

Young People and Society



Introduction

Scouting offers young people tremendous opportunities for fun, adventure and fellowship, through a progressive training programme.

Guided by adult leaders, young people are encouraged to grow in understanding and to take a constructive place in today's society.

The responsibility of an adult leader is to ensure that individual and corporate activities help the young person in their development as an individual, achieving social identity and fulfillment. This responsibility is discharged through the provision of an active programme based on equal concern for physical, intellectual, spiritual and social growth and leads to an understanding and involvement in society.

For young people 'Scouting' is a question of attitudes -attitudes towards family life, education, work, standards, decision making, cultures, controls and security.

Attitudes will be formed or influenced by the features, situations, circumstances and posturing which take place in everyday life.

Media coverage can often mask the realities of the situation, the sensational headline is a poor substitute for the real issues and concerns, yet perceptions and views can be formed so easily from this base.

The adult leader must be, therefore, in a position to encourage, support and counsel young people towards obtaining knowledge and understanding of the society in which we live.

These notes aim to equip you with some basic background information on a variety of topics relevant to today's society as a basis for further discussion, thought and research.

1. Family life and social values

1.1 Erosion of the family unit

The divorce rate continues to increase (1979: 35% of marriages; 1984: 41 % of marriages; 1993 one divorce for every two marriages).

The proportion of lone-parent families has more than doubled in 20 years: 8% in 1971 to 21 % in 1992. The proportion of working women in the labour force has been increasing steadily: 10% in 1951, 30% in 1951, 63% in 1992.

The basic family unit remains geographically very mobile.

In 1993 there were **186,000** children under **16** in Great Britain with parents divorced.

Recent years have seen greater demands and dependency on National Health Services, Legal Aid, supplementary benefit, social and welfare facilities. For households as a whole these benefits are the second most important source of income after employment.

Around 6% of young people aged **16-19** lived alone or with single childless people in 1994/95.

1.2 Multi-cultural society

The media offers an awareness of other cultures. There is increasingly acceptable diversity in clothing, food and entertainment.

Greater internationalism is evident in every High Street (e.g. international food chains).

Popularisation of serious news is increasing especially for young people ('Blue Peter', 'Newsround').

1.3 Multi-racial factors

Racial minority pressure groups are increasing in number.

Racial minorities tend to live in inner city areas. Many minority groups wish both to preserve a self-identity through their traditional culture and to assimilate into their host culture.

Black and ethnic minority young people face conflicting pressures, particularly between their family's traditional cultures and the youth culture of their peers. They are more prone to frustration, unemployment and criminal involvement.

1.4 Growth in spiritual awareness

More young people appear to be searching for alternative sets of values.

There is dissatisfaction with many traditional forms of religion.

There is an increase in practical outlets for idealism (e.g. community service, fundraising for charity, voluntary projects).

57% of 16-19 year olds say they believe in God.

1.5 Questioning of traditional values

Children are better informed than their parents on many matters of knowledge (e.g. technology, current health issues).

Increased knowledge leads to a greater awareness of choices available in any subject.

On many matters young people and children have opportunities to choose for themselves whereas in the past a choice would have to be made for them.

Religious attendance is one of the least popular pursuits.

Individual young people want to identify with a particular youth culture, each of which is only one of several contemporary cultures. This makes them vulnerable to exploitation both ideological and commercial.

There is a passive acceptance of lawlessness and vandalism.

The trend in society as a whole has continued to be towards material value.

1.6 More travel

Two thirds of all households in 1995 had access to at least one car. 88% of all travel is by car.

In all aspects of travel, 'cheap ticket' facilities are increasingly available, especially for young people.

Recent years have seen an increase in all forms of holiday travel,

International travel costs are becoming cheaper relative to other prices.

The Channel Tunnel has increased access to France and the rest of Europe.

1.7 Conservation

There is an increasing awareness generally of the finite limitations of natural resources.

There is an increase in the number of groups concerned with specific aspects of conservation.

In 1993, global warming was the issue of greatest concern for 18-24 year olds.

7% of the area of England and Wales is designated 'National Park'.

15% of England and Wales is designated 'an area of outstanding natural beauty'.

1.8 Equality of sexes

There has been wide legislation against sex discrimination.

Many more women than men have entered the labour force in recent years.

74% of mothers with dependent children between the ages of 10-18 are working.

