



Ministry of Defence

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Dear Demelza,

Thank you your letter of 23 May regarding the enlistment of recruits under the age of 18 into the Armed Forces.

The Armed Forces do not intend to phase out the recruitment of personnel who are under the age of 18. We believe that our policies on under-18s in Service are robust and comply with national and international law. In addition to the comprehensive welfare system that is in place for all Service personnel we meet in full our obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

We take the duty of care towards all recruits seriously and in particular those under 18 years. We have robust, effective and independently verified safeguards in place to ensure that under-18s are cared for properly. All recruitment into the UK military is voluntary, and no young person under the age of 18 years may join our Armed Forces unless their application is accompanied by the formal written consent of their parent or guardian.

The provision of education and training for 16-year-old school leavers provides a route into the Armed Forces that complies with Government education policy and provides a firm foundation for emotional, physical and educational development throughout an individual's career. The Army alone has the largest apprenticeship programme in the country, with about 95 per cent of all new soldiers taking part and over 8,000 completing their apprenticeship training each year. Ofsted regularly inspects our care of newly joined young recruits, and we are very proud of the standards we achieve.

I am also conscious of the wider benefits to society that come from the opportunity for those under the age of 18 to join the Armed Forces. A number of those joining have had a deprived childhood, and I am proud of the efforts of both the Armed Forces and the young servicemen and women themselves to develop both technical and life skills that will serve them well for the rest of their lives. The UK has many talented young people, some of whom choose to seek a career in the Armed Forces. We have no intention of denying young people this opportunity, and in turn we will continue to provide a culture within which that talent can thrive.

PENNY MORDAUNT MP

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