficulties that military recruitment faces, a long-term and multi-faceted approach is seen as necessary both to yield numbers of new recruits and to create high levels of positive feeling towards the armed forces that will ensure the continued acceptability of what they do. However, these 'new approaches and initiatives' raise ethical concerns that must be carefully scrutinised as they affect not only the well-being of recruits but also the relationship of wider society to the military, including its perception of the use of military force.



One of a series of posters from the Army's 2019 recruitment campaign. MoD/Crown Copyright.

Armed forces recruitment marketing strategies

‘The armed forces are shamelessly manipulating the vulnerable qualities we see in a number of young people for their own cynical gain. The fact that the armed forces are specifically looking for people who are “money-driven but not good at money management” shows that their focus is only to recruit impressionable soldiers that they can exploit.’ - Liz Saville Roberts MP, Plaid Cymru²⁶

This chapter focuses on the strategies and mechanics of armed forces marketing campaigns. We explore military branding and target audiences of young people, particularly from low income families, and their ‘gatekeepers’ and how the diversity of channels of communication make oversight difficult. Extensive audience research is utilised to spark and capture interest. We look at two multidisciplinary academic studies on the impact of marketing on young people to contextualise recruitment advertising within wider marketing practices and point to some of the concerns.

As understanding of adolescent psychology has developed, increasing caution has been recommended regarding marketing to children and young people, leading to the implementation of regulation for various high-risk or addictive products. In their multidisciplinary review of research on adolescents’ vulnerability to advertising and promotion, Pechmann et al state that of particular concern are ‘marketing materials that seem to be especially attractive to adolescents, including depictions of risky, impulsive behaviour and psychosocial, image benefits.’²⁷ This is not to say that messages are effectively delivered to passive audiences or that audiences decode messages the way intended by producers. Having said that, given the unique risks associated with an armed forces career, it could be argued that military recruitment marketing should be evaluated with the same critical perspective.

Armed forces marketing has to deliver nuanced messaging to increasingly sophisticated audiences, competing with diverse opinions about military action and what life in the forces is like. The adverts are part of a wider strategy which involves engagement with children from a young age and over a number of years in ‘soft’ recruitment activities. Most materials about a military career – adverts, websites, brochures, presentations – are promotional and lack detailed information about risks, terms and conditions and legal obligations. They also aim to present a positive image to wider society. Parents, guardians, teachers, youth workers and sports and activity leaders – referred to by the armed forces as ‘gatekeepers’ for the role they play in influencing a young person’s decision to enlist – must also be won over.

Military marketing campaigns are well-resourced complex strategic campaigns with multiple elements and segmented audiences. The production of the **This is Belonging** 2018 adverts and associated content cost £1.6 million pounds.²⁸ ‘More Than Meets The Eye’ – part of the Army’s **Be The Best** campaign – cost over £5 million in a ten-month period in 2014; the **Start Thinking Soldier** campaign cost £4.6 million in a seven-month period in 2009.²⁹ Total spend on marketing across all three services for recruitment purposes is over £27 million each year.³⁰

i. Military branding – selling a dream

The military’s strategic thinking around recruitment places considerable importance on increasing awareness and understanding of what the armed forces do. At the same time however, Army, Navy and RAF marketing attempts to create simplified, focused and strong brand identities, to the extent that they are far from realistic. We argue that they sell a dream of self-development, adventure and comradeship via a rewarding career in public service. Their marketing offers a journey towards stability and status that will be attractive to young people moving into a new phase of life, yet with elements of fun, adventure and moderate risk that appeals to an age group that is not typically risk-averse.

Research with Army recruits found that most join for personal development reasons, and for the adventure, while others join because they lack other options.³¹

'The Army needs a brand to underpin all its communications (particularly recruit advertising), to address the risks of our institutional credibility being lost or eroded and to reinforce the pride and sense of belonging of soldiers and their families, especially during change.' - *The Army Brand, 2017*³²

Three traits of contemporary armed forces marketing stand out. The first is the message that the armed forces are *the* means by which we can 'be the best' and by which our best selves will be 'made'. Indeed, they suggest that joining up is the only way of achieving our full potential. This was epitomised by the Army's recruitment campaign of 2016, *Don't join the Army, don't be a better you*. The second message is that the camaraderie of the group is unique. Both of these messages resonate with the most vulnerable adolescents in particular – those weighed down by adversity and/or the erosion of family and community infrastructure that helps to create a sense of belonging and achievement, as well as limited employment opportunities. Finally, these adverts are a channel through which the military can depoliticise its image by depicting itself as a place where individual self-fulfilment can be pursued without concern for the wider purpose of military institutions.

Pechmann et al discuss how, 'With the onset of puberty, adolescents experience more intense urges. Yet the ability to resist acting on urges is not fully developed until late adolescence or early adulthood. Furthermore, adolescents often experience strong negative emotions that may overwhelm their already weak inhibitory control.' Self-consciousness and social anxiety make adolescents more receptive to image advertising and high-status, heavily advertised brands, which 'are believed to project positive social roles or images, which in turn leads to higher perceptions of self-worth.' They may be particularly attracted to brands that create feelings of self-worth because of the self-doubt that is so often associated with adolescence.

'These adverts play into the needs and desires of young adults, they offer the chance for a career with a purpose and ability to make a change in the world, as well as fellowship and friendship with others of the same age. Some such as Made in the Royal Navy offer the chance to travel and experience life as more than a 'tourist'. This is Belonging 2017 plays into the idea of 'tough but good' and bonding experiences the Army is known for...They mostly showed young attractive people having fun, reminiscent of music videos. To me this feels deceptive, but also compelling...Although attractive I can't overlook seeing the results of war. If I had not had that experience they would have been very convincing.' - Survey respondent, aged 22.

ii. Target audiences – low income adolescents and gatekeepers

The target audience of *This is Belonging* is described as aged between 16 and 24, and coming from households with an average income of £10,000. The briefing refers to 'C2DE' which are the lowest socio-economic groups, covering those in skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, as well as the unemployed.³³ A list of target cities including Leeds, Cardiff, Belfast, Cleveland, Nottingham, Manchester, Doncaster, Birmingham, Sheffield, Newcastle, and Liverpool was provided in both 2017 and 2018. Table 1 shows that most of the cities identified have relatively high levels of deprivation.

The 2018 brief also notes that the target audience would be 'high index for social, mobile, cinema. Not heavy TV viewers. Interested in sports and spending time with friends'. It mentions other social groups identified by marketing companies: 'M55' – lower-income homeowners whose adult children are still striving to gain independence; 'Municipal Challenge' – urban renters of social housing facing an array of challenges; and '062' – educated, entertainment-seeking young people privately renting in towns and cities.³⁴

The brief describes its target audience, based on the Army's analysis of current regular soldiers, as being 'ambitious

Table 1: Cities identified for targeted marketing in the *This is Belonging* advertising briefs 2017 and 2018

City identified by marketing brief	Campaign year			Multiple deprivation index: proportion of neighbourhoods in most deprived 10% in England or Scotland or Wales ³⁵	
	2017	2018 primary	2018 secondary	Quartile (1 indicates most deprived)	% (higher % indicates higher level of deprivation)
Belfast	x			1	(a)
Birmingham	x	x		1	40
Blackpool			x	1	38
Bournemouth			x	3	6
Bradford		x		1	33
Cardiff	x	x		1	18
Cleveland (Redcar and Cleveland)	x			1	22
Doncaster	x			1	21
Dundee			x	1	22
Glasgow		x		1	33
Hull			x	1	45
Leeds	x	x		1	22
Leicester			x	1	24
Liverpool	x	x		1	45
London		x		(b)	6
Manchester	x	x		1	41
Middlesbrough		x		1	49
Newcastle	x	x		1	22
Nottingham	x		x	1	34
Plymouth			x	2	17
Scunthorpe (North Lincolnshire)			x	2	9
Sheffield	x	x		1	23
Southampton			x	2	13
Stirling			x	2	5
Stoke			x	1	30
Sunderland		x		1	19
Swansea			x	2	12

Notes
a. Comparable information not available. Belfast has the highest proportion of deprived neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland.
b. Information not available at regional level.

and money-driven but not good at money management', having a 'thirst for variety of risk' and being 'likely to be influenced by those around them.'

The 16-24 year-old target audience of the Royal Navy are also described as 'easily influenced' and lacking knowledge of the armed forces.³⁶ The campaign targets young people from specific areas around the UK as each advert names a place where the recruit is from.

Both Army briefs note the importance of resonating with 'gatekeepers' – parents, guardians and others who will 'have significant influence on the decision-making process for our core regular target audience 16-24 C2DEs.'³⁷ Adverts

on mainstream channels – TV, cinema and radio – are aimed towards gatekeepers, who could create a barrier to the target audience enlisting. The positive and softer messages of the adverts will reassure parents that the Army is a good and safe place to belong.

To continue to attract recruits under 18, the armed forces must get their message accepted by parents and other gatekeepers. Written materials for them are similar to the glossy brochures directed at potential recruits, with little reference to concerns or information about risks, terms and conditions and legal obligations that parents may wish to know. Furthermore, the Army's parental consent safeguards are generally inadequate and were criticised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016 as insufficient under international law.³⁸

As part of a previous Army campaign, *Don't Join the Army*, which ran from 2016, the video *Become a Better You* shows a father initially resisting his son's interest in joining up. He concedes when his son says, 'I realise I can do more than I thought, more than you thought' towards becoming 'a better me'.³⁹ They then bond over a cup of tea and fixing a motorbike. The advert not only speaks directly to gatekeepers to avoid their obstruction of enlistment, but also encourages young people to question their parents' cautious responses and concerns to their desire to enlist.

'Made in the Royal Navy markets a naval career through representations of adventure, imagining the recruit moving from deprived towns and cities to travelling around the world. As such, the naval recruit is 'made' through their movement from spaces associated with limited social and economic prospects to seemingly exotic and tropical landscapes of adventure. The campaign is therefore engaged in targeting some of the most deprived and vulnerable young people in society by presenting a military career as an escape from the very structural disadvantages which play a key role in shaping an individual's predisposition to military service.'

Matthew Kearns, ESRC Doctoral Candidate at the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University.

iii. More channels, more sophisticated

In discussing recent research into the vulnerability of adolescents to marketing messages, Lapierre et al show that 'the channels to reach youth have grown, and marketers are increasingly using them, often blurring the distinction between entertainment and advertising.'⁴⁰ There has been little research into the effects of the aggressive use of these new channels by marketers. The authors discuss sophisticated marketing techniques that young people may need help contending with, particularly within online and social media environments where there is likely to be little parental or regulatory oversight.

The Army was recently criticised for using social media to target recruitment material towards stressed 16 year-olds around GCSE results day.⁴¹ For example, in August 2016, the Army told young people via Facebook: 'Whatever happens on results day, we'll help you learn, earn and stand on your own two feet.' The image showed an open-topped Army vehicle during a beautiful sunset.⁴² This is one of many ways in which the Army uses integrated data-driven digital marketing to reach different audiences, as outlined in their Digital Strategy of 2016.⁴³ In that year the Army spent £640,000 on Facebook recruitment posts alone. The total digital advertising spend was £3,280,000 – covering job boards, website adverts, advertising on search engines, social media platforms and media sites like YouTube.⁴⁴

Another aspect of marketing across the forces is the use of first person narrators, who may be real or constructed, to describe their journey towards 'a life without limits.' This emulates the narrative and visual styles often used in films and other entertainment forms to create affinity and desire in the audience.

