

Extending Entitlement Revisited: The Maintained Youth Service 2002-2007

Paper Number 2 – How Was the Evidence Found and Analysed?

It is the intention of this paper to identify the data collection and analysis techniques that were used to provide a reliable¹ and valid² answer to the research question. To achieve this, it was necessary to identify and select a research strategy capable of determining both the level of collective knowledge and understanding of those involved in the maintained Youth Service of the three elements of the investigation and the links they make to these in their practice. Within this framework a suitable approach (including the selection of the most appropriate research instruments) had to be developed to provide evidence on which a conclusion to the investigation could be based. There is an understanding of the inherent difficulties in achieving this because collecting useful or reliable data about the maintained Youth Service in Wales has historically been difficult because managers and full-time and part-time workers have often appeared to be reluctant to contribute (WYWP 1991, Howells 1993, Edwards 1993, Rose 1997). Within this setting, obtaining defensible data of use in answering the research question required a broad-based approach grounded in contemporary practice. It was felt that a consequence of this stance would be to obtain information of a more general nature, to the exclusion of much of the detail of contemporary practice, with its links to the needs of young people and the requirements of government policy. Nevertheless, it was believed that given the limitations of previous research projects in Wales, the approach decided upon would result in the availability of new evidence, the analysis and interpretation of which would make an appropriate new contribution to the body of knowledge about the maintained Youth Service in Wales.

The first decision made, was to use as the research strategy a case-study approach, using the maintained Youth Service in Wales as a single case, which would be concerned to carry out an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple methods of gathering evidence (Yin 1994, Robson 1998). It can be suggested that the adoption of this strategy cannot be defined through its research techniques

¹ Concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable (Bryman 2001)

² Concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research (Bryman 2001)

but by its theoretical orientation, which may not be substantive theory in the first instance but would emphasise understanding processes alongside their (organisational and other) contexts. It is recognised (Guba and Lincoln 1981, Yin 1994) that some concerns have been levied against the case-study model, including:

- lack of rigour;
- limited basis for scientific generalisation;
- the process takes too long because of the amounts of data produced by case studies; and
- over-dependence of the interpretation by the researcher on information that the researcher has also selected, within which biases or errors in judgement cannot easily be detected.

However, case studies are also recognised as having many significant attributes, including the ability to provide a thick description (Geertz 1973, Lincoln and Guba 1985) as well as being able to present grounded data (Glaser and Strauss 1967) that emerges from the context itself. Case studies are also described as being able to present a credible description, recognisable to the actual participants, through the simplification of available data into a focused, conversation-like format rather than by using complex technical tables (Guba and Lincoln 1981). This process is further described as being capable of focusing the attention of the reader as well as illuminating meanings. Most importantly, however, the case-study approach is able to “*communicate more than can be said in propositional language*” (ibid: 376) by building on the tacit knowledge of its readers by assuming the role of a reporting vehicle appropriate to the understanding and language of its audience (Platt 1983).

The second decision made was to locate the investigation within an evaluation research framework. Suchman (1967) describes evaluation research as a method for determining the extent to which a planned programme of activities achieves its desired objectives. Smith (1975) builds on this position by suggesting that evaluation research is concerned with the assessment of the effectiveness of existing social programmes developed and delivered as tentative solutions to contemporary social problems. For Smith, this approach is seen to be a quality control responsibility, concerned to determine the efficacy of agreed courses of action and the attainment of appropriate organisational outcomes. Weiss (1979) agrees with this stance by suggesting the purpose of evaluation research is to examine the effects of policies and programmes on their target(s) in achieving the intended outcomes through the use of

objective and systematic methods. This is a position further supported by Rossi and Freeman (1989:18), who claim that evaluation research is concerned with:

“the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualisation, design, implementation and utility of social intervention programmes”

