

The Challenge of Youth

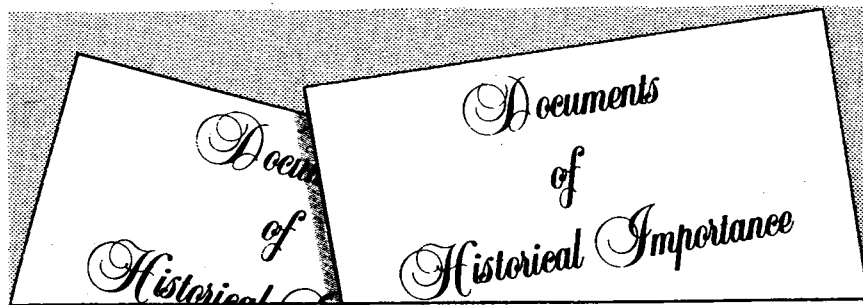
Circular 1516, 27th June 1940

From the Government Board of Education

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THE CHALLENGE OF YOUTH

Circular 1516, 27th June 1940

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1. In Circular 1486 the Board asked Local Education Authorities to see that properly constituted Youth Committees were set up in their areas. The response to that Circular has been almost universal and beginnings are already being made to provide more and better facilities. The time has now come to attempt to give some guidance on the general aim and purpose of the work and to find, in the many and varied types of facilities provided, some common element, which will serve as a foundation for this new national service.

GENERAL AIM

2. The general aim is to be found in the social and physical training, which links all youth organisations to one another and to the schools. In the schools, thirty years of research and experience have shown that the child needs training in his social and physical, no less than his mental, life. At each stage of education — the Nursery and Infant School, the Junior School and the Senior School — appropriate means are found of bringing the child into a right and normal relation with his fellows and of developing bodily fitness by games and recreation. It would be surprising if ten years of life in the Elementary School were enough to complete this process. For most children the opportunities of social and physical training are arrested just at the stage when they are most needed. Secondary and similar schools emphasise its value to all their pupils, whatever their mental attainments. How then can such social and physical training be continued for the majority of children whose education does not extend beyond the Elementary School? The answer to this question was given in Section 17 of the Education Act, 1918, which, for the first time, gave statutory recognition to the need for social and physical training among children and young persons alike. The overriding purpose of all this training is the building of character: this implies developing the whole personality of individual boys and girls to enable them to take their place as full members of a free community.

RELATION BETWEEN PUBLIC AUTHORITIES AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

3. Up to the time of the last war facilities for this kind of training were provided mainly, if not entirely, by voluntary bodies each working in its own sphere with little co-operation. In 1916 an attempt was made, by the setting up of Juvenile Organisations Committees, to give system and drive to the

work and to associate Local Education Authorities with voluntary bodies. In some areas voluntary effort was encouraged and supported by the Local Authorities, but certain Authorities launched a new type of Recreational Institute under their own control in populous centres. But the service so begun failed to survive the financial crises of the post-war years and the competition of other educational needs. To-day a new beginning has been made, and the principle has been accepted that Youth Welfare must take its place as a recognised province of education, side by side with Elementary, Secondary and Further Education.

4. Any attempt at a State-controlled uniformity or regimentation would be both stupid and perilous; more than that, it would be wholly alien to the spirit of this country. The function of the State in this work is to focus and lead the efforts of all engaged in Youth Welfare; to supplement the resources of existing national organisations without impairing their independence; and to ensure through co-operation that the ground is covered in a way never so far attained. The function of the Local Education Authorities is equally clear and essential. They are to take the initiative in their local areas; provide the machinery for local co-operation; encourage existing organisations to extend their work; and fill the gaps not covered by such organisations.

5. There need be no clash between statutory and voluntary effort. Apart from the goodwill which may be expected to exist among all concerned with work for youth, the field is so large and the range so wide that there is ample room for a vast extension of effort. Much of the virtue of the work done for youth by voluntary organisations lies in the variety of their approach and technique. Some of them, for example, have a religious basis or are in close association with the Churches — and where they are in a position to provide effectively, whether nationally or locally, facilities of the types described below, their work calls for encouragement. Variety of approach with a common purpose is no new principle in our educational system; but it has even more significance in youth work than in the schools, because of the strong traditions and individuality possessed by the national voluntary organisations.

TYPES OF ORGANISATION

6. There is then a common purpose which informs all work in the service of youth. But Local Youth Committees must take account of the different types of organisation.

(i) *Separate Clubs or Units.* — Separate Clubs, belonging

either to a voluntary body, a Church or a Works, exist throughout the country. Such Clubs regard it as a matter of the first importance that they should work on their own lines and in their own surroundings.

(ii) *Youth Centres.* — A well designed or adapted Youth Centre may be provided by a Local Education Authority or by voluntary effort or by both. A full-time Warden is usually essential. In such Centres all local units, voluntary and otherwise, can meet regularly and share the use of the hall, gymnasium and other facilities.

(iii) *Recreational Evening Institutes.* — Evening Institutes vary with almost every Authority, but in recent years, and particularly since the war, they have developed strong recreational sides. In some cases the Institute has partaken more of the nature of a Club, and a tradition for social work among youth has been established.

(iv) *Old Scholars' Clubs.* — Old Scholars' Clubs meet most frequently in school premises. The modern Senior School, with its ample facilities for practical work, physical education and, in the countryside, for gardening and Rural Science, is well adapted for youth activities. A separate entrance and rooms are often useful additional facilities.

(v) *Emergency Clubs.* — In more recent months Emergency Clubs have been opened, often in makeshift premises, for young people of both sexes as a means of combating the effects of war and the black-out. Their objective has been limited; but it is hoped that, by their informal methods of approach, they may lead young people to make a better and fuller use of leisure.

Such are the main ways in which Youth work is being organised and housed; but no single method will meet the variety of needs to be found, even in a single area.

COMMON ELEMENTS IN TRAINING

7. There are, however, common elements in the training of Youth to which attention may be called.

(a) *Social Facilities.* — Social facilities necessarily play a prominent part in any service for young people and they have two objects in view. First, they provide a meeting place for young people of the neighbourhood. Many young people live in good homes where they enjoy all the advantages of a happy family life; but even in their case membership of a club or similar organisation will bring new interests and new opportunities. Others, unfortunately, are not so happily placed and in too many cases have nowhere to go at the end of the day's work except the street and a night's lodging. For them the club or centre provides perhaps the only opportunity for healthy social life in association with their fellows. A community which has allowed whole townships to grow up with no social amenities or which permits the movement of young workers to areas totally unprepared to receive them can no longer escape its responsibility.

But secondly, they supply a definite training to fit young people for membership of a free society. To take an equal place with others in some common project, but to be ready to act either under the authority of others or in authority over them — for which the summer or week-end camp provides so admirable an opportunity — these are lessons which cannot fully be learnt by the age of 14, when most children leave school. Much of the training will be incidental and indirect, the result of influence rather than exhortation. But in one sphere there will be direct training — in the self-government of the club or unit itself. In this the youth service can become not merely a service for youth, but a service of youth.

(b) *Physical Recreation.* — The general aim of a scheme of physical recreation should be to provide opportunities for the practice of wholesome physical activities conducted in such a way as to create a satisfied body and a joyful spirit. The scheme should provide for all-the-year round activities and be sufficiently comprehensive to cater not only for the needs and

interests of the competent performer, but also for the untrained and unskilful.

Systematic bodily development is a physiological need during all the years of growth, and is provided most effectively by suitable gymnastic training. Wherever possible, therefore, such training should, on grounds of efficiency, form a continuation of that given in schools. It may with advantage lay special emphasis on exercises designed to build up skill in specific games and athletic events. If, owing to inadequate accommodation and lack of equipment, the lessons cannot include a satisfactory combination of free-standing exercises, exercises on the floor and on fixed and portable apparatus, it may be advisable not to attempt concerted exercises on class lines. Members will soon become bored if their gymnastics are less interesting than at school, where there may well have been three or four lessons weekly in well-equipped gymnasia, supplemented by commodious playground accommodation. In certain circumstances, therefore, the gymnastic period might be devoted to activities such as skipping, boxing, wrestling, vaulting and agility exercises, carried out in groups under selected leaders. Acceptable standards of behaviour should, of course, be maintained under this freer organisation.

Enthusiastic leadership is essential for the success of a recreational programme. Everyone must be encouraged to give of his best and to reach the highest standard of which he is capable. Competition has its place as an incentive to discipline, but it needs to be carefully controlled. Adaptability, endurance and self-reliance — these qualities can be developed by putting the individual against the problems and obstacles presented by nature in hill climbing, making one's way across open country, handling a boat under oars or sail, camping and the like.

A wisely directed and comprehensive scheme of physical recreation would result in a desire for bodily fitness, a greater capacity for comradeship and a higher appreciation of true chivalry and good sportsmanship.

(c) *Continued Education.* — While better social facilities and proper physical recreation form the background of youth training, there is, of course, a wider range of opportunity offered by Technical Colleges, Evening Institutes and, to some extent, by voluntary bodies. This is not the place to describe the variety of vocational subjects open to the part-time evening student. But, apart from such courses of a more formal kind, there is an increasing interest shown, particularly among the older boys and girls, in music, dramatics, discussion and debating societies. In some areas the Technical Colleges and Evening Institutes have developed a corporate life of their own very parallel to that found in several organisations to the voluntary bodies. Local Youth Committees would do well to encourage and develop musical festivals, dramatic competitions and art and craft exhibitions, because it is in such activities that the beginnings can be made of the practice of citizenship.

In the Counties and the countryside where Young Farmers' Clubs and new Senior Schools exist there is ample room for new experiments. Here in particular the formation of Old Scholars' Associations will form a valuable link between school and post-school life. The rich background of tradition, the obvious opportunities of the country itself, the wartime demands for service in agriculture and forestry, the mingling of town and country children in reception areas, all these should be used to the full by County Youth Committees in developing their future policy.

Neither in town nor country can any hard and fast line be drawn between vocational and cultural activities. Handicraft and housewifery classes, courses in dramatics, literature and history, an introduction to the world of science — such studies should find a place in the all-round development of young people. It is in the method of teaching and choice of teacher that the greatest care should be taken if the best results are to be obtained.

LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

8. But something more is needed if a genuine Service of Youth is to be created in this country. Leadership is essential; and much of it must spring from the corporate life of youth itself. Here lies the challenge to Local Youth Committees and voluntary bodies. It is upon local genius and local patriotism that the foundations of democracy rest. Opportunities for

service must therefore be offered to young people as well as opportunities to equip themselves for service. At a time like the present, when the nation is fighting for its life, preparation of our youth for their full participation in the life of the nation assumes a new significance. In the days that lie immediately before us the demands on our efforts and energies to deal with other tasks will be very insistent; yet we cannot afford to neglect the youth for whose free future the struggle is being waged.

Documents of Historical Importance

As a contribution to the debate on the origins and development of youth work, YOUTH IN SOCIETY launched its series of Documents of Historical Importance in April 1982. At quarterly intervals subscribers have been sent reprints of some of the most significant documents, and further additions to the series are planned for 1984.

The series currently comprises:

THE VILLAGE COLLEGE

Being a Memorandum on the Provision of Educational and Social Facilities for the Countryside, with Special Reference to Cambridgeshire
by H Morris, Secretary for Education, Cambridgeshire. 1925

THE SERVICE OF YOUTH

Circular 1486, 27th November 1939

From the Government Board of Education to Local Education Authorities for Higher Education

TRAINING AND SERVICE FOR GIRLS OF 14-16

Circular 1630, 27th May 1943

From the Government Board of Education to Local Education Authorities for Higher Education

LADY ALBEMARLE'S BOYS

by Ray Gosling

A Young Fabian publication, January 1961

EMERGENCY COURSES OF TRAINING FOR THOSE ENGAGING IN THE YOUTH SERVICE

Circular 1598, 15th July 1942

From the Government Board of Education to Local Education Authorities for Higher Education Training Departments and Training Colleges

THE YOUTH SERVICE AND OTHER YOUTH PROVISION

Extracts from section three of 'Young People, the Youth Service and Youth Provision', September 1981

The Written Evidence of the National Youth Bureau to the Department of Education and Science Review Group on the Youth Service

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Sets of these documents are now available, in a durable plastic wallet, from the Sales Department, National Youth Bureau, 17-23 Albion Street, Leicester LE1 6GD, price £1.50 post free. Cash with order please.