Although still a small proportion of the total, there is a growing tendency for more women to be seen in key positions. There are 10% of women in managerial/ administrative jobs compared to 20% of men.

On average, in April 1995, women earned £100 per week less than men.

1.9 Personal economics and responsibility

Many social services are paid for publicly or subsidised indirectly (e.g. Health Service, public transport, libraries). Current attitudes tend to emphasise rights rather than responsibilities.

A prevailing attitude with many people is a wish to have value for money'.

Consumers tend to be more concerned with value for money, discounts, offers etc.

Total household disposable income almost doubled between 1971 and 1994. But the proportion of that income from wages and salaries has fallen since 1964.

In 1994, of household disposable income: 12% was spent on food compared with 16 % in 1971, 13 % on motor vehicles compared with 10% in 1971, 16% on housing compared with 18% in 1971.

59% of children in one-parent families and 34% of children in two-parent families live below the Government Poverty Line.

1.10 Ageing population

In 1994, 16% of the population was over 65 years of age. This is projected to rise to 23% in 2031.

Percentage of the population over retirement age:

1961	1971	1981	1994	2031
12.0	13.0	15.0	16.0	23

Due to the projected rise in the pensionable age over the next 40 years an increased proportion of the national wealth will need to be spent on the elderly. In 1994/95, more than 40% of all benefit expenditure was accounted for by the elderly.

1.11 Special needs

The prevailing current attitude is towards integration rather than segregation of people with special needs.

There is increased provision for them.

Provision is increasingly backed by legislation (e.g. employment and building regulations).

Money spent on adaptations to property to enable people with special needs to integrate into normal life doubled between 1973 and 1978. Money spent on personal aids to people with disabilities also doubled during the same period.

2 Work and technology

2.1 Shorter hours, more leisure

There are decreases in the number of working hours in the day.

The United Kingdom has the highest number of hours in the working week in Europe.

There is a decrease in the number of years in the working life through early retirement or job release schemes. Retirement age for both men and women is **65**.

There is an increase in the time given for holidays. Flexible working patterns are more common - and also flexibility of holidays.

The location of work is affected by technology, particularly communications.

Education for leisure is increasingly recognised as necessary.

There are wide opportunities for the constructive use of leisure.

More people will need to seek personal fulfillment through leisure rather than through work, especially young people.

For the part 20 years, approximately 20% of adults have taken at least one holiday per year. But those taking more than two had quadrupled since 1966 to 26%.

The number of overseas holidays taken by Great Britain residents increased by more than 50% between 1981 and 1990 to 20.5 million.

Holiday entitlement with pay has increased substantially since 1961. Then, 97% of full time manual employees had a basic entitlement of only two weeks. By 1987, 99% were entitled to four weeks or more, and 22% to 5 weeks or more.

2.2 Movement of population

There is an increasing desire by people to establish roots and integrate into their local community.

Career development increasingly requires geographical movement.

Population drift tends to be away from cities and away from rural areas into small towns and suburbia.

There are Government incentives for business to move (especially to rural areas for career and educational purposes).

Young people aged sixteen plus tend increasingly to move away from city areas for purposes connected with house purchase.

2.3 Participation In decision making

People increasingly expect to be consulted over matters which affect them (education, family, work etc.). Leadership styles in all aspects of society have tended to become more democratic and less authoritarian. There is a greater collective decision making within families.

There is greater openness in the decision making processes of churches, of government and of some business.

The trend towards greater employee participation and representation which has occurred in many organisations in recent years is unlikely to decrease and may well be extended (particularly by legislation) in the next ten years.

There has been a dramatic fall in trade union membership since 1979 when membership was at a peak.

In 1994, 30% of all employees were members of a union or professional association compared with 55% in 1979.

2.4 Changing patterns of employment

A number of people in the working population can expect periods of unemployment in their lives; unemployment reached a peak in 1986 at 3.1 million (11.2% of the workforce), in 1989 this had fallen to 1.8 million (6.1% of the workforce). There is an increasing number of jobs which are offered on short term contracts and in recent years job sharing has become more popular. Short-term employment is highest among 14-19 year olds. The likelihood of long term unemployment increases with age.

Being unemployed is now seen by many as an acceptable lifestyle without social stigma. The changing age structure of the labour force presents recruitment problems for employers. Those employers who rely on young people as a significant source of their recruits face declining numbers until the mid 1990s. Since its peak in 1989, the number of apprenticeships has fallen by about 10%.