The website for each service displays a large array of further 'real-life' stories and images, as well as short texts to convey information about trades, benefits and the nature of military life. The messages of the advertising videos are reiterated, reinforced and supplemented by further promotional material.

iv. Capturing interest

The *This is Belonging* 2017 campaign aimed to increase the number of applications to join the Army outside of those who were most likely to join anyway.⁴⁵ The approach of the advertising agency was thorough:

'Karmarama's strategists took a data sample of previously successful recruits and matched this into their Continuum datapool – a proprietary aggregated database of 48 million UK adults. From there, tech experts used neurolinguistics to model their interests and behaviours. A unique algorithm scraped social profiles of soldiers and matched the time stamps of their interaction with the Army to what they were doing on social (sic). This revealed distinct barriers and motivations and, crucially, provided social behavioural triggers that the team onboarded to all digital buys to optimise targeting and journeys. Their creative strategists then used psychological studies and qualitative interviews to identify a universal emotion broad enough to be eventually tailored to the drivers now identified, making the candidate journey more powerful.'

The 2018 marketing brief outlines how different channels are utilised.⁴⁶ Digital channels include desktop and mobile websites, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn amongst other social media, in addition to video and music streaming services. TV is the 'lead media' and cinema offers an immersive experience which allows opportunities for longer-length adverts. TV, radio and cinema focus on a broad audience, including 'gatekeepers', while other channels offer segmented targeting.

The brief notes gamers as a key audience as well as those tuned in to sports, music, fashion, action, adventure, feminism, equality, gender and religion. The campaign emphasises retargeting with multiple awareness messaging of 'exposed users', 'consideration messaging' for engaged users, and 'ongoing conversation and reassurance messaging' for converted users. Channels are connected and synchronised and drive people towards the goal of making an application.

While an application can be started quickly online, the enlistment process can take months to complete. Karmarama describe that to keep candidates motivated, 'we used data-driven content to craft personalised messaging that would engage them along every step of the way'. They were able to 'serve this tailored content to potential candidates at an individual-level, at the right time and in the right context – increasing engagement and conversion rates whilst significantly decreasing media spend.'⁴⁷

The Army website 'was transformed' into 'a conversion-led, mobile-first digital hub where potential recruits could take bespoke paths depending on their interests and what stage they were at in their decision-making process.'⁴⁸



Still from *Live your dreams - No Ordinary Job*, 2016. Royal Air Forces/YouTube.

'I like that the adverts were not forceful, however it worries me that because they were good, well thought through adverts it will encourage people to join when they don't really know the consequences. I admire the Army more for thinking of a good advert idea as it shows they are clever and know how to entice people.' - Survey respondent, aged under 16.

Impact of military marketing on applications and enlistments

This chapter explores how current armed forces marketing campaigns are judged as successful, yet the services are still failing to fulfil their recruitment targets as even large numbers of applications are not translated into adequate levels of enlistment. We consider that it may be far harder to 'belong' to the military than depicted, potentially leaving those who stop education early in order to join up, or do not pursue other opportunities, in a difficult and limiting position.

Karmarama state that *This is Belonging* 'has already been one of the most talked about Army campaigns in Army history, producing record-breaking results' and that 'applications steadily increased from the moment the new campaign launched, a positive sign that more young people are seeing the Army as somewhere they want to, and believe they can, belong.'⁴⁹ MoD statistics show an increase in applications for 2017-18 for regular soldiers by 17% compared to 2015-16.⁵⁰

The Government Communication Service (GCS) put the *Made in the Royal Navy* campaign amongst its highlights for 2016/2017: 'The Made in the Royal Navy TV campaign was the best-performing media campaign in many years, and continues to contribute to a major uplift in applicants.'⁵¹

Research suggests the importance of marketing in generating interest in an armed forces career. Many of those who join the armed forces have had a long-term interest and the influence of family or friends who have served is ranked highest in how recruits learn about the armed forces (table 2).⁵² However, one third of recruits learnt about the armed forces via advertising while another 42% learnt through the internet and websites which carry associated marketing content. GCS notes that the *Made in the Royal Navy* campaign accounted for 28% of expressions of interests and applications in 2015/16 but that there continues to be a shortfall in trades requiring technical skills and qualifications, where competition is 'fierce'.

Table 2: Where new recruits learnt about the armed forces, 2017-18⁵³

'Where did you learn about careers in the armed forces?'	%
Friends/family that have served	53
Internet/websites	42
AFCO, ACIO, RNCIO (careers offices)	39
Armed forces advertising	33
TV/newspapers	25
Recruitment fairs	21
TV/films/books	20
Military shows	16
In the cadets	14
Site visits/guided tours	10
Youth organisations	0
Other	3
No answer	3

However, it seems that while these campaigns are effective in raising the number of applications, this does not necessarily result in more recruits. GCS notes that:

The Royal Navy needed to recruit 4,494 high quality entrants to meet their targets. Based on established models of the customer journey, this meant receiving 27,230 applicants from 87,543 initial contacts (any instance where a potential applicant registers their details).

So, it is anticipated that only 17% of people who pursue an application to the Navy will finally enlist. The statistics for full-time Regular service in the Navy show similar levels: there were 14,169 in the year ending September 2017 but only 2,876 new recruits.⁵⁴ The figures for the Army and RAF show even more disparity between number of applications and entrants. Additional Army research shows that 47% dropped out of its application process voluntarily rather than failing to meet required standards.⁵⁵

Furthermore, figures for new enlistments for 2017 show a decline compared to 2016 for all three services, but most markedly for the Army.⁵⁶ The National Audit Office (NAO) has identified the current shortfall as resulting from technical issues relating to a new online application process in 2017.⁵⁷ The NAO also lists a number of recent changes to the recruitment process, including reintroducing more real-life contact with recruits and parents, in a bid to improve applicant/enlistment ratios.

While these sophisticated and heavily resourced recruitment campaigns do generate high levels of interest, multiple applications have to be generated for every new recruit, and the campaigns are not yielding the necessary numbers to stem the recruitment shortfall. Moreover, the disappointment of a rejected or abandoned application is unlikely to be factored into assessing the success of the campaigns. While many potential recruits will take the opportunity to reconsider their decision to start an armed forces career, many may be early school leavers, enticed away from mainstream education by the appeal of the military and then left to re-enter, behind their peers, or to find other employment while lacking qualifications.

'I'm really uncomfortable with... how we sold the Army to young people; I feel like I was party to some fairly questionable stuff.' - Former advertising executive on the Army contract.⁵⁸



A British Army recruitment leaflet for 16 and 17 year-olds with insert from reverse side. Photo: Emma Sangster.

Health and adolescent recruitment to the armed forces

Contribution from Reem Abu-Hayyeh

Reem Abu-Hayyeh is the Peace and Security Campaigner at the public health charity Medact.

The armed forces recruit around 2,300 under-18s each year, of whom four-fifths join the army.⁵⁹ This chapter looks at the increased susceptibility to mental health-related disorders and physical risks in the long-term trajectory of young recruits. This is particularly important given the recent evidence that military recruitment campaigns are briefed to target 16-24 year-olds from lower socio-economic backgrounds (see chapter 4(ii)) as childhood adversity is itself a considerable risk factor.

There is broad consensus amongst developmental specialists that the age of adolescence, considered to be between the ages of 10 and 19, with new research extending this to as old as 24, is a 'window of vulnerability'.⁶⁰ During this time, complex neurological changes in the brain alter decision-making biases and reactions to stress. This includes the under-development of the prefrontal cortex and a higher capacity for plasticity, resulting in experiences during this time playing a role in determining which synapses are strengthened and long-term neurological development.^{61 62}

Adolescent development and military recruitment

This continuous process of neurological development has two key consequences. Firstly, those in mid-adolescence (16-17 year-olds) are more inclined than adults to make life choices and decisions based on emotive appeal. This also means that they are more likely to undertake risk-taking behaviour.⁶³ As such, public health professionals have argued that those who enlist at this age may not do so with fully informed consent given the methods of recruitment that are used and the glamorisation of the armed forces as a career choice in recruitment campaigns.⁶⁴

Secondly, young adolescents, particularly those who have faced adversity in childhood, are more reactive than adults to high-stress environments, leading to higher incidence of the development of mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression.⁶⁵ This has both short-term and long-term psychological and neurological impacts on adolescents. A 2007 survey by the King's Centre for Military Mental Health Research found that as many as 76% of UK military personnel participants reported having experienced two or more experiences of childhood adversity.⁶⁶ The study also found that the highest counts of vulnerability were associated with younger age, serving in the Army and low educational attainment. All of these factors are, of course, inextricably linked.

Commodore Paul Branscombe, who managed a major military welfare service after a Navy career of 33 years, writes: 'At [age 16] recruits are not emotionally, psychologically or physically mature enough to withstand the demands placed upon them... Many of the welfare issues I have encountered among armed forces personnel, during and after service, have been related to enlisting too young.'⁶⁷

Impacts of adolescent recruitment on mental health

Medact's 2016 report *The Recruitment of Children to the UK Armed Forces* provides an overview of the mental and physical health outcomes for those recruited to the military as adolescents.⁶⁸ Those most likely to suffer mental health problems enlist at a young age and come from deprived backgrounds. Although recruits aged 16 or 17 do not see active service until they reach 18, they are more likely to be deployed to war in frontline combat roles where the frequency of traumatic experiences is greater when they do. They are also more likely to struggle to re-adjust to civilian life after leaving the Forces.⁶⁹ The youngest recruits face the greatest long-term mental health risks, with an increased risk of suicide of 64% among young men (under 20) in the Army when compared to the general population.

Whereas defence ministers often argue that military service only affects the mental health of a small minority of the

current armed forces, they often underplay the higher prevalence of problems experienced by veterans who have left, particularly Early Service Leavers.⁷⁰ This was highlighted in particular in evidence presented to the Defence Select Committee as part of its inquiry into the mental health of veterans and military personnel.⁷¹ In the British armed forces, rates of post-traumatic stress among ex-forces war veterans have been found to be three times as high as personnel who deployed to war and are still in service - with evidence published recently showing that the rate of PTSD among members of the armed forces increased from 2004-6 and 2007-9 to 2014-16 from 4% to 6%.⁷² Heavy drinking, anxiety and depression, and self-harming behaviour are all serious issues faced by veterans, and susceptibility to the development of these disorders often increases the younger the recruit.

Impacts of adolescent recruitment on physical health

There is evidence not only of adolescent recruitment to the armed forces resulting in greater disposition to mental health and neurological disorders, but also to impacts on physical health and well-being. Research has shown that physical injuries are common in training, with younger recruits more likely to be affected.⁷³ Musculoskeletal injuries are the most prevalent reason for being 'injured out' of the Army; adolescents are at greater risk because their bones have yet to fully develop.

Those recruited under the age of 18 are most likely to enlist into the Army and are more likely than adult recruits to be channelled into the infantry.⁷⁴ Figures have shown that fatality rates for those in frontline combat roles are higher than in other roles, and that those who enlist into the armed forces aged 16 are more likely to be killed or injured than those above the age of 18.⁷⁵

Childhood adversity and military recruitment

A 2007 King's Centre for Military Mental Health Research study found that 76% of UK military personnel who completed a survey about childhood and adolescent adversity had experienced two or more experiences of childhood adversity (ACEs).⁷⁶ A high count of experiences of childhood adversity was associated with young age, being in the Army, and having low educational attainment.

This is particularly worrying given research that shows that young people with a background of adversity are markedly susceptible to developing general psychological ill-health, PTSD, self-harming behaviours and alcohol misuse, particularly among those who have been exposed to violence.⁷⁷

On top of this, it is known that childhood adversity has a cumulative impact, such that additional exposure to stressful experiences increases the risk of lasting mental health and behaviour problems. Young people with a high number of ACEs suffer significant psychological and neurological impact, with long-term effects on adolescent development. Evidence shows that repeated adversity in childhood over-stimulates stress-relieving hormones.⁷⁸

Military training and adolescent health

Another crucial factor compromising the well-being of adolescents recruited to the military is their mandatory training. There are of course aspects of military training that will be beneficial to health, such as regular exercise and regular meals, which may not be part of the daily life of many civilian adolescents. However, while military training colleges are subject to, and must have in place, mandatory safeguarding policies, research has shown that some training practices may lead to and exacerbate existing psychological and developmental issues.