In contrast to the attempts at clarity by the previous statements, Williamson and Weatherspoon (1985) claims that evaluation is a frequently used but rarely clearly defined term, particularly when used in relation to research attempting to determine the value of social care and human relations. At best, Williamson states, evaluation research only offers opportunities to draw various conclusions from the benefits and constraints that appear to arise from such processes and relationships. Within this environment, analysis is *“likely to rely heavily on considered interpretation. To use a legal analogy, conclusions are likely to be based on the balance of probabilities rather than beyond all doubt”* (ibid:602). This supports the position of Cronbach et al (1980), who suggests that the results of evaluation research rarely rely on the empirical evidence alone because there is a necessary compromise to be made between precision and the broad picture. Cronbach et al also warn that evaluation theory has been developed from the concept of managerialism supported by what is described as the inaccurate assumption that both policy makers and managers are in control of decision making (ibid). To overcome this possibility, it was suggested (Scrivens 1967) that those involved in an evaluation process should proceed with a veil of ignorance regarding the perceived outcomes of programme managers or other stakeholders. Driven by an outcome-free evaluation approach, Scrivens claims the evaluator would seek out all the outcomes rather than be biased by the views of managers or workers. This position has also been put forward by Cronbach et al. (1980:133), who are opposed to both goal-setting models and the close association of evaluation with accountability, which, it is claimed, often *“becomes an incantation and one that can cast a malign spell”*. This goal-setting environment was of growing significance to the Youth Service which could be seen to be increasingly pressurised by government, through the promise of greater organisational security, to introduce more formal curriculum activities and accreditation mechanisms to its work with young people. These politically determined outcomes, linked to government agendas, appear to discount the more difficult-to-measure outcomes related to the more specific needs of young people making the transition from interdependence to independence.

However, for the researcher, the term evaluation is broader than an attempt to measure the effects of an existing and particular government agenda. In the context of this investigation, evaluation research will be concerned with what Finch (1986:158) describes as a process concerned to:

“understand the real effects of policies, to compare the assumptions upon which policies are based with social experience and to assist in a considered assessment of their viability and appropriateness.”

To achieve this outcome, it will be necessary for the investigation to move away from a process driven by a hierarchical approach concerned with management-defined problems to one concerned to involve group discussion, negotiation and consensus. It will be a process of identifying the value of a complex context through the collection of a range of evidence from individuals and organisations with a relevant interest and making judgements about this evidence in relation to specific criteria that have been formulated beforehand.

The selected research instruments

Within this framework, the decision of the researcher was to adopt an integrated quantitative/qualitative approach utilising a range of appropriate research instruments. These instruments would consist of an analysis of appropriate documents, the analysis of the Youth Work in Wales Excellence Award applications between 1997 and 2002, a questionnaire survey and individual and focus group interviews. The process which makes use of multiple methods in a single study is described as triangulation (Reinhartz 1992) and is a process which attempts to map out or explain complex situations in greater detail by examining phenomenon such as human behaviour from a number of different positions. It achieves this by using information that is both quantitative and qualitative and is a process that allows comparison of a wide range of data, including interviews, observations, documents and surveys (Whyte 1981) and Fielding and Fielding (1986). By using a multiple method approach it is believed that the two key issues of reliability and validity will be addressed.

Document analysis

The justification for using document analysis is that it would allow the collection of information from a secondary source that would provide a range of background information on the maintained Youth Service which would be used to support the evidence obtained from the analysis of the Youth Work in Wales Excellence Awards, the questionnaire survey and the interviews. This analysis would be more than a literature review but would be concerned to extract from appropriate documents existing evidence of relevance to the research question. It was recognised that care would be needed when analysing existing documents to ensure that the quality of the process would meet the four criteria identified by Scott (1990). First, the documents would need to be authentic as a means of ensuring their evidence was genuine and of unquestionable origin. Second, they would need to be credible inasmuch as their evidence should be free from error and distortion. Third, they would need to be representative, the evidence contained within them being typical of its kind. Fourth, they would need to have meaning in the sense that the evidence contained within them should be clear and comprehensible.

