



# **THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SCOUTING**



World Organization  
of the Scout Movement  
Organisation Mondiale  
du Mouvement Scout

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# STRATEGY

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# THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SCOUTING

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Within the framework of the work on the Strategy for Scouting, the World Scout Committee, through its Strategy Task Force, prepared this paper on “The Essential Characteristics of Scouting”. On the basis of WOSM’s Constitution, the paper provides a compact but comprehensive overview of the key elements which characterize our Movement and its mission.

**CONTRIBUTING TO THE  
EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE:  
THE PURPOSE OF SCOUTING**

**THROUGH A SYSTEM OF  
PROGRESSIVE SELF-EDUCATION...**

**BASED UPON A VALUE SYSTEM**

**1. WHAT IS EDUCATION?**

**a) Definition**

The Constitution of the World Organization of the Scout Movement states clearly that Scouting is “an educational Movement”.

Education in the broadest sense is a life long process which enables the global and continuous development of a person’s capacities both as an individual and a member of society. Contrary to the commonly held view, education goes far beyond formal education (i.e. school) in both scope and duration.

- ***A life long process:*** the development of an individual does not take place exclusively during the “formative years” (childhood and adolescence). It will continue throughout his or her life. As a “process”, it will have ups and downs - periods that will be more active, intensive, significant than others - and it will need to be supported.
- ***The continuous development of a person’s capacities:*** the purpose of education is to contribute to the full development of an autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed individual:
  - Autonomous: able to make his/her own decisions and to manage his/her life
  - Supportive: who actively cares about and for others
  - Responsible: able to assume the consequences of the decisions he/she makes, to keep commitments and to complete what he/she undertakes
  - Committed: who seeks to live according to his/her values and supports the ideals which he/she finds are important.
- ***As an individual:*** the development of all the abilities of an individual in all areas of growth - physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual.
- ***As a member of society:*** the development of an awareness of and concern for others, the sense of belonging to a community and being part of its history and evolution.

These two dimensions cannot be dissociated since there is no “education” without a search for the full development of a person’s own potentials and there is no “education” without learning to live with others as a member of the local, national and international communities.

## **b) The “four pillars of education”**

In its broader definition, education throughout life is based on four pillars<sup>1</sup>:

*Learning to know*, by combining a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth in a few subjects. This also means learning to learn, so as to benefit from the opportunities education provides throughout life.

*Learning to do*, in order to acquire not only occupational skills but also a broad range of life skills including interpersonal and team relationships.

*Learning to live together*, developing an understanding of other people, an appreciation of interdependence, skills in team work and conflict resolution, and an adherence to the values of democracy, mutual respect and understanding, peace and justice.

*Learning to be*, so as to better develop one’s character and act with ever greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility. In that connection, education must not disregard any aspect in the development of a young person’s potential.

## **c) Educational Agents**

A variety of educational agents make a contribution to the full development of an individual. The UNESCO definition shows three distinct types:

*Formal education* is the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded, educational system running from primary through to tertiary institutions.

*Informal education* is the process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience, such as from family, friends, peer groups, the media and other influences and factors in the person’s environment.

*Non-formal education* is organized educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended to serve an identifiable learning clientele with identifiable learning objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> “*Learning: The Treasure Within*” Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Mr. Jacques Delors, 1996.

## 2. SCOUTING'S SPECIFIC APPROACH

As an educational movement for young people, Scouting identifies fully with the elements of education as stated above.

- Its *purpose* is to contribute to the development of young people's full potentials as autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed individuals and members of society.
- It includes all four *pillars of education*: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be, the last two requiring a particular emphasis.
- It belongs to the category of *non-formal education* since, while it takes place outside the formal educational system, it is an organized institution with an educational aim and is addressed to a specific clientele.

In addition, Scouting's educational approach is characterized by the following:

- a) it adopts a *holistic approach* to a young person's education;
- b) it seeks to achieve its educational purpose on the basis of an *educational proposal*;
- c) as a non-formal educational agent, it plays a *complementary role* to that of other educational agents;
- d) it recognizes that it can only make a *contribution* to the education of young people.

These characteristics are developed below:

### a) A holistic approach

Scouting considers each young person as an individual who is:

- a **complex being** whose identity is formed, in part, through interaction and relationships between the various dimensions of the individual (physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual), between the individual and the external world and, ultimately, between the individual and a Spiritual Reality.

As a result, Scouting addresses the development of the *whole person* through seeking to stimulate development in all dimensions:

- it recognizes that *the various dimensions of the human personality are connected* and influence each other;
- it acknowledges that *the development of the person as a whole can only take place as a result of a multiplicity of experiences* which are necessarily spread over a period of time.

- a **unique individual**, each with his or her own personal history, set of characteristics, variations in needs, capacities, and pace of development.

As a result, Scouting addresses the development of the whole person *as a unique individual*:

- it recognizes that the development of each young person’s capacities takes place *at his or her own pace*, with bursts of growth in certain dimensions and with dormant periods in others. Scouting therefore seeks to meet each young person’s educational needs as they emerge, while continuing to stimulate development in all dimensions;
  - it acknowledges that each person’s potential is different and thus seeks to help each young person to *develop his or her capacities to the best of that person’s ability* (“*doing one’s best*”).
- and an **integral part of the world** in which he or she lives.

As a result, Scouting addresses the development of the whole person as a unique individual *who is also an integral part of the world in which he or she lives*:

- it seeks to help each young person *to recognize him or herself as a part*, albeit a small one, *of a whole* and *to develop a sense of belonging*, which helps to give meaning to life. This requires a multiplicity of opportunities for the young person to interact with, and make a meaningful contribution to, the world of which he or she is a part (the family, local, national and international community, cultural heritage and natural environment).

## **b) An educational proposal**

Scouting seeks to achieve its educational purpose as described above – to contribute to the development of young people’s full potential – on the basis of a number of ideals or values – its principles – and in accordance with a clearly defined educational method – the Scout Method. Scouting therefore offers a specific **educational proposal**.

This educational proposal:

- is not an empty shell that anyone can fill up with whatever one likes depending on one's beliefs and wishes. The proposal cannot be accepted in part or rejected in part and, once accepted, it becomes binding. Of course it will evolve with time but not at the whim of any individual member.
- does not aim to make the young person conform to a pre-set ideal model. He or she is invited to do his/her best to develop to the full all the dimensions of his/her unique personality.



