

Out-of-school settings consultation Impact on church youth work

Ofsted is to be given legal power to assess whether teaching provided by out-of-school settings complies with 'British values'. Under new Government plans, any place which provides instruction to under 19-year-olds for more than 6 hours in any week would be covered. This would catch various forms of church youth work, such as holiday Bible clubs, church weekends and summer camps.

The Prime Minister referred particularly to madrassas when he announced the new approach in October 2015, but said it will apply to an institution "whatever its religion" and added, "if you are teaching intolerance, we will shut you down". Rather surprisingly a consultation (now closed) was launched over the busy Christmas period. A highlighted version of the consultation paper is available here: www.bit.ly/out-of-school

'Undesirable teaching'

The consultation paper says that "undesirable teaching" which is incompatible with British values will be prohibited (para. 3.19). Sanctions would include banning people from working with children and closing premises (para. 3.21) in order to address "the harm caused by extremism" (para. 1.1), including "emotional harm" (para. 2.1).

Nationwide registration scheme

The Government envisages a nationwide registration scheme for all out-of-school settings for those under 19 which provide 'intensive' education – defined as "anything which entails an individual child attending a setting for more than between 6 to 8 hours a week". Groups would need to register with their local authority. The plans would specifically encompass one-off events which, for example, only run during school holidays (para. 3.7). The scope of the proposals is enormous, affecting, for example, sports groups, out-of-school music teaching, cooking courses and drama groups.

New powers for Ofsted

Under the plans, teaching will be policed by Ofsted in a new and expanded role. Ofsted would be able to investigate whether church activities for children comply with British values. In effect, Ofsted would become the state regulator of religion.

However, the Government's definition of British values is very vague and subjective: "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs". This broad-brush approach has already seen Ofsted inspectors demonstrate hostility towards Christian and Jewish schools. Over the past year they have been caught out questioning school pupils about their views on same-sex marriage and transsexualism. It is likely that teaching that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ would qualify as 'intolerance' in the minds of some inspectors.

Church youth work

It is possible that individual churches could be targeted if a child's attendance at midweek youth activities and Sunday services adds up to 6 hours in any week. For example, a teenager attending groups on Friday night and Sunday morning and the Sunday evening service will thereby open the door for Ofsted to scrutinise the church's teaching. Any additional teaching, such as baptism or confirmation classes, are very likely to draw churches into the scheme. It is not the total number of hours of all a church's youth activities which counts, but rather whether one child could experience more than 6 hours' teaching in a week. Some possible scenarios are included overleaf.

Allowing state regulation of religious beliefs

The State should not regulate Church teaching. Inspectors should not be given power to police church youth work using vague and subjective

terms such as “emotional harm” or “tolerance”. The plans would render churches wide open to false accusations. Atheists like Richard Dawkins say it is ‘mental abuse’ to teach children that the Bible is true. The Government’s Counter-Extremism Strategy says that children in out-of-school settings “may be at risk of being presented with, and believing, twisted interpretations of their religion” (October 2015, para. 24).

Christians are law-abiding people

Churches do not radicalise children. In fact, Christians are most likely to be the victims of extremist actions around the world. We are law-abiding citizens who support democracy and are taught to love our neighbour (Matthew 22:39). The Government is looking in the wrong place for extremists.

Churches are already regulated by the Charity Commission, which requires them to have a safeguarding policy in place for their children’s work and to carry out criminal records checks on those involved.

Harmful effects

The Counter-Extremism Strategy will waste resources by forcing investigations into people and groups which are completely innocent. A panic-driven response to Islamist extremism not only threatens to take away vital freedoms from law-abiding people, but actually puts public safety at risk by distracting the security services from where radicalisation is taking place, for example online or in unregulated settings.

As has already happened in universities, it is possible that teaching which covers the dangers of Islamic terrorism could be deemed contrary to ‘British values’ by failing to show tolerance of other religions. It could be very easy to use false allegations – e.g. an early evening French language course which asks students to discuss the impact on France of the ISIS Paris attacks could be maliciously reported to Ofsted.

