

The Combined Cadet Force: the service ethos for Britain's youth

Susan FINDING & Lauranne FOUGERE
Université de Poitiers

*Defence continues to make a significant positive impact on the Government's youth agenda, by supporting a range of projects focused on the well being of young people.*¹

The Downing Street response to a petitioner requesting the introduction of 'boot camps' to reinforce measures against anti-social behaviour underlines the new emphasis placed on the educational and social contribution of the armed forces. This has not been without criticism. The reasons which have induced this renewed interest in what might have been considered an outmoded form of education will here be explored by looking at the history of the Cadet Corps, the context in which the initiative was decided, the advantages put forward for recent plans for its expansion and criticisms voiced about the extension of the Cadets. The arguments throw light on the problems the government has encountered trying to meet the challenges concerning British youth, the values emphasised by the Labour government in office, in particular since the 2005 general election, and the means used to achieve those ends.²

This article is based on a dual approach linking an examination of the political discourse and policies surrounding the Cadet Force, a top-down vision, with an enquiry on the ground involving a questionnaire and interviews of teachers and pupils in a Cadet Corps in an independent school which is neither top of the league nor unknown. However the school in question is more than just typical, it happens to be historically the *locus* of the first known Cadet corps. A *vox populi* is of course subject to caution, but the words of the children can be taken as both representative of their peers and of the social and educational context in which they find themselves. It was not possible in the course of the research for this article to conduct similar research in a state school offering Cadet training which might have shed a contrasting light on the pupils' remarks.

The Army has a wide range of training courses. These include the Cadets, a volunteer youth organisation. In total, Britain has 130,000 cadets in specialist units managed by the Army (44,000), RAF (34,000) and RN (13,000) and in Combined

¹ The Prime Minister's Office. March 16th, 2007, *Nationalsubs - epetition response*, <http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page11272> (accessed March 30th, 2009).

² This article includes interviews and surveys of pupils involved in the Cadet Corps at Rossall School, Lancashire in 2007-8 conducted by Lauranne Fougère. The authors wish to express their thanks to the staff and pupils of the school.

Cadet Force (CCF) units (42,000).³ The army units with Cadets in 1,760 detachments boast of being “one of the largest and most successful youth organisations in the country”.⁴ In comparison, the Scout Association had 138,000 members of similar age range (total 380,000 aged 6 to 25) in April 2008.⁵ Army cadet training and activities include first aid, competition rifle shooting, sports and adventurous training. As with the Scouts, these activities can count towards the Duke of Edinburgh Award. In addition they can lead to Army Proficiency Certificates and Vocational Qualifications. Cadet Force units are either local voluntary units like the Scouts or can be set up in schools and colleges which continue education after the age of sixteen. They may comprise up to three sections corresponding to the three Services, the Royal Navy (RN) (including Royal Marine units), the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the Army. Combined Cadet Force membership does not necessarily entail service or compulsory training in the Armed Forces.⁶

In 2001, the number of Combined Cadet Force units stood at 253,⁷ out of a total 6,400 state, independent and maintained secondary schools. The CCF are overwhelmingly based in independent schools (201 in 2001). Nearly one-third (42,000) of the total number of cadets in Britain (130,000) are involved as pupils in schools; however only one fifth (52 in 2005) of the Cadet Force units are based in state schools. The two-hundred independent schools involved are among the most prestigious in the country and include Eton, Harrow, Fettes, Marlborough, Oundle, and Rugby, while the state schools with cadets are largely maintained selective schools and include the London Oratory, Wells Cathedral School, the Royal Grammar School in High Wycombe.

Brief history

The CCF dates back to the Crimean War and the fear of invasion in 1859. The growing power of Napoleon III and the assassination attempt in 1858 by the Italian, Count Felice Orsini, encouraged the British government to call for a military defence force. As the accomplices of the would-be assassin had devised their plot in London, the tension between France and Britain reached its peak, and the government felt impelled to raise Volunteer Battalions. The Poet Laureate Alfred Tennyson lent his talent to the swell of opinion behind the scare.

³ Ministry of Defence, *Cadet Force expansion revealed*, January 9, 2007 (accessed November 17, 2007), <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/CadetForceExpansionRevealed.htm>.

⁴ Army Cadet Force Association, *Army Cadet Force 2008 Annual Review*, London, 2008.

⁵ The Scout Association, *It all adds up to making a big difference, Annual Report and Accounts 2007/2008*, p.18, Census of Membership for the year ending 31st March, 2008, <http://scouts.org.uk/documents/ScoutsAR.pdf> (accessed May 6th, 2009).

⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Combined Cadet Force Manual*. By Command of the Defence Council, 1994, part I-1 1, “Status”.

⁷ Table: List of CCF schools in Britain established by the Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, *Hansard, Lords*, February 6, 2001, Col. WA97.

THERE is a sound of thunder afar,
 Storm in the south that darkens the day,
 Storm of battle and thunder of war,
 Well, if it do not roll our way.
 Form! form! Riflemen form!
 Ready, be ready to meet the storm!
 Riflemen, riflemen, riflemen form!
 Be not deaf to the sound that warns!
 Be not gull'd by a despot's plea!
 Are figs of thistles or grapes of thorns?
 How should a despot set men free?
 Form! form! Riflemen form!
 Ready, be ready to meet the storm!
 Riflemen, riflemen, riflemen form!
 (...)⁸

As a result, from 1859, a number of schools formed units which were attached to the Rifle Volunteer Battalions. Rossall School – a co-educational boarding and dayschool which currently has 660 pupils in total (131 of whom have joined the Combined Cadet Force unit based at Rossall today)⁹ located in Fleetwood, Lancashire on the North West coast of England – is said to have been the first school to have raised a unit but other prestigious public schools such as Eton and Harrow followed suit shortly after.¹⁰

The Rossall Corps was enrolled on February 1st, 1860 as the 65th Lancashire Rifle Volunteers. It consisted in about 100 volunteers – partly masters, partly senior boys – and was a combatant unit. The threat of invasion appeared very real to many at the time, as an account of the constitution of the Rossall Corps makes clear.