Scouting is fully successful when a member leaves the Movement with a positive attitude towards entering adult life and has the abilities to do so in a constructive, assertive and responsible way, realising that he or she will need to continue his/her development as an autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed person.

### **c) A complementary role**

It is often said that Scouting has a complementary role to play in the personal development of an individual.

As noted in Section 1.c (Educational Agents) above, three distinct educational “agents” contribute to the full development of any individual. Scouting forms part of the non-formal educational “agency”, and thus ***its contribution complements that provided by the formal sector and by the informal sector***. Scouting is not a formal educational agent, like school, nor is it an informal one, like the family, peers or other influences. Scouting has a distinctive role to play; it is not a repetition of - or a substitute for - what happens at school, at home or in any other institution that has an influence on the development of a young person. A Scout leader, therefore, has a distinctive function; he or she is not simply another teacher, parent, officer or priest.

Scouting, therefore, must play a specific and distinctive role in the education of young people; it must identify its own “niche” in the spectrum of educational provision for young people. Scouting is ***non-formal*** in the sense that it is ***organized and structured***, with a ***specific educational proposal*** which includes a clearly defined ***method***.

It is precisely Scouting’s ***unique method*** that holds the key to its distinctive role. The Scout Method - one method comprising many elements - is the instrument Scouting uses to achieve its specific approach to the education of young people. Many other educational agents have adopted elements of the Scout Method and some of them are used today in schools, youth clubs and other settings. However, in none of these instances is the Scout Method used in its entirety. The Scout Method *per se* cannot be applied in school, in church, or in the family. The Scout Method, applied in a leisure-time setting, among peers, in partnership with adults, provides the safe environment within which the young person can “experiment” and learn from his or her experiences, and thus grow and develop as a unique human being who is ever more autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed.

Scouting is concerned with the global development of the individual. In that sense, the ideal that Scouting seeks to achieve is no different from that of school or family, which are both also concerned with the overall development of the individual.

However, as mentioned above, the methods used in formal education and the ways in which individuals “learn” informally, are likely to result in different contributions to the development of a young person’s capacities in each of the dimensions of the human personality.

Thus, by virtue of the effective application of its unique method, Scouting is able to make a different kind of contribution to the physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual development of a young person, compared to that made by school, by the family or groups of friends, by the media or religious institution or any other “influence” on the education of that individual. To take just one example: in the area of intellectual development, many agents will emphasize the acquisition of knowledge, whereas Scouting, through the effective use of the Scout Method, emphasizes creativity, resourcefulness, etc.

#### **d) A contribution**

As an educational movement for young people, Scouting recognizes that it ***can only make a contribution*** to this process as:

- Scouting is only one of many influences on a young person’s life, and
- education is a life-long process, and thus a person’s full potential continues to unfold throughout life. Scouting can, therefore, only directly help young people develop their potential during their time in the Movement.

It should be noted that:

- For this contribution to produce its full benefit, the young person should be a member of the Movement long enough, particularly through his/her adolescent years, to have a chance to achieve the final educational objectives of Scouting. A shorter stay, especially at a younger age, will of course produce some results and benefit the young person but to a very limited extent.
- Inasmuch as Scouting’s educational approach seeks to help the young person to be responsible for his or her own development, it also seeks to help the young person to develop the inner resources - and desire - to continue to realize his or her potential as an individual and as an active and constructive stakeholder in the world once the young person has left the Movement.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE  
EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE...

THROUGH A SYSTEM OF  
PROGRESSIVE SELF-EDUCATION:  
THE SCOUT METHOD

BASED UPON A VALUE SYSTEM

## 1. PROGRESSIVE SELF- EDUCATION

Scouting is based on the concept of **self-education**. This implies that each youth member is considered as a unique individual who, from the outset, has the potential to develop in all dimensions and to take responsibility for his or her own development. Implicit in self-education is the fact that it is based on the concept of “education from within”, as opposed to “instruction from without”. The youth member is the primary actor in the educational process – i.e. the young person’s “educator” is primarily him or herself. The Scout Method is the structured framework which is designed to guide and encourage each young person along this path of personal growth.

That self-education is also **progressive**. The Scout Method is intended to help each young person to use and develop his or her capacities, interests and experience of life thus far; to stimulate the discovery and development of new capacities and interests; to help him or her find constructive ways of meeting needs at different stages of development, and to open doors to further stages at his or her own individual pace.

## 2. A SYSTEM

The Scout Method is also described as a **system**. This implies that it has to be conceived as an interdependent group of elements forming a unified and integrated whole. That is why the word “Method” is used in the singular, not in the plural. For, while each of the elements comprising it can be considered as a method in its own right (and are in fact considered so by other educational bodies), we can only speak of the Scout Method when all these elements are combined within an integrated educational system.

Each of the elements has **an educational function** (i.e. each element is designed to contribute to the educational process in a specific way); and each element **complements the impact of the others**. All of the elements are therefore needed for the system as a whole to function and must be used in a way which is consistent with Scouting’s purpose and principles.

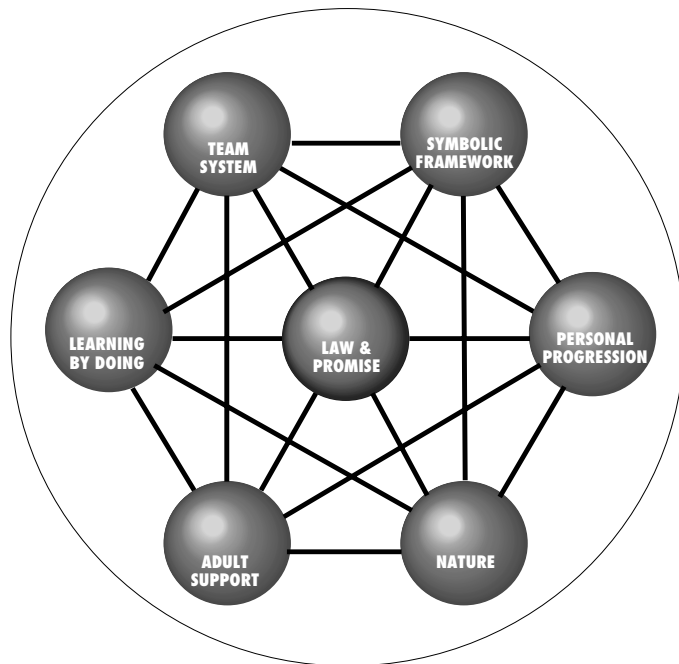
The way in which the elements are applied must be **appropriate to the level of maturity** of the young people. The Scout Method is a fundamental aspect of Scouting. If any of the elements cannot function because of an insufficient level of maturity, or because the individuals have “outgrown” the need for any one of the elements, then Scouting

is not suitable for them. This can happen when trying to apply the Scout Method to very young children or to adults beyond their early twenties.

