



Ministry  
of Defence

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*Dear Frank,*

Thank you for your letter of 16 January about standards of literacy for those joining the Army as Junior Soldiers.

The Army employs the national literacy and numeracy standards defined as part of the Regulated Qualifications Framework. The Army ensures that the literacy and numeracy skills of all recruits are developed during the course of their training, and all those undertaking literacy and numeracy programmes are expected to work towards Functional Skills qualifications in English and Maths.

The minimum literacy and numeracy standard for Regular enlistment is Entry Level 2. Speaking and listening skills are considered to be a critical element of literacy, and so all soldiers must have a minimum of Level 1 in speaking and listening when they enlist. By the time that recruits start the second phase of initial training, they must have attained at least Entry Level 3 standard, and within three years of joining must have attained Level 1 (equivalent to GCSE grades D to G), largely delivered through the Army's apprenticeship programme.

Candidates applying to the Army undertake an assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills when they attend an Army Assessment Centre during the course of their application, and the minimum eligibility standards must be met by all at that stage. Recruits are assessed again at the start of training, but this is used by the education contractors as a general indication only, to assist in streaming recruits into the correct groups and to identify the appropriate level of support. Some of the recruits starting training at Army Foundation College, Harrogate in March 2015 were assessed to be at Entry Level 1 for literacy, despite having met the required standard during their application. This is primarily thought to be due to 'skill fade' occurring in the period between their first and second tests. The Junior Soldiers in question were provided with extra tuition in the evenings as well as individual support in the classroom, in order to ensure that their standards improved. This support continues throughout their time at the College.

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I can assure you that the Army has a strong record for improving the literacy and numeracy skills of those with low levels of attainment, demonstrated by what Junior Soldiers achieve during initial training. For example, in the August 2015 intake, 71.5% were below Level 1 when they started, but only 0.3% were below that level on completion of training. The Army actively ensures that its recruits are provided with the literacy and numeracy skills they need, in order to be effective in service and able to make the most of the various development opportunities open to them during their Army careers and beyond. The Army provides crucial development and training opportunities to all of its personnel, irrespective of their academic or social backgrounds.

Applications to enlist are now carried out online. Advice and support is available throughout the application process from recruiting staff at Army Careers Offices and the National Recruiting Centre, where each candidate is assigned a Candidate Support Manager to assist them with any queries, including the completion of forms.

I hope this reply is helpful.

*Yours ever,*

*Freddie*

**THE RT HON EARL HOWE PC**