*A preliminary meeting for the formation of a volunteer rifle corps was held at the committee room of the Town Hall on Monday last. The Mayor occupied the chair. About 30 of the leading gentlemen of the town were present. The Mayor alluding to the formation of these corps in almost every part of the country. [...] There seemed to be only one impression throughout the land and that was the desirability of putting this country in a state of defence. [...] Mr Walmsley proceeded to make some remarks upon the French Navy, and of the first Napoleon's desire to make England a large province of France.*¹¹

The cadet rifle clubs became popular and well-established in public schools. The additional military training corresponded to the schools' ethos by encouraging

⁸ First published in *The Times*, May 9, 1859 and reprinted in *The Death of Oenone and other poems*, 1892.

⁹ Department for Children, Schools and Families, Performance tables (accessed March 19, 2009) http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/cgibin/performance/tables/school_06.pl?Mode=Z&No=8886044&Type=P&Num=p045&Phase=1&Year=06&Base.

¹⁰ Lt.-Col. L. H. TRIST, *A short history of the Rossall School Corps*, June 10th, 1960. Published by *Fleetwood Chronicle* on the occasion of the Centenary Parade and inspection of the Corps. 28pp.

¹¹ *Fleetwood Chronicle*, June 3rd, 1857.

leadership and self-reliance. Cadet corps training reinforced the public school ethos with its spartan conditions and military discipline and corresponded to the values required of the ‘officer material’ being schooled in these establishments. The saying goes that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.¹² Eugenic considerations received renewed support and reinforced the idea that physical and mental alertness were necessary to the nation from both educational and military points of view.¹³ Indeed the practice of games was so ingrained that athleticism has been defined as a ideology in Victorian and Edwardian public schools¹⁴ while militarism characterised the New Imperialism of the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ The ‘esprit de corps’ was reinforced by the loss of many of these schools’ former cadets, notably in the First and Second World Wars.¹⁶

How did the Cadet Corps, a relic from bygone days, restricted to elite schools with socially-selective recruitment in untroubled locations become part of community initiatives in policies aimed at curbing youth unruliness in areas of urban blight?

A new lease of life

The historic reasons for the organisation’s creation and its association with militarism and discipline, make the Cadet Corps seem to have outlived its usefulness. Yet, one-hundred and fifty years since its inception, the Cadet Force has been given a new lease of life. From 2003 a raft of reports about British youth such as that published in 2004 by the National Centre for Social Research¹⁷ or *Thursday’s Child*, published in 2008 by the Institute for Public Policy Research,¹⁸ highlighted the fact that the well-being of young people in Britain was a cause for concern. Unicef (the United Nations Children’s Fund), which originally focused its work on the Third World or War Zones, ranked the United Kingdom last among 21 industrialised nations for the well-being of its children in 2007,¹⁹ when taking into consideration the quality of family life, the number of children living in relative poverty, vaccination rates and the time spent talking or eating daily with parents. Unicef presented this result as the main reason for declining youth behaviour and

¹² Attributed to the Duke of Wellington, an old Etonian, by Charles d’Alembert in *De l’Avenir politique de l’Angleterre*, 1855.

¹³ Graham E. HOWE, “Education and vitality” in LABORDE E.D., (Assistant Master at Harrow School.) (Ed.), *Problems in Modern Education*, 1939, 165 pp.

¹⁴ J.A. MANGAN, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: the emergence and consolidation of an ideology*, London: Routledge, 1981 (2000), 346 pp.

¹⁵ Geoffrey BEST, “Militarism and the Victorian Public School”, in Brian SIMON, Ian BRADLEY (eds.), *The Victorian Public School*, Dublin, 1975; SUMMERS Anne, “Militarism in Britain before the Great War”, *History Workshop Journal* 2, 1976, pp. 108-110.

¹⁶ Rex WARNER, *English Public Schools*, 1945, William Collins of London, p. 9.

¹⁷ Alison PARK, Miranda PHILLIPS, Mark JOHNSON, National Center for Social Research. *Young people in Britain: the Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 year olds*, 2004, Research Report no 564. 133 pp. (accessed March 4, 2008)

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR564.pdf>.

¹⁸ Julia MARGO, Sonia SODHA, *Thursday’s Child*, Institute for Public Policy Research, 2008.

¹⁹ Philip JOHNSTON, “Crisis point over Britain’s disaffected youth”, *The Daily Telegraph*, February 15th, 2007.

high rates of obesity, drunkenness, bullying, early sexual experience, drug-taking and teenage pregnancy. A 2007 European Commission report found the United Kingdom had the highest number of single parents with dependent children in 2005.²⁰ This merely served to heighten worries about the conditions in which children in Britain were being raised.

In 2007, the Conservative think tank, the Bow Group, issued a report entitled *Invisible children*, asserting that too many children are currently abandoned by the educational system and accusing the Labour government of being responsible for this situation.²¹ Despite attempts by the Blair government's social exclusion unit to cut truancy by a third, the introduction of ASBOs (Anti-social behaviour orders), and the threat of sending parents who failed to control their children to prison, there had been no sign of significant changes in truancy, bad behaviour and aggression in the classroom. The Bow Group report underlined the £1 billion spent in an attempt to reduce truancy which seemed to be to no avail as the number of truants had not only not decreased but had increased since 1997. Similarly the number of school exclusions had increased, supporting the idea of increasing misbehaviour in classrooms, although this increase can partly be explained by a less tolerant attitude towards misdemeanours.²²

On the Left, the Institute for Public Policy Research 2006 report, *Freedom's Orphans*, showed that youth clubs were likely to have a negative impact on young people's social lives as teenagers who attended these clubs were more likely to smoke, drink or become teenage parents. A gloss on the report's title gives an insight into its thesis: freedom or lack of discipline had made children 'parentless', orphans with no markers, no limits, no controlled environment. This marks a profound revision of the liberal attitudes prevalent since the 1960s in favour among those working with young people. The report argued that youth activities in structured environments help teenagers develop social and emotional skills. It suggested that pre-teens attend these once a week after school, as an extension of the school day. Amongst other recommendations such as improving teacher training, limiting the exposure of children to consumerism, and improving skills training, the *Freedom's orphans* report recommended that:

An element of compulsion should be introduced to young people's participation in structured, positive extra-curricular activities offered as part of the Extended Schools agenda, but within a framework that promotes choice. The proposed activities should be vetted to ensure the activities on offer will benefit the participants. [...] on activities such as

²⁰ European Commission, *Living conditions in Europe, 2007*, Office for official publications of the European communities, Luxembourg, 107pp. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-76-06-390/EN/KS-76-06-390_EN.PDF (accessed April 16th, 2008).

