

5. The Youth Service in Wales

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"THE culture, tradition and institutions of Wales should figure prominently in the programme of any youth group. All work in the Youth Service should be inspired by a well-defined sense of purpose. Efforts should be directed towards training young people to find themselves, to make their full contribution to the life of the community." This is an extract from the minutes of a County Youth Committee of one of the Welsh Authorities in 1941. It illustrates the fact that, when local education authorities in Wales were called upon to secure the provision of social and recreational facilities for young people, it was not difficult for them to see the relevance of this to the education of young people generally. The Youth Service was regarded as an agency for the continued development of personality and for the further improvement of social qualities, and not merely as the rallying point for a sect or as a roof over the heads of young people who might otherwise be in the streets. The importance of social and cultural education as distinct from formal education was very quickly recognized in Wales.

It would probably be true to say that, before the advent of the Youth Service, the leisure time activities of many young people were centred in the churches and chapels. Most places of worship organized weekly meetings for social and cultural activities for young people. The programmes were based on the Welsh cultural pattern and these have been continued in some secular clubs and centres. Some of the churches still make a valuable contribution to the Youth Service in Wales.

The Post-war Youth Service in Wales

The Welsh Youth Committee, which published its report during the war years on "The Post-war Youth Service in Wales", pointed out that the social and recreational facilities provided should not be confined to adolescents. They should be continued through adolescence into adult life and a general "leisure service" should be developed for all age groups. The Committee accepted the principle that the whole community needs provision for healthy, positive, leisure time activities as a permanent service.

It is not surprising, therefore, that most of the Youth Service officers employed by local education authorities in Wales are also responsible for adult education and community services. In some areas local education authorities have set up "adult and youth" centres, where one warden is responsible for both sections. There is, therefore, a close link between all aspects of post-school work in Wales. The activities of the majority of the voluntary youth organizations (the Welsh League of Youth in particular), as well as the Youth Service directly provided by local education authorities, include significant elements of the traditional cultural pattern of Wales. The Eisteddfod is an integral part of this pattern and has been used by the Youth Service to foster worthwhile activities. Thus opportunities have been given for young people to become interested in music, drama and the arts.

Financial Provision and Projects in Wales

An examination of the statistical information given in the Albemarle Report reveals that the Youth Service in Wales has always received a slightly larger proportion of the educational "cake" than has England. For the year 1957-58, when the statistics for the Albermarle Report were obtained, Wales was spending 34 s. per head of the youth population, while the average for all regions of England was 15 s. per head. In the post-Albemarle period, local education authorities and voluntary youth organizations in Wales have been authorized to develop new projects under the Capital Building Programmes. In the period 1960-1965 approval was given for 132 projects in Wales, 65 of these for local education authorities and the remainder for voluntary organizations. The new projects approved include a good number of centres and facilities for outdoor pursuits and sports.

Open Air Activities

There has been an increased interest in open air activities since the publication of the Albemarle Report. The Wolfenden Report on Sport and the Community stated that the Welsh countryside, mountains and coast were very well suited to such activities, but it seemed that more use was made of Snowdonia, for instance, by young people from the Midlands than by the youth of Wales. A recent survey made by the Central Council of Physical Recreation has shown that more and more young people in Wales are now being attracted to outdoor pursuits. Team games, especially rugby football in South Wales, have always been well catered for by the Youth Service in Wales. However, such activities as rock climbing, mountaineering, sailing and canoeing were not formerly an important feature in the work of Welsh youth organizations. The opening of the C.C.P.R. mountain activity centre at Plas y Brenin, Caernarvonshire, and the Welsh League of Youth centre at Glanllyn, Bala, has given a stimulus to these

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interests. In addition, many local education authorities and voluntary organizations are now planning new outdoor pursuits centres, and there has been a greater recognition of the value of single activity groups. This growth of interest in outdoor pursuits is a new feature of the development plans for the Youth Service in Wales.

Youth Athletics

Some of the local education authorities, however, have maintained for some time that the Youth Service is intended to make a general provision for the leisure time needs of young people and their aim has been not to think of the Service as youth club work only. It is interesting to note that the Welsh Counties Youth Amateur Athletic Association was formed in 1950 by further education and youth service officers in Wales and a youth athletics championship meeting has been held every year since 1952. The seventeen local education authorities have each formed a county or county borough association for youth athletics and teams are selected to compete at the annual championships. The entries are confined to those young people who are not in full-time education. The Welsh Counties Youth Amateur Athletic Association decided on this policy because young people in schools were already catered for by the Welsh Secondary Schools Association.

National Youth Orchestra of Wales

An interesting development in youth work in Wales was the foundation in 1945 of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales. This Orchestra has given a concert at the National Eisteddfod every year since 1948 and in 1955 took part in the Edinburgh International Festival. The Orchestra also broadcasts every year on radio and television, and in 1957 made a concert tour of Holland. All the members of the Orchestra are under 21 years of age and are drawn from all parts of Wales. The Orchestra is maintained by the seventeen education authorities and is administered on their behalf by the Welsh Joint Education Committee. A three weeks Bourse and concert tour is held every summer, and competition for places in the Orchestra is extremely keen. The formation of the National Youth Orchestra has acted as a stimulus to the formation of local and area youth orchestras and it is, therefore, a means by which hundreds of young people develop an interest in music making. Most of the members of the Orchestra continue with their interest in music and become active members of adult Amateur orchestras, and a small proportion have become professional musicians and have found places in well-known British orchestras.

Teachers as Youth Leaders

The link between formal education and the Youth Service has been a very close one and a large proportion of the part-time leaders, both paid and voluntary, are drawn from the teaching profession. This enables some interesting educational group work to be carried out in many centres and clubs. A survey, made in 1958, revealed that at that time 54 per cent of the part-time leaders employed by education authorities and voluntary organizations in Wales were qualified teachers. The recommendation in the Newsom Report that there should be closer co-operation between the secondary schools and the youth service has already been implemented in some parts of Wales because of the large number of teachers involved in youth work. Some of the Welsh Authorities have been making provision for the 13-16 age group for some years. Clubs and centres have been established in secondary modern schools, sometimes in specially planned youth wings, and some interesting experiments have emerged showing that activities can be linked for the mutual benefit of school and club. Newsom urges that there should be more clubs and societies in schools for the older age groups, and experience gained in the junior clubs and centres should be valuable for the "extra curricular" activities recommended in the Report.

Training for Part-time Youth Leaders

After the publication of the Bessey Report on the training of part-time youth leaders and assistants in 1962, a conference was held in Cardiff to consider the establishment of training agencies. This conference exemplifies the partnership that exists in Wales. There were representatives present from the four Institutes of Education (University College Faculties of Education in Wales), the Welsh Department of the Ministry of Education,* all local education authorities and voluntary organizations in Wales. Following this conference eight training agencies were established and in September 1963 training courses were initiated to cater for all areas in Wales. The response has been very encouraging and all agencies have received more applications for training than can be accepted. A total of 340 students were enrolled for these courses, which extend over a period of approximately 9 months. Representatives of all these agencies have also met to confer on methods of training and to consider the problems that have arisen in making provision for basic courses for part-time youth leaders and assistants.

Youth Work in Rural Areas

In recent years some local education authorities in the rural areas of Wales have been considering the provision of better facilities for young

*Now the Welsh Office of the Department of Education and Science.

people in isolated communities. It has been found that the pattern of youth service provided in urban communities is not always suitable for sparsely populated areas. The National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs is one of the organizations that cater for rural youth, and the Welsh Y.F.C. County Organizers have recently met to consider the problem of clubs in such areas. It is not possible to provide adequate facilities in all villages because of the small number in any one age group and the lack of leadership. Some interesting experiments have been made by certain local education authorities and these include: (a) providing an annexe to a rural primary school which serves as a community centre for adults and young people, (b) encouraging and helping adult societies to form youth sections, (c) providing area youth clubs which are situated at focal points suitable for neighbouring villages and (d) setting up special activity clubs for groups drawn from a fairly wide area, as young people who live in the country are more mobile today than ever before. These experiments have been made in areas which have suffered severely from rural depopulation. It is hoped that some solutions will be found and that these will help to stem the drift away from the country-side.

Bilingual Youth Clubs in Wales

"The existence of two languages in Wales necessitates a different approach to the problems of youth and at the same time multiplies them. A bilingual nation needs bilingual provision in the form of youth clubs no less than in the provision of schools." The above statement was made in the chapter on Wales in the Albemarle Report. It is true that only a minority of the young people in Wales now speak Welsh, but those who do not are none the less Welsh for that. All education authorities, as well as the voluntary youth organizations, provide bilingual clubs, and the pattern of Youth Service in Wales provides opportunities for young people to know their cultural heritage.