# Royal Marines face tension between rigorous training standards and diversity targets



Concerns are mounting within the Royal Marines regarding the integrity of their rigorous training programmes, sparking debates about the potential impact of political pressures related to diversity targets. Whistleblowers within the ranks have raised alarm that the formidable standards, which have been largely unchanged since World War II, might be altered to facilitate the inclusion of more women into their elite forces.

The commando training conducted at Lympstone, which is known for its demanding physical and mental challenges, has seen nine women successfully complete a shortened ten-week ‘all-arms commando test’. However, none have yet managed to pass the complete 32-week Royal Marines course. Notably, former England rower Philippa Birch made headlines in 2019 when she was among the first women to attempt the full course, but her aspirations were cut short due to injury.

Insiders have indicated that the pressure to boost diversity figures has intensified, with senior officials reportedly feeling the heat from civil servants to ensure a greater female representation within the forces. One senior officer, who recently served at the commando training centre, remarked that while standards for wearing the prestigious green beret remain unchanged, there is significant pressure from the leadership to see a woman succeed in the course, which they perceive as a strategic objective rather than a necessity based purely on merit.

Marine John Carr's outspoken concerns have brought further attention to the issue. After publicly stating that training standards were being compromised, he alleged mistreatment by the Ministry of Defence police, who reportedly treated him like a “terrorist and criminal” for his complaints about the integrity of the training regimen. Carr claimed that some female recruits were being “artificially pushed through” and receiving “unearned paper passes,” a claim that has been staunchly denied by Defence sources.

Despite reassurance from military chiefs that selection standards remain unchanged, the broader implications of the Ministry of Defence's '30 by 30' initiative, which aims for 30% of new recruits to be women by 2030, have generated widespread debate. Admiral Sir Ben Key, the First Sea Lord, has cautioned against purely numerical targets, emphasising the need for inclusivity that values each individual’s contributions over meeting quotas. This sentiment echoes in light of recent reports highlighting significant gaps in diversity within the upper echelons of the Armed Forces, where many initiatives have not translated into improved promotion rates for minority groups despite an investment of over £8 million in diversity programs.

Additionally, the Royal Navy's recent decision to redeploy personnel specifically for roles centered around diversity and inclusion sparked criticism. Critics argue that this might distract from primary operational duties, raising questions about the long-term effectiveness of such initiatives.

Current statistics reveal a slow but steady increase in female representation within the UK Regular Forces, rising to 11.9% in October 2024. However, the lack of true representation among minority groups at senior ranks remains stark, underscoring ongoing challenges in meeting diversity goals without compromising operational effectiveness.

Amid this landscape, the Royal Marines stand at a crucial crossroads. The balance between enhancing diversity and maintaining the rigorous standards synonymous with elite military training presents a challenge that may shape the future of recruitment and training within one of the UK's most storied institutions. The ongoing discourse suggests that finding a sustainable path forward will require careful consideration of both the values the military stands for and the practical ramifications of policy decisions.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6
2. Paragraph 5
3. Paragraph 6
4. Paragraph 5
5. Paragraph 7
6. Paragraph 6
7. Paragraph 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14699243/Royal-Marines-training-women-Navy-political-pressure-diversity-targets.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/06/first-sea-lord-warns-against-armed-forces-diversity-targets/> - In September 2023, Admiral Sir Ben Key, the First Sea Lord, expressed concerns about the Ministry of Defence's '30 by 30' policy, which aims to have 30% of new recruits be women by 2030. He noted that such targets could lead to unintended consequences and emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive environment where individuals are recognized for their contributions, rather than focusing solely on numerical goals.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/20/armed-forces-8m-diversity-failed-minorities-top-ranks/> - An April 2024 report revealed that despite the Armed Forces spending over £8 million on diversity initiatives between 2019 and 2023, no Black or ethnic minority officers were promoted to the highest military ranks. The data highlighted a significant underrepresentation of minority groups in senior positions, raising questions about the effectiveness of current diversity strategies.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/27/royal-navy-redeploys-sailors-marines-diversity-inclusion/> - In January 2024, the Royal Navy announced plans to redeploy sailors and marines to roles focused on diversity and inclusion. This decision aimed to enhance the 'lived experience' of personnel amid ongoing recruitment challenges. However, some critics questioned the move, suggesting that it might divert attention from operational priorities.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-april-2024/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-april-2024> - The UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics for April 2024 indicated that female representation in the UK Regular Forces increased to 11.7%, up from 11.5% in April 2023. Additionally, ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities) made up 11.2% of the UK Regular Forces, marking a rise from 10.1% in the previous year.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-october-2024/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-october-2024> - The UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics for October 2024 showed a slight increase in female representation in the UK Regular Forces to 11.9%, up from 11.7% in October 2023. Ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities) represented 11.7% of the UK Regular Forces, an increase from 10.6% in the previous year.
7. <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/events/careers/080623-diverse-workforce-information-session-teams> - In June 2023, the Royal Navy hosted a 'Diverse Workforce Information Session' to discuss topics such as appearance, culture, faith, dietary needs, and health. The event aimed to provide insights into the experiences of serving Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel and address questions from potential recruits and their families.