²¹ Chris SKIDMORE, Nick CUFF, Charlotte LESLIE, *Invisible Children*, The Bow Group, June 24, 2007, <http://www.bowgroup.org/harriercollectionitems/INVISIBLECHILDREN%5B2%5D.pdf> (accessed March 4th, 2008).

²² For a discussion of school exclusions see TROUVE-FINDING Susan, "Hors de l'établissement, point de salut : les exclusions scolaires au Royaume Uni", *Cahiers du MIMMOC*, No.1, February 2006, <http://edel.univ-poitiers.fr/cahiersdumimmoc/document.php?id=111>.

*sport, drama, cadets, and some forms of vocational activity being structured, regular, and constructive with a clear end goal and clearly defined, hierarchical (though malleable) roles.*²³

It is clear that the vocational and hierarchical nature of the cadets made the institution seem highly appropriate to the IPPR.

The government had previously set up a scheme with similar structure and methods. In attempts to address high levels of crime and truancy, the Department for Education and Skills introduced its *Behaviour Improvement Programme* in July 2002. Beginning with 34 local education authorities, it covered a total of 130 secondary schools, 555 primary schools and over 300,000 pupils. It was extended in April 2003 to 27 further local education authorities including 100 secondary and 500 primary schools and over 250,000 pupils. A joint Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) project entitled *Skill Force*, launched in 2000 to provide alternative learning in areas of high deprivation and skills shortage, was brought within this programme. It bore a strong resemblance to the Cadet Force and was considered to have significantly improved the communication skills of participants.²⁴

*A small team, mostly young former members of the armed forces, teach skills and outdoor education to groups of about 20 pupils, who are selected as being unlikely to attain five GCSEs at grades A-C and likely to respond to a more vocational syllabus. This syllabus replaces two of their usual subjects, and usually covers ASDAN [Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network] Bronze or Silver and Wider Key Skills awards [through the Quality Improvement Agency], the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze award; the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Entry Level Certificate in Preparation for Employment; and two St John Ambulance Young Lifesaver awards. Literacy is addressed through practical work like planning for trips or other rewarding activities, and students build up a portfolio of work while being encouraged to take particular pride in its presentation, which is enhanced through ICT.*²⁵

In Slough, the Skill Force programme was recognised as having raised “self-esteem through problem solving and team building activities” taught for one day per week over two years. Pupils are given the equivalent credits for two GCSEs. Skill

²³ Julia MARGO, Mike DIXON, Nick PEARCE, Howard REED, *Freedom's Orphans: Raising youth in a changing world*, Institute for Public Policy Research, 2006, Executive Summary, p. xii.

²⁴ S. HALLAM, L. ROGERS, J. RHAMIE, J. SHAW *et al.*, “Students’ perceptions of an alternative curriculum: Skill Force”, *Research Papers in Education* Vol. 22, No.1, March 2007, pp. 43-63. <http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/research/themes/inclusion/studentsperceptions/whatis> (accessed May 10, 2009).

²⁵ Department for Education and Skills, *Behaviour Improvement Programme*, 19 September 2003, <http://www.governornet.co.uk/cropArticle.cfm?topicAreaId=3&contentId=561 &mode=further> (accessed May 10, 2009).

Force is credited with having “re-engaged a group of disaffected Pakistani boys” and used as a case study in the strategy against exclusion by the DCSF.²⁶

More globally, the government announced that it was earmarking funding (2005 Green Paper *Youth Matters*²⁷) to extend its policy for children initiated with the 2004 *Every Child Matters* programme,²⁸ the 2004 *Children’s Act*, the creation of Children’s Commissioners and the reorganisation and intensification of local authority child support services through Children’s Trusts and Children and Young Peoples’ Plans. The reforms of child provision and education, tackling pre-school, in-school and after-school provision, under way since 1997, were now being carried through to the teenage population. The momentum behind this thrust was maintained by renewed concerns about misbehaviour, yobbishness and teenage pregnancy. Making use of dormant existing facilities such as schools, which were encouraged to open all-day long, ‘eight till late’-style, allowing voluntary sector ‘kids’ clubs’ to use their premises, was a means to encompass young people, and draw them back into the fold.²⁹

In the 2005 Green Paper, Ruth Kelly, the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, announced proposals “to engage more young people in positive activities [...] encourage [them] to volunteer and become more involved in their communities, provide better information, advice and guidance, better and more personalised intensive support for each young person who has serious problems”. This was to be achieved by “involving a wide range of organisations from the voluntary, community and private sectors in order to increase choice and secure the best outcomes; and building on the best of what is currently provided.”³⁰ It is thus hardly surprising to find Gordon Brown, in his first speech to the Labour Conference as a party leader on September 24th, 2007, dedicating a large section to anti-social behaviour in an attempt to justify the fundamentals and head off criticism about the policies:

Boundaries that reflect the words I was taught when I was young – words upon which we all know strong communities are founded: discipline, respect, responsibility. [...] As we take action against anti-social behaviour, so too we must take action that could transform our communities, by providing the kind of facilities young people want and need. So we will use unclaimed assets in dormant bank accounts to build new youth centres, and we will invest over £670 million pounds so that in every community there are places for young people to go. With youth budgets let us say to young people: for the first time you will have a say over how the money is spent. I believe we have not done

²⁶ Department for Children, Schools and Families, Case Study 41 Slough Borough Council Strategy to move towards zero exclusions, innovative alternative provision and supporting funding arrangements, June 2004, <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/exclusions/uploads/Slough%20.pdf> (accessed May 10, 2009).