Scenarios

The Government proposes to regulate any institution in England which provides more than six hours of teaching in a week to under 19-year-olds. A vast array of organisations will be covered,

including certain church youth work. Possible scenarios could include:

- St Thomas’ Church has run a holiday Bible club for a week in August for many years. However, a complaint is made to Ofsted about leaders teaching that only people who believe in Jesus go to heaven (from John 14:6) and the inspector seeks to close down the holiday Bible club for causing emotional harm to children.
- A 15-year-old attends Christ Church’s youth group on a Friday evening for two hours 30 minutes, on Sunday morning for one hour 30 minutes, and Sunday evening events for two hours. His over-cautious schoolteacher knows that the pastor of Christ Church is a prominent opponent of same-sex marriage and tells Ofsted that teenagers in the church are at risk of being indoctrinated with hateful opinions contrary to equality laws.
- An interested 17-year-old goes to a Saturday day conference run by her local Humanist Association. The event uses materials from the national ‘Exploring Humanism’ course which says: “Religious authority has been, and still is, used to justify oppression, discrimination and injustice”. The mother of the 17-year-old later complains to Ofsted that the course is promoting intolerance.
- A chef runs weekend cookery classes for those over 16. However, he refuses, on animal welfare grounds, a request from a Muslim enquirer to use only halal food. The enquirer asks Ofsted to close down the course for failing to show tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.
- A local wildlife charity runs a week’s activities for children during the school holidays. One of the organisers gives a talk which supports local protests against fracking. A parent who works in the engineering sector complains to Ofsted that the charity is radicalising children and an investigation is launched.
- National Royal Air Force Air Cadet training weekends study the bombing campaign in Syria and Iraq. Co-ordinated anonymous complaints are made to Ofsted that the Air Cadets’ course is promoting hatred and violence against minority groups.

Further examples are included in the Appendix.

Appendix:

The scope of 'out-of-school settings'

The sheer breadth of activities that could be caught by the Government's proposal is remarkable. Here is just a sample:

The Prince's Trust – volunteering for young people aged 13 to 30.¹ They run a variety of programmes that could be caught under the supplementary schools consultation criteria:

- **Get Started** programme – a 5-day training course aimed at 16 to 25-year-olds (so some under 19s would be covered). There is a choice of courses, including music, radio, football, hair and make-up, robotics, games or product design, theatre, film or art.²
- **Team** is a 12-week personal development programme for 16 to 25-year-olds. It involves an action-packed residential week, a group community project and 2 weeks' work experience.³

RSPB Phoenix is for teenagers and it runs a conference each year which is a residential overnight trip and so the event would involve activities of more than 6 hours.⁴ **Residential volunteering projects**, which involve training beforehand, are on offer for those aged over 16.⁵

The Young Actors Company provides teaching and training in the arts to children and young people.⁶ The **Stage Academy** part of it meets on Saturdays in Cambridge from 10am to 5pm (with other centres around the UK).⁷

Action for Children runs a confidence building weekend called **Articulation** for children and young people, with lots of activities including a course on how to manage money. It runs from a Friday to a Sunday and has many hours of contact time with various activities on offer.⁸

RISE, a young people's group for St John's Ambulance runs lots of activities, including a 1-day introduction to first aid and managing incidents, as well as a 6-hour first aid course.⁹ Many of the **community first aid courses** are available to children from the age of 12.¹⁰

Cycloan does bike maintenance courses – the Sunday courses are available to those aged 16 and over and run from 9.30am to 4.30pm.¹¹

The **National Citizen Service** involves a stay in an outdoor activity centre for four days, plus a stay in university accommodation for a week. The programme is open to those aged 15 to 17.¹²

Bolton Lads and Girls Club runs a holiday club lasting more than 8 hours. There is a youth club 7 nights a week, so if a child was attending on more than 2 evenings they would be fulfilling the 6-hour criteria. It also runs the National Citizen Service.¹³

The **Academy of Northern Ballet** runs extra-curricular ballet training for children aged 10 to 17. The classes last for between 10 and 20 hours per week.¹⁴

The **Cheltenham Literature Festival** holds a special week of events for children and young people. The **schedule** for the previous festival shows that it would be easily possible to exceed the 6-hour limit.¹⁵

The **Starfish Project** runs 3-day courses to help children overcome a stammer. Children have to be aged 12 to 16, and are accompanied by a parent.¹⁶

Norfolk Carers Support runs various activities for young carers, including a residential course over 2 days.¹⁷

Action for Blind People runs residential activity weeks for children and young people who suffer from sight loss. They run various courses and accept children from ages 8 to 17.¹⁸

The **Northumberland Young Firefighters' Association** is open to people aged 13 to 17. Meetings are held once a week at local fire stations (for 2 hours) but there is also an annual summer camp.¹⁹

Conservative Future is for anyone under 30. Members have the **right to attend the Party Conference**, which would amount to more than 6 hours in a particular week.²⁰

Young Labour is open to anyone between 15 and 27. The Young Labour Conference includes more than 6 hours of events.²¹

Liberal Youth is the youth branch of the Liberal Democrats. Young people are able to attend Party Conferences and other larger events.²²

The **TUC Young Workers Conference 2015** lasts significantly more than 6 hours.²³

