

The British army: Estimated recruitment requirement of an all-adult force

Summary

The British armed forces recruit around 2,000 minors (aged 16 or 17) each year, of which more than **80 per cent** join the army.¹ The UK is unique in Europe and unusual worldwide in allowing its armed forces to recruit from age 16.² The policy has been widely challenged.³

Ending the enlistment of minors would reduce the army's recruitment pool overall, but it would also save around **£50 million per year**, a substantial sum that could be used to attract and retain more adult recruits.⁴ Further, the pool of 16 and 17 year olds available to the armed forces is dwindling. In 2003, **24 per cent** of 16 year olds left education to join the jobs market; by 2011 the proportion had fallen by more than half, to **10 per cent**,⁵ and it continues to fall.⁶

This briefing estimates the number of additional adult recruits that the army would have to enlist if it stopped recruiting minors. Three scenarios are explored, based on varying proportions of the army's current intake of minors who would still join as adults if 18 were the minimum enlistment age.

Based on the 'medium' scenario, which estimates that 50 per cent of the current intake of minors would still have joined as adults, the army would need to recruit **an additional 646 adult recruits** in order to sustain the current flow of personnel to its 'trained strength'. In other scenarios, the additional recruitment varies between **191 and 1,101**.

Calculations

In 2014-15, the army enlisted **7,650** soldiers, of whom **1,820** were minors and **5,830** adults.⁷

Trainee drop-out rates differ between the two age groups in a long-established pattern. For example, between 2010-11 and 2012-13, **35.9 per cent** of enlisted minors left the army during training, versus **25.0 per cent** of adult recruits.⁸ Table 1 uses these rates to estimate that, of the total intake of **1,820** minors in 2014-15, **1,167** complete their training to join the army's 'trained strength'.

Table 1: Current intake of enlisted soldiers aged under 18 with expected drop-out rates (2014-15)	
Intake 2014-15	1,820
Expected to drop-out (%)	35.9%
Expected to drop-out (n)	653
Expected to progress to trained strength	1,167

Table 2 estimates the proportion of the 1,820 recruits who now enlist aged 16 or 17 would still enlist if 18 were the minimum age for entry (called here *deferred-entry adult recruits*). The table explores three scenarios, in which the number of deferred-entry adult recruits would be: a) low (25 per cent); b) medium (50 per cent); and c) high (75 per cent). For example, the 'medium' scenario assumes that 50 per cent of recruits who now enlist as minors would still have enlisted as adults, had 18 been the minimum age for entry.

On these bases, Table 2 further calculates the number of *additional adult recruits* that would be required to ensure that the overall number of soldiers entering the trained strength remains the same as it is now. Row B of the table shows that, based on the 'medium' scenario, the army would need to attract **646** adult recruits, in

addition to those who now join younger but would still join aged 18. This is equivalent to an **11 per cent** increase in the current adult intake.

Table 2: Three recruitment scenarios for adult-only enlistment, based on a low, medium, and high proportion of the 1,820 soldiers who now enlist as minors (2014-15) and would still have joined the army if 18 were the minimum age for entry (i.e. 'deferred-entry adult recruits')			
	Low (25%)	Medium (50%)	High (75%)
A. Intake of deferred-entry adult recruits	455	910	1,365
Expected to drop out (25.0%)	114	228	341
Expected to join trained strength	341	683	1,024
B. Required additional adult intake	1,101	646	191
Expected to drop out (25.0%)	275	162	48
Expected to join trained strength	826	485	143
C. Total intake progressing to trained strength	1,167	1,167	1,167

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References

¹ MoD, *UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics, 1 October 2015*, 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-2015>.

² Child Soldiers International, *Louder than words: An agenda for action to end state use of child soldiers*, 2012, pp. 142-160, http://child-soldiers.org/global_report_reader.php?id=562.

³ Among those to have challenged the UK's policy are the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Commons Defence Committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the Children's Commissioners for the four jurisdictions of the UK, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The major British children's organisations and human rights groups have called on the armed forces to recruit adults only, as have MPs across the spectrum, many faith groups, and veterans. Answering an open question in a 2014 Ipsos Mori poll about what the recruitment age should be, 77 per cent of those who expressed a view said it should be 18 or above; 14 per cent thought it should be 16. Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration Of Reports Submitted By States Parties Under Article 8 Of The Optional Protocol To The Convention On The Rights Of The Child On The Involvement Of Children In Armed Conflict: Concluding observations, United Kingdom Of Great Britain And Northern Ireland*, (CRC/C/OPAC/GBR/CO/1), 2008, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC.C.OPAC.GBR.CO.1.pdf>; House of Commons Defence Committee, *Duty of Care (Third Report of Session 2004-5)*, 2005; House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Armed forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel (Fifth Report of Session 2013-14)*, 2013; Joint Committee on Human Rights, *Children's Rights (Twenty-fifth Report of Session 2008-09)*, 2009; Child Soldiers International, *Children's Commissioners call for an end to the recruitment of minors into the British armed forces*, http://child-soldiers.org/news_reader.php?id=834; Equality and Human Rights Commission, *UK Government UPR Mid-term Report: Report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission*, 2010, p. 5, http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/humanrights/hrc13_midterm_report.pdf; Amnesty International, *United Kingdom: Army Barracks Deaths: Families Demand Justice*, 2003, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR45/004/2003/fr/0087c2f2-d6d8-11dd-ab95-a13b602c0642/eur450042003en.html>; UNICEF, *UNICEF questions UK's right to deploy child soldiers in cases of "genuine military need"*, 23 July 2003, http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/000085.html. Ipsos MORI, *Nationwide poll conducted in July 2014 by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd*, http://forceswatch.net/sites/default/files/IPSOSsurvey2014-Forces_age.pdf. Poll question: 'In your opinion, what should be the minimum age to join the British army? Please answer regardless of whatever you believe the minimum age is at the moment.'

⁴ Child Soldiers International and ForcesWatch, 2014, op. cit.

⁵ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *The 2011 Skills for Life Survey: A Survey of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT Levels in England*, 2012, p. 121.

⁶ Department for Education, *Press release: Thousands more school leavers staying in education or training*, 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-more-school-leavers-staying-in-education-or-training>.

⁷ MoD, 2015, op. cit.

⁸ Between 2010-11 and 2012-13, 36 per cent of minors and 25 per cent of adults who enlisted in the Army left during training, calculated as follows: Of those who enlisted in the army aged under 18, 1,050 dropped out of 2,400 recruits in 2010-11; 930 of 2,930 in 2011-12; 760 of 2,300 in 2012-13; total 2,740 of 7,630 = 35.9 per cent. Of those who enlisted over 18, 1,710 dropped out of 5,640 recruits in 2010-11; 1,900 of 7,550 in 2011-12; 1,520 of 7,360 in 2012-13; total 5,130 of 20,550 = 25.0 per cent. MoD, *Annual Personnel Report* [2012, 2013, 2014 editions], <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-armed-forces-annual-manning-statistics-index>; drop-out figures from Hansard: HC Deb, 13 May 2013 c99W.