²⁷ Department for Education and Skills, *Youth Matters*, Green Paper, CM 6629, 2005.

²⁸ Department for Education and Skills, *Every Child Matters*, DfES-1110-2004.

²⁹ Department for Education and Skills, *Extended Schools: Access to opportunities and services for all. A prospectus*, 2005.

³⁰ Department for Education and Skills, *Youth Matters*, Green Paper, CM 6629, 2005, Executive Summary, Vision, Challenges and Principles, Our Approach to Reform §12.

enough in the last ten years to emphasise that in return for the rights we all have, there are responsibilities we all owe. [Emphasis by authors]

The service ethos

The Cadets are seen as corresponding to these values and providing a ready-made answer to these issues. The CCF is clearly part of Government's attempts to tackle exclusion and youth offending which extends beyond school cadet units and encompasses the outreach programme, Youth Justice, the skill force programme, and the Army Cadet Force youth and community project helping "socially disengaged young people to become responsible citizens", financed jointly by the MoD and the Home Office.³¹ The Combined Cadet Force manual defines the broad function of the Cadets as providing "a disciplined organisation in a school so that pupils may develop powers of leadership by means of training to promote the qualities of responsibility, self-reliance, resourcefulness, endurance and perseverance". The Combined Cadet Force message from the Ministry of Defence, repeated by numerous independent schools with Cadet Force units, is that "the self-confidence and self-discipline required in Service life are equally vital in the civil life of the Nation today".³² Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister in waiting, announcing the new initiative on Veteran's Day, in June 2006, echoed these concerns:

*We not only want every young person to learn from our veterans in their schools and communities, but we want more young people to have the opportunity also to join our cadet forces, to develop new skills, build their confidence, actively engage in their local communities, and experience for themselves an introduction to both military and community service.*³³

Roger Shipton, principal of King Edward's school, Birmingham, confirmed this idea: "It develops those things that Gordon Brown referred to- independence of mind, a willingness to work together and being part of an ethos with shared values. A lot of the children like the discipline that it affords them in their out-of-school hours." Shipton reported that pupils' involvement in Combined Cadet Force activities had transformed their lives. "They have changed from being potentially difficult and confrontational youngsters into collaborative individuals with something they aim at." Although the school's Cadet force has only 60 recruits, split between the army and RAF contingents, the Head thought their influence was disproportionate to their numbers. Shipton considered them the school's 'ambassadors' on public occasions, taking charge of hospitality and car parking. "They are a group of people who can be relied on to follow instructions and get

³¹ Derek TWIGG, *Hansard Commons*, 27 January 2007, col. 1672.

³² The Oratory School, CCF, <http://www.oratory.co.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=activities.content&cmid=44> (accessed 6th May, 2009).

³³ Joint HM Treasury - Ministry of Defence release, 27 June 2006 'Chancellor announces expansion of school cadet forces', http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/press_jointmod_06.htm (accessed 7th May, 2009).

things right".³⁴ It will not escape readers that the language is reminiscent of officer-speak.

Despite the fact that Cadets, previously considered as "a coterie of public-school patriots",³⁵ still fly the flag, in recognition of the tribute paid by those who have defended Britain, they have nevertheless been singled out as an untapped resource and best practices model for 'structured' youth activities such as those recommended by think-tanks and government. Under Secretary of State and Minister for Veterans Derek Twigg, in a speech delivered to the Combined Cadet Force Association on December 18th, 2006,³⁶ gave credit to the organisation in the following terms:

As one of the biggest youth organisations in this country today – some 133,000 young people strong - and growing - supported by over 26,000 adult volunteers the Cadet Forces are a huge success story. I happen to think they are an unsung one. We hear a lot about problems with our youth nowadays. It would be great to hear a bit more about the positives. [...] Cadets play a hugely important role in keeping the young people of today in touch with our military past and traditions. Individual cadet units have close links with the Services - the kinds of links that really build relationships across the generations.

The Cadet Force is also viewed by its promoters and certain detractors as an Army recruitment drive, enabling children to 'play for real' at being soldiers and encouraging them to enlist in the Armed Forces whose recruitment needs run to 20 000 young people annually. Indeed more than one-quarter of those enlisted in the Army have Cadet experience.³⁷

*The reasons why we regard the budget on cadets as money well spent are: first, it is a good way of keeping defence in the public eye and promoting a knowledge of the Armed Forces among the public; secondly, it is a way of delivering useful training to young people within a service ethos; thirdly, it increases the level of interest in the Armed Forces among the young. All the evidence shows that the cadet movement succeeds admirably in those objectives.*³⁸

Indeed, while justifying the Cadets 'educational' role in training for leadership, the very function independent schools had first been established to fulfil, the Training Manual – issued, it is true, by the Ministry of Defence – places the Cadet Force's military connexion firmly at the top of its priorities. The specific function of

³⁴ "Education: A force to be reckoned with", *The Sunday Times*, February 19th, 2006.

³⁵ James CUSICK, "New model army in the Major mould", *The Independent*, Friday, 24 January 1997.

³⁶ <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/People/Speeches/MinVet/20061218CombinedCadetForceAssociationAnnualDinner18December2006.htm> (accessed March 30th, 2009).

³⁷ Andy SHARMAN, "Use the force: Why ministers want all pupils to learn to fight", *The Independent*, 15 May 2008.

³⁸ Lord Earl HOWE, *Hansard*, January 27, 1997. Column 965.

the service training is set out in the Cadet Force Manuel (1994) as providing: “the opportunity for young people to exercise responsibility and leadership and to learn from the Services how they can best be developed [...] a basic knowledge and understanding of the role of the Armed Forces” and encouraging enlistment in the Regular Forces or the Reserve.³⁹

The Cadets fit the bill on a number of criteria in the new youth policy announced by Ruth Kelly in the 2005 Green Paper *Youth Matters*: already existing structure, under-utilised resource, partially funded by the state (via the MOD), largely run by volunteers, located within educational centres of excellence (independent schools) and in a partnership set-up (schools and Army). The shift in policy was evidently seen as part of the policy to rehabilitate existing cadet forces within the existing voluntary structures involving young people. In December 2006, the Defence Secretary emphasised the importance of the armed forces contribution to investment in youth by means of partnerships with various youth organisations, setting the Combined Cadet Force within the context of other youth orientated initiatives which came under his remit.

Every year we engage with nearly 1 million young people across the UK:

From individual mentoring to outdoor pursuits and sport. From training recruits to cadets. From Scouts to Girl Guides. From partnerships like Outreach, Skill Force and The Prince's Trust to supporting charities like Raleigh International. And through education and training - like our MOD Apprenticeship scheme - recognised as an excellent model for industry.

[...]

*The defence community is making a profound, positive contribution to today's young people every day.*⁴⁰

The decision to extend the cadet training model, taken in February 2006, led to the announcement in June of that year of three-year pilot schemes to extend the Combined Cadet Forces in the state school sector, as a measure designed to address the problems encountered by schools in deprived areas.⁴¹ This indicates a shift in thinking about the role and place of this institution. Six additional state schools out of 22 having expressed an interest⁴² were selected to open Cadet units. This was deemed a start to enlarging the social appeal of cadets in response to criticism that MOD funding for cadets largely benefitted the independent school sector. The

³⁹ Ministry of Defence, *Combined Cadet Force Manual*, By Command of the Defence Council, 1994, part I-1-1, “Aim”.

⁴⁰ Derek TWIGG, *Investing in young people*, Speech delivered at St Joseph's College to local MP's, cadets, teachers, school governors, school sponsors, clergy and Rifle Officers, November 20th, 2007,

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/People/Speeches/MinVet/20071120investingInYoungPeople.htm>, (accessed March 20th, 2009)

⁴¹ Joint HM Treasury - Ministry of Defence release, 27 June 2006, “Chancellor announces expansion of school cadet forces”,

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/press_jointmod_06.htm accessed 7th May, 2009).

⁴² Derek TWIGG, *Hansard Commons*, 26 November 2006, Col. 621 W.

accusation of biased funding was refuted by Under Secretary Twigg who pointed out that only 9% of MoD spending on all cadets went to independent schools.⁴³ The new pilot schools were to be Haberdashers' Aske's Federation of Hatcham College and Knights Academy in London; Budmouth Technology College in Weymouth; Archers Court in Dover; Deacon's School in Peterborough and Treorchy Comprehensive School in Mid Glamorgan.⁴⁴

Cadet Force provision was also to be extended by new partnerships between state and independent schools. In May 2007, Alan Johnson, the Education Secretary, urged independent schools to back new academies to help to justify the tax breaks they receive as charitable foundations. Turning towards their natural constituency, the Conservatives also addressed the problem. Heads of independent schools in the South East met David Willets, Shadow Education Secretary to discuss how they could support the academies. Wellington College, an independent co-educational school in Berkshire, became the first independent school in Britain to sponsor a new academy to the tune of £2 million raised from former alumni or parents of pupils. The new academy is situated in Tidworth, Wiltshire, near army bases on the edge of Salisbury Plain. The academy replaced two failing secondary schools Castledown School, Tidworth, and Avon Valley College, Durrington, in an area where tension between the local population and the army, is thought to have been incurred by the war in Iraq. It was scheduled to open in 2010 with up to £30 million of state funding, one of the 400 new academies the government aimed to have set up by that date.⁴⁵ The Thomas Deacon Academy, Peterborough, a town with mixed social areas and limited deprivation, linked with Oundle, the independent school, and the local Territorial Army in Grantham, not surprisingly also set up a Cadet unit on its creation. "It's about giving children opportunities, a structured leadership programme, and boundaries and experiences that give them independence, self-reliance, and all those sorts of things. The educational argument, I didn't have a problem with" commented the principal, Dr. Alan McMurdo.⁴⁶

Following a series of incidents in which servicemen in uniform were taken to task or derided in public, the review into the relations between the Armed Forces and the public, commissioned by the government and headed by Quentin Davies, made two recommendations concerning the Cadet Forces among numerous other ideas to improve the public profile of the military. Recognising the 'social value' of the Cadet Force, whether community-based Cadets or school-based Cadet units, the report noted the imbalance in provision in schools with 200 units in independent or grammar schools, compared to 60 in state comprehensive schools, six of which were newly created, and encouraged comprehensive schools and city academies to set up

⁴³ *Hansard Commons*, 25 January 2007, Col. 1670.

⁴⁴ MOD Defence News, "Cadet Force expansion revealed", 9 January 2007, <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/CadetForceExpansionRevealed.htm> (accessed 7th May, 2009).

⁴⁵ Sian GRIFFITHS, "Public school to sponsor academy". *The Times*, June 24th, 2007.

⁴⁶ Andy SHARMAN, *op.cit.*

their own CCF.⁴⁷ At the same time, in May 2008, the government White Paper *Back on Track A Strategy for Modernising Alternative Provision for Young People* unveiled the framework within which dealing with ‘challenging pupils’ referred to Pupil Referral Units (PRU) could be improved. Although the White Paper does not specifically mention Combined Cadet Forces it encourages the “wider use of alternative provision”, “extending capacity through collaboration” in school behaviour units. Further to the White Paper, local schemes having adopted the Cadet Force model in their attempts to redeem “people involved in youth crime and anti-social behaviour, with poor educational outcomes” were given as examples of “innovative ways of making alternative provision”. Knowsley Skills Academy established by the local Council was contracting schools to provide a programme along the Army Cadet Force syllabus and BTecs (see below) for one hundred and twenty pupils aged 14 to 19.⁴⁸

In September 2008 six further partnerships between independent and state schools in London were announced. In each one an independent school with a Combined Cadet Force unit would take pupils from the neighbouring partner state school in their unit. These partnerships were backed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the Ministry of Defence and HSBC Global Trust. Two sets of paired schools were already operating the scheme: St Dunstan’s College, Catford, and St Matthew Academy, Lewisham; Reed’s School, Cobham, and Hinchley Wood School, Esher. A further four including Aldenham school, City of London school and Whitgift school, were to start during the school year. Peter Lonsdale, a former head teacher and CCF Adult Volunteer, was named Cadet Ambassador to liaise between schools, the DCSF and the MoD. In September 2009, six new partnerships were to be set up taking the total to eighteen. Andrew Adonis, the Minister for Children, Schools and Families, speaking at the Independent schools Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference, commented:

*These partnerships are all set up on the basis of willing schools, willing teachers and willing students. Cadets can be a real force for good in our schools. The experience provides not only fun, healthy activities for young people but also encourages valuable personal attributes, help to build skills and, using military themes based upon the culture and ethos of the single Services, fosters confidence, self reliance, initiative, resourcefulness, loyalty and a sense of service to others. This initiative is another example of the emerging spirit of cooperation between state and independent schools, which we must continue to foster and encourage.*⁴⁹ [Emphasis by authors]

⁴⁷ Quentin DAVIES, Bill CLARK, Martin SHARP, *Report of Inquiry into National Recognition of our Armed Forces, A report to the Prime Minister*, May 2008, recommendations 26 and 27.

⁴⁸ Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Taking Back on Track forward Response to consultation and next steps*, October 2008, Annex 2, Pilots to explore a range of innovative ways of making alternative provision, [http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/exclusions/uploads/BACK%20ON%20TRACK%20Next%20Steps%20231008%20final%20\(3\).pdf](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/exclusions/uploads/BACK%20ON%20TRACK%20Next%20Steps%20231008%20final%20(3).pdf) (accessed May 10, 2009).

⁴⁹ Department for Children, Schools and Families. Press Release, “From Playground To Parade Ground – More Cadet Forces In State Schools”, 30 September 2008, (accessed May 10, 2009)

Advantages and attractiveness

The renewed interest in what could be termed a marginal phenomenon confined to elite schools and concerning a small but significant proportion of British youth can be explained by this reappraisal of the advantages that the Cadet Force bring. In July 2008, eighteen months after his speech to the Association, Derek Twigg justified the £11 million given to the Combined Cadet Force annually, emphasising “the role that all Cadet forces play in society offering as they do a vast range of personal development and educational opportunities for young people.”⁵⁰ The advantages that are underlined range from reducing the social divide, instilling a new ethos of civic responsibility, to improving discipline in schools and giving pupils further qualifications. The means used can be summed up in one word: partnership.

According to the IPPR, the ‘personal skills divide’ it identified was now more significant than school results for a successful career. The *Thursday’s child* report emphasized the importance of communication, self-control and self-esteem as factors which now contribute far more in determining earnings. Social inequalities would not be bridged if young people were not taught these vital skills. The report showed that people were less likely to be single, separated or depressed if they participated in a structured activity before the age of 30. The Cadet Force provides an answer to those issues in the form of the BTEC National Diploma, a vocational qualification for young people aged 16 and over, originally established for those who felt a particular interest in a career in the Armed Forces or in the fire, ambulance or prison services. It is deemed equivalent to 4 GCSEs at A-C level, is usually completed by the end of the Lower Sixth year and is directly connected with the CCF, as both are promoted by the MOD. Based on continuous assessment, monitoring and tasks there are no examinations involved. In practice, at Rossall, the BTEC requirements are achieved in the course of the normal CCF timetable plus a number of personal assignments.⁵¹ Rossall School offers three different courses and cadets who have reached the age of 16 can take a BTEC in Public Services, Music or Design. The BTEC in Public Services coursework mixes theory and practical elements with an emphasis on leadership, teamwork, communications, problem solving and fitness.⁵² The BTEC National Diploma is awarded by the Cadet Vocational Qualification Organisation (CVQO), a registered charity, which provides the opportunity for members of the Cadet Forces to gain nationally recognised vocational qualifications.

The BTEC programme of studies is based on social and emotional skills and not on academic knowledge. Students who may struggle with normal school subjects

http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0217.

⁵⁰ *Hansard*, July 21, 2008, Col. 833W.

⁵¹ Rossall School, *CCF BTEC*, http://www.rossall.co.uk/sporting_and_activities/163,168 (accessed June 30th, 2008).

⁵² Cadet Vocational Qualification Organisation (CVQO), *BTEC First Diploma in Public Service* (accessed April 15th, 2008)

<http://www.cvqo.co.uk/default.php?category=Cadet+Qualifications&pageName=BTEC+-+Public+Services>.

can therefore gain BTEC qualifications. This is presented by the CVQO as an advantage for students applying for a university or for an employment. At the beginning of 2007, 8000 cadets in the community Cadet Corps and in school contingents had gained the BTEC in public services. This was deemed to “make a huge difference to a child’s life chances because without it, nearly half those children would have left school with fewer than five GCSEs”.⁵³ The qualification is one of the strongest selling points in the BTEC promotional literature. Dr Alan Pearson, Principal of St Hilda and St Bede, Durham University points out that BTEC can swing the decision in students’ applications to university. “The qualification offered by CVQO focus on communication, leadership and teamwork; all important skills that Universities look for in potential students.”⁵⁴ Pupils see the advantages of the BTEC. “The BTEC First Diploma in Public Services was instrumental in my obtaining a place at Cambridge University. There is no doubt that this additional qualification sent me apart from the others and the interviewer was particularly impressed that I had earned this qualification on my own time.”⁵⁵ Among the 131 CCF Rossall cadets in 2007-2008, 30% were taking CCF activities as a BTEC option. Many cadets at Rossall gave the BTEC National Diploma as the main reason for continuing CCF after year 10. For instance, when asked if she intended to continue CCF activities in year 11, a year 9 pupil replied “Yes, but only because it’s five more GCSEs for one year of an hour a week”. CCF activities also provide an opportunity to work towards the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award often used by guide and scout clubs and equally appreciated on *curricula vitae*. The government calls this possibility to achieve vocational qualifications and a sense of discipline and self-esteem ‘empowerment’:

These activities are not ends in themselves. They are ways the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence are empowering young people.