While all the elements of the Scout Method, working as part of a system, will be constantly in play in the Scout experience as it is lived within the local unit, ***not all of these elements will be apparent in the forefront at any particular moment***; some will be playing only a background role. However, over a period of time – for example, over the course of several meetings or a Scout camp – all elements of the Method will have been used actively. In other words, a snapshot picture of life in the unit will not usually capture all elements of the Method in action – but a video diary will!

### 3. ELEMENTS OF THE SCOUT METHOD

These elements can be illustrated as follows:



- **The Scout law and promise**

The Scout law is a code of living - for each individual Scout and for the members of the unit collectively – based on Scouting’s principles. Through the practical experience of a code of living applied to daily life, the Scout law provides a concrete (i.e. not abstract) and practical way for young people to understand the values (see Section: Based upon a value system) which Scouting proposes as a basis for one’s life.

The promise is a personal pledge to do one’s best to live according to that code which every young person makes before a group of peers when he or she chooses to join the Movement. By making

the Scout promise, the young person makes a conscious and voluntary decision to accept the Scout law and to assume the responsibility of that decision through personal effort (“doing one’s best”). The fact of making the promise in front of peers not only makes the personal commitment public, it also symbolises a social commitment to the others in the group. Making the promise is thus the first symbolic step in the process of self-education.

The law and promise are considered as one element because they are closely linked.

- **Learning by doing**

Learning by doing means developing as a result of first-hand experience as opposed to theoretical instruction. It reflects the active way in which young people gain knowledge, skills and attitudes; it reflects Scouting’s practical approach to education, based on learning through the opportunities for experiences that arise in the course of pursuing interests and dealing with everyday life. It is thus a way of helping young people to develop in all dimensions of the personality through extracting what is personally significant from everything that they experience.

- **The patrol (or team) system**

The team system (or patrol system, as it is often called) is the basic organizational structure of the local unit, which is composed of small groups of youth members and the adult leadership.

Each small group, normally comprising 6-8 youth members, operates as a team with one member acting as team leader. Within each team and in ways appropriate to their capacities, the youth members organize their life as a group, sharing responsibilities, and decide upon, organize, carry out and evaluate their activities. This is done with the support of the adult leadership. A representational system ensures that the youth members also participate in the decision-making processes of the unit as a whole with the adult leaders.

The team system, based on young people’s natural tendency to form small groups, channels the substantial influence that peers have on each other in a constructive direction. It enables young people to develop their personal and collective capacities through pooling and building on their individual skills, talents and experience and through the development of a mutually supportive team spirit. It also enables them to develop constructive relationships with other young people and adults and to learn to live according to a democratic form of self-government.

- **Symbolic framework**

A symbol can be described as something familiar which represents something more vast or abstract (e.g. an idea or concept). Symbols are often used (e.g. in advertising) to help people to understand and identify with concepts through an appeal to the imagination. In Scouting, a symbolic framework is a set of symbols which represent Scouting's educational proposal for a particular age range. The purpose of the symbolic framework is to build on young people's capacity for imagination, adventure, creativity and inventiveness in a way which stimulates their development, helps them to identify with the directions of development and the values underlying Scouting and stimulates cohesiveness and solidarity within the group.

The very name of the Movement, "Scouting", is an element of a symbolic framework adopted by Baden-Powell when he wrote *Scouting for Boys*, intended to inspire the youth of his day. "By the term "Scouting" is meant the work and attributes of backwoodsmen, explorers, hunters, seamen, airmen, pioneers and frontiersmen"<sup>2</sup>. Scouting represented adventure, close-knit groups, developed powers of observation, resourcefulness and a simple healthy life in the great outdoors – all qualities which Baden-Powell sought to promote.

As Scouting now addresses a wider range of ages than when first invented, each age section has a distinct symbolic framework which corresponds to the level of maturity of the age section and focuses on a specific educational need which is characteristic of the age section.

- **Personal progression**

Personal progression is the element concerned with helping each young person to develop the inner motivation to be consciously and actively involved in his or her own development. It enables the young person to progress in his or her own way at his or her own pace in the general direction of the educational objectives of the age section; to gain confidence and to recognize the progress made. The progressive scheme is the main tool used to support this element of the Scout Method.

- **Nature**

Nature refers to the natural environment - the woods, the plains, the sea, the mountains, the desert - as opposed to the artificially created environments, such as the school yard, cement campsites

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<sup>2</sup> "Aids to Scoutmastership", R. Baden-Powell, World Brotherhood Edition, 1944.

and crowded cities. Nature also refers to what Baden-Powell called the “harmonious whole” of the “infinite, the historic and the microscopic”, and of mankind’s place in it.

Due to the immense possibilities that the natural world offers for the development of the young person’s physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual potentials, the natural environment provides an ideal setting in which the Scout Method can be applied. Indeed, although it may not always be readily accessible especially in today’s urbanized environment, most Scout activities should take place in a natural environment.

However, the use of Nature, as an element of the Scout Method, involves more than activities carried out in the great outdoors. It involves the development of constructive contact with Nature, making full use of all the unique learning opportunities provided by the natural world in order to contribute to the development of young people.

Although referring to the forest, Baden-Powell’s view of Nature as an educational tool can be summarized as follows: “For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, the forest is at once a laboratory, a club and a temple.”<sup>3</sup>

- **Adult support**

Adult support to young people involves three aspects which correspond to the three different roles an adult needs to play within a Scout unit:

- *The activity leader*: he or she must ensure that every activity that the group undertakes is successfully carried out. While no adult can be expected to have all the skills required for all activities, it is his or her responsibility to ensure that the necessary technical support and expertise is made available to the group when and where needed.
- *The educator*: he or she needs to directly support the process of self-education and ensure that what a young person experiences has a positive impact on the development of that young person’s knowledge, skills or attitudes. In other words, as an educator, the adult leader needs to relate to each individual member - male or female - so as to help the young person to identify his or her development needs, to help the young person to accept those needs and to ensure that they are met adequately through the Youth Programme.
- *The group facilitator*: based on a voluntary partnership between adults and young people, he or she needs to ensure

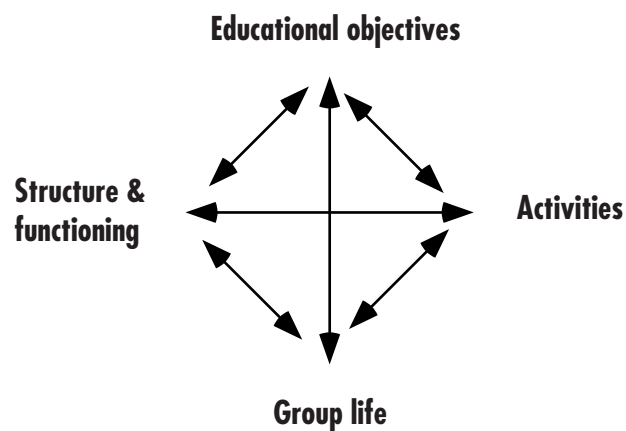
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<sup>3</sup> “*Rovering to Success*”, R. Baden-Powell, Herbert Jenkins Ltd., 8th printing, London, 1930.

that the relationships within the group are positive and enriching to all and that the group provides an attractive and supportive environment for the continued growth of the group as a whole. This implies a rich learning partnership between young people and adults, based on mutual respect, trust and acceptance of each other as persons.

#### **4. THE DYNAMICS OF SCOUTING: THE SCOUT METHOD IN ACTION**

In order for the Scout Method to function effectively with a group of young people, the adult leader must be able to make appropriate use of the elements of the Scout Method and the dynamics of Scouting in action. The dynamics of Scouting are composed of four inter-related and interdependent elements. These are:



- **Educational objectives**

Within the context of the Youth Programme, a set of general educational objectives, concerning the development of the young person in each area of development of the human personality, is proposed for each age section. Each youth member strives to progress towards these educational objectives in a personalized way. The adult leader needs to consider everything in the unit (e.g. the way in which the unit is run, the decision-making processes, the kinds of relationships to be promoted as well as the activities that the young people take part in) from the perspective of how all these aspects can contribute to, as opposed to detract from, the educational objectives sought.

- **Activities**

In Scouting, activities include such things as a hike in nature, a community service, etc. They also include things that are necessary for the functioning of the unit and for dealing with the necessities of everyday life, e.g. buying food and cooking supper in camp, travelling to an activity site, or taking part in a discussion to evaluate personal progression. Both kinds of activities contribute to the educational process and the Scout Method must be applied to both. Indeed, activities provide the supporting context for the application of the



Scout Method. An activity, of whatever kind, does not automatically constitute a Scout activity. It only becomes a Scout activity when the Scout Method is applied to it.

In themselves, activities in Scouting must be based on the young people's interests and needs so as to be enjoyable and attractive to them. The activities must be conceived with a clearly defined educational objective in mind; they must provide an appropriate degree of challenge and be perceived by the young people as useful to them. Over time, a balanced variety of activities needs to be offered.

- **Group life**

This refers to everything that is experienced, within the teams and the unit as a whole, as a result of operating as a mini-society composed of the young people and the adult leader. A sense of group life is essential for the harmonious development of young people.

While young people have a natural tendency to form “gangs” of friends, and even though this tendency is reflected in the team system, a sense of group life does not automatically exist in Scouting. Fostering a sense of group life involves promoting constructive group dynamics (the interaction and relationships that develop between the young people and between the young people and the adult leader). It also involves making use of opportunities for young people to interact (amongst themselves and with the adult leadership) in the wide variety of situations which occur naturally in the course of their time in Scouting. When a true sense of group life develops, the group as a whole takes into account the needs and interests of each person, and each person contributes towards the well-being of the group.

Group life stimulates experiences which can lead to emotional and social growth, the development of attitudes and the progressive appropriation of values because:

- operating within a close-knit group and experiencing for themselves the merits of a code of living (the Scout law in action) provide a natural context for each young person to discover the deeper meaning of the values for which Scouting stands;
- constructive interaction and relationships with others in the group stimulate a climate of mutual trust and caring and contribute to the development of a sense of identity, self-worth and belonging;
- when the prospect of being part of a close-knit group stimulates a desire to belong and feel accepted, and when that

group operates according to Scouting's code of living, peer pressure – a major influence on the development of young people – is constructive, not destructive.

Thus, the attitudes and values which group life stimulates are both of a personal nature (such as a constructive and pro-active attitude to life, self-confidence, a spirit of enterprise, goal-setting, etc.), and of a social nature (such as a team spirit, seeking a consensus, acknowledging differences and interdependence, experiencing solidarity, etc.). Group life, therefore, provides a useful way of helping young people straight away to put into practice, and develop – to the extent of their abilities – their capacities for autonomy, supportiveness, responsibility and commitment.

- **Structure and functioning of the unit**

This refers to the way in which the Scout Method is applied and the operating mechanisms put into place in the unit (e.g. the provision of concrete opportunities for young people to experience making decisions and assuming responsibility, establishing contact with their local community, etc.). It also refers to the use of resources (not only financial and material, but also in terms of time, etc.) which also play an important role in influencing the quality of the educational experience.

When these four elements truly reinforce each other, Scouting can offer a more coherent and richer learning experience. For example, an association may consider that “democracy” is an important issue that requires an educational emphasis. Helping young people to develop a personal adherence to a democratic way of life (*educational objective*) is unlikely to result solely from activities related to gaining knowledge about the subject. In this example, questions to consider include: does the way in which the *activities* are conceived permit an experience of a democratic way of life? Do all of the young people share in responsibilities and make a personal contribution to the well-being of the unit (*group life*)? Is the adult leader able to listen to the young people and offer opportunities for them to make decisions to the extent of their ability (*structure and functioning*)? In summary, what could be modified in the way in which the unit functions, in the way in which the adult leadership and young people interact, in the activities that the young people take part in, so as to reinforce the educational objectives?

CONTRIBUTING TO THE  
EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE...

THROUGH A SYSTEM OF  
PROGRESSIVE SELF-EDUCATION...