For instance, the stress and aggression of initial military training could account for the elevated levels of anger, anxiety and depression found in young personnel who have not yet been deployed. It has been argued that initial military training is characterised by the extensive use of stressors, including 'beasting' and punishment, as part of attempts to condition recruits for service and what to expect.⁷⁹ Beastings are reported to consist of instructors shouting at, insulting, giving demanding and humiliating orders as form of punishment, and varied levels of physical aggression. Punishment is aimed at individuals and at the collective group, building resentment among trainees.

In 2016, the British Army claimed to ban the use of 'beasting' after an inquest found that its use had contributed to Private Gavin Williams' death at Wiltshire Barracks in 2006.⁸⁰ However, a video of a young servicewoman reduced to tears surfaced in 2018 that appeared to show an army corporal using methods of punishment that can be described as

'beasting' - leading to a subsequent investigation of the video and the instructor in question.⁸¹

Military experts have acknowledged that military training, particularly training for the infantry, repeatedly stimulates aggression to prepare recruits for killing at close range.⁸² Taking into consideration adolescent reactivity to stress and its possible impact on brain development, the high-stress context of pre-deployment increases the risk of long-term mental health disorders in this age group. This is particularly true for those beginning training with pre-service vulnerabilities, as outlined above.

As discussed above, there is a higher risk of developing mental health issues amongst Early Service Leavers, with this risk decreasing the longer the period of service. This is concerning in light of the fact that between 2012-2016, one third of under-18 Army enlistees left before completing training.⁸³ While academics and military experts often attribute pre-service vulnerabilities as an explanation for Early Service Leavers, there is little information as to why there is such a high rate amongst under-18 recruits in training.

Mitigating or compounding harm?

Charities such as Young Minds have provided a blueprint for public services and local authorities on how to attempt to best protect the long-term well-being of young people who have experienced childhood adversity. This includes making as a priority for those young people: positive and supportive family environments; safe and mutual relationships with peers; ability to regulate emotions and manage emotional distress; compassionate attuned and supportive responses from professionals; and, trauma-informed policies and systems that address bullying, harassment and victimisation.⁸⁴ While significant improvements have been made to Army safeguarding and welfare structures since the deaths of four young trainees at Deepcut Barracks, serious problems still persist and there remains a fundamental question about the suitability of Army discipline and culture for young and vulnerable recruits.⁸⁵

Given the high number of military personnel with experiences of childhood adversity, and research showing that those in the military with several ACEs face worse mental health outcomes, it is important to question whether training and combat experiences within the Army in fact risk compounding or adding to the effects of ACEs in those recruited under the age of 18. If the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces are actively targeting those aged 16-24 from low income backgrounds for recruitment, are they sufficiently concerned with putting in place steps to mitigate the potential additional long-term harm caused by the stresses of training and combat?

Military marketing messages: key themes

While there are differences between the latest Army, Navy and RAF marketing campaigns, the focus on self-development, self-fulfilment and camaraderie is common to all of them. In this chapter, we identify five areas in which the emphasis on these aspects is problematic: armed forces life is portrayed as superior in comparison to civilian life; the reality of armed forces life is glossed over; to some extent the depiction of diversity is token and reinforces stereotypes; the emphasis on camaraderie and belonging exploits adolescent vulnerabilities and masks experiences of loneliness and isolation; and, self-fulfilment for young people in the UK is promoted within the depoliticised context of conflict elsewhere.

i. The portrayal of armed forces life as superior

The advertising campaigns build the idea that a sense of belonging and self-development and fulfilment are unique to the military, constructing an idealised image of life in the armed forces.

This is Belonging projects the idea that the Army is the only place where you can truly find belonging, and the only place where you can escape from things in life that hold people back. The 2019 adverts utilise traits which are stereotypically seen as negative, stating that they would be viewed as positive attributes in the Army. The 2018 animations which addressed potential concerns for female, gay or Muslim recruits depict a similarly binary view of civil and military worlds, setting them up in opposition to each other and putting the military on a pedestal compared to civilian life. The use of animation allowed for a further lack of realism in a way that is almost childlike and magical.

Similarly, in *Made in the Royal Navy* the military is presented as a 'way out' from lack of opportunity, and civilian life is presented as without prospects; the journey of self-development can only be pursued away from home. The adverts minimise what can be achieved in the civilian world, and maximise the progress that can be made in the Navy. The viewer is invited to 'start your journey' at the end of each film, forcing them to question the validity of not moving away from home, and of not taking up the offer to be 'made'.

'These adverts simultaneously capitalise on working class places by using regional accents and identities to make the Navy seem relatable and accessible, while constructing them as a place you have to escape; you can't be "made" there.' - Charlotte Cooper, *Child Soldiers International*

ii. Glossing over the reality of a life in the forces

While the armed forces are depicted as unique in their offer of social mobility and fulfilment to young people, the reality of life in the military is glossed over and sanitised. Armed forces advertising suggests that it is possible to 'have it all' in the military. The adverts construct a version of reality based on what will market well, which may bear little resemblance to the lived experience of serving personnel.

Table 3: Recruit perception of service life before joining and levels of satisfaction among personnel⁹⁰

	Army	Royal Navy (a)	RAF	All
Recruits: % who felt they had an accurate picture of service life before joining	51	52	47	50
Officers: satisfaction with service life in general	55	53	53	54
Other ranks: satisfaction with service life in general	40	35	37	38
Officers: would recommend joining the service to others	56	55	57	56
Other ranks: would recommend joining the service to others	38	38	40	38
Notes				
a. Royal Navy figures do not include Royal Marines who are included in the overall figures.				

Lack of accurate information prior to enlisting

Potential recruits and their parents will find that information about risks, hardships and legal obligations associated with armed forces careers, which are indeed unique, are absent in marketing materials.⁸⁶ Factual details of the contractual obligations are difficult to access, including key information relating to length of service and what limited opportunities there are to leave. The enlistment papers are only presented to the recruit at the time of signing. Joining the military also involves the suspension of some fundamental human rights guaranteed to civilian employees⁸⁷, and only around half of new recruits felt that they were given an accurate picture of daily life before they joined – this was lowest for the RAF (table 3).⁸⁸

Low levels of satisfaction with armed forces life

The Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey suggests that expectations built up by marketing campaigns may not match reality. Only four in ten of other ranks (non-officers) are satisfied with service life in general and would recommend it to others (the rate of satisfaction is higher among officers).⁸⁹ This reflects levels of satisfaction about many aspects of service life such as the sense of achievement, the variety and challenge involved, opportunities for development and issues concerned with work-life balance. Overall, only 36% of personnel across the services felt their own morale was high and only 7% felt the morale of the service was high.

A career in the forces can be very short

As discussed in chapter 3, retention is a significant problem in the armed forces; each year more people leave than join and often before finishing training or after 4 years' service, the earliest point at which most personnel can leave. Table 4 shows that in 2016-17, 665 recruits who joined aged under 18, and 2,189 adult recruits, left the forces before they finished training. In that year 19% of outflow was accounted for those who left untrained and 27% by those with no more than 4 years' service. As Early Service Leavers they can experience particular problems.⁹¹

Figures provided by the Army show that a new recruit has an 84% chance of still being in the service at the end of the first year.⁹² This drops to 54% after 5 years of service and 26% after 10 years. While the forces are no longer depicted as a career for life, average length of service is only around 10 years for the Army and 12 for the Navy and Marine; the average length of service in the RAF is longer at nearly 17 years.⁹³

Social mobility claims not validated

Marketing campaigns have contributed to a commonly-held belief that the armed forces are a vehicle for social mobility. Such claims rely on anecdotal and individual experience because relevant statistical data on the social-economic status of recruits is not available. The military continues not to collect this data, which could then be mapped against career progression and other related factors such as leaving the service early and bullying.⁹⁵ Unpicking fact from fiction regarding aspects of social mobility reveals a more complex and problematic picture.⁹⁶

The high drop-out rates detailed above are a barrier to social mobility, particularly for young recruits who may end up unemployed and outside of civilian education. These Early Service Leavers are identified as particularly vulnerable

Table 4: Intake and outflow to the armed forces in the 12 months ending 31 March 2017 and by age of enlistment and length of service⁹⁴

	v	Outflow	As a % of total annual outflow
Armed forces total	13,383	15,047	100
<i>Untrained</i>	12,636	2,843	19
<i>Trained & Trade-Trained</i>	747	12,204	81
of which enlisted when under 18	2,400	2,663	18
<i>of which left before Phase 2 training completion</i>		665	4
<i>of which left within 4 years of entry date</i>		878	6
of which enlisted at 18 or older	10,880	12,400	82
<i>of which left before Phase 2 training completion</i>		2,189	15
<i>of which left within 4 years of entry date</i>		3,232	22

to post-service issues (see chapter 6). Adolescent recruits who continue at the Army Foundation College are offered short sub-GCSE course in three subjects and an apprenticeship consisting of basic soldier training; the College is exempt from the minimum standards set by the Education and Skills Act.⁹⁷

The emphasis placed on the armed forces as a place to develop skills for later civilian employment is contradicted by British Legion research that shows that working age veterans are twice as likely as non-veterans to be unemployed.⁹⁸ Research from the veterans charity SSAFA shows that many veterans complain of a lack of transferable skills when leaving the forces.⁹⁹ The same research indicates the breadth of problems that veterans face after leaving the services and the difficulties of adjusting to civilian life.

The impact of military training and service on physical and mental health are also potentially very significant, particularly for those who are recruited very young and/or with experience of childhood adversity, as we explore in chapter 6. The youngest recruits who join with few qualifications are wanted 'particularly for the infantry' where they face the highest risks of combat and post-service mental health issues.¹⁰⁰ Personnel across the armed forces are more likely than civilians to suffer from common stress-related mental health problems and to experience PTSD.¹⁰¹ These difficulties, and others associated with military and institutional culture such as bullying and other harmful behaviour, could also have long-term impacts on the trajectory of young recruits.

iii. Tokenising diversity and reinforcing stereotypes

The idea of being 'made' by military service emphasised in these adverts refers not just to ideas of social mobility, but also to the relationship that young people have with social expectations and conventions. Despite attempts to move away from gender stereotypes, the trope that the military 'makes a man of you' is still subtly echoed – the characters in the campaigns become hard working, responsible and respected by peers and their communities.

'No Ordinary Job is a manipulative marketing and recruitment viral campaign which attempts to convince young, impressionable adolescents that military life can be encapsulated by excitement and exhilaration through expedition. A go pro propaganda advertisement which sanitises all elements of militarism and tries to package its ethos into a fun, life affirming, coming of age hedonistic utopia.

It's only after enlisting that you discover you've been manipulated and the idea that your line manager can afford to grant you time off from powering the military industrial complex to go canoeing and camping is nothing short of illusory. The constant is tedium and monotony, punctuated by infrequent variables of shit jobs, shit postings and shit deployments, all of which you don't really understand.

22 years of bullshit, but don't worry you'll get a pension at the end of it, it just won't look like the one we promised you.'

Daniel Lenham, RAF veteran

For the female characters in particular, service is depicted as offering a chance to defy expectations of what they, and women, can achieve, despite many taking on caring roles such as chef, medic, or human resources.

While Louise's story, launched on International Women's Day 2018, presents the Navy as an environment where women can find empowerment, freedom, adventure and strength, it also rather clumsily reinforces gender stereotypes with nail-painting and the idea that a woman would be told where their place is in a civilian environment in the modern world (see annex). In *Will I be listened to in the Army?* the female protagonist is constructed as weak and oppressed in civilian life; through being in the Army, she is empowered and granted an equal platform with men, albeit in a world of male power.

Many of the Royal Navy and RAF protagonists are women and/or BAME, reflecting two key target audiences. While concerns of these, and LGBTQ+, audiences are given some focus in the Army's 2018 animations, there is a conspicuous lack of prominent women in almost all of the *This is Belonging* real-life films. The films reinforce the idea that women must fit into a male-dominated environment; this is reinforced by focusing on ways of bonding associated with masculinity – the jokey banter, the hand on the shoulder and the monosyllabic acknowledgement.

The tension between the Army seeking to project an image of an inclusive and diverse institution and the need to attract a cohort of traditional recruits results in a tokenism around diversity. In another example, *Can I practise my faith in the Army?* a male recruit from a devout Muslim background finds that, while in the outside world he encountered temptations counter to his religion, and could not find a job during which he was able to pray, in the Army he is able to observe his religious practices, even on exercises. The depiction of the Muslim community is simplistic and stereotyped, and unhelpfully suggests to young Muslim people that they will not be able to practice their faith or be treated with respect in civilian society.

In reality, an overtly 'masculine' culture remains a serious problem in the armed forces, with bullying and sexual harassment still real concerns. The 2018 Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey showed 12% reported having been subject to bullying, discrimination or harassment in the last 12 months, while only 6% of these made a formal written complaint.¹⁰² This was mainly because they either did not believe anything would be done if a complaint was made, or they thought it might adversely affect their career. In 2018, the Armed Forces Ombudsman said:

*'I remain concerned about the over-representation of female and BAME personnel as complainants, and also the persisting culture of viewing complaints as a negative event rather than a positive opportunity to correct potential failings. In addition, there is inadequate staffing in many different areas, including my office, which is causing delay.'*¹⁰³

Responding to criticisms about the 'political correctness' of adverts that reach out to diverse audiences, senior Army figures emphasised that recruits need to know that 'we are not going to be soft and we are not going to be nice to people.'¹⁰⁴ The animated and less hard-edged adverts addressing diversity issues are no longer available online in 2019 and the most recent adverts depict more stressful scenes of conflict than previously. However, the armed forces know that although some are attracted to images of combat, for the majority of recruits and parents and other gatekeepers, it is a secure career opportunity that is the primary motivation.¹⁰⁵ This is also reflected in the focus on trades and qualifications on the website; it is only on the Infantry Soldier page that the ultimate demand of the Army is clearly stated – 'to close with and defeat the enemy through close combat'.

'I disliked the way they focused entirely on white individuals, they portray war as positive and they don't recognise any of the horrible effects that war can have on people in any capacity, they treat it as if it is all fun and games.' - Survey respondent, aged 20

'If I were sympathetic to the armed forces it would make me want to get involved because it plays on the masculine ideals of brotherhood and risk-taking.' - Survey respondent, aged 24.

'The film *Made in the Royal Navy* [Ben's story] plays to the natural anxiety in boys and young men about how they are going to become a man and go out into the world. The message is that the Navy will remake the raw youth into a heroic version of the inadequate boy that they once were.

The title *Made in the Royal Navy* exposes the aim of naval training, which is to break apart the natural human behaviour of a civilian and reform it ready for acts of extreme violence. Unlike other professions, the career path is very short and the return to civilian life entails being 'Unmade after the Royal Navy' often leading to depression and regret.

Becoming a truly confident and fulfilled man in normal life normally builds from inside a person but if that person is simply a creation of the Royal Navy, then it can be a very fragile and temporary achievement.'

David Collins, Royal Marines veteran

iv. Selling a dream: camaraderie or loneliness and social isolation?

For the armed forces, there is a focus on belonging and camaraderie as key selling points. The 2019 *This is Belonging – Your Army Needs You* campaign also directly capitalises on vulnerabilities young people may have as a result of feeling isolated in civilian society because of who they are or what they want to do. The reality however is that military training is strict and conformity is paramount; opportunities for individuals to be themselves will be limited. Belonging to the armed forces and being oneself are therefore not particularly compatible.

The need to 'belong' is particularly powerful for adolescents who are going through the most intense phase of their process of social identity formation. Clinical psychologist Sally Zlotowitz cautions that being anonymised and moulded into the military identity could be damaging for some young people who have to hide parts of themselves or feel less able to express themselves:

Adolescence is a key phase for connecting with friends and finding your identity, through who you spend time with and what you do together. It's quite usual for adolescents to be concerned about 'fitting in' and being liked by others. Indeed, everyone has these worries! But if an adolescent feels very lonely and isolated, it's really important that they can be offered or have available a range of ways to connect with others.

It's also vital for good well-being that young people feel authentically themselves in whichever group they belong to. If young people feel they are mostly 'hiding' parts of themselves, unable to express certain emotional experiences and values, or inside don't agree with some of the group behaviour, then in the longer term this will just make the sense of isolation worse. Having someone you trust outside of the group who you can talk to and reflect on your experiences with, can help with knowing when a group is not actually making you feel good anymore.

The structures of the Army might well help some young people to find a sense of belonging. But this must be balanced with knowing the risks, including how difficult re-integration into society can be later down the line, especially if you join under 18.¹⁰⁹

The experience of loneliness

The evidence presented above suggests that many personnel do not ultimately feel they 'belong' and do not pursue a long career in the forces. For those that stay, loneliness and isolation can be a significant issue. A British Legion survey found that a quarter of respondents felt lonely and socially isolated 'always' or 'often, with almost 70% agreeing that loneliness and social isolation are issues in the armed forces community.¹¹⁰ The Legion identified elements of forces lifestyle which increase vulnerability to these issues: these include the mobile nature of the lifestyle and issues related to accommodation and lack of access to welfare and support, elements of armed forces life such as a 'culture of self-

reliance and avoidance of “weakness”, relationship issues due to strain from long periods of separation, health-related issues, and experiencing alienation from the civilian community’.

Exiting the armed forces was the most common cause of both loneliness and social isolation:

Many are concerned about integration into civilian society, as well as the loss of military friendships. Personnel who are unexpectedly discharged from the forces may be particularly vulnerable due to sudden loss of identity, stability and support.

The British Legion goes on to explore the complex impact of belonging for veterans:

Although strong bonds within Service can mitigate against feelings of homesickness upon joining, such bonding may also hinder the transition into civilian society ... Ex-serving personnel also note the loss of camaraderie and friendships built during Service, and the impact of this on their social networks post-exit. Some veterans feel an ongoing sense of alienation from civilian society due to a strong internalised military identity.

One respondent was quoted as saying: ‘After 25 years of indoctrination, I will never truly be a civilian.’¹¹¹

‘Encouraging people to join The Army isn’t like asking someone to try a different tea brand or buy a new kettle. A decision to join The Army is a decision to change your life, so we had to look beyond traditional advertising to reach our goals. Qualitative interviews, quantitative research and data analysis revealed a key powerful emotional driver that attracted people to The Army beyond skills and adventure... This desire to belong – one of psychology’s most powerful drivers – became the core motivating message in this year’s recruitment campaign.’

Karmarama¹⁰⁷

‘A sense of belonging may sound like a small thing. Yet it fuels you as much as food and water, because it doesn’t just feed your body, it feeds your mind and soul. The stronger the sense of belonging – the stronger you become. Sure, you could look for belonging in a football team or a club, but the sense of belonging you’ll find in the Army – well, that’s the next level...When you’ve trained together side by side, learnt things no classroom can teach you and fought with each other, for each other – that creates a bond like no other. A bond that lasts a lifetime.’

Army landing page for This is Belonging¹⁰⁸

'The Army's This is Belonging recruitment campaign is troubling because of how it is designed to play upon the psychological weaknesses of young people and children. The PR company behind the campaign have even stated that it is designed to exploit young people's 'desire to belong,' and they note that this is 'one of psychology's most powerful drivers.' The campaign itself is directly targeted at children from working class backgrounds and deprived areas in the UK. This attempt to take advantage of young, economically poor people's desire to belong is cynical at best, and predatory at worst.'

Dr Rhys Crilley¹⁰⁶

'When you leave the Army you're sort of left in this limbo where you're not in the military so your friends in the military don't see you as a military guy anymore, but you're not... you don't feel like you're a civilian, so you're sort of in this limbo state where you don't feel like you can identify with either... so you sort of feel very alone, and vulnerable. You leave with no idea of how to engage with people emotionally... friends for life is a load of rubbish. I had a meet up with a few friends the other day and there is like a bond there – but you all just moan about how rubbish the Army was, that's what you spend your time thinking of.'

Wayne Sharrocks, Army veteran who left aged 24 after being injured in an IED explosion



Still from *Your Army Needs You, and Your Resilience*, 2019. British Army/YouTube.

v. Promoting self-development in the context of conflict

As we noted in the introduction, these adverts explicitly or implicitly use conflict elsewhere in the world as the context for the marketing of self-development to young people in the UK. By using a narrative frame of individual fulfilment, these adverts depoliticise military action; the focus is on the individual recruit and what role they are playing, rather than on the bigger picture.

This process is made easier by steering clear of controversial imagery as the Army found when its *Start Thinking Soldier* marketing campaign was criticised for using video game aesthetics to sell careers.¹¹² The result was a move away from direct depictions of combat in military marketing. The 2018 marketing brief stipulates that the adverts must not take place around 'military/combat/forces films' in cinemas, suggesting that it is keen to control how the messaging about war and state-led armed violence is understood. While the Army has said it does not want to attract recruits who glory in violence, it has since made a return to depicting scenes of conflict and combat in 2019.¹¹³ It is also utilising gaming behaviour that could be classified as addictive.¹¹⁴

The *Made in the Royal Navy* films depict weaponry as a technical challenge or a fun object to handle. A few fleeting images of conflict or reconstruction scenes are shown but the sense of what the Navy actually does is barely present; even the message that the Navy provides humanitarian assistance, which does feature on its website and has been a part of other marketing campaigns, is not present here. The life of these personnel is more or less depicted as a binary between home and ship, and there are no scenarios introduced that suggest the purpose of all this activity.

The RAF films are also lacking in context, and the depiction of the purpose for the planes. Were it not for the occasional RAF logo there would be no clue that these are adverts for a military air force in many of the films. Others feature the Red Arrows, which the British public are familiar with from air-shows and fly-pasts at public events. Their use in recruitment marketing glosses over the more common deployment of fighter jets. In addition, the RAF website states that they are involved in '15 missions in 4 continents in 22 countries' but does not list what those missions are, and only partially illustrates 'What we do' with 'Hurricane Irma relief', 'Quick reaction alert' and 'Combating DAESH'.¹¹⁵

'RAF only focuses on red arrows and downtime which completely ignores the actual work of the RAF.' - Survey respondent, aged 24

Reflections on military marketing messages

i. Colour, gender, religion: there's more than political correctness to the new British Army recruitment campaign

Contribution from Nivi Manchanda and Paul Higate, first published in *The Conversation*¹¹⁶

Dr Nivi Manchanda is Lecturer in International Politics at Queen Mary University London and Paul Higate is Professor in Conflict & Security at Politics & International Studies (PoLIS), University of Bath.

The British Army's new recruitment videos are rather surprising. Instead of depicting masculine, gun-wielding warriors on the battlefield, they feature, short, alluring animations that speak to those who would not ordinarily volunteer for the most respected of national institutions. The message of these animations is clear: the Army will accept you without judgement and welcome you into its family, irrespective of whether you are a woman, gay, a practising Muslim, emotionally vulnerable or even physically unfit.

Appealing to the so-called 'snowflake generation', this campaign deviates from its 'Be the Best' predecessor, which was criticised as 'dated, elitist and non-inclusive'.¹¹⁷ Yet, resistance to this 'overly politically correct' campaign remains.¹¹⁸

Those defending the status quo prioritise the defence of the realm over the Army being representative of society. Their belief is that the traditional macho warrior (implicitly, and often explicitly, conceived of as white, straight and male) makes the best fighter. Characterised by an unflappable stoicism, unquestionable patriotism, physical superiority and a cool but ruthless drive to get the job done, these soldiers are the most likely to excel in combat – at least according to some.¹¹⁹

In more ways than one, especially for the more 'progressive' among us, the new campaign is an indubitably positive one: it has wide appeal, draws in people from all sections of British society, and in a time of rising Islamophobia, misogyny, homophobia and hate crime, presents the Army as a truly diverse and cosmopolitan force.

Indeed, seen in light of US President Donald Trump's injunction to ban all transgender soldiers, the British Army comes across as shockingly enlightened, even humane.¹²⁰ But lest we forget, Britain is in a state of permanent war.

Reports of special forces deployments – likely ongoing – have been documented as recently as October 2016 in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.¹²¹ These shadow wars are animated by national interest and have generated their own insecurities at both home and abroad in ways that reveal the clear limits to using military power in foreign policy.

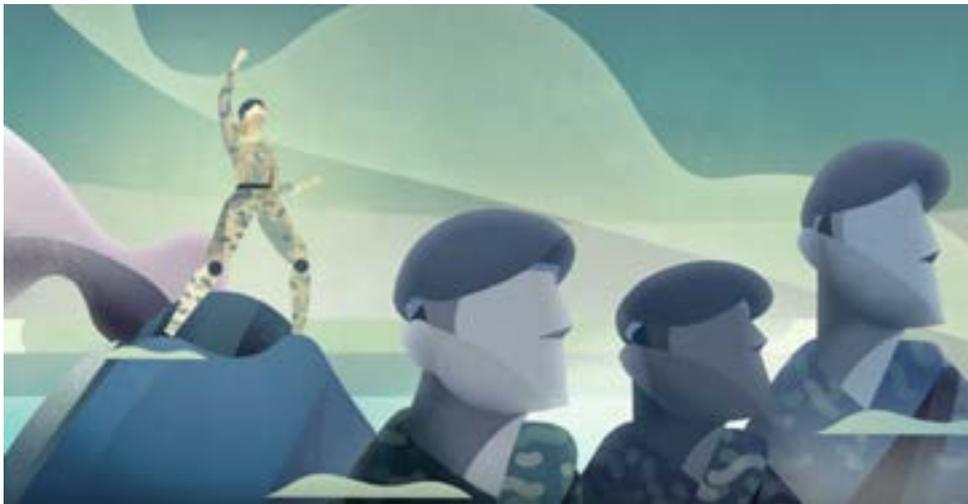
But more importantly, perhaps, is the fact that just as heteronormativity is not the sole reserve of heterosexuals¹²² so militarisation – in its many guises, but specifically for our purposes here, through the targeted nature of the recruiting campaign – need not be limited to white, straight, men.

And herein lies both the seduction and the danger of these 'inclusionary' Army videos. Through mass appeal and in the face of an ever-expanding remit of who constitutes a 'good' soldier, the Army becomes more attractive to those who might have otherwise voiced opposition to it.

We arguably see here the active militarisation of civil society, and a population subtly inured to the politics and violence of conflict. The British Army is a 'killing machine', embroiled in covert wars that actively destroy the lives and livelihoods of many innocent people in other parts of the world.¹²³

These videos also cleverly gloss over sexism and racism within the ranks of the Army. Deploying the language of 'exception', the Army is posited as much kinder, much more familial and much more feminist than 'normal' jobs out there. As we know, the Army is no paragon of egalitarianism and justice;¹²⁴ but even more crucially what the construction of the Army as a 'safe space' does is exacerbate the difference between 'home' and 'abroad'. 'We' in Britain have feminism, diversity and liberalism, 'they' over there, where we fight, have sexism, intolerance and abuse. The legitimisation of war is brilliantly folded into these videos, reifying difference and celebrating 'British values'.

Ultimately, the Army videos are a stroke of genius. And that might be one of the biggest obstacles we face if we are truly in the game for a more peaceful and less racist world.



Still from *Will I be listened to in the Army?*, 2018.
British Army/YouTube.

ii. Made in the Royal Navy and sold to the state

Nivi Manchanda and Paul Higate

The *Made in the Royal Navy* campaign has been running since 2014 and over the years has produced a number of short and compelling biographical vignettes of individual life journeys. A minute or two in duration, these videos follow the trajectory of individuals -- from civilian to regular member of the RN.

Take Ben's archetypal story of growing up in Carlisle. Accompanied by a reassuring Geordie voiceover and shot through a grainy colour filter, we see Ben as he transitions to adulthood, opening with him as a baby aged one followed by images of a four year-old 'kicking off the stabilisers of a bike', then at seven 'being United (football) mad'.

Aged 11 he is expressing his boredom through lying on a sofa and being comically covered by sofa cushions, which is followed by getting his 'first black-eye and girlfriend' at 14. After leaving school at 16 and falling into a series of activities familiar to young men -- the rough and tumble of breaking his arm and 'breaking the bank' to buy a car -- eventually he turns his life around and moves from 'pulling pints' at 18 in his local pub to 'pushing' himself physically.

At this point an electrifying soundtrack lifts the mood of the video and its tempo shifts up a gear where we are told that he has 'upped his game', 'made a leap' and learned to 'think on his feet'.

The remaining 30 seconds are dedicated to Ben developing confidence in the Royal Navy, travelling extensively, becoming part of a brotherhood, assuming an importance for the lives of others and finally, returning home (presumably on shore leave) to his waiting mother with the closing lines of 'sure, I was born in Carlisle, but I was made in the Royal Navy'. Other vignettes covering the parallel transitions of Ali, Modou, Louise, Tammi, Shantel and Michael from civilian to Royal Navy regular mobilise similar tropes invoking the importance of gaining an identity, purpose, worth and value as both an individual and team member.

The adverts are slick and captivating, yet wholly elide the *raison d'être* of military service and the attendant violence at its heart. There is no need to look away. There is no blood here, no trauma and no enemy. There is no dilemma around whether or not to take life, what this could mean for those on the receiving end of such acts or even for the perpetrators and their own long-term psychological well-being.

These men and women are freed from the burden of politics as they navigate their way through the task focused institution known for its 'can do' attitude and ability to get the job done. Horizons are limited, heads are down and the message is 'crack-on'. Stoicism is what is required and rewarded here, not questions.

In this sense -- and perhaps unsurprisingly -- *Made in the Royal Navy* parallels recent British Army and Royal Air Force campaigns that gloss over war and its inestimable impact on society -- both 'theirs' and 'ours'.

Yet, while there is little of real novelty in highlighting the ways that this traditional institution yokes its aspirations to the logics of a moribund Empire -- albeit briefly enlivened by nostalgic fantasies of a sovereign Britain freed from its European shackles in the form of Brexit -- this particular campaign exceeds its predecessors like no other.

Imbued with God-like powers of creation, the Royal Navy loftily presents itself as 'making' or 'creating' people. Before their individual rights of passage, they were ordinary people. Civilians. Largely irrelevant Nobodies. They are then 'saved' through being transformed into fully-formed individuals with meaning and gravitas. The metamorphosis is profound and complete.

The take-home message is: to be worth it, you must become enrolled in the Royal Navy. Though alluring, these ads are ultimately a paean to the neoliberal self: strong, rational and empowered. As citizens invested in the future of this country, it is incumbent upon us to challenge this and other forms of seductive and familiar, yet deeply problematic instances of contemporary militarisation and its racialised and gendered underpinnings.

We should also stop and think about the framing of a destructive force in wholly 'constructive' or 'creative' terms. The centring of 'making' people in these advertisements cleverly conceals the ultimate destruction of lives central to the use of military violence.

iii. Royal Navy veteran, Mark Smith

I grew up in a small village with three sisters and an older brother. Middle child of five. Grew up in a loving home with two amazing parents.

I started working at 14 with a paper round. Left school at 16. I didn't really have grades I was proud of but that wasn't important. Heard stories of the Royal Navy from a young age. My father served as did many of my uncles. My older sister joined at 17. My brother two years later, also at 17. As a child being in the Navy was what I wanted to do when I grew up. Space didn't interest me and I was a terrible footballer. All through school I planned to join the military at 16.

I didn't enjoy school but at sixteen I got into music and going to gigs. I got into girls. The plan to join up was always there in the back of my mind. Good career, good prospects and good pay. Working dead-end jobs, earning minimum wage. Fine if you're living for the weekend but doesn't everyone want more?

I finally joined up at 20. Decided to follow my uncle and become a submariner. The pride of a silent assassin. I went through basic training and enjoyed 'playing the game'. Six months passed and so did the option of early release. No problem, I've got my ship mates, my comrades.

I served on my first patrol over Christmas of '07. Got my head down and concentrated on getting my dolphins. Something wasn't quite right though. That thought in the back of my head about my 'dream job' was changing. I got upset and depressed. I didn't feel right in myself. I was a strong-minded person. Forget about it, push it down. Passed and became part of the team. Made my family proud.

Time came around to go to sea again. I started to get stressed. I couldn't bring myself to go. It didn't make sense to me. I didn't want to let my mates down but at the same time, I would lie awake at night, falling into a black hole at the thought of being onboard. I told my close friends, they said it was a wibble. Spoke to a doctor who told me I was fine and reported it to my welfare manager onboard. This created more stress. The thought of going away and now getting questioned about it by someone who didn't understand my frame of mind.

Day before sailing and I decided I had to do something, speak to someone about exactly how I'm feeling. Told another doctor I would self-harm. I would try and break my arm so has not to have to go back onboard. Finally my words came out and someone listened and understood that I wasn't right. Help was offered and I was stood down from duty. My boat went away for three weeks and I was left on shore. When my boat returns my ship mates aren't the same with me. It felt like they didn't have the time for me like they did before. One of my buddies from basic was still the same but reported that my superior officers had started calling me a 'quitter'. I apparently wasn't one of them anymore. I abandoned them so they had abandoned me.

This ate away at me for a long time. Since a small child I had dreamt of being a sailor. Had heard of the bond between ship mates. Friends for life. The feeling of belonging. The team works.

I didn't understand mental health. I always believed that anyone can change their mind-set. Just cheer up. Look on the bright side. How could this feeling of emptiness attack me? How do I stop it? Why am I not as strong as my friends? Why does the quitter have to be me? I still think about it sometimes but time is a great healer.

I am no longer in the Royal Navy. I managed to stick out another two years. Two because you have to allow a year after giving your notice. I am now a civilian. I am now happy and stress free. I meditate and take time to listen to my mind and understand that things can be stressful and hard. I now understand not to listen to other people's opinions of me. I'm sure some of my old crew still have their views on me but I don't care. I'd like to speak with them one day and explain everything and hopefully they can understand.

Negative mental health can afflict anyone. Anybody can sit in their own head and make things worse. The best thing you can do is tell someone you trust. Speaking your thoughts, no matter how crazy they seem, will help to ground you. From this grounding you can grow. Friends and loved ones will help you understand that you're not alone.

Was I made in the Royal Navy? I don't think so. Although parts of it have shaped me and helped me grow into a stronger person, parts of it also destroyed me for a while. I would like to thank the ones who stayed by my side and understood that I was a person with feelings and not just a service number and part of a bigger machine.

iv. No Ordinary Job?

Contribution from Chris Rossdale

Dr Chris Rossdale is Fellow in International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Watching the videos for the RAF's ongoing recruitment campaign 'No Ordinary Job' is an arresting experience. To slick visuals of satisfied recruits and the warm sounds of roaring engines, we are offered an experience like no other. Tapping knowingly into the frustrated desires of the millennial generation, the adverts promise what so many of us long for: an escape from the monotony, drudgery and expendability of late-modern capitalism; a place in society that carries respect; a way to be special. Each of the adverts models the ideal fusion of person and task, collective and individual. Harry uses his engineering degree to help keep Eurofighter Typhoons in the air. Stephanie the cook can express herself while fuelling an Army. The RAF will make you better both as an individual and as part of a society; it will build your skills, make you fit, teach you responsibility, all of these while providing the kind of companionship and comradeship other workplaces consider unproductive. At the same time, and in the oldest tradition of military recruitment, they offer travel, adventure and the opportunity to see the world. The videos show recruits orienteering, sailing, rowing and relaxing on beaches. What better job than one that takes you on holiday?

These promises are especially powerful in a time of seemingly perpetual economic slump, in which chances for social advancement are limited and where the casualisation of work trains us to consider ourselves disposable. Endless austerity is a social and economic disaster for our youth, but plays at least some role in stimulating military recruitment and so helps to mitigate the ongoing recruitment challenges that have beset the forces since the Iraq war. Part of the problem facing the RAF, alongside the Army and Navy, is that potential recruits know that this isn't an ordinary job.

The adverts carefully elide much of what makes a career in the RAF highly unusual. Their focus lies squarely on the individual, their progression and development, and their role within the RAF family. There is no war, no enemy, no violence and no death. There are no unconscionable orders, no moral dilemmas, no tragedy, no trauma. The videos are concerned solely with the pleasures offered through integration within the machine, with no acknowledgement of what that machine does. The harsher reality, conspicuous through its absence in these videos, is that a career in the RAF means a future that is implicated in some of the worst violence of British militarism. Despite traditional images of the UK as a naval power, for the past hundred years it has been superior air forces that have underpinned Britain's status as a leading military force. Air control and aerial bombardment played a key role in the latter period of formal imperial rule, and in more recent years have been central to brutal and disastrous military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. This history and these wars are fundamental to any meaningful story about the RAF, but they are not here. Also absent is the role the RAF plays in promoting British arms sales abroad. RAF personnel are employed to showcase British weapons to potential buyers, and have recently helped to train Saudi Arabian personnel in the use of British-sold weaponry even as the Saudi Air Force has continued in its murderous bombardment of Yemen. The adverts do show Ellie maintaining the iconic Red Arrows, but conceal the important role the Red Arrows play in promoting British-made fighters to overseas buyers.

Part of what is powerful about the adverts is that they offer nothing more than what we might reasonably expect from any ordinary job: an employer who sees you as an individual, who will be invested in your future, who will (as the campaign website states) focus on what makes you 'valuable, productive and happy'. The adverts offer social advancement whether you left school early or have recently graduated from university. This is a job-market fantasy that today's young people are learning to live without, and the RAF harness the anxieties and lost desires that accompany this process expertly. But they do so while concealing the troublesome realities; that you will be plugging a recruitment crisis, making possible new imperial adventures, and helping to sell British weaponry overseas. Revealing these silences is an important means of challenging the increasing militarisation of British society. But the adverts also serve as a call to address the failures of economic justice and dignity they reveal and mobilise. The RAF are trading on the false promises and lost futures of contemporary capitalism. It is here that their message is powerful, but also here that we should stop to think about how economic crises and military mobilisation interrelate. Much deeper social problems are revealed at this intersection.

Target audience reflections - What do young people think?

We conducted a small survey to explore how young people respond to the messages of *This is Belonging* 2017 and 2018, *Made in the Royal Navy* and *No Ordinary Job*. Responses from 28 people aged up to 24 were gathered anonymously via Facebook using a paid advertisement, as well as Twitter and one school class. Of the respondents, 11 were under 16, 14 stated they were male, 11 female and 3 non-binary or not stated.

Respondents watched a selection of adverts from some or all of the campaigns. Asked whether they found the adverts persuasive, over half (15) said they were very (3) or quite (12) persuasive. Ten of these were 16 or 17 years old and 9 were male.

Asked if they thought the adverts are realistic, less than one quarter (6) thought they were very (2) or quite (4) realistic. Four of these were 16 or 17 years old.

Asked if the adverts made them more or less likely to enlist, 8 said more likely and 6 said less likely. Five out of these 8 are 16 or 17 years old. Not all of those who were more likely to enlist as a result of watching the adverts found them realistic.

Of this sample, fewer people found the adverts persuasive than found them realistic, which suggests that persuasion may not be dependent on accurate depictions of military life. Younger respondents were more likely to say that the adverts were persuasive while older respondents were more likely to be critical. This suggests that young adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to the marketing messages and without an informed awareness of alternative perspectives.

Respondents were asked to comment on the adverts. One male under 16 said, 'I'm going to sign up no matter the adverts, but I am one for a severe physical challenge and that is not portrayed within the adverts.' Another respondent under 16 said she was more likely to enlist 'because it states that you don't need expertise and loads of opportunities.'

A 19-year-old male said he thought the adverts were quite persuasive, and they make him more likely to enlist, and it 'has tempted me before, but didn't join because of my mother'. Although they 'did make me feel a sense of wanting to belong' they were not very realistic because they 'downplay the level of trauma that our soldiers go through and can give unrealistic expectations to young people.'

Older respondents tended to voice more critical opinions. On whether the adverts are realistic, a 22-year-old male commented, 'There is little mention of the harsh nature of training. There is little mention of fighting in these, we see soldiers on watch or one shot of a stretcher, glossing over the key part of the Army.' A 21-year-old female said, 'I don't like the fact that they're promoting the Army as part of belonging somewhere, whereas the Army is something psychologically and physically very challenging.'

Some respondents were critical of the style of marketing. For example, a 19-year-old female said, 'I'm not naïve to the fact that the forces are not just about people making friends and learning. I find it aggressive in trying to find recruits and I don't like the way they try to force it on people.'

Reflecting that the belonging offered is not for everyone, a 24-year-old male commented: 'I'm sure that some of the experiences are accurate for a subsection of people, but if I entered the forces I wouldn't have anywhere near the experiences because it requires a certain mindset. If you're into football, banter with the lads, are conservative in world-view, it might be a blast but I don't think any of the camaraderie and adventure are going to be waiting for someone who overthinks the wider implications of their actions. Also, I highly doubt most of your time abroad will be spent cliff-diving with other attractive young people.'

While it is not possible to generalise from this small survey it does point to how further research could inform understanding about the effects of military marketing on young people across the span of adolescent years.

Applying new understanding to military marketing

This report has discussed how military marketing campaigns create powerful messages that attract young people. They employ an understanding of adolescent psychology that works to embed positive ideas about military life, taking advantage of developmental vulnerabilities and social inequality. It is not surprising that many find them persuasive, even with an underlying knowledge that the adverts do not depict reality.

The Army's *This is Belonging* campaign has particularly caught public attention, partly because of the new turns that the adverts took – introducing influential filmic and animated aesthetics – and also because parts of the campaign attempt to address concerns that potential recruits may have. The 2019 *Your Army Needs You* adverts have also played on more divisive themes, and can be seen as perpetuating harmful stereotypes. The idea of twisting those stereotypes into something of positive use for the Army and suggesting that the Army will look favourably on them unlike civilians, is undermined by the fact that significant public statements had previously been made by the Head of the Army bemoaning the character of young people today. The manner of the Army's high-profile launch suggests not only a willingness to push boundaries, and even to court controversy, but also to have an influence in society that is far wider than the target audience for recruiting.

This is Belonging is still mainly focused towards traditional recruit audiences, with the inclusion of women and LGBTQ+ and BAME communities rather token; the Navy and RAF adverts are generally more inclusive. Common to all three campaigns is the construction of various binaries between civil society and the military that are simplistic and tend to reinforce stereotypes.

The *Made in the Royal Navy* and RAF's *No Ordinary Job* adverts target those not only attracted to adventure and thrill-seeking but who also want to 'better themselves', find direction and empowerment. The armed forces are presented as *the* escape route from a lack of opportunity and towards self-fulfilment and respect. As with the Army adverts, the protagonists also 'belong'; each part of a unit, a crew, a service which 'makes' them who they are and provides all they need.

Our analysis has identified a number of key themes:

1. ***Life in the armed forces is portrayed as superior to civilian life***
In enabling belonging and self-development, the armed forces are depicted as superior to civilian occupations, even unique. This constructs an idealised image of life in the armed forces.
2. ***Much of the reality of an armed forces career is glossed over***
There is an absence of information on the risks, legal obligations and reality of military life in the promotional material relating to military careers. Far from 'having it all' as a number of the adverts depict, evidence shows that levels of satisfaction and morale are not high. Retention is a significant problem in the forces, who provide a long career for very few. Furthermore, problems associated with leaving the forces can mean that, rather than being a means to social mobility, veterans can struggle with post-service problems and to readjust to civilian life.
3. ***Diversity is tokenised, and in some cases unhelpful stereotypes are reinforced***
Despite being an important dimension of the advertising briefs, the Army's focus on diversity is token, particularly around gender, with a more prominent theme of male bonding. While the Navy and RAF are more successful in creating a sense of equality, the adverts tend to echo and exploit existing stereotypes, and reinforce ideas that diversity of opportunity is not available in civilian life. They ignore the evidence that there is still a strong culture that works against diversity in the military.
4. ***Emphasising camaraderie exploits adolescent vulnerability and masks feelings of isolation within the armed force community***
Using 'belonging' and camaraderie as key selling points is problematic as it capitalises on vulnerabilities that young people may have due to social isolation but the conformity involved in the formation of a military identity can mean people have to hide parts of themselves. Ultimately, many who join feel they do not fit in and

leave; the adjustment back into civilian life, to a state of not 'belonging', can be hard or impossible for veterans. Loneliness and isolation also affect the serving armed forces community.

5. *Promoting self-development in the context of conflict depoliticises military purpose*

The focus on seeking individual fulfilment in the context of conflict or preparing for conflict distracts from an awareness that military action is inherently political. For some recruits, a lack of awareness of what they are getting into and also of the moral dilemmas that military action poses will have important consequences in later life. For society more generally, we must not let narratives of development, fulfilment and diversity distract from scrutiny around the legitimacy of military action and awareness of all its consequences. We must also be aware how military marketing and the debate it generates act as propaganda to influence perceptions and acceptance of military purpose and action among the general public.

A moral perspective

There is a growing interest in how ethics relates to the experience of individual service personnel. Many are familiar with conscientious objection but are less aware of new understanding around moral injury and moral exploitation.

Moral injury is a new development in understanding of war trauma and PTSD. It is recognised by the U.S. Department for Veteran Affairs as psychological harm resulting from an 'act of transgression' against one's moral code. They state that, 'In the context of war, moral injuries may stem from direct participation in acts of combat, such as killing or harming others, or indirect acts, such as witnessing death or dying, failing to prevent immoral acts of others, or giving or receiving orders that are perceived as gross moral violations.'¹²⁵

A US study published in 2017 found that 11% of combat-exposed veterans admitted perceived moral transgressions on the battlefield, a quarter witnessed perceived moral transgressions by others, and a quarter felt morally betrayed by their peers or leaders, or by others.¹²⁶ Moral injury is not widely recognised in the UK and there have yet to be any published empirical clinical studies of it in a UK military context.

It is interesting to consider the implications of moral injury given that military recruitment adverts play out against a backdrop of conflict, with no sense that this context could be problematic for the individual or more generally. While warfare is presented as an avenue to self-improvement and escape for vulnerable young people, philosophers have argued that disproportionately offloading the moral burdens of warfare onto vulnerable people amounts to moral exploitation.