Within this framework, four groups of documents will be analysed. These will be:

1. Historical and contemporary publications that help to describe the purposes, principles and values of the maintained Youth Service in Wales;
2. Local authority Youth Service Strategic and Operational Plans;
3. Estyn³ Inspection Reports of the Youth Service carried out between 2000 and 2002 which contain a range of relevant maintained Youth Service indicators and comments on the standards and quality of work being delivered, the efficiency of the service, the management of quality, factors contributing to the effectiveness of the service and key issues for action, plus the response by the Youth Service inspected. The Reports examined included the local authority Youth Services of Caerphilly, Pembrokeshire, Conwy, Neath Port Talbot and Gwynedd. The Annual Reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for 1998-1999 (HMSO 1999), 1999-2000 (HMSO 2000a), 2000-2001 (HMSO 2001) and 2001-2002 (HMSO 2002) will also be analysed; and
4. Relevant reports and papers published by the Wales Youth Agency between 1994 and 2002 including:

³ Estyn has a statutory base, which at the time of the investigation was located within section 55 of the Further and Higher Education Act (FHE) Act 1992. This Act identifies the purpose of the inspection process as being to "identify strengths and weaknesses so that the quality of education can be improved and the standards achieved may be raised" (Estyn 1998:2).

- Building the Future (WYA 1994a)
- Practical Co-operation to Promote the Successful Transition of Young People from School to Adult and Working Life (WYA 1995)
- Wales Youth Agency Response to ‘Learning is for Everyone’ (WYA 1998a)
- Lifelong Learning: A Youth Service Response (WYA 1998b)
- Implications of the Welsh Assembly for the Youth Service in Wales (WYA 1999a)
- Youth Service Audit (WYA 1999b)
- Youth Work Training Conference (WYA 1999c)
- Review of the Youth and Community Service of Denbighshire County Council (WYA 1999d)
- Review of the Youth Service of Blaenau Gwent (WYA 1999e)
- Attitude, Attendance and Achievement (WYA 2000a)
- Securing the Future, Social Policy and the Re-emerging Youth Service in Wales (WYA 2000b)
- Response to ‘Extending Entitlement’ (WYA 2000c)
- Review of the Youth Service of Ceredigion (WYA 2002a)
- Response to ‘Consultation to the Draft Direction and Guidance for Extending Entitlement’ (WYA 2002b).

These specific documents were selected because they had been identified by the researcher (who had a direct link to both the Welsh Office and the National Assembly for Wales and the library of the Wales Youth Agency) as the most relevant documents written from a maintained Youth Service perspective either shortly before, or during, the period of the investigation.

Youth Work in Wales Excellence Awards

The Youth Work in Wales Excellence Award was introduced in 1994 by the then Minister of State for Wales to give national recognition of quality youth work practice contained within a specific project or piece of work undertaken as part of a youth work programme. 193 applications had been made by the maintained sector between 1997 and 2002, each one required by the criteria for entry to demonstrate recognition of the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales. All entries were considered as examples of excellent work as defined by

those who made the application; no added consideration was given to those determined as winners of the award by the judging panel which remained unknown to the researcher. By adopting this approach, the analysis became an interpretation of Excellence Award entries of equal status each one entered as a piece of work determined as excellent by the applicant. The importance of the application form in the context of this investigation is that it required applicants to give specific details of the project being submitted with a request to link its purpose to the elements of the Youth Work Curriculum Statement. The application form also asked applicants to identify the benefits of the work for the young people involved and, in doing so, provided a valuable source of information of relevance to this investigation. Applicants were also asked to supply quantifiable information including how many young people were involved in the project together with their age.

Questionnaire survey

The purpose of a survey has been described as being either descriptive or explanatory, through the production and interpretation of information to provide explanations of a particular phenomenon(s) Moser and Kalton (1989). Cohen and Manion (1989) support this position by the claim that the survey gathers information at a particular point in time for the purpose of providing data, ranging from simple frequency counts through to relational analysis. The strengths of the survey methods are their potential for generating volumes of data that can be statistically analysed within a limited time and their cost-effective time frame (Denscombe 1998). These benefits are achieved through obtaining information at a specific point in time and are based on the notion of measuring and recording tangible incidences. A survey is seen as an appropriate approach to the study of attitudes, values, beliefs and motives and the more respondents that participate in a study, the more likely it is that the results can be generalised to the wider population within the sampling frame (Robson 1998). The weakness of the survey method is related to its focus on empiricism, which, in the opinion of Denscombe (1998), questions the significance of the data, as it sometimes has to speak for itself rather than permitting relevant issues, problems and theories to be developed from it. Questions are also raised about data being affected by the characteristics of the respondents, with particular reference to their memory, knowledge, experience, motivation and personality (Robson 1998).

Despite these limitations, it is the intention of this investigation to obtain data generated through a questionnaire survey to obtain information of a factual nature, including biographical information, through closed-response (tick box) questions. It is also intended to obtain data, through open responses, about both the opinions – how individuals feel about a programme or experience – and attitudes of respondents about perceptions with the potential to influence behaviour in a range of specific circumstances (Oppenheim 1992). The questionnaire was designed with the knowledge that it was a method with a history of limited success when used to gather information from those working in the Youth Service in Wales (WYWP 1991, WYA 2000d). The reasons for this, within the maintained Youth Service context, have not been researched but based on experience, including an involvement in the 1991 survey and my MPhil research in 1997, it is my contention that two key issues, complexity and length, affect response. Accordingly, the questionnaire was restricted to a single double-sided sheet that would focus on seven main elements considered to be of importance to the investigation.

Section one of the questionnaire asked for personal details related to gender and age. Section two asked for information about respondents' current Youth Work, which includes naming their employing authority, listing their current job title, number of years employed in the Youth Service, location of their employment, whether they work weekends and school holidays, number of hours per week employed in the Youth Service, and the percentage of that time they spend in face-to-face work with young people. Both of these sections are concerned to provide information that would lead to a greater level of understanding of the profiles of those working within the maintained Youth Service. Much of this information has never been previously collected. Using open-ended questions, section three asked respondents to describe both the main activities they carry out with young people and whether the activities are planned to achieve specific outcomes. Answers to these questions from the perspective of both full and part-time workers are fundamental to this investigation because they would provide evidence of the types of curriculum activities being offered to young people and the outcomes that are planned. Section four asked for details of the respondents' qualifications measured against national and local qualifications criteria as well as questions related to their involvement in in-service training opportunities within the Youth Service. Significant anecdotal information was available which suggested the maintained Youth Service is increasingly being managed and its curriculum delivered by a growing number of inexperienced and unqualified workers. It is the intention of this section to obtain

information to determine if this is the reality. Section five asks for information about the main occupation of part-time respondents not simply to gain knowledge of its structural aspects, including numbers employed within occupational strands, levels of qualification and experience, or current working practices, but also to determine the potential effects of external influences on youth work practice. The purpose of asking this question is to discover if the maintained Youth Service has developed the “*social and phenomenological uniqueness of a particular organisational community*” (Beare et al. 1989:173) or if it is being adversely affected by sub-cultures as a consequence of its employment and induction training strategy. Section six asked three specific questions. The first asked respondents to detail the age of the young people they work with during their Youth Service employment. The second asked them to calculate the percentage of female and male users of their Youth Club or Youth Project. The third asked respondents to describe the academic ability of those young people they have come into contact with during their Youth Service employment. To facilitate the answering of this question, they are offered four choices: *Academic achievers*, defined as young people with 5 GCSEs or more; *Academic underachievers*, defined as young people with fewer than 5 GCSEs; *academic non-achievers*, young people with no academic qualifications; or the fourth option is for respondents to indicate that they do not know the academic status of the young people they work with in the maintained Youth Service. To complete section six, respondents are required to categorise young people within these classifications by percentage, which is expected to total 100%. Section seven uses open-response questions about how respondents determine the needs of those young people they come into contact with, to indicate if they target particular groups of young people and, if they do, to describe their characteristics.

The survey was conducted between April 2003 and December 2003 with the questionnaire distributed through three main sources in an attempt to include all those working within the maintained Youth Service in Wales. These included:

1. distribution by post through the Wales Youth Agency database, which contains the contact details of approximately 2,300 workers across the identified occupational strands;
2. distribution through the local authority Youth Service to those it employed; and
3. being made available to students in training at the North East Wales Institute (NEWI) Wrexham and the University of Wales Newport (UWN) Caerleon.

The questionnaire was distributed in this way because of the perceived difficulty in obtaining a representative sample across what was seen to be a very diverse workforce. Although four main occupational strands had been identified there was recognition by the researcher that within these strands there were an unknown number of sub-occupational strands, each with the potential to see themselves as belonging to a different organisation. It was also done because the resources were available to the researcher to carry out this process and the results would produce, for the first time since 1984 (Welsh Office 1984a), a range of fundamental information about the contemporary maintained Youth Service in Wales. In total 2,462 questionnaires were distributed and (24.7%) 608 were returned. The details of those taking part in the survey are available if required.

The pilot study

The pilot study was perceived as an opportunity to test the instruments, methods and data-processing techniques that would be employed in the main study. It was regarded as part of the training of the researcher himself because the pilot study helps to establish the reliability and validity of the instruments and processes.

Throughout the development of the questionnaire, the researcher had been aware of the need to check certain assumptions at the earliest opportunity. Involvement in three major surveys of the Youth Service (WYWP 1991, WYA 1994b, Rose 1997) had given the researcher some insight into the sensitivity needed in the use of language, particularly at part-time worker level. With these considerations in mind, a draft questionnaire was presented to 37 workers employed in the maintained Youth Service across the occupational strands. Included in this process were two Principal Youth Officers, five regional/specialist officers, 10 full-time workers and 20 part-time workers. The two Principal Youth Officers and five regional/specialist workers (5 male, 2 female) completed the questionnaire during a national conference organised by the Wales Youth Agency. The full-time workers completed the questionnaire during their involvement in their third year Youth and Community work training programme, six (4 female, 2 male) at University College Newport and four (2 male, 2 Female) at University of Wales Institute Cardiff. The 20 part-time workers were involved at three separate in-service training courses, nine (5 female, 4 male) at Ferryside Training Centre, five (4 female, 1 male) at the Elan Valley Hotel and six (4 female, 2 male) at the YMCA Rhayader. The full-time and part-time workers were employed within 14 different

local authorities and were employed in a variety of capacities and locations. They included centre based workers, detached workers, information workers and specialists working with young people primarily through sport, drama and outdoor activities. All of the workers involved in the pilot survey were qualified in accordance with the requirements of the Joint Negotiation Council (JNC).

Prior to the completion of the questionnaire, those taking part were informed of the purpose of the Pilot Study and that they would be asked to comment on its content. They were also encouraged to make a critical assessment about the process involved in completion, which could include such things as time spent, comprehension of question and knowledge of the worker in relation to the questions being asked.

All of the workers involved completed the questionnaire in the presence of the researcher but isolated from each other as a means of avoiding influencing responses. This method also had the advantage of allowing the researcher to give immediate answers to questions there were raised. On completion of the questionnaire a process of evaluation was conducted with the respondents. In general, the layout of the questionnaire was considered to be appropriate; positive comments were made about both its length and the time it had taken to complete. As stated previously, language was a sensitive issue, particularly with the part-time workers, and care had been taken to use a form of language that would be seen as appropriate. This care appeared to be worthwhile as no major comment was made about the language used. Of most concern across all the occupational strands were the questions requiring a baseline of factual information regarding the young people they were in contact with, which many respondents had difficulty in completing because of the lack of effective record keeping. Consequently, it was decided to ask respondents to indicate by percentage the age of young people they were in contact with rather than ask for actual numbers; the same decision was made for the questions related to the academic level of the young people workers were in contact with. A reminder that the total figure should add up to 100% was also incorporated. Following the comments of a number of those involved in the pilot it was also decided to give respondents the opportunity to list not only the academic status of the young people they were in contact with but also to make a judgment on the academic status they were likely to attain. This was felt necessary because significant numbers of young people using the maintained Youth Service had yet to sit their GCSEs.

Interviews

Central to the creation of a research framework that reflects the value base of the Youth Service is the recognition that to:

“understand other persons’ constructions of reality we would do well to ask them and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms and in depth which addresses the rich contexts that is the substance of their meanings”

(Jones 1985:46)

This process of asking, which is to be one of the central research methods used in this investigation, is carried out through the use of individual and focus group interviews. The use of interviews is designed to encourage those taking part to interact in a way that generates data about a specific set of issues (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999) and is concerned, in the context of this investigation, to establish the level of collective understanding by those working in the maintained Youth Service of its organisational role and their resultant responsibilities. It is recognised that the use of focus groups creates a process with some important differences from the individual interview, with the focus group being described as synergistic (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990) resulting in group interaction being explicitly used to generate data and insights. As a consequence:

“The focus group presents a more natural environment than the individual interview because participants are influencing and being influenced by others – just as they are in real life”

Kreuger and Casey (2000:11)

The findings from both types of interviews will be used to construct a picture of the commonly held fabric of meanings of those operating within the organisation, which can be described as a particular social context (Turner 1971). Smirchich (1983) claims that determining this common ground is important because organisations depend on shared interpretative purposes expressed in language and other symbolic constructions such as rituals, ideologies and myths. These are developed through social interaction as a means of ensuring that routine actions become embedded in day-to-day activities (Pondy et al. 1983). The outcome of this process is a more detailed understanding of the meaning system used by the maintained Youth Service, which can be discovered through a process of analysis concerned to describe symbol systems and associated meanings and by the articulation of

recurring themes (Smirchich 1983). It is these themes that provide the context “*against which symbols have meaning; they specify the links between values, beliefs and action*” (ibid: 163). The interviews also set out to identify how programmes are constructed, both to reflect the purpose, value and unique characteristics of the maintained Youth Service and to meet the needs of young people and government policy. Questions will be raised to determine the educational philosophy and learning theory related to the programmes being delivered, particularly their epistemological and ontological perspectives. The purpose of these questions is to discover what, in a collective sense, lies at the heart of maintained Youth Service practice in Wales determined by “*the way in which people being studied understand and interpret their social reality*” (Bryman 1988:8).

Although these broad areas of questions could be identified at the research design stage, the final questions, both in terms of their content and use of language, will not be determined until after the questionnaire survey and document analysis have been completed. The findings from these two methods will be used to determine the focus of the planned semi-structured interviews (Sarantakos 1998), which was identified as the most appropriate type of interview within the context being examined. A semi-structured interview has a series of questions in the general form of an interview schedule but the interviewer is able to vary the sequence of questions and to ask further questions in response to significant answers (Bryman 2001). The problem of recording respondents’ answers to ensure distortion is avoided and to eliminate error was overcome by the Wales Youth Agency agreeing to pay for the taped recordings of all of the interviews to be transcribed. As a result, all of the interviews were recorded on tape using high-quality recording equipment and supplemented by the notes of the interviewer (Cohen and Manion 1989).

Interviewees

Given the characteristic of the maintained Youth Service including the numbers of workers employed (WYA 1999b), consideration needed to be given to the possibility of sampling within the four occupational strands identified. Robson (1998:155) makes the claim that any consideration of sampling needs to recognise that ‘*real life*’, including the constraints of ‘*real time*’ and limited access to and availability of relevant people, will provide a range of logistical problems with the outcome being “*whatever sampling plan is decided upon it will be impossible to complete it in full*” (ibid:155). Nevertheless, these thoughts with respect to

sampling are regarded as important because they require consideration to be given by the researcher to the particular characteristics of those involved in the sample. The decision was therefore made to involve in the interview process the four broadly defined groups – Principal Youth Officers (PYOs), regional and subject managers, full-time workers and part-time workers – identified by the Youth Service audit (WYA 1999b). Further decisions were also taken about the numbers of workers within each of these four categories. The audit had identified 76 managers within the 22 local authorities, each of which had a designated Principal Officer responsible for the delivery of the Youth Service; the remaining 54 managers were responsible for a designated geographical area or subject area within each local authority. The decision was taken to interview individually a minimum of eight (32%) Principal Youth Officers selected to ensure a balance between rural, urban and old industrial locations and between Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) qualified youth workers and youth workers who are teacher trained. The decision was also taken to interview 14 (26%) regional/subject officers in two focus groups. These focus group interviews were carried out at a series of national events related to curriculum development and training organised by the Wales Youth Agency. The audit also identified 132 full-time workers, 23% of whom were unqualified to JNC national qualification standard. The researcher decided to interview 48 of this group (36%) divided into six focus groups. Interviewees were selected to include both qualified and unqualified workers working in rural, urban and old industrial locations. For pragmatic reasons the focus group interviews for the full-time workers were managed around times and events when groups of full-time workers had come together for a particular reason, which included their involvement in local or national training events or during their qualifying training time. The part-time workforce consisted of 2273 workers, of which 1129 (49.7%) were unqualified. The researcher decided to interview a maximum of 340 (15%) of this group divided into 34 separate focus groups. These were selected to include both qualified and unqualified workers working in rural, urban and old industrial locations. These interviews were planned to take place when groups of part-time workers were coming together for a particular reason which included their involvement in local and national training events.

Concern was felt by the researcher about the amount of time required to carry out this process with the limited resources available. Consideration was given to involving a smaller number of participants for an extended period of interview involving more than one session. This option was considered inappropriate, both because the researcher believed that the probability

of bringing the same group of people together, particularly the part-time workers with their other commitments, for a number of separate sessions was highly unlikely and because it would reduce the numbers involved in the process. The decision was therefore taken to hold one interview session for each individual or focus group scheduled for a minimum of 1.5 hours, which would result in a total interviewing time of 84 hours (8 x 1.5-hour individual interviews, 48 focus groups x 1.5 hours). Being able to carry out an interview schedule of this size was made possible both by the generosity of my employer, who fully supported the investigation, and by the requirements of my job, which gave me regular access to workers within all the occupational strands, including at Wales Youth Agency sponsored events, where it was possible as part of a training programme or seminar to invite selected workers to take part in semi-structured interviews concerned with the focus of the investigation.

Although the figures given previously were the intended sample sizes, consideration was given during the interview process to the concept of “*theoretical saturation*”, when additional analysis no longer contributes to discovering anything new about a category (Strauss 1987:21). Part of the principles of grounded theory, this concept suggests that there is no need to specify at the outset how large a sample should be. The process of obtaining information should continue until new data seems to confirm rather than add anything new to the investigation. The interviews were carried out between April 2004 and December 2004. The details of those involved in the interview process are available elsewhere if required.

Limitations of the selected research methods

It was recognised by the researcher that the selected research methods have a number of potential limitations. First, the document analysis was restricted as a consequence of a lack of documents produced from independent sources. As a result, the documents available for analysis were restricted to official publications produced by organisations such as Estyn, the Wales Youth Agency and local authorities. Second, the analysis of the Youth Work in Wales Excellence Award applications would require a judgment to be made by the researcher of the outcomes of the submitