

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND THE YOUTH SERVICE IN WALES: A SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMITTEE ON WELSH AFFAIRS.

INTRODUCTION: THE YOUTH SERVICE

1. In Wales, the purposes of youth work have been outlined in the following way:
 - to promote equality of opportunity for all young people in order that they fulfil their potential as empowered individuals and as members of groups and communities.
 - to support young people in the transition to adulthood.
 - to assist young people to develop attitudes and skills which enable them to make purposeful use of their personal resources and time.

Youth work thus offers young people opportunities, which are Educative, Participative, Empowering and Expressive (Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales. Wales Youth Work Partnership and the Wales Youth Agency, 1992).

2. The UK Government has indicated that "the purpose of youth work is to facilitate and support young people's growth through dependence to interdependence, by encouraging their personal and social education and helping them to take a positive role in the development of their communities and society"(DfEE 1997). In this way, and by developing the potential of young people through informal learning, youth work in Wales is making a distinct contribution to the creation of a 'learning society'. This takes place within a culture of voluntary participation.
3. In September 1996, the United Kingdom Youth Work Alliance produced Agenda for a Generation. At its heart was the conviction that youth work was engaged in addressing three major social imperatives:
 - building the capacity of young people, through promoting their skills, self-worth, creativity and enterprise.
 - promoting social inclusion through supporting more disadvantaged young people, re-engaging them in learning and thereby enhancing their employability.
 - encouraging active citizenship and developing in young people an awareness of their rights and responsibilities to the wider community.

THE CHALLENGE

4. Over the past 20 years, young people have increasingly become a focus of UK government policy. There have been initiatives to tackle youth unemployment, raise educational standards, reduce youth crime and promote active citizenship. Many of these efforts have been reflected in the priorities of the National Assembly and we applaud this new policy orientation. We are especially pleased that in January, the then First Secretary made a key statement to the Assembly on 'Supporting Young People'. This statement was important in that it located youth services firmly within the context of the broader social agenda, while reflecting a determination to achieve greater coherence in policy delivery. The centrality of the youth service to the process of creating a more cohesive society was made explicitly clear by the Secretary for Health and Social Services when she stated, in an Assembly debate in February, "the youth strategy, 'Supporting Young People in Wales' is all about promoting social inclusion."

5. The importance of Jane Hutt's statement arises from the fact that in Wales there are significant numbers of young people who are 'disaffected', or, to use a perhaps more appropriate term, 'disengaged'. In 1994, a detailed research study was carried out in South Glamorgan to establish reliable estimates of the number of young people who were not in education, training or employment. The conclusion was striking, in that it was estimated that, at any one time, between 16% and 23% of 16 and 17 year olds were outside of education, training or work. These were far higher figures than those officially acknowledged at the time. Moreover, it was found that many of those 16 and 17 year olds had been in that position for more than 6 months.
6. Soon after the South Glamorgan report, a similar study was carried out in Mid Glamorgan. Here it was found that the estimates of 'disengaged' 16 and 17 year olds was closer to 25%, although it was pointed out that the 'circumstances' of the young people in the two counties were very different because of varying cultural and economic factors.
7. In 1998, the Welsh Office Green Paper, 'Learning Is For Everyone', suggested that in Wales as many as 1,600 sixteen year olds left school with no qualifications and estimated that as many as one in seven 16-17 year olds were not in education, training or work. As the Green Paper stated "These young people are most likely to be at risk of becoming marginalised in our society."
8. More recently, the National Assembly's National Economic Development Strategy and the Objective 1 Single Programming Document for West Wales and the Valleys have both highlighted the extent of social exclusion in Wales and have argued for an holistic agenda which brings together social and economic measures to achieve increased business competitiveness and greater social cohesion. In both documents references are made to the needs of young people in 'marginalised' communities.
9. At a UK level, in 1998, the House of Commons Education and Employment Select Committee report on 'Disaffected Children' suggested that 'disaffection' among young people, aged 14 to 19, across Britain, was a major public policy challenge. Other reports, too, have highlighted the startling numbers of young people 'off register'. Most significantly, last year the think-tank Demos published a report by Tom Bentley and Ravi Gurumurthy. This set out a bleak national picture of 1 in 10 of all young people between the ages of 16 to 24 being outside of training, education and employment and not on the register of claimant unemployed. It seems that while the New Deal is having a positive impact in generally improving employment opportunities for young people, there remains a significant number who remain 'off-register'.
10. Equally hard-hitting was the report of the government's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) 'Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training.' Like the Demos report, the SEU's report emphasised that 16 is a critical point in a young person's transition to adulthood. For young people who have been 'disengaged' between the ages of 16 and 18, the report points out that, compared with their peers who had been in education or work, by the age of 21, they are far more likely to be unqualified, untrained and unemployed. These young people are also far more likely to be earning less if employed, be a parent and experience more depression and poor physical health. In other words, disengagement at 16 is a major factor contributing to social exclusion.
11. To provide opportunities for 'disengaged' young people, the UK government has proposed a new strategy based on 4 elements: a) A clear outcome to aim for by 19 i.e. 'graduation' b) A variety of different pathways to 'graduation' c) Developing incentives for the most disadvantaged groups and d) The creation of a new multi-skill support service.
12. Following on from the work of the SEU, Demos and the White Paper 'Learning to Succeed: A new framework for post 16 learning', the government has introduced a new 'Skills and Learning Bill', which had its first reading in the House of Lords in December.