Robillard and Strawser argue that if 'a soldier's decision was heavily conditioned by their pronounced vulnerability (socio-economic, age-related, or myriad other factors), then it is doubtful that the soldier was in a position to refuse the additional moral responsibility, moral risk, and potential blameworthiness thrust upon them by military service.'¹²⁷ Those from more disadvantaged parts of society are more like to opt for military service due to lack of alternative opportunities, and the fact that individuals may join up because of long-established relationships between the armed forces and their communities and families only strengthens this sense of economic exploitation.

Thinking about how moral exploitation operates in a pre-recruitment context, Jonathan Parry, Director of the Centre for the Study of Global Ethics at the University of Birmingham, argues that society should be encouraging young people to think about the moral risk of military service rather than feeding them 'sanitised promotional materials that focus on "big guns" and "awesome armour"'.¹²⁸ With reference to under-18 recruitment, he questions whether '15 and 16-year-olds lack the psychological maturity and full information required to genuinely consent to the terms of service' particularly given the way in which they are strategically targeted by military recruitment marketing campaigns and strategies.

Creating a new framework for assessing military marketing

As we discuss in chapter 6, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to marketing messages and to the risks and rigours of a career in the armed forces. The UK continues to recruit at a very young age and target teenagers from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. While it is true that marketing rarely deals with reality, this is less acceptable when audiences are targeted on the basis of their youth and other vulnerabilities, including coming from low income

'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.'

Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

households and when what is being sold to them entails potentially life changing risks. Ultimately this style of marketing contributes significantly to both retention issues for the military and post-service issues for the individual.

We have noted recent developments in understanding which are important for rethinking the impact and appropriateness of military marketing:

- Adolescence as an extended period of neurological development, which creates a 'window of vulnerability' affecting behaviour and decision-making and response to stress. This is particularly acute for those who have faced adversity in childhood and can have long-term consequences (chapters 4 and 6).
- Mental and physical health issues associated with military training and service. Very young recruits and those who have experienced childhood adversity are particularly exposed and susceptible, even if they are not deployed until aged 18 (chapter 6).
- Vulnerability of certain groups to sophisticated marketing strategies and need for regulation and oversight to help children and young people to 'defend against persuasion' (chapter 4).
- The development of resources to help public authorities protect the long-term well-being of young people who have experienced childhood adversity and the rights and well-being of young people in general (chapter 6 and below).

Unlike marketing for most consumer products, the decision to enlist will have life-changing consequences, yet there is very little debate about whether or not this is an appropriate activity. We argue that this new understanding must be used to inform an examination of military recruitment advertising so that it is not just assessed in terms of how successful it is in drawing in applications; it should be assessed by health and ethical criteria in the same way as addictive substances and junk food.

Concerns about the vulnerability of the youngest recruits and the need for young people to be in an environment that is conducive to their development are at the heart of the measures contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which address children (under-18s) and armed conflict.

In 2016 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended again that the UK, 'reconsider its active policy of recruitment of children into the armed forces and ensure that it does not occur in a manner which specifically targets ethnic minorities and children of low-income families.'¹²⁹ These concerns have been echoed by the UK's four Children's Commissioners, many children's rights and welfare organisations and civil society organisations and there is a high level of public support for raising the minimum age of recruitment to the UK.¹³⁰ Parliament's Defence Committee and Joint Committee on Human Rights have also called for the policy to be reviewed.¹³¹

If the UK, as a signatory to both the Convention and the related Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, were to fully embrace the spirit of them instead of derogating from key aspects, such a move would help to build a framework for military marketing to adolescents that takes the concerns of specialists on children's rights and welfare into consideration.¹³²

There is some oversight of armed forces promotion to children developing in the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliaments in the context of education which could be useful in looking at military promotion more generally.¹³³ In 2015 the Welsh Government accepted recommendations to ensure that armed forces visits to 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.'¹³⁴ The Scottish Government are considering recommendations for scrutiny, guidance and regulation around armed forces visits to schools.¹³⁵ These include commissioning a Child Rights and Welfare Impact Assessment, providing information on the risks and legal obligations of an armed forces career as part of school-based careers information, and exploring further how parents and young people should be consulted. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UK's four Commissioners for Children and Young People have also called for military

recruitment activities in schools to be stopped.¹³⁶

This is a debate which needs to develop if the best interests of young people are to be prioritised over the interests of military institutions and if we are to move away from the unfortunate mind-set of 'recruitment at all costs' that currently prevails amongst policy makers, in the context of the 'recruitment crisis' narrative.

*Quote: 'British societal expectations in respect of young people's best interests are also evolving, as exemplified by restricting the purchase of tobacco, fireworks, glue and knives to adults only. Enlistment from sixteen stands out as incongruous.'*¹³⁷



Army magazine 'The Locker' with the latest recruitment material aimed at gamers, which was distributed to all subscribers of Playstation magazine in January 2019.

Photo: Emily Apple.

Principles and recommendations

This report has indicated how recent research about the risks associated with signing up at a young age, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, and new understanding on the potential susceptibility of adolescents to marketing techniques, should inform new thinking on the appropriateness of unregulated marketing of careers associated with high levels of risk. Military marketing campaigns and how they are conducted, increasingly away from view of parents and others, should be subject to scrutiny and oversight. Greater recognition of child rights and welfare and the implementation of measures to further them provides the framework of standards within which powerful institutions such as the military must operate.

The following principles should be adopted in relation to military recruitment practices in general:

1. Prioritise the well-being of young people over recruitment needs of the armed forces.

With the dominant 'recruitment crisis' narrative there is little room to prioritise recruits' best interests. Military recruitment marketing seeks to persuade wider society and policy makers of the benefits of a career in the armed forces, as well as persuading young people to sign up. This is at odds with both the specific measures of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child relating to recruitment of under-18s and to the wider spirit of it that seeks to protect the best interests of young people.

2. Recognition of the link between early recruitment, childhood adversity and worse health outcomes.

A military environment is not suitable for the youngest recruits if it risks compounding the effects of vulnerability due to childhood adversity or young age. The expertise provided by charities such as Young Minds and Medact on how to attempt to best protect the long-term well-being of young people who have experienced childhood adversity is vital here. If military marketing continues to pitch itself to some of the most vulnerable teenagers – from low income families and those failed by the system – they need to account for how will they mitigate the long-term harm caused.

Recommendations

1. The UK should raise the minimum age of armed forces recruitment to 18 in order to safeguard many of the most vulnerable recruits.

This policy change would put the UK in line with the growing international consensus that no young person who is not legally an adult should join the armed forces. Voices from many quarters have called for this change, and it is supported by three-quarters of public opinion. The case has been made elsewhere that it is both feasible and advantageous for the UK armed forces to raise the recruitment age to 18.¹³⁸

2. Disseminate and encourage critical perspectives of military marketing campaigns

Educators and others in a position to guide young people should be mindful of concerns around military marketing and the continued recruitment of under-18s. Young people should feel permitted and empowered to discuss and debate these issues, and wider critiques of how advertising works, as well as encouraged to form a critical awareness of them. Educators should consider whether armed forces marketing should be allowed in schools and elsewhere where young people provide a captive audience, in the same way that this would occur around marketing of other products.

3. Policy makers should recommend measures to ensure that marketing practices are developmentally appropriate and accountable to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and UK policy makers.

In considering the aggressive approaches of many marketers towards the audiences they wish to influence, Lapierre et al recommend measures to mitigate the ‘most deleterious’ effects including educating parents ‘about the subtle pervasiveness of marketing (particularly in new media settings)’ and that policy makers should apply ‘increased pressure...to marketers to ensure that their practices are developmentally appropriate and transparent.’ The way that armed forces market to young people should be included in the process of reporting to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. The armed forces should be accountable for the approaches taken in the marketing campaigns and the Committee could consider whether these approaches are appropriate for recruits under 18.

4. Policy makers should consider regulation and guidance to ensure greater transparency in armed forces recruitment information.

Policy makers should also consider different ways in which regulation and guidance could be used to ensure greater transparency in armed forces recruitment information. Such measures should include accessible and detailed information for potential recruits and their parents/guardians that address concerns and practical information not present in recruitment adverts.

5. Research on how marketing messages impact on young people

We echo Lapierre et al’s suggestion that there is need for more research including interdisciplinary studies and longitudinal research ‘to determine the most effective ways to enhance receptivity to health messages and increase protection against unhealthy marketing messages.’¹³⁹ As the armed forces are using such psychosocial research themselves; research into young people’s perspectives on military marketing would create a level playing field amongst marketers, child rights organisations and regulators, providing useful insight for parents as well as young people.

6. Offer and track further development opportunities

Military academies should improve the qualifications offered in military training so that GCSE results are offered. Other positive steps forward would include the Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence collecting socioeconomic demographic data disaggregated by age on recruits so they can track what happens to young early service leavers.

Annex: Contemporary military recruitment campaign case studies

This is Belonging 2017 to 2019

This is Belonging began in January 2017. It was taken into a second phase in 2018 and a third in 2019, each with stylistic and thematic differences. It targets a core audience of 16-24 year-olds and in particular young people who are working class, focusing on lower income households in certain cities around the UK. The 2017 campaign looked to engage a traditional Army audience but in 2018 some emphasis was put on female, BAME and LGBTQ+ audiences.

The 2017 brief given by Capita and British Army to advertising agency Karmarama, describes it as moving on from the 2016 *Don't Join the Army* campaign, 'Which was aimed at changing perceptions that the Army is just about guns and tanks...the Army is a route to personal development, becoming a better you.' The campaign's main message is of camaraderie and personal development 'unique' to the Army. The brief stated that:

*'In 2017 we want to single mindedly hero the uniquely Army way to major personal development, belonging to something bigger than you. A brotherhood and sisterhood formed of unbreakable bonds which you can join and which will accept you for you.'*¹⁴⁰

The 2018 phase sought to make the sense of belonging established in 2017 'feel attainable to people who could be put off by intimidating stereotypes.'¹⁴¹ It describes its target audience, based on analysis of current regular soldiers, as being 'ambitious and money-driven but not good at money management', having a 'thirst for variety of risk' and being 'likely to be influenced by those around them.'

The 2019 campaign took this concept of the Army as a progressive and welcoming institution further by reaching out to those stereotyped by society and affirming that they can find a place in the Army.

This is Belonging 2017

The 2017 *This is Belonging* videos featured young soldiers in six short 20 or 30 second clips. One shows a young boy shivering in a tropical rainstorm, but surrounded by comrades. A fellow soldier pours him tea from a flask, another ruffles his hair; there is a little laugh but they mainly sit in silence, checking their rifles, a picture of solidarity and togetherness. Another shows a line of soldiers traipsing up a desolate, snowy mountain slope. One helps another who trips up, and one whistles and then sings 'I'm having the time of their life', ensuing playful banter and laughter.

Reflecting the key target audience, the *This is Belonging* films mostly show young white men. Given that the Army are also aiming for more female and BAME recruits, it is surprising that they are hardly visible in the 2017 campaign; a woman is amongst the group in only two videos.

These videos could be described as sensory marketing – they appeal to the viewers' senses and a powerful emotive effect. The adverts use film aesthetics to draw the viewer in. The dominant noise in the first video is a tropical rainstorm; in the second video the soldiers are walking through a cold, snowy, mountainous landscape. In both, the warmth of the group, even in adverse conditions, is the key message. The sensory focus makes the adverts captivating and memorable and helps the viewer to identify with the protagonists. The varying outdoor landscapes also speak to those seeking experience and adventure.

The dialogue is minimal, just giving a sense of friendly banter. There is no music. The lack of action in the videos leads towards a focus on the words 'This is Belonging', and finally, the 'Army, Be the Best' logo along with 'Find where you belong: Search Army Jobs.'

