

Speaking Notes

Community and Youth Workers' Union - National Conference

The Pavilions Conference Centre, Plymouth

Saturday, 12 May 2001

Introduction

I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak to this national audience about how the National Assembly for Wales plans to improve services for young people.

You will all be familiar with the introduction and roll out of Connexions in England. [I understand David Blunkett set out his plans to you on Thursday]. Youth work is a devolved function and we are not having Connexions in Wales, so I thought it might be helpful to talk about our ideas, thoughts and aspirations on the future shape of services for young people in Wales. This is an area in which I take a major personal interest having spent a number of years working as a youth and community worker and being strongly committed to the value of informal education.

- A few weeks ago DfEE published *'Transforming Youth Work'*. The consultation document considers the role of youth work within the Connexions framework, and highlights the value of quality youth work in improving services for young people. Although the document is intended to cover the situation in England, much of what it has to say applies equally to Wales; it follows that the National Assembly shares many of the report's sentiments particularly with relationship to the value of high quality youth work. However, we aim to do things differently in Wales - our *'Made in Wales'* approach because we are always open to good ideas from all quarters, but the development of our ideas means we will be working very closely with our youth work partners, and others, to create unique Welsh solutions to Welsh problems.

Background to Extending Entitlement

Last November the National Assembly held its first ever major debate on young people. At the heart of that debate was a document produced by the Assembly's Policy Unit working with an independent advisory group of youth work specialists and following months of close consultation with many individuals, including young people, and public and voluntary sector organisations and agencies across Wales.

As members we wanted a report that would do two things:

1. give us a more coherent approach to youth policy across a range of policy areas including education and lifelong learning, health, regenerating our communities.
2. to help us to design and deliver a new approach to support services for young people using the new powers contained in the youth support sections in the Learning and Skills Act - which are unique to Wales.

That report was "Extending Entitlement" - a major challenging agenda which:

- looked at the **needs of young people** - not those of service providers
- was based on the **needs and priorities of Wales** - drawing on experience elsewhere but rooted in what people on the ground in Wales see as the issues.

- At the end of a long, involved and I'm happy to say very supportive debate all parties in the Assembly voted to accept the report's broad principles and values, thus giving me a clear mandate to press ahead.

So what's Extending Entitlement all about?

Youth policy is a very broad area - if we are going to cover all the needs of young people it is hard to think of a service area that wouldn't be included. But Extending Entitlement gives the Assembly a clear agenda and focus for discussion and action.

It contains four key messages:

1. we need to do a better job of **supporting young people** - in order to help them as individuals and to achieve our economic and social objectives
2. this means improving **all the mainstream public services** - education, health etc and **the way they deliver for young people** - by raising service providers' awareness of young people as a distinct and important set of customers; by raising quality; and making sure services reach all those who need them

3. it also means improving the services **whose core function is to help and advise young people** - the youth service, the Careers Companies, the voluntary sector - upgrading and modernising them and creating stronger links between them.

4. and finally it means that services for young people must be better organised and co-ordinated on the ground so that gaps in provision are identified and addressed.

What the report says

- So Extending Entitlement tells us that we need to do a better job of supporting young people.

- It argues that the way to achieve this is to deliver **an entitlement for all young people** to a range of services and opportunities including personal support in proportion to their needs. I welcome this approach because:

- **It is voluntary** - and aims to work with the grain of young people's interests and ideas. All experience suggests that this is vital to success. The key is to motivate young people to learn, and be skilled, through informal and formal learning opportunities.
- It fits well with the **rights approach** of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- **It is inclusive** and avoids patronising those young people who need extra support.
- **It is positive and preventative** - it is not about hitting targets for crime prevention or reducing substance misuse, important though these are. But if we do a better job of supporting young people and giving them positive options - these problems are likely to reduce.

Distinctive 'Made in Wales' approach

The entitlement model is a highly distinctive approach.

- Extending Entitlement advocates a different approach for Wales that is based on working to improve existing structures and improving the links between them. This is not distinctive for the sake of it - it is a different approach to delivery built on a holistic, bottom up analysis of the needs of young people in Wales.

Improving how all the public services deliver for young people

- Extending Entitlement provides a very broad view of supporting young people - it is not just about advice and guidance but includes all the opportunities which give young people a chance to succeed and develop self confidence and the capacity to be independent.
- The report recognises, for example, that the **experience of school** is crucial to young people's personal development and that whatever we develop in the community must be linked to what is happening in schools. It includes a vision of **inclusive schools and excellence for all** which I think we would all support. In Wales, for example, I have also reaffirmed our commitment to comprehensive education.

It also recognises that we need to improve the **relevance and quality of all the provision that is on offer for young people**. We need to look

not only at young people's aptitude and motivation but also what we are providing for them - if it is the wrong course or placement, or is seen by the young person as a waste of time, it is unlikely to be a success. This is central to the Assembly's programme of reforms of the post 16 education sector which is all about raising **quality and relevance** across all the education and training providers.

There is a strong link between the needs of young people and the **Better Government** agenda. Often the quality issues raised by young people are not unique to them - including problems of access, discrimination and lack of choice. If we work to tackle these issues across the public services - young people will benefit along with everyone else.

There is also a strong link to the National Assembly's commitment to a **society of opportunity and inclusiveness**. 3 key strands enshrined in legislation affecting all business in the Assembly: equal opportunities, social exclusion and sustainability. Promoting equal opportunities is the key rationale for improving youth support - in order to ensure that **all young people** have the support and opportunities which most take for granted but are lacking in a significant minority of families.

Advice and Support Services

Extending Entitlement looks in detail at the youth sector and careers advice and guidance and wider information services for young people. It says that these services have a key role and their potential is far from being realised. The message here is clear:

- we need to **upgrade these services and modernise their delivery** - and connect them together into an effective support network, open to all young people and capable of responding **effectively and proportionately** to problems.
- making this network happen locally is the role of the **partnership structure advocated in the report - led** by democratically elected local government and based on an audit of how all local provision for young people matches up to the entitlement model. I'm glad that local government has welcomed this report - we need to work closely with them in designing the delivery structure - extra money to develop.

Youth Work Sector

- Within this local network Extending Entitlement highlights the role of **the youth work sector, both statutory and voluntary** in creating new opportunities and challenges for young people and addressing head on the poverty of experience and expectation which blights so many of our communities.
- Everybody here knows that **quality front line work with young people**, is important and effective in preventing problems and helping young people to participate. But this work is often difficult and needs to be professional and well managed - as the report recognises.

Participation by young people

- One of the key planks of a support structure is giving young people a chance to contribute to decision making at all levels. The Assembly is doing this through a new participatory initiative: ***Young Voice-Llais [fane]***. We will be looking for young people to participate in decision making at all levels - from school councils, local youth fora and regional and national platforms as well. We hope this will help develop a new, more confident generation of young people in Wales - it will also help a

large group of young people **understand our political system better** and enable them to use it more effectively.

- The other crucial payoff of listening to young people is that it helps put their issues on the agenda. From *Young Voice-Llais Ifanc*, the consultation around Extending Entitlement and the Assembly's other major policy document '**Children and Young People: a Framework for Partnership**', we have learnt that young people value informal provision and that they have strong views on the way advice and information is offered to them on a range of issues. If we take this on board we are likely to improve both quality and effectiveness.
- I am very keen that young people should contribute to the future shape of **their** services. In July I will be participating in 4 consultation days when some 200 young people will come together to talk to me freely and openly about their own experiences and wishes in the context of better services through Extending Entitlement.

Where we go from here

- The next stage is to **translate these messages into action** on the ground - to create better, more responsive services for young people.
- To demonstrate our commitment to the broad objective of improving support for our young people **we have already made provision in the Assembly's Budget** for investment to enable local authorities and others to make a start on the ambitious programme of improvement set out in Extending Entitlement.
- As part of the local authority revenue settlement, additional funding is being provided of **£2 million, £3 million and £4 million** over the next three years. This recognises the new burden on local authorities to strengthen youth work in both the statutory and voluntary sectors.
- The budget for the Wales Youth Agency has been increased significantly over the next three years, including an extra **£700,000** to fund the training of youth workers; and **half a million pounds** to support the work of the national voluntary youth organisations.
- Over **£1 million** over the next three years for a free comprehensive information services and a youth card for young people through the Canllaw Online project.

- £840,000 over three years in support of *Llais Ifanc-Young Voice*.

But this is by no means all. We are also providing an extra:

- £2 million, £6 million and £8 million across the next three years for Careers Wales, including the extension of our own Youth Gateway;
- £1.6 million, £2 million and £2 million, mainly to local authorities, for the development of local partnerships to coordinate and plan services for children and young people, including the arrangements envisaged in *Extending Entitlement*]
- £1 million in each year for the Youth Access Initiative.
- £1.5 million, £2 million and £2 million for hardship funds to help students who otherwise would be unable to enter Higher Education institutions; and

£5 million in 2002-03 and £10 million in 2003-04 for Learning Maintenance Allowances to encourage 16 to 18 year olds to stay in full-time education and not be put off by financial considerations.

These are not small amounts. Taken together, they total more than £57 million over the next three years - and this is on top of the previous baselines.

Closing Remarks

- This is an all Wales agenda and it is an agenda for investment in our future.

We will now work together with our many partners in Wales to produce a workable, understandable, effective and sustainable package of services for young people in Wales. The youth service will have a key role to play.

Our young people are our future. In Wales our development as a prosperous, socially just society depends in large part on the success we make of our educational and social policies for our best assets, our

young people. Extending Entitlement is an important signpost down that road - now, as government, we have to respond to the consultation in a way which promises the faith that this issue and many others have shown about our agenda. I hope that within 3 years we will see this agenda being taken up the length and breadth of Wales.