A new Government initiative of modern apprenticeships for 16 and 17 year olds covers work areas across industry and commerce. On the job training was the dominant form of training for 18 and 19 year olds in 1994.

Adults will most probably need retraining in different skills in the future.

2.5 Growth of technology, media and communications

Recent technology developments are carried into the home and into leisure pursuits (e.g. CDs, mobile phones, satellite TV, computer games). In 1950, 10% of all households had television ownership; 1978, 90% and 1994, 99%.

Consumer durables (e.g. cameras, stereos, watches) are becoming technologically more sophisticated and relatively less expensive.

Purchasing and information services are becoming technologically more sophisticated (e.g. telephone banking, home shopping channels, e-mail, Internet).

Local radio stations and local television stations are increasing in numbers. The number of independent radio stations broadcasting in Great Britain increased from 49 to 78 between 1986 and 1990.

The Media (particularly television) are increasingly used for educational purposes (not only for schools but also for general interest programmes).

In 1993/94 listening to records, tapes and compact discs was considered an important leisure activity for over 80% of the population. British Telecom have 25.4 million customers in the United Kingdom in 1991 compared with only 20 million in 1984. In 1994/95, 91% of households had a telephone. BT is facing increasing competition from Mercury, mobile phones, etc.

3 Education and leisure

3.1 Greater pressures on young people

The increasing number of opportunities available to young people means that more important decisions are being made by them.

There is greater competition for 'good' opportunities particularly in education and employment.

Parental expectations for their children often contain a wish for self improvement.

Consideration of possible unemployment is as real for young people as consideration of choice of career.

3.2 Variety of education systems

There tends to be constant change in educational ideas and methods.

Geographically there is a wide range in the structure of school systems, colleges, further and higher education.

The Open University has developed and expanded at a fast rate. It accounted for 12% of part time students when it opened in 1970 but by 1990 this had risen to 22%.

The number of students in full time higher education in the UK has more than doubled since 1980 to 948,000.

3.3 Problems of areas of special needs

Since the nineteenth century there has been a general trend, especially in London, for people to move away from the congested urban centres into the suburbs. The social problems of inner cities are increasing despite Government interventions (i.e. disproportionate employment, low incomes for families, high rate of crime etc.). Inner cities contain large groups of immigrants each with its own culture and sense of community. Whilst there is general agreement that inner-city and rural areas have problems there is no consensus of agreement on causes of these problems.

3.4 Emphasis on qualifications

Current social attitudes emphasise the individual's need for some form of status. Status is increasingly measured by some form of qualification.

Access to further and higher education is more frequently seen as universal right. In 1990 70% of 16 to 18 year olds continued in education and training.

There would appear to be less general interest in education for its intrinsic value particularly with younger people - education is seen more as a means to obtaining a job.

Qualifications are increasingly required for participation and instruction within leisure activities.

Employers often use formal qualifications as a criterion for initial selection and subsequent promotion to a greater extent than in the past.

3.5 Increased co-education

There is increased co-education at all levels and in all aspects of educational provision.

There are roughly equal numbers of men and women enrolling for further education.

3.6 Range of activities offered by schools

Activities hitherto seen as concerned with leisure are increasingly coming within the curriculum as well as being extra curricular.

School holidays, camps, cruises etc. have recently increased in number and scope but may be subject to financial restraints.

Fewer teachers are now willing to participate in unpaid extra curricular activities.

4 Government and political Institutions

4.1 European Influences

Regulations determined by the EU are increasing in their number and scope (e.g. health, farming, transport).

The movement of labour between European countries is easier.

In many spheres of activity a European identity is emerging.

4.2 Restraints on the Individual

Many people feel a sense of personal powerlessness against large organisations, government and Trade Unions at all levels.

1970-1975 saw major legislation on incomes, employment legislation, consumer protection, equal rights for women, health and social services and environmental protection.

There is increased protective legislation concerning the safeguarding of the rights of individuals (e.g. Children Act, Citizen's Charter).

4.3 Resistance to change

The rate of change in almost every sphere is increasing. People naturally resist change.

Where change causes insecurity, there is a tendency to seek stability through nostalgic references to the past.

Young people will develop drive, initiative, enthusiasm and commitment to creating a more tolerant and caring society if we as adult leaders ensure that activities are selected to meet individual needs. Opportunities are provided for advancement, and success is rewarded through recognition or self fulfillment.