Empowering them through:

- *Investments of skills, qualifications and experiences.*
- *Investments in their self discipline and self worth.*
- *Investments in their physical and mental fitness - and ability to work effectively in teams.*
- *And Introducing them to new people, new abilities and new issues.*⁵⁶

The attraction of activities like shooting, campcraft, mountain biking or orienteering⁵⁷ for cadets is attested by the fact that 67.5% of Rossall cadets enjoy them as ‘fun’, ‘interesting’, ‘enjoyable’. In the 2007-2008 school year, cadets at Rossall took part in an adventure camp near Helvelly – second highest peak in the Lake District – in March-April and went to Wales to attend a shooting competition at RAF Sealand in February. The summer Term Field Day in June took place at Warcop Training Camp, in Cumbria.⁵⁸ The MOD recommends a range of activities

⁵³ Derek TWIGG, *Hansard Commons*, 25 January 2007, col. 1671.

⁵⁴ CVQO, *Step Forward, Stand Out*, n.d.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Derek TWIGG, *Investing in young people*. Speech *op.cit.*, November 20th, 2007.

⁵⁷ Rossall School, *Combined Cadet Force, Forthcoming events* (accessed September 27th, 2007) http://www.rossall.co.uk/sport_the_arts_and_activities/163,369.

⁵⁸ Rossall School, *Combined Cadet Force, News* (accessed June 30th, 2008)

which include rock climbing, mountaineering, mountain walking, top roping, abseiling, canoeing, snow skiing, caving, gliding, offshore sailing, sub aqua diving, parachuting, hang gliding and paragliding.⁵⁹ A year 10 pupil at Rossall School pointed out that “You can do things that other children in other schools aren’t able to do. This is also a rare opportunity.”

Enjoyment takes the sting out of the compulsory nature of these activities in some schools. Two thirds of Rossall CCF pupils questioned were in favour of compulsory CCF for years 9 and 10. A year 10 pupil replied “I think it is good as it is character-building and enjoyable. Sometimes we try new things which we wouldn’t otherwise and enjoy them.” A year 9 pupil at Rossall where the Cadet Force is compulsory for year 9 and 10 declared: “I like CCF activities because they teach me new skills and discipline. I think it is fun and gives children the opportunity for enrichment. I would definitely like to do CCF in year 11”. Just over half of the pupils at Rossall (54% of the year 9 and year 10 Cadets) want to carry on practising Cadet activities in years 11, 12 and 13 as an optional activity. The range of activities is in itself attractive. At King’s School, Canterbury, a co-educational independent boarding and day school with a Cadet contingent, CCF is a voluntary activity which nevertheless attracts 120 children out of 780 pupils even though the school does not offer the BTEC as a carrot.⁶⁰

Ambiguities and criticism

The attraction of outdoor activities away from school has limits nevertheless. Instructions from the Ministry of Defence restrict the time spent on adventurous training to 14% of the total training time and stress that “The balance between military training and adventure course is to be 60% / 40% in favour of military training.”⁶¹ Allocating defence budget money to Britain’s youth has to be justified in terms of educational and defence outcomes.⁶² The expansion of Cadet forces and public animosity towards the Armed Forces since Britain’s unpopular role in the war in Irak led to rising concerns about the implications of the Cadet Force initiative. In March 2008, the NUT claimed the expansion of school-based cadet units was merely a questionable tactic to increase military vocations.⁶³ The Army had previously announced a bursary scheme for thousands of school leavers in an effort to boost recruitment. The largest teachers’ union pointed out that the MOD was focusing disproportionately on schools in the most disadvantaged areas and targeting vulnerable pupils without clearly outlining the risks of an Army career. The union

http://www.rossall.co.uk/sport_the_arts_and_activities/163,343.

⁵⁹ Ministry of Defence, *Combined Cadet Force Manual*, 1994, By Command of the Defence Council, part II-3-5.

⁶⁰ Response by School Staff Instructor at King’s School to inquiry by authors, 12 March 2008.

⁶¹ Ministry of Defence, *Combined Cadet Force Manual*, 1994. By Command of the Defence Council, part II-1-1, “Training; Purpose and Principles; Purpose of Training”.

⁶² Ministry of Defence, *The Combined Cadet Force - A unique educational partnership* <http://www.mod.uk/defenceinternet/aboutdefence/whatwedo/reserveforcesandcadets/drfc/theombinedcadetforceauniqueeducationalpartnership.htm> (accessed November 17th, 2007)

⁶³ Mark TOWNSEND & Anushka ASTHANA, “Brown backs army cadet corps plan for schools”. *The Observer*, April 6th, 2008.

insisted it was not anti-military.⁶⁴ It did however agree to support teachers who boycotted army recruitment campaigns and warned against material produced by the Ministry of Defence which might not conform to the legal requirement for schools to present a balanced view of controversial issues.⁶⁵ The general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, representing independent schools, was also reticent about the plans to extend cadet forces in schools if that meant staff were going to become drill sergeants.⁶⁶ A 2007 report sponsored by the Rowntree Trust questioned the way in which the army was promoted and portrayed in cadet activities:

*The primary target group for armed forces marketing are children and adolescents. This involves schools visits, literature and internet resources, and local cadet forces. As the pool of potential recruits shrinks, outreach to children is expanding, including to those as young as seven years old. Key messages are tailored to children's interests and values: military roles are promoted as glamorous and exciting, warfare is portrayed as game-like and enjoyable, and outreach to the young is described as serving their personal growth and education. Children are introduced to the potential benefits of a forces career but not to its risks.*⁶⁷

Mitigating the indoctrination thesis, a year 10 pupil at Rossall declared “We don’t do anything useful unless we’re going to be in the army.” Indeed only 14 pupils amongst 68 cadets in years 9 and 10 feel interested in a military career.

