

INQUIRY QUESTION

Senator the Hon Sarah Henderson asked the Department of Defence the following question, upon notice, on 29 September 2025:

CHAIR: Can I quickly ask you—I'm sorry; I know we're under time pressure—about school based Army cadet programs. Is there a proper basis to expand those programs to more schools?

RADM Earley: I'm not the subject matter expert on the cadet programs, so I'd have to take that on notice. I know it is fairly widespread across all three services around the country. But again, as was mentioned by previous witnesses, with the take-up of people wanting to join, Defence, like others, is finding it difficult to have people join those programs.

CHAIR: Rear Admiral, can I just flag that I did write to Defence raising that particular issue and saying that I would want to raise it in today's hearing, so I'm disappointed that there wasn't someone available to address those questions. If you could please respond on notice as to the current status of school Army cadet programs, how it might be possible to expand them and at what cost, and what resources would be required, I'd be most grateful.

RADM Earley: Yes, I will respond. Thank you.

Defence provides the following answer:

Australian Army Cadets (AAC) is a youth development program run as a partnership between Army and communities. AAC accepts youth from 13 to 18 years of age and encourages diversity, with cadets representing the spectrum of Australian society. AAC seeks to cater for all abilities provided a safe environment can be maintained for participants. There are two types of cadet unit within the AAC:

- **School Based Units (SBU):** These units utilise school facilities and are only open to students of the school who run the program as co-curricular or extra-curricular activities. There are 45 SBUs within the AAC.
- **Community Based Units (CBU):** These units utilise available Defence or community facilities (which may include schools) and are open to all youth within the local area. There are 205 CBUs within the AAC.

The AAC Program has a total of 19,904 cadets in 250 cadet units across Australia.

Army Cadet Staff run cadet units and activities and are responsible for the safety and youth protection of all participants. There are no Army personnel posted within cadet units.

AAC has an online presence and provides information upon request; however, as a 2025 initiative, AAC has distributed a number of information packs on cadets to schools and government entities. In addition, AAC's Army commanders are actively engaged in seeking community support for new cadet units. Since February 2025, nine schools have expressed interest in establishing an Army cadet unit and another two intend to substantially expand their current cadet units.

There is no standard cost for establishing a new cadet unit. Costs can depend on a range of factors including location, number of prospective Army Cadet Staff and cadets, and their level of participation in AAC's major activities.