**BASED UPON A VALUE SYSTEM:  
ADHERENCE TO THE PROMISE  
AND LAW AND THE  
PRINCIPLES OF SCOUTING**

When Baden-Powell returned to England from South Africa at the beginning of the 20th century, he observed “Thousands of boys and young men pale, narrow chested, hunched up, miserable specimens, smoking endless cigarettes, numbers of them begging”<sup>4</sup>. He was concerned about the decline of moral standards particularly among young people and the danger which this represented for the future of society.

Scouting was thus born from its Founder’s desire to improve society, a goal he believed could only be achieved by improving the individuals in society. Indeed, Baden-Powell considered the “character of its citizens” as being a country’s greatest strength.

Within Scouting, the “improvement of the individual” or, to use a more appropriate term, the educational process, is achieved through a system of progressive self-education which is the Scout Method. One of the fundamental components of the Method, one might even say its cornerstone, is the promise and law, which is a voluntary personal commitment (the Scout promise) to do one’s best to adhere to an ethical code of behaviour (the Scout law). The promise and law encapsulate, in simple terms, the values upon which Baden-Powell considered that a healthy society must be based. These values constitute the essential ethical framework within which Scouting functions, and without which the Movement would no longer be Scouting.

Consequently, one of the essential characteristics of Scouting is that, since its inception, it has been based upon a value system, i.e. an interrelated set of ethical rules. But what exactly is a “value” and how are values expressed within Scouting?

- As the word itself indicates, ***a value is something fundamental***, worthwhile, durable. The values of a person are those things that are important to him or her, things in which he or she believes and considers essential and which therefore condition his or her behaviour and life.
- ***For young people, Scouting’s values are expressed in the promise and law*** which are, as mentioned above, a fundamental component of the Scout Method. ***For the Movement as a whole, the values are expressed in the principles*** of the Movement; the principles are the fundamental laws and beliefs which represent

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted from “250 Million Scouts”, Laszlo Nagy, 1985.

an ideal, a vision of society and a code of conduct for all its members. The principles are not abstract concepts; they permeate all aspects of Scouting and guide the life-style of its members.

The principles of Scouting, or values it stands for, are normally summarized in three categories:

- “*Duty to God*” – a person’s relationship with the spiritual values of life, the fundamental belief in a force above mankind.
- “*Duty to others*” – a person’s relationship with, and responsibility within, society in the broadest sense of the term: his or her family, local community, country and the world at large, as well as respect for others and for the natural world.
- “*Duty to self*” – a person’s responsibility to develop his or her own potential, to the best of that person’s ability.

What is important to underline here is the exact function of the principles, or values, within Scouting.

- At the level of the Movement as a whole, they represent Scouting’s vision of society, the ideals it stands for and the image it projects.
- For anyone joining the Movement, the principles represent those elements which each individual must be open to accept and must be willing to do his or her best to follow. This initial acceptance does not, and certainly cannot in the case of young people, imply in any way an understanding of the full significance of these values; this can only be acquired through membership of the Movement over a period of time. By contrast, a rejection by an individual of these principles disqualifies him or her from membership of the Movement, which is open to all provided they agree with its purpose, principles and method.
- Once a young person has expressed his or her initial acceptance of these principles, through making the promise, the whole educational process within Scouting consists in enabling the young person to gradually understand these values, adhere to them and make them his or her own so that they permeate the person's behaviour throughout life. In the Founder’s words “*Self-education*, that is, what a boy learns for himself, is what is going to stick by him and guide him later on in life, far more than anything that is imposed upon him through *instruction* by a teacher”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> “*Scouting for Boys*”, R. Baden-Powell, 26th edition, 1951.

**A MOVEMENT...**  
**FOR YOUNG PEOPLE...**  
**VOLUNTARY...**  
**OPEN TO ALL...**  
**NON-POLITICAL...**  
**INDEPENDENT**

Scouting is a movement. According to the dictionary, a movement is “a series of actions and endeavours by a body of persons, tending more or less continuously towards a special end” or “a series of concerted organized activities or related events working toward or shaping some objective”.

Developing upon the above definitions, a movement such as Scouting refers to a group of people who share a number of ideals and the desire to achieve actively a common purpose which unites them and to which they are all committed; usually this is accomplished through some type of organization and structure.

As a movement, Scouting must therefore be characterized by the following:

- A movement implies **unity**. This unity results from the sharing of a common purpose, a common set of values and a common educational method which together create a sense of belonging among its members and which makes their identification with the Movement possible.

Unity is an essential characteristic without which a movement cannot exist. Unity does not mean uniformity and it does not preclude diversity among its members in areas where diversity is possible and indeed desirable. However, unity does require that all members of a movement adhere to the fundamental elements which it has defined as being the basis for its existence. In the case of Scouting, these fundamental elements are the purpose, principles and method of the Movement. Its members cannot pick and choose from among these fundamentals what suits them; they constitute an integrated package which must be accepted in its totality.

In order to safeguard the unity of Scouting, its purpose, principles and method are agreed upon internationally by all its members and clearly defined at world level within the Constitution of the World Organization of the Scout Movement; any adaptation or reformulation of the fundamentals of Scouting requires the amendment of the Constitution of WOSM. Furthermore, the formulation of the purpose, principles and method within the constitutions of national associations, and any amendments to that formulation, require the approval of the World Organization before entering into force.

The fundamental elements of the unity of Scouting - i.e. its purpose, principles and method - are binding on the Movement at all its levels. It is the duty of the world bodies to ensure that these fundamental elements are respected by all national Scout associations. It is the duty of each national Scout association to ensure that the fundamental elements are reflected in all aspects of their structure and activities and by each of their own individual members. It is such adherence and respect which guarantee the permanence of Scouting both nationally and worldwide.

- A movement must be **dynamic**, it cannot be static. A movement, by definition, implies **evolution**. Within a movement, evolution is a means to reach a **purpose** or objective, to which it must remain faithful; it is not haphazard or unguided change.

As a movement, Scouting exists in order to achieve a purpose, which is the education of young people on the basis of a number of ideals or values – its principles – and in accordance with a clearly defined educational method – the Scout method. As stated earlier, the purpose, principles and method of Scouting – i.e. its fundamentals – are universal, invariable and unite all elements of the Movement. Yet because it is a movement, Scouting, at all levels, must always be able to change its approach, to adapt, to be flexible in the manner in which it works to reach its purpose, since Scouting does not live in a vacuum but in a constantly and rapidly changing society.