Among the main provisions of the Bill is the creation of a Youth Support Service (YSS) for England. This new Service will be a key element of government social policy, with approximately 20,000 'Personal Advisors' being recruited. Indications are that it will be a centrally funded (and, therefore, centrally administered) body, which will effectively create a new profession. The Service will be universal, in that all young people between the ages of 13 and 19 will have the support of a Personal Advisor, but the Service will be targeted on young people who are at risk of disaffection.

13. There is little doubt that the YSS in England will improve the coherence and co-ordination of services for young people, and will thus make a significant contribution to reducing the incidence of social exclusion among young people in their transition to adulthood. We note, however, that reservations have been expressed by youth work practitioners, as well as by academics with youth work experience, as to whether the 'brokerage' model is likely to be the most effective means of ensuring that young people re-engage, or continue to engage, with learning and training. For instance, there is the quite fundamental point that disengaged young people, many of whom have extremely unstructured lifestyles, may not easily be able to work with professional advisors. As one academic practitioner has remarked, " I [am] constantly reminded of taking horses to water". (Williamson 1999a).
14. We would also like to highlight the fact that in a number of ways, youth service provision in Wales occurs within a somewhat different framework to that of England. In addition, there are a number of features which are common to Wales as a whole. For example, there is a distinct curriculum statement for Wales (referred to above), which forms the basis for youth work practice throughout the country; there is a strong relationship with Estyn, the Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, so as to ensure high standards of delivery; unitary authorities providing youth services, are now well-established; there are coherent training policies and accreditation systems in place; there has been a growth in outreach and detached work; information services are developing on an all-Wales basis; networks are continually being strengthened locally and across Wales; and, importantly, partnership is increasingly becoming a feature of good youth work practice.
15. The importance of developing strong and meaningful 'partnerships' is worth emphasising. Although we believe much more needs to be done, in recent years one of the hallmarks of youth work practice has been increasing co-operation between providers. Within local authorities, while delivery mechanisms vary, a holistic approach towards the provision of services for young people is becoming more widespread, as is collaboration between the maintained and voluntary sectors. Without compromising the ethos of universality, work with disengaged or potentially disengaged young people is widely seen as a priority and examples of good practice abound. (See, for example, the recent Estyn report on the voluntary youth service).
16. Dialogue and co-operation between the youth service and other agencies working with young people is also developing. This is taking place within a number of contexts, including lifelong learning, human resource development, career guidance, health promotion, drug and alcohol misuse, community safety and community regeneration. It is also worth stating that currently discussions are taking place with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and a number of training and education providers about the youth service's involvement in future European Structural Fund programmes.
17. The Wales Youth Agency has argued strongly that the youth service has a key role to play in helping to develop young people's skills. In the National Economic Development Strategy it was stated that " the employability of young people must be improved by equipping them with basic and key skills that employers demand". Similarly, both the Future Skills Wales Project and the Report of the Education and Training Action Group (ETAG) have underlined the importance of generic skills for young people i.e. practical attributes such as the ability to work in teams, to solve problems, to follow instructions, to communicate clearly and to show initiative in improving learning and performance. The

youth service in Wales places a strong emphasis on developing both basic and generic skills and offers an extensive range of accreditation for young people. Accreditation, in fact, particularly for 'disengaged' young people, is important in building enthusiasm, self-esteem and confidence, and we would see accreditation assuming greater importance.

18. An area where partnership is, of course, essential is between schools and the youth service, especially if young people at risk of disengagement are to benefit from learning and training opportunities. A number of studies have documented the effectiveness of developing youth work methodologies within schools, including a major study commissioned by the DfEE (National Youth Agency 1998). And it was in recognition of the effectiveness of such an approach in reducing social exclusion that the then Welsh Office launched the Youth Work and Schools Partnership Programme in 1998 (Welsh Office 1998). The stated aim of the Programme is to support young people in raising their levels of achievement and attendance at school and to help to improve attitudes to learning.
19. In the first year of the programme, eight projects were funded - six being delivered by local authorities in designated schools; one being directed at looked after children, again under the direction of a local authority; and the other being delivered by a voluntary agency in partnership with a number of schools. Although the projects differed widely in the approaches adopted towards planning and delivery, there were core elements to the projects. These were the use of methodologies usually associated with youth work and informal education, the development of a more appropriate curriculum, inter-agency co operation, and some form of community-based activity.
20. In the unpublished interim evaluations of these projects the following outcomes have been observed: improved attendance at school and higher attainment than would otherwise have been the case - qualifications attained have included Open College Network (OCN) units, GNVQ Foundation Awards and higher than predicted grades at GCSE and CoE. There has also been a discernible increase in participating pupils' self-esteem and motivation, permanent and fixed-term exclusions have been reduced and a number of pupils who would have been excluded from school, have not been because of successful interventions. In all the projects, the development of a more appropriate curriculum has provided increased opportunities for the young people, including in some cases vocational 'tasters', work placements or college provision. In all the projects there have been improvements in the participants general sociability.
21. Importantly, the projects have also led to more general improvements in classroom management and pupil behaviour, and heads of year have found themselves having to spend less time on behaviour and discipline problems. In some cases, schools have become more responsive to the needs of young people experiencing difficulties and, in one particular case, the Head expressed his opinion that the project was helping his school become more of a "community school".
22. Other findings to date include the positive involvement of parents in the projects; the close co-operation of agencies in pupil review meetings; comprehensive support provided to young people in a variety of ways; and, at least in one, the recognition that early intervention at primary school level is often appropriate.
23. Since the initial stage of the Programme, projects have been established in a total of 13 local authority areas and the Wales Youth Agency is in the process of expanding the programme during 2000/2001 so that there will be partnership projects within all local authority areas in Wales.
24. It is worth noting that the Wales Youth Access Initiative (YAI) is, in some ways, complementary to the Youth Work and Schools Partnership Programme. The YAI was initiated in 1998 as a three year funding programme and is designed to re-integrate

disaffected young people into education, learning and employment. TECs and Local Authorities, with the advice of the Wales Youth Agency, have developed local action plans which are built on good practice. A recent interim report by Estyn has highlighted a number of positive outcomes.

25. On the basis of the above, we are firmly of the view that the Youth Work and Schools Partnership Programme should be developed further as a major part of the National Assembly's strategy to promote social inclusion. The Wales Youth Agency is currently evaluating the impact of the Programme and, on the basis of the positive outcomes observed, we would urge that the Assembly gives serious consideration to expanding the Programme into a comprehensive strategy embracing all schools with high levels of pupil 'disaffection'. We also acknowledge the importance of extending co-operation to include the Further Education sector (Andrews 2000).
26. The Agency believes that 'partnership', in the truest sense of the term, should be central to tackling 'disaffection' among children and young people. Partnership is at the heart of the Schools and Youth Work Programme and we are mindful of one of the key recommendations of the report on 'Disaffected Children' by the House of Commons Select Committee. In 1998, the Committee proposed the creation of local forums, "in which all the agencies involved can work together, exchange best practice and help ensure that disaffected young people do not fall through gaps in the system".
27. Local Authorities have long played a key role in providing services to young people and their responsibility to do so arises from section 11 of the Further and Higher Education Act, 1992, in which it is stated that local authorities have a duty "to secure adequate facilities for Further Education." A Welsh Office circular issued in December 1992, stated that "The further education for which they (the LEAs) have a duty to secure adequate facilities includes the youth service. The provision of the youth service for those of school age is covered by section 53 of the 1944 Act." In reality, however, this has proved to be a weak legal base and provision for young people has suffered as a consequence.
28. The Wales Youth Agency would like to see a much stronger legislative commitment to youth work and, therefore, we welcome the statement by the then First Secretary, in January, that it was the government of Wales' intention to "clarify the statutory basis for youth work". Such a strengthening would occur through the introduction of specific Welsh clauses to the Learning and Skills Bill which is currently before Parliament.
29. We would hope that a stronger legal base for local authority provision would ensure that all local authorities in Wales develop a fully integrated service for the support of young people. This service would address the multiplicity of needs which young people have in a modern, complex society, and would ensure that policy issues, as apparently diverse as housing and transport, dovetail into social services and education, with the objective of providing comprehensive support for young people. It would be essential for the voluntary youth sector's contribution to be integral to that process to ensure the greatest possible coherence in policy development and service outcome.
30. Central to such an approach must be the idea of 'active citizenship'. In recent years there has been a rapid growth in the number of local youth forums and the National Assembly has taken the lead in launching Young Voice Llais Ifanc. These developments need to be taken further so that young people in Wales are genuinely 'empowered' and to ensure that, through young people's active involvement in such initiatives, services are developed in a way, which accurately addresses the needs of young people.
31. We are also mindful that 'social exclusion' is a broad concept and we recognise the importance of developing the youth service so as to meet the needs of disadvantaged young people when the causes of their 'exclusion' are not necessarily 'economic'. It is, therefore, important for the youth service to engage with all young people and to promote

equality, by challenging discrimination which arises from race, sexual identity, gender, disability, age and religion. It is also essential to recognise the diversity of culture and language in Wales.

32. It is a truism that in today's complex society, young people find themselves making difficult life choices. This applies to all young people but especially those who find themselves marginalised or disadvantaged. It is, therefore, important to continue to develop comprehensive information services to enable young people to make the most appropriate decisions affecting their lives.
33. Of course, we do not underestimate the challenge of developing a joined-up approach to services for young people. We believe, however, that radical change is far better than continuing with the situation in which young people are faced with what they see as an incoherent and incomprehensible set of support mechanisms. There is now a golden opportunity to construct an approach towards young people's services which firmly locates the youth service within the sphere of lifelong learning, while recognising that the youth service makes a broader contribution to the development of stable and healthy communities.
34. Accordingly, we would hope that consideration be given to broadening the youth service so that it can assist in providing support for young people, by deploying youth service methodologies, and through advising young people of the availability of specialist support and wider opportunities. The ethos of the youth service should continue to be based on universality, while targeting those young people in the greatest need of support. In this way, we would see the youth service making a major contribution to fulfilling the government's policy of social inclusion.
35. Clearly, one of the aims of the newly-enhanced youth service should be to address the needs of disengaged, or potentially disengaged, young people and to help re-connect them to the learning and training process. Youth workers, through co-operation with others and by developing young people's skills, should help 'disaffected' young people improve their prospects of employment. But it ought to be recognised that 'disaffection' cannot be tackled successfully through an approach that is narrowly focused on developing young people's 'suitability' for the labour market. If 'disaffection' is to be substantially reduced, there needs to be a recognition that its origins lie in a complex interaction of social, economic and personal factors. It follows that youth work needs to be sufficiently broad, flexible and 'young person centred' to be able to provide the most appropriate and effective support.

CONCLUSION

36. With the establishment of the National Assembly, we believe there is a great opportunity to develop policies, which are appropriate to the distinct needs of Wales. Promoting social inclusion has been identified correctly as one of the great challenges facing Wales, and providing real life chances for disadvantaged young people is a vital part of that challenge. It is, therefore, essential that the needs of the young people of Wales are placed at the centre of the policy agenda. With the passage of the new Learning and Skills Bill there is an ideal opportunity to create a system of support for young people which will be appropriate, relevant and capable of ensuring that our young people are able to meet the challenges of the future.

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