Progress ("Labour's progressives") runs weekend schools that under-19s can attend.²⁴

The **Young Greens of England and Wales** hold an annual national convention which runs over a couple of days, with sessions from 9.30am until 5pm.²⁵

The **Young Communist League** in Britain is open to people aged between 12 and 28.²⁶ The members attended the **Young Workers and Trade Union Activists Weekend School** in August which was over a 2-day period.²⁷

The **United Kingdom Mathematical Trust** runs both **summer schools** and **Mathematical Circles** for children aged 14 to 16. The summer schools last for a week and the Mathematical Circles last for 2 days.²⁸

The **UNIQ** summer schools run at the University of Oxford and last for 7 days. They are open to young people in Year 12 at school, aged 16 to 17.²⁹

The **Sutton Trust Summer Schools** operate in various universities throughout the UK and are open to 16 to 17-year-olds. They include lectures and seminars and last for a week.³⁰

The **University of Cambridge** runs various **summer schools** as part of its International Summer Programme that are open to those **under the age of 18** (if a chaperone is present). They accept applications from 18-year-olds. The courses last for between 1 and 4 weeks.³¹

The **University of Birmingham** holds open days that last seven hours. The schedule for these open days includes lots of talks, so you could conceivably meet the 6-hour criteria.³²

Newcastle upon Tyne NHS Foundation Trust offers a 4-day hospital-based observational clinical placement for sixth form students.³³

Tottenham Hotspur offer a residential football coaching course for boys and girls aged 9 to 15 over 5 nights.³⁴

National Youth Theatre runs acting courses for **those aged 14 to 25** or **those aged 16 to 21**.³⁵

Yorkshire Young Musicians holds Sunday teaching sessions from 9.30am to 4pm during term time.³⁶

English Chess Federation holds training weekends for young people totalling 10 hours of instruction.³⁷

Christmas cooking workshops in Henley-on-Thames for ages 6-15 run from 10am to 4pm.³⁸

Yorkshire Wolds Cookery School runs a [cookery course for students](#) from 9:30am to 4pm over 2 days.³⁹

Chestnuts Riding School runs '[pony for a day](#)' courses for children from 10am to 4pm.⁴⁰

Motorbike/scooter training for over-16s, such as the [Compulsory Basic Training](#) day course, can run from 9am to 4pm.⁴¹

Aqua Sports Company runs a [range of kayaking and canoeing courses for under-18s](#), including packages that would be 4 hours a day for 4 consecutive days. They also run summer camps.⁴²

Bu'sen Martial Arts School runs various martial arts courses for children over 2 or 4 days during half terms.⁴³

The **National Portrait Gallery** runs a young people's programme, which includes a 3-day workshop in February each year for 14 to 21-year-olds and runs from 11am to 4pm.⁴⁴

Roundhouse organises training workshops for young people aged 18-25 in documentary filmmaking (6.5 hours for a 1-day masterclass) or filming live TV. There are also creative challenge days for 11-15s which last for 6 hours.⁴⁵

Camp Quest is a summer camp for 'free-thinking kids'. There is a 4-day camp for children aged 7-11 and a 7-day camp for 11

to 17-year-olds. The camps have a different theme each year, but have included evolution, the mind and critical thinking, science and ecosystems. The camps offer children 'the chance to ponder the bigger questions in life in an environment of inquisitive peers'. The Richard Dawkins Foundation originally helped subsidise it.⁴⁶

A young vegetarian and vegan camp, run by TeenVGN, took place this year for 11 to 17-year-olds over 5 nights, with vegan cookery classes, workshops, wildlife walks, yoga and music sessions.⁴⁷

Vegfest UK runs national vegan events at weekends. Children under 16 can attend free and those over 16 can attend as concessions. Events include talks, an activists' summit, demos and workshops which could include some form of instruction and the opening hours overall are approximately 7 hours on both Saturday and Sunday.⁴⁸

Vegan camp can be attended by whole families and one source says that **35% of attendees are under 18**. There are first aid lessons, workshops, orienteering and other activities.⁴⁹

Tech Camp is a technology and computing camp for children aged 9-17, with 3 separate weeks run during summer 2015. Campers can go for a day or for a residential.⁵⁰

Fire Tech Camps for 12 to 17-year-olds take place at Sedbergh School and cover coding, Minecraft and various other technology-related topics.⁵¹

Club Excel runs a lot of different activity camps for children that would clock up the relevant number of hours, covering cricket, cookery, science, robotics and performing arts.⁵²

Camp Wilderness runs camps for children that teach them basic survival skills including fire-lighting and shelter-building, as well as archery and wild swimming.⁵³

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