Following the announcement in March 2009 that the new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, would include the idea of compulsory community service for youth in the Labour manifesto for his first general election at the head of the party, a left-wing commentator feared the consequences. “What Brown is unveiling with his compulsory measures is a roadmap to the reintroduction of compulsory conscription into the armed forces for all youth.”⁶⁸ In a similar but less radical vein, the ambiguity of the decision to extend the CCF in order to reduce youth violence when some CCF activities like shooting appear to contradict that aim is criticised. A year 10 cadet at Rossall disliked CCF “because it is teaching you violent things.” In 2008, Lyn Costello - co-founder of MAMAA (Mothers Against Murder And Aggression) which supports and campaigns on behalf of families and friends of murder victims - said plans to encourage the use of firearms in state schools were disturbing. “There would be a problem putting kids onto rifle ranges because that doesn’t teach them that guns are dangerous, but in the Army you hope that they will learn that it is a bit

⁶⁴ TOWNSEND & ASTHANA, *op.cit.*

⁶⁵ Polly CURTIS, “Boycott threat over military recruitment”, *The Guardian*, 26 March 2008.

⁶⁶ SHARMAN, *op.cit.*

⁶⁷ David GEE, *Informed choice? Armed forces recruitment practice in the United Kingdom*, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, 2007, p.3, www.informedchoice.org.uk (accessed May 6th, 2009).

⁶⁸ “Brown wants to introduce youth conscription”, alt.politics.socialism.trotsky, 15 April, 2009, http://groups.google.com/group/alt.politics.socialism.trotsky/browse_thread/thread/6e0b617caf9faa2a (accessed May 10th, 2009).

of machinery that kills. Obviously, they will need strict controls and the guns would have to be monitored very carefully.”⁶⁹

As a large part of the programme is based on theory, that is to say indoor sessions like searching for information on the internet or traditional lessons, the idea that an army career is extolled is further debunked. For many cadets, there is no real difference between classroom lessons and CCF sessions. For some pupils, the CCF thus merely represents an extension of the school timetable. Amongst the 26 Rossall cadets who rejected CCF activities, 11 of them said they were “boring”. Some teachers worried about the time taken out of the academic timetable for CCF. The fact that CCF activities are promoted at the expense of more traditional sports, even though they are listed under the sports activities on Rossall Schools website, is likewise subject to criticism. A year 11 pupil at Rossall School said he thought it “unfair because more productive activities could be done like sports.” Visibly, Combined Cadet Force activities are not considered as an alternative to Physical Education. Compulsion also feeds ambiguous attitudes towards CCF. Asked “Do you think it is good that the CCF is compulsory for year 9 and 10?”, a year 10 Rossall School Cadet replied: “Possibly no as you get a lot of people doing it who are forced to do it and so tend to just mess around and not take it seriously.”

Further criticism is voiced by those who resent initiatives which amount to nanny state interference in the private sphere. Reacting to newspaper reports on plans to extend Cadet Force initiatives, Phil Doherty, father of five children living at St Anne’s on Sea, Lancashire, expressed this dissatisfaction accusing the government of being ‘interferalist’.

*The government plays lip-service to family requirements and values. Over the last 20 years, I have seen a steady erosion of my rights as a parent and my ability to mitigate social impacts on my children. [...] We used to have strong interconnected communities that underpinned strong ethical family values. Now we have disparate families struggling against our own government and authorities, their enforced changes and their hypocrisy.*⁷⁰

Cadet unit membership is thus considered by its detractors to be at best pointless, detrimental to their academic career, detracting pupils from more serious and scholarly activities, and disruptive of school timetables. Worse, it is seen as misleading as to the dangers of an army career, and to those most opposed, as militaristic, violent and coercitive.

A marginal phenomenon or a major new initiative?

In view of the scattering of small local initiatives and the small total number of schools involved, 250 existing units, both the promoters and the opponents of the

⁶⁹ Mothers Against Murder And Aggression. <http://www.mamaa.org/index.html> (accessed June 2nd, 2008).

⁷⁰ Julia MARGO, “Gordon’s plan to keep the kids under control”. *The Sunday Times*, July, 8th 2007.

initiative to extend the Cadet force units in Britain's schools may be guilty of overestimating the impact of the Cadets nationwide. Cabinet members give the impression that these are unpublicised and unsung but strong youth groups but the NUT and parents critical of the scheme may also be exaggerating the impact and the extent of the policy. While 42,000 members may seem a large number, this in fact only represents 1% of all children aged 12 to 18,⁷¹ and only one in twenty-five secondary schools. In the three years from 2006 to 2009, the scheme was extended to a mere total eighteen state schools. Likewise, local authority projects along Cadet lines (Skill Force) involve very small numbers of children excluded from schools. For example in Slough and Knowsley there were no more than a few dozen each.

The advantages put forward by the government can also be tempered by the reality as experienced by pupils. The children in schools for whom the Cadet units are a given entity – albeit pupils in one independent school – give the general impression of enjoying the opportunity, belying arguments about its dubious nature. On the other hand, the attraction of Cadet unit membership in schools is dampened by largely theoretical nature of the Cadet activities – an extension of the school day rather than an alternative. The widely lauded technical qualification that can be gained, the BTEC, is hardly sufficient on its own. Further academic qualifications are needed. However it is recognised that pupils' confidence and communication skills can be improved by taking part in Cadet activities and taking the BTEC. The initiative can also be said to highlight rather than to diminish the social divide between state and independent schools. It is within that context that NUT criticism can better be understood. State school teachers may balk at the idea of introducing leading advantaged independent school ethos to the more disadvantaged and trailing state comprehensive schools.

The emphasis on the service ethos is double-edged. While underlining the importance of integrating children into the wider community, offering them the opportunity to serve their neighbourhoods and fellows, in a manner which is common to other youth networks such as the Scouting movement, the term is redolent of 'national service', the militarisation of youth and compulsory controls, reminiscent of the criticism abounding in the debates on the omnipresence of CCTV and the introduction of ID cards. Ultimately the scheme is associated with state intrusion. Disproportionately trumpeted in relation to the number of children it would affect, it would seem that the scheme to expand the Combined Cadet Force in schools in Britain is as much part and parcel of the communitarian ideology and rights and duties discourse of the third New Labour term in office. The focus of attention on this small and marginal institution must be considered essentially as a symbolic but significant signal about the values propounded by the New Labour government Mark 2 with perhaps more spin than substance.

⁷¹ 4 049 897. All full-time students and schoolchildren at their term-time address: *Census 2001, National Report for England and Wales - Part 2*. Office for National Statistics.

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