This duality – the need to be faithful to its fundamentals and, at the same time, to be flexible and dynamic in its ways of working – is an essential characteristic of Scouting. Change that is not clearly directed towards achieving Scouting’s purpose would lead to a loss of the movement’s identity and therefore to chaos, whereas a rigid and inflexible approach to reaching the purpose would lead to sclerosis which could kill the movement.

- A movement implies not only a dynamic process aimed at achieving an objective, but also some type of **organization** and structure to ensure this. What is important to bear in mind is that if, within a movement, organization and structure are – like change – a necessity, they are also – like change – not an end in themselves but a means to achieve the movement’s purpose.

Baden-Powell said “First I had an idea. Then I saw an ideal. Now we have a Movement, and if some of you don’t watch out we shall end up with **just** an organization”<sup>6</sup> (emphasis added). This statement has often been misinterpreted to mean that Scouting is not an organization, or that an organization is not important. What the Founder was criticizing was not the principle of an organization, but that of “just an organization”, i.e. a structure that exists only for itself and not to serve the movement and its purpose.

Within Scouting, as in any other movement, the organization and structures must always be designed, and aimed, exclusively at reaching the movement’s objectives; their existence cannot be justified otherwise. Furthermore, because Scouting is a movement, the organization must be dynamic and adaptable in order to constantly enable the movement to achieve its purpose in light of the rapid and inevitable societal changes. Organizations that are self-serving and self-perpetuating go against the very concept of a movement.

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<sup>6</sup> Source and year unknown. Supplied by P. Siebold.

What is true of a movement in general also applies to a **world movement**. As a world movement, Scouting is **united** by its fundamentals which must be the same everywhere. Because it is a movement, Scouting must remain **flexible** and **adaptable** in its ways of working in order to meet the needs of young people in a specific time and place and a wide diversity of situations. Likewise, its organization and structure and all persons working within them at whatever level – local, national or international – must at all times seek to achieve the movement’s purpose and be able to adapt whenever necessary.

It is precisely these two factors which have enabled Scouting to grow steadily into a **unique worldwide movement** – the world’s largest voluntary educational youth movement.

## A MOVEMENT...

### FOR YOUNG PEOPLE...

Scouting, as a youth movement, addresses its educational proposal to *young people*.

### VOLUNTARY...

In this respect, it is important to note that:

### OPEN TO ALL...

### NON-POLITICAL...

### INDEPENDENT

- While there are broad trends concerning the **age range** of the young people to whom Scouting's educational proposal is offered, there are no absolute rules governing this subject. Each national Scout association determines the age ranges applicable within it. However, as a movement for young people, it would be inappropriate to apply the Youth Programme to persons beyond their early twenties. In addition, the document *Towards a Strategy for Scouting*<sup>7</sup> noted that there was a potential danger in some national Scout associations of departing from one key element of the original purpose of Scouting, namely that it is **particularly suited to the adolescent age range** – and not primarily for children. The contribution that Scouting can make to the development of a young person differs according to the specific stage of development of that young person. To adolescents in particular, the Scout Method provides the opportunity to develop the ability to make their own decisions and reach a higher stage of autonomy – an essential step in their development. Yet, particularly in industrialized countries, the adolescent membership is not thriving to the same extent as the younger membership such as pre-Cub and Cub.

This is of particular concern where Scouting's educational proposal is offered to very young children. The Scout Method is **not at all suited for children who are too young for it to work effectively**: too young, for example, to understand the concept of making a personal commitment to a code of conduct through a promise and law, or to exercise a leadership role within a small group. Moreover, adolescents are usually not attracted to any organization that they perceive as being "for children". In addition, if one considers that most young people will only remain in any organization for a certain number of years – a fact which can be statistically demonstrated in many national Scout associations – there is the added problem of retaining into their adolescent years young people who join at too early an age.

As an educational movement whose purpose is to help develop young people to take a constructive place in society, Scouting can not succeed if it does not accompany young people through adolescence **to the point of their "graduation" from the Movement** ideally at the end of the senior age section.

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<sup>7</sup> Adopted by the 31st World Scout Conference, Melbourne, 1988.



- “Young people”, of course, includes **both genders**: boys and girls, young men and young women. While Scouting was originally for boys only (and Guiding for girls), the Scout Movement has, for the past 25 years, been open to all young people irrespective of gender.

In this respect, it should be noted that the fact that, as a world movement, Scouting is open to both genders does not affect the principle that each national Scout association makes its own decision on whether or not it admits girls. However, it does require that national Scout associations consider their educational provision carefully, taking into account the characteristics of the society in which they operate and the changes taking place in that society which affect young people. Thus:

- In societies where mixed gender relationships (at school, in social and professional life) are, or are becoming, socially accepted and where, therefore, Scouting has a role to play in helping young people to prepare for active and constructive participation in a mixed social environment, the norm would be for national Scout associations to address both genders through a coeducational approach.

In Scouting, coeducation can be defined as an approach which aims at the development of both genders equally, bearing in mind the individuality of each person. A coeducational approach does not imply that young people of both genders have to take part in all activities together.

- When a national Scout association operates in a society where separate gender relationships are the norm and where coeducation is therefore excluded, nothing prevents the national association from providing Scouting to both genders in single-sex settings.
  - If a national Scout association opens its membership to both genders, it must address the educational needs of each equally. This implies that if an association admits both genders in any age section, then provision must continue to be made in one form or another for both genders in the subsequent age sections.
  - Irrespective of the composition of membership, no educational provision today can be considered as complete if it does not foster mutual respect and understanding between the sexes.
- Finally, Scouting is not just **a movement for young people** managed by adults only; it is also **a movement of young people**,

supported by adults<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the Scout Movement offers the potential for a learning community of young people and adults, working together in a partnership of enthusiasm and experience. This basic principle should be applied within the Youth Programme of all national Scout associations.

Within the Youth Programme, members in all age sections need to be involved in making decisions affecting the implementation of the programme in which they participate at unit level, assuming increasing responsibility with age for their own decisions and actions. Youth members in the older age sections should also participate in the process of programme design and development carried out by national Scout associations. Baden-Powell referred to this as “self-government” and frequently urged adult leaders to always ask their young members what they wanted for their unit.

Within the Youth Programme, the ***role of adult leaders*** is to encourage and facilitate the progressive personal development of the youth members through a rich and varied ***partnership*** with them. At all levels and in all situations, an appropriate balance must be struck between the complementary roles of youth members and adult leaders.

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<sup>8</sup> “*Policy on Involvement of Young Members in Decision-Making*”, adopted by the 33rd World Scout Conference, Bangkok, 1993.

