Dear Mr Stewart

Following our previous submissions to the Defence Committee in relation to the enlistment of minors please find enclosed a copy of our latest analysis, prepared jointly with ForcesWatch, of the financial implications of this policy. This analysis identifies the cost saving which would have accrued to the Army in the financial year 2013/2014 had it enlisted only recruits aged 18 and above. Based on figures provided by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) we calculate that the saving would have been approximately £50 million. Note that this figure is adjusted to reflect both the higher in-training drop-out rates of recruits who enlist as minors and the slightly longer average career length of those minors who complete training.

We note the “Future Army 2020: Government Response to the Committee’s Ninth Report of Session 2013–14: Seventh Special Report, HC 387” report published on the Defence Committee’s website on 12 September, in which the Junior Entry recruitment programme is addressed. We would like to respond to each of the claims made by the MoD in Appendix B (Letter from Rt Hon Michael Fallon MP, Secretary of State) which are summarised and repeated in paragraph 29 of the report.

1. The Secretary of State notes the very high cost of Phase 1 training for Junior Entry (JE) recruits at the Army Foundation College in Harrogate, which is more than three times the cost of Phase 1 training for Standard Entry (SE) recruits elsewhere. Once the cost of recruitment and selection has been included, and the total has been adjusted for a nominal post-training army career of 10 years, we have calculated that the cost of successfully recruiting and training a 16-year-old is approximately £93,000; the same cost for an 18-year-old progressing through Catterick is approximately £48,000. Both figures exclude Phase 2 training. Please see the briefing paper attached for full calculations and explanations on this point.

The Secretary of State has said that, whilst JE training is more expensive than SE training, the longer average length of service of JE recruits means that “over a longer period, the Army has to recruit and train fewer numbers of people, which ultimately provides a marginal saving for defence”. The MoD does not provide calculations to support this conclusion and it is very difficult to see how they could. Our own analysis of the cost of JE versus SE training, which uses the MoD’s own figures and accounts for career length and retention rates, demonstrates that the MoD’s assertion is incorrect. In order for JE recruits to prove cost effective, their Army careers after completion of training would have to be four times longer than those of SE recruits. In fact, they are only about one third longer.

The slightly longer average Army career length of JE recruits who complete training is at least partly attributable to their terms of service, which obligate them to serve for up to two years longer than adult recruits (Army Terms of Service (Amendment etc.) Regulations 2008). This disparity in the minimum service period has been repeatedly criticised by the Armed Forces Bill Committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. We believe that the Army’s continuing discriminatory regulations are potentially unlawful under the Equality Act 2010 and the Equal Treatment Directive 2000/78/EC, and should be abolished as a matter of urgency. Please see
Child Soldiers International’s recent submission to the Defence Committee inquiry “Future Force 2020” for full consideration of this issue.

2. The Secretary of State claims that JE recruits receive valuable training and qualifications. Whilst we do not dispute that the majority of JE recruits achieve Level 1 or 2 qualifications in literacy and numeracy during their training, these qualifications fall below the minimum recommended standard for this age group. The Department for Education, education experts and industry bodies have all affirmed that GCSE qualifications are “critical” for all young people, and that the failure of the “most vulnerable” young people to acquire these qualifications seriously harms their future employment potential (see Department for Education (2011), “Wolf Review of Vocational Education: Government Response”, p.7). Despite this, GCSEs are not part of the curriculum for JE recruits. We wholly reject the MoD’s claim, therefore, that the educational qualifications attained by JE recruits are “valuable” when compared to the minimum qualifications available as standard to their civilian peers.

The Secretary of State also notes that all recruits begin an infantry apprenticeship, “later graduating towards specific trade apprenticeships”. As we have stated in previous submissions to the Committee, the majority of Army apprenticeships undertaken by JE recruits have very limited, if any, transferable value to future civilian employment. The majority of JE recruits remain in non-technical, combat specific roles throughout their Army careers. This is directly related to the lower level of qualifications held (or attained in training) by most JE recruits, which means they are excluded from the more technical Army apprenticeship programmes. Had they completed their secondary level education before enlisting they would have been eligible for a much wider range of Army apprenticeships, with better prospects for future civilian employment.

3. The Secretary of State concludes by noting that JE recruits comprise around 15% of Army intake and states that “any reduction in the size of the Junior Entrant cohort would have a considerable effect on the Army’s ability to provide enough manpower to support the Army 2020 requirement”. However, we have demonstrated in the attached analysis that recruiting only from age 18 and above would actually reduce the number of recruits needed to meet the trained strength requirement. This is due to the much higher in-training drop-out rate of minors compared to adults. Indeed, the majority of EU and NATO states, which field armed forces of comparable size to the UK’s as a proportion of their population, enlist all-volunteer armies from age 18 and above. The MoD has yet to demonstrate why the UK should be unique in its inability or unwillingness to recruit an all-adult armed force. Nor has it justified on ethical grounds a policy of relying on some of society’s most vulnerable minors to shore up failing recruitment strategies for the Army’s most dangerous frontline roles.

The MoD has once again failed to substantiate its claims regarding the cost-effectiveness or educational benefits of enlisting minors. We therefore urge the Committee to recommend the MoD take immediate steps to raise the minimum enlistment age to 18 as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Richard Clarke
Director
Child Soldiers International