The four other videos contain similar elements – two armed soldiers, at their post in a building made derelict by warfare, chatting about liking and not liking cricket; a practical joke is played on a soldier changing a wheel on a jeep in a desert convoy with much laughter and cheering; a tin of peaches is given to someone on their birthday along with laughing and man-hugs, the receiver claims ‘I don’t even like peaches’ but is clearly pleased. The final video depicts two older men in a cosy pub playing cards, medals and poppies on their blazers. One gives the other his last snack which the other receives with a small smile of thanks and friendship.

The inference is that these powerful experiences pull people together; they are a team, they respect each other, they have fun together and look after one another. And this will be long-lasting. Most of the videos have elements of physical touch and pleasure demonstrated through laughing or smiles. The viewer feels pulled in to this unit – they too can be a part of a close bonded group. They too can belong.

This is Belonging 2018

The first videos to be launched for *This is Belonging 2018* were animations that address fears that potential recruits may have about joining the Army. They each begin with a question:

‘Will I be listened to in the Army?’

‘Can I practise my faith in the Army?’

‘What if I get emotional in the Army?’

‘Can I be gay in the Army?’

‘Do I have to be a superhero to join the Army?’

Each video is narrated by a ‘real-life’ voice who tells a story of initial anxiety about whether the Army would be the right place for them – soon dispelled as they are reassured by the camaraderie of the group. The animations present a linear journey from uncertainty or even negativity in the civilian world to one of security and positivity in the Army. They journey from enclosed spaces with dark and foreboding imagery and music, to vistas of light filled horizons and uplifting music.

The films show the unit becoming the family or team for the individual, signified by a helping hand or a friendly pat on the shoulder. Weapons are in view but not central to the stories and combat scenes are avoided.

The *What if I get emotional in the Army?* protagonist says he thought the pressures on men to not show emotion would be far worse in the Army, that ‘any sign of emotion would be a sign of weakness’ that would be ‘ripped out’. But instead he found the Army to be like family, or even closer than family. Instead of the tears caused by negative emotions that he felt before he joined up, the narrator is now crying tears of joy or laughter.

The *Do I have to be a superhero to join the Army?* protagonist presents himself as having been physically unfit while working in a bar, but the Army helped him to get ‘fitter than he ever was’ in a supportive rather than intimidating environment.

Most of the protagonists are male but the film *Will I be listened to in the Army?* features a woman whose life has so far been dominated by men and finds that ‘the Army is different to all that’. She presents the military as a space for female empowerment in a world dominated by men as she ends up leading a team of women as an officer. She raises her fist to the air as she says ‘it finally feels good to have a voice of my own’.

The animations were followed up with a series of five non-animated vignettes along similar themes. In one we see a Muslim soldier being given time to pray on exercise, in another a group out running stop as one of them successfully does pull-ups, and in a third an older soldier receives a letter from home and a young soldier brings him a cup of hot water for the tea-bag it contains. In *Still playing the joker* a practical joke at the end of an exercise ends in laughing. Each one shows the group reaching out to the individual.

This is Belonging 2019 – Your Army Needs You

The Army recently launched new ‘belonging’ adverts and a poster campaign around the concept of ‘Your Army Needs You’. The launch received a fanfare of publicity centring on the posters which have been seen as controversial for two reasons: firstly because they employed a style heavily reminiscent of Kitchener’s ‘Your Country Needs You’ posters

from World War One.¹⁴² Secondly, the posters took derogatory terms such as ‘snowflake’ and ‘me, me, me millennials’ and turned them around to suggest that these qualities are of use in the Army.¹⁴³ While opinion about whether the posters are insulting or very clever has been divided, it is clear that the Army has gained significant publicity in pushing boundaries of acceptability.

The three videos focus on individuals who are often criticised or demeaned by others, and who are in situations that will be familiar to many young people - a supermarket worker, a ‘binge gamer’ and a young office joker. The message is that while you may be looked down on in civilian life, the Army will respect and welcome you. While the ‘trolley walley’ is derided by her co-workers for being slow, the Army praises her resilience, patience and perfectionism. The joker’s spirit translates into being up for anything in the Army - whether in fun or more serious situations. In *Your Army needs you, and your stamina* the all-night gamer is shown moving from one game to the next in his living room. This is interspersed with combat images and a voiceover that confirms that stamina and dedication are ‘just what we [the Army] need.’

While these recent adverts continue the established themes of self-development and fulfilment, there are several new dimensions to the campaign. Firstly, the suggestion that ‘your Army needs you’ utilises various heightened concerns about national defence issues in the current political climate. Secondly, it reflects statements from senior military personnel in recent years about a perceived lack of willingness from so-called millennials to enlist in the armed forces (despite it being millennials who have fought in the last few wars).¹⁴⁴ Thirdly, more conflict imagery is depicted in a variety of settings, albeit without depicting full battle scenes (this may reflect the first dimension). In one very short sequence we watch a situation of social unrest from the point of view of the soldiers who are holding riot shields and batons.

Made in the Royal Navy

Made in the Royal Navy was launched in 2015 and created by the advertising agency WCRS who also run advertising campaigns for the Royal Navy Reserves, the Royal Navy Engineers and the Royal Marines Commandos. The campaign builds on the themes of the previous Royal Navy *Life Without Limits* campaign.¹⁴⁵

It initially featured a series of five short films, each depicting how the life of a recruit has been positively transformed by joining the Navy. The campaign’s main message is about the journey of personal development and ‘a totally unique lifestyle’ that a career in the Navy will lead to with ‘competitive pay, camaraderie, unrivalled leave, career progression.’¹⁴⁶

The 16-24-year-old target audience are described as being in a period of transition and ‘ready to make commitments’ while the 18-24 target audience are ‘graduates looking to kick start their careers’ who are ‘motivated to succeed in life and conscious of their well-being.’¹⁴⁷

The films are fast-paced and packed with music, speech and imagery which creates an energy and clear sense of direction. Some of them resemble music videos while in others the rhyming first-person narrative creates a poetic dimension that heightens the impact still further:

‘I left home, I wrote home, I found a new home.

I did things I never thought I would, I overcame things I never thought I could.’ (Ben’s story)

Each film employs a contrast between the protagonist’s previous and current lives, using the idea of moving away from home to a new home in the Navy as both a literal and symbolic journey of self-discovery. Each protagonist is born in a city around the UK but is ‘made in the Royal Navy’. Ben was born in Carlisle, Tom in Lincoln, others in Blyth, St Andrews, Blackpool, Croydon, Bridgend, Huddersfield, Portsmouth, Sunderland. These cities reflect the socio-economic groups of the target audience but they are not enough for these ambitious young people who are looking for something unique – ‘going nowhere, to everywhere’ (Michael’s story).

In one of the first films to be released, Ben leaves school at sixteen and after a job ‘pulling pints’ he ‘makes a leap’ and joins the Navy, where he has responsibility, power and community: ‘I put my life in the hands of others and held their lives in mine’. Through the Navy, he found adventure and excitement while travelling the world. The film flicks rapidly through very short scenes: ships firing guns, helicopters taking off, speedboats, weight lifting, rescuing someone on a

stretcher, with friends on a night out, arm wrestling – and finally going home to be greeted by his proud mother.

Tom's story also features his mother, who looks back through his poor reports from school, reading out comments about Tom not being 'willing to make himself work' – while the film shows him now working hard in the Navy. She says, 'I don't think if his teachers saw him now they would believe that man that stepped off that ship...I am amazed at the journey Tom's been through.'

Each film presents the Navy as a vehicle through which an individual can fully determine their future. Many of the films show particular trades: Tammi is a writer, 'While the crew are looking after the ship, I am looking after them'; Danny is a weapons engineer with a qualification that he can take with him when he leaves; Stuart is a warfare specialist; Shantel a chef. While many say that they got to that point after joining with few or no qualifications, there is also a place for those with good qualifications – Modou is shown questioning whether 'I can improve me', a high achiever who passes all the exams he goes for.

The brief for Louise's story was to encourage more women to consider a career on the ocean wave.¹⁴⁸ The video was launched on International Women's Day 2018 and turns an old-fashioned concept on its head: 'A woman's place. I decided it was up to me where that was, and it was in the Navy.' The journey takes her from working in a café behind the till, to lifting weights, playing football, fixing an engine, driving a speedboat, out with friends and painting another girl's nails. The text at the end reads: 'A woman's place is here' – and 'here' flashes repeatedly on the screen alongside images of her hugging her friends, in Navy uniform, and in the power stance.

Many of the films show the protagonist returning on leave to family and the warmth of their admiration. This speaks to young people's desire to make their parents proud but also to 'gatekeepers' by reassuring them not only of the career prospects in the Navy but that their young people do not reject them and will keep coming home. Tom's mother speaks directly to other parents – if she endorses this career option, why shouldn't they? Beccy talks of making her family proud by becoming a Navy medic even though she had none of the qualifications to become a doctor in civilian life.

Images of weapons, such as torpedoes and guns, feature in a number of the adverts. Weapons engineer Danny says, 'The best bit about the Navy is the kit we get to work on. I always wanted to work with big guns. And now, I get to do it for a living'; the film cuts to him aiming a gun before drinking with his mates, playing volleyball, and talking about the engineering qualifications he can take with him if he leaves.

No Ordinary Job (RAF)

No Ordinary Job is a Royal Air Force recruitment campaign released in 2014 by WCRS. No written campaign brief or impact evaluation is available.^{149,150}

In 'Engineer This', Harry is shown as a 27-year-old Engineering Officer who is in charge of 60 technicians and 12 'state-of-the-art Typhoons.' The film emphasises his power and responsibility; it shows him suited, with a name above his office, leading a meeting, someone saluting him, him supervising a Typhoon taking off. This is no ordinary career progression, the film suggests; where else could you have such amazing opportunities to quickly gain power and responsibility?

Stephanie, who 'loved to cook' is now 21 and has already 'mastered every kitchen.' She is shown cooking over a campfire, in a tent for the squadron, and for a formal dinner. Her high level of authority and responsibility are emphasised: at the end she is shown cooking for an official function for senior military personnel. But this is 'no ordinary job' for a chef – Stephanie is also shown in running in uniform, flying in a military helicopter, and helping to pitch a tent.

In 'Get Far, Fast', Ellie is shown hard at work with a sporty, active lifestyle – running, travelling, lifting weights and working on planes. She wakes with a look of clear determination, gets back to work, flies a plane and watches the Red Arrows take off. It is stated that she was 'powering the Red Arrows', the year after leaving school.

The films have a 'work hard, play hard' theme, with active or outdoors-y downtime interspersed in the montage showing their successful working life. Harry is shown playing basketball and one of the lads at the same time as being in a leadership position. Amanda is shown working out and hard at work, but also enjoying the fruits of her labour – sitting back and watching the planes fly with her peers, out of uniform and on a beach, messing around with her friends.

Some of the films go a step further and could essentially be advertising holiday destinations rather than military careers. 'Travel the World' is a fast-paced montage of beautiful scenery with people sailing, watching a school of dolphins swim past, snorkelling with turtles, jumping into a lagoon by a giant waterfall. Nobody is in uniform although the RAF logo is shown briefly on a flask. This advert focuses on joining the RAF Reserves.

'Explore the Wild' also begins with people strapping boats onto a vehicle before navigating through a forest to a stunning lake or river. They canoe until they reach a place to pitch their tent, light a fire, drink tea and cook. The next morning, canoeing on choppy water, one falls in and is pulled back onto the boat. It is wild, outdoors-y, adventurous, fun and looks like a great way to make friends: it ends by saying 'The Harken expedition. Started as workmates, finished as best mates' while showing the group laughing, smiling and chatting around the campfire.



Still from *Made in the Royal Navy - Louise's Story*, 2018. Royal Navy/YouTube.

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