**A MOVEMENT...**  
**FOR YOUNG PEOPLE...**

**VOLUNTARY...**

The dictionary defines the word “voluntary” as “(something) performed, undertaken or brought about by free choice, willingly ... and without compulsion”.

**OPEN TO ALL...**

**NON-POLITICAL...**

**INDEPENDENT**

The voluntary character of the Scout Movement emphasizes the fact that members, in accepting the educational proposal made to them by their national association, adhere to the Movement of their own **free will**. There is no compulsion to join the Scout Movement or to remain a member. Scouting is not like school, at which attendance is usually compulsory between certain ages. Young people choose when to join the Movement and when to leave. The same principle of voluntary membership applies to adult leaders.

This has certain implications and consequences for the Movement:

- Implicit in the idea that membership of the Scout Movement is undertaken by free choice is that what Scouting offers to its members must, in the first instance, be **attractive and relevant** to them and subsequently retain their interest. The Movement itself must be – and be seen as – dynamic and alive.
- In return, the Scout Movement requires a **commitment** from the individual member – a commitment, first and foremost, to respect and act according to the **fundamental principles** of the Movement: duty to God, duty to others and duty to self. This commitment is made through making the Scout promise, which is the public expression of the willingness to do one’s best to adhere to a code of living based on these ideals.

This voluntary commitment to the Scout Movement extends also to achieving the **educational purpose** of Scouting. This applies to youth members, insofar as their own personal development is concerned; indeed the voluntary commitment is an essential component of Scouting’s educational process, influencing motivation and personal attitude, being in control of one’s own personal development, setting personal objectives, self-drive, etc.

- Adults in the Movement must also be committed to Scouting’s purpose, principles and method, as their role is to help youth members, directly or indirectly, to achieve their full potentials. This leads to a strong sense of **shared responsibility and partnership** among all members of the Movement: youth and adult, “volunteer” and “professional”.

- Also implicit in the fact that becoming a member of the Scout Movement is a voluntary act is the recognition that what the Movement offers to young people – its educational proposal – is **not suited to everyone**. Thus, not all young people are potential members of the Scout Movement; there are those who, for whatever reason, will never be attracted to it or find it possible to adhere to its fundamental principles. What is critical, however, is that the Scout Movement offers the *possibility* to join, to all those who wish to, and does not construct barriers to membership that are based on factors other than the fundamentals of the Movement.
- Also arising from the voluntary nature of the Scout Movement is that adults serving the Movement in a leadership capacity do so of their own accord, freely and willingly, **without being paid** for their services or time. Each adult in a voluntary movement contributes in his or her own way, according to his or her skills, talents, time availability, etc., to the accomplishment of shared goals.

The fact that Scouting is a voluntary movement **does not mean that it does not use paid professionals**, on a full or part-time basis, to support its work. Where the need exists and resources permit, some people may be employed to fulfil specific roles that contribute to the effective and efficient achievement of Scouting's purpose but which demand an extended time commitment; usually such people share the strong commitment to the Scout Movement. The use of professionals and a **good volunteer-professional partnership** strengthens the Movement and increases its effectiveness.

- A voluntary movement depends upon **participation** of all its members, male and female, young as well as older, at all levels, **in the decision-making process**. As part-owners, or “stakeholders” in the Movement, they must be actively involved in managing its affairs in a democratic manner.

**A MOVEMENT...**  
**FOR YOUNG PEOPLE...**  
**VOLUNTARY...**  
**OPEN TO ALL...**  
**NON-POLITICAL...**  
**INDEPENDENT**

“The Scout Movement (...) [is] open to all without distinction of origin, race or creed (...).”

The statement - which is part of the definition of the Scout Movement in the Constitution of WOSM - is very clear.

Right from the beginning, Scouting has been open to all boys whatever social background they may be part of, wherever they may be born and whatever religion they may belong to. Indeed, those who took part in the experimental camp on Brownsea Island were chosen deliberately from different social backgrounds. Although started in Britain, Scouting was immediately adopted in many distant countries with completely different cultures, social and economic conditions. Finally, although the Movement started in a Christian environment, it has had no problem taking root in Hindu, Buddhist, Moslem or other religious environments.

Today, as a movement for “young people”, it is open to all, boys and girls, young men and young women, without any distinction of origin, race or creed or restriction based on gender.

Being open to all has a number of important implications:

- ***Open to all does not mean that Scouting is for all.*** Indeed, it is for all who are willing to adhere to its purpose, principles and method. This choice places the final decision – to join or not join – in the hands of the young person, who is the only one who can decide whether he or she is prepared to make such a commitment. It is not for adult leaders to decide whether or not that young person is “suitable material” for the Scout Movement or to restrict recruitment to a particular social class. After all, if we are an “educational Movement” we have an obligation to accept all those who are prepared to learn through Scouting.

At the same time, we should not expect the result of education to be achieved before the educational process itself has already started. In other words, and to use spiritual development as an example, we should not expect Scouts to be the perfect examples of devoted believers of the faith to which they belong, but accept that they will do their best to understand it and develop spiritually both personally and as members of a religious community.

- Scouting is ***not an elite movement***; its membership is by no means restricted to a selected few who correspond to a prototype, for example those who will always “obey without question”. It should be made available to those who need it most and who often “do not look like Scouts” when they join!

At the same time, it is not a movement that all youth must join, whether or not they are willing to adhere to its purpose, principles and method. By its very nature as a voluntary movement, Scouting should be accessible to all who are interested by what it has to offer and prepared to make a commitment that they will do their best to adhere to the fundamentals.

- Accessibility is a key concept, which means:
  - that the language used can be understood and that the image projected amongst the general public and potential members is sufficiently attractive and corresponds to what young people can identify with or, at least, be associated with. This obviously depends on the “product” (i.e. the Youth Programme) that an association offers to young people but also on who is offering that programme, that is, those adults who form part of the “delivery system”;
  - that new groups will have to be created whenever a demand exists, such as places where there is no local structure to welcome new members, or where waiting lists in established groups prevent others from joining; and
  - that the financial cost of participating in the programme (the activities, uniforms, subscriptions, etc.) should not constitute a barrier.

