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**THE BLOG**

# Why It's Unfair To Criticise The Army For Being 'Too PC'

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In January the British Army came under direct criticism for being *too* politically correct. Not an accusation that you might have expected.

A new recruitment campaign was launched, not under the traditional banner of: '*be the best*', but exploring themes of inclusiveness, diversity and mental health awareness. It engaged with recruits and asked questions like, 'can I practise my faith in the Army?', and 'what if I get emotional in the Army?'

The spearhead of the campaign, [The Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nick Carter](#), came under attack by a number of former Army Officers and some areas of the press, who argued that it wasn't the role of soldiers to be 'nice'. They argued that the campaign would not attract the 'right' sort of person; men and women who are willing to fight and kill where necessary. The controversy has rumbled on, with the [Telegraph reporting recently](#), and with some concern, that Army Officers were at risk of being passed over for promotion if they had not improved 'inclusiveness and diversity' in their units.

This is a blinkered perspective, which ignores much of the factual background and the reality of the issues that the Army is facing. The Army isn't being too PC. In truth the campaign and promotion process are common sense moves.

The Army is in the midst of a retention crisis. It has seen historic cuts in numbers, job satisfaction has fallen and benefits have been slashed. According to figures released in 2017, 58% of service personnel are either 'neutral' or 'unsatisfied' with service life in general. Recruitment is falling; army recruits have traditionally been drawn from a pool of white males aged between 16 and 25, and there are fewer of these 'typical' recruits today with demographics within British society changed (though the representation of ethnic minorities in the British Army has consistently been low – the figures make for bleak reading).

Moreover, recruits are influenced and dissuaded by the stresses that come with the job, quite apart from the prospect of combat. The Army suffers from horrendous levels of harassment – research commissioned by General Carter found in 2015 that 4 out of 10 women in the service had experienced unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature, and high profile stories in the press, such as that of Corporal Anne-Marie Ellement, will concern potential applicants.

Soldiers, perhaps not surprisingly, are also more likely to suffer with mental health issues than civilians. There was a 90% increase in medical discharges relating to mental health over the period 2012 to 2017. These figures are worrying. The mental health charity, Combat Stress, saw a 71% increase in its referrals over the same period. They and many similar charities have been struggling to find the resources to tackle the problem.

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It follows that the majority of soldiers are either unhappy or apathetic about their service life. Soldiers are leaving the Army, fewer are joining, and it will have to find new talent. That's where the change in tactics comes from.

Bearing all of these things in mind, are we surprised the Army is casting a wide net in recruitment? This is just common sense. If a recruit fulfils the mental and physical requirements, then why should it matter if they are black, or gay, or of a particular faith? It doesn't (or at least it shouldn't).

Should we also be surprised the Army is seeking to reassure recruits that mental health issues will be taken seriously, and soldiers supported? No, given the treatment crisis that is brewing, this commitment is crucial, if not necessarily sustainable.

This all adds up to explain the approach taken by the Army in its recruitment campaign. The promotion process is warranted, and indeed, needed.

But we need to look wider. The criticism is not just misconceived when we think of the issue as a human resource problem. We have to ask a question about the sort of society that the Army protects.

The majority of our society believes that it is not okay to be racist, sexist, or homophobic. That diversity and inclusiveness should be encouraged. Should our soldiers behave any differently? No, they shouldn't. They are also part of our society and must reflect it, inside and out. Many of them already do, and new recruits need to be guided into being professional, moral soldiers that we can be proud of. These changes in attitude are crucial if the Army is to modernise and continue to thrive.

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