

UK soldiers fast-tracked into teaching

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The Department for Education (DfE) has unveiled its “Troops to Teachers” (ITT) programme, which will allow ex-soldiers without undergraduate degrees to become teachers after two years of on-the-job training.

Veterans with qualifications as instructors, coaches or mentors will be able to take part in the fast-track scheme, which has them earning a salary and teaching in classrooms for four days a week, with the remaining day spent at university.

The BBC noted that ITT will make ex-soldiers the only people who can undertake teacher training as non-graduates and qualify in just two years.

The program also provides scholarships for soldiers leaving the army who already have a degree, so they can undertake the traditional one-year graduate teaching diploma, the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE).

David Laws, the Education Minister, said that the scheme would bring “the military values of leadership, discipline, motivation and teamwork into the classroom” and that ex-soldiers would “inspire young people.”

The main teaching unions have issued pro-forma statements of concern regarding the ITT program, highlighting the reduced training military candidates will receive. The traditional routes into teaching in the UK have been either by completing a four-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) or a three-year undergraduate degree followed by a one-year PGCE, amounting to four years of further education.

The removal of the need for an undergraduate degree sees the further deskilling of the teaching profession, dovetailing with the move by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government to a more proscriptive, “fact-based” National Curriculum. (See, “UK government’s new national curriculum meets widespread opposition”)

The central argument of the introduction of a military

ethos into public education is that ex-soldiers will have a positive influence on behaviour due to their experience of martial discipline. Mike Tull, a headteacher, opposed such notions, telling the BBC that “discipline in a military context is premised on a highly legalised process which can ultimately lead to court martial and removal of liberty... whereas students are there as a legal requirement and it's their entitlement to be taught.”

The Troops to Teachers program is by no means isolated with regard to introducing the military ethos into public education. At the end of May, the government proposed a network of military oriented free schools after approving the establishment of the controversial Phoenix Free School in Oldham. The Phoenix school, which will open in September 2014, will adopt a “zero tolerance approach to behaviour” and will be staffed by ex-soldiers, the *Telegraph* reported. One of the key figures behind the Phoenix Free School is AK Burki, a serving Army Captain who has worked in counter-insurgency.

The move to military schools can be seen as the implementation of a policy suggestion made last year by the right-wing think tank *Respublica*.

The *World Socialist Web Site* explained, “Authors Phillip Blond and Patricia Kaszynska stress their proposal is for a new model of schooling as a 'solution to the social ills that became manifest at the time of the riots'—a reference to last August's inner-city disturbances in England.” (See, “UK government supports plans for military schools”)

The aim of social control that lies behind the militarisation of education was expressed in the sales pitch of the Phoenix school, which asserts, “All the old remedies for poverty, under-achievement and alienation have been tested to destruction. The consequences were starkly before us on the streets of Tottenham and Croydon [riot-hit areas in London]. But before we put

troops on the streets we should consider putting them in our schools.”

The British ruling class is united in the move to militarise childhood, with the Labour Party having floated the idea of “Services Schools” back in July 2012.

Writing for Labour's Policy Review, “The Service Ethos”, Shadow Education Secretary Stephen Twigg states:

“The values of responsibility, comradeship, hard work and a respect for public service are embodied in our Armed Forces. The ‘service ethos’ emphasises the importance of character formation and high ethical standards, as well as the development of crucial skills such as team-working. And our veterans and reservists can be great role models...

“The Armed Forces can make an important contribution to the nation not just on the battlefield but by embedding the standards and values they embody within our social fabric: responsibility, comradeship, hard work and a respect for public service. One way this can be achieved is through educational provision.”

Twigg adds that “The cadet experience engenders a sense of responsibility and citizenship which combines fun and instils companionship. We want to spread this throughout all schools, while promoting lasting links between pupils from different backgrounds through their cadet experience.”

A few days before the ITT announcement, Nick Boles, the Conservative Planning Minister, suggested the establishment of a National Pledge of Allegiance to be recited by school children in order to “unite a diverse Britain” the *Express* reported.

The idea that abstracted “bad behaviour” is the main and isolated cause of the lack of achievement in working class neighbourhoods is the rationale given by many for the introduction of “military values” into schools. This does nothing to address the increasing social crisis facing working families and youth. The stress on discipline is used to obscure the link between complex behavioural issues and social deprivation.

The integration of the military into schools will also be used to promote militarism and the army as a career for working class youth. At a time when British imperialism is engaged in increasingly reckless interventions abroad, and brutal austerity at home, militarised education is seen as necessary step for the

ruling elite.



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