To conclude, most people will agree that Scouting is open to all. However not everyone is prepared to make sure that it reaches young people who need it most. For example, many young people who have difficulties in their day to day life and who may not be readily accepted in their community may nevertheless be prepared to do their best to commit themselves to the principles of the Movement. Unfortunately in some associations, rigid practices (sometimes described as “tradition”), which time and prejudice have deposited on the Movement, have too often made it impossible to reach young people in different – often difficult – social environments. Making Scouting truly open to all, in particular those who need it most, obviously requires adaptation without compromising the purpose, principles and method of the Movement.

**A MOVEMENT...**  
**FOR YOUNG PEOPLE...**  
**VOLUNTARY...**  
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**INDEPENDENT**

As an educational movement, Scouting is non-political in the sense that it is not involved in the struggle for power which is the subject-matter of politics.

In explaining the non-political nature of Scouting, it is necessary to distinguish between:

- the Movement, and its organization, as a social force,
- the individuals who are members of the Movement.

*As a social force*, the Scout Movement and its organization must not be identified with political parties which are usually the reflection of politics in a democratic society. Neither the Organization itself in its statements, publications, etc., nor anyone presenting him or herself as its representative must be identified with a party or other clearly structured political group within a democracy, since this would be a breach of the independence of the Movement.

The reason why Scouting must remain an independent, non-political movement is simple. Baden-Powell wrote that “Danger lies in the people becoming accustomed to having their own minds made up for them without any exercise of their own judgement or conscience in the process”<sup>9</sup> and he therefore concluded that “individual power of judgement is essential”. This is why Scouting is an educational movement aimed at helping young people to develop, from within themselves, their own abilities and their autonomy. This approach requires complete neutrality in the educational process, the only constraint being the principles, or values, upon which Scouting is based. The identification of the Scout Movement with any political party inevitably jeopardizes the objectivity and neutrality which must always characterize the person-centred educational approach for which Scouting stands.

This does not, however, mean that Scouting is completely divorced from socio-political realities. The Scout Movement itself is a social reality and its aim is to help young people to develop as responsible individuals and as members of society. This civic education cannot take place in a vacuum, and the Movement must be able to defend the values it stands for and to create the best possible conditions for the type of education

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<sup>9</sup> “Scouting and Youth Movements”, R. Baden-Powell, 1929.

it advocates. Consequently, nothing prevents the Scout Movement from taking a stance on a certain number of issues such as, for example, the rights of children, provided that this is clearly related to its educational mission, is based upon its own Constitution and principles and is presented as such and not as part of the power struggle or partisan politics which the Scout Movement must transcend.

As for ***the individuals who are members of the Movement***, the situation is somewhat different. The Founder did not discourage members of the Movement from belonging to political parties, provided that this was in an individual capacity and not as a representative of the Movement.

Consequently, in addition to exercising their civic responsibilities, nothing precludes a member of the Movement from also being an active member of a political party, but as an individual, not as a Scout.

Membership of a political party is not, however, unconditional. The reason is that Scouting is based upon a number of values, or principles, which condition the political options of its individual members who cannot have a conflicting set of values: one for their life as a Scout, the other for their life outside Scouting. Thus, for example, the belief in a force higher than mankind, or the recognition and respect for one's fellow-man and for the equality of all without distinction of origin, race or creed, or again the importance attached to the integrity of the natural world, preclude a Scout from joining, as an individual, a number of parties on the political spectrum.

If a member chooses to adhere to a political party in an individual capacity, he or she can do so only if the basic values of that party are consistent with those he or she holds as a Scout. If a member has any doubts in this respect, he or she should consult with others to determine and ensure that there is no conflict of values. When the individual adheres to a political party, he or she must in no circumstances use Scouting as a platform for the promotion of the party to which he or she belongs.

It should be noted that the observations made above generally apply in democratic societies, which constitute the appropriate framework in which Scouting can operate and in which the Scout Movement, as well as the individuals comprising it, have a choice. In non-democratic societies, both the Movement and its individual members will need to live with political realities but must ensure, to the maximum extent possible, that the Movement does all it can to maintain its independence as much as possible.



A MOVEMENT...  
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE...  
VOLUNTARY...  
OPEN TO ALL...  
NON-POLITICAL...

**INDEPENDENT**

Scouting, at all levels – local, national and international – has a **specific identity** based on its purpose, principles and method:

- it is a movement that exists to provide a **specific educational contribution to young people...**
- based on Scouting's **fundamentals...**
- which have been **internationally defined...**
- and which constitute the **unity** of the Movement.

Scouting can succeed in fully achieving its educational purpose only if its specific identity is safeguarded. Any loss or diminution of this identity – through, for example, being too closely linked to or influenced by another organization or authority – will inevitably have a negative impact on the Movement.

The Movement must, therefore, remain independent, with its own **sovereign decision-making authority** at all levels.

This does not imply that Scouting should operate in isolation; nor should it refuse to cooperate with other organizations or authorities. Indeed, Scouting may never have become the World Movement that it is without the popular and institutional acceptance and support that it has received throughout its history. What it does infer is that any offer or acceptance of support, or any form of partnership with another organization or authority, can only be justified if it serves to further what Scouting sets out to achieve: its educational purpose.

This means that all levels of the Movement must be vigilant in their relationships with other entities – sponsoring bodies, working partners, kindred organizations, governmental authorities, and the like – to ensure that the Movement's specific identity and independence are not compromised as a result of these relationships.

For example:

- Scouting's cooperation with other educational youth organizations must never lead to the loss or compromise of its own independence and specific role in educational provision to young people;

- Scouting's sponsorship by a religious or community organization must never result in a Scout association being controlled by that organization or being perceived as being subordinate to it;
- Scouting's links to local or national authorities must never be such that the Movement's voluntary, non-formal educational role in society is put into question;
- Scouting's support to development agencies must never lead to the Movement itself being seen as a development agency, rather than as a movement with a specific contribution to make to the education of young people.

Of course, there is a natural desire to consult and cooperate with other organizations serving the needs of young people. There may also be advantages in building or maintaining close institutional links with governmental authorities concerned with matters such as youth and education. Inevitably, there is also a constant search for opportunities to increase Scouting's "profile" in the community or to find new sources of financial and human resources. However, great caution needs to be exercised at every level of the Movement in such situations to ensure that Scouting does not risk losing its independence and its specific identity.

It is important to note that what protects the Movement when it is threatened by outside forces is the fact that its nature and specific identity are internationally defined and agreed upon by all Scout associations. For example, challenges to the Movement's fundamental principles in any particular country can be defended on the basis of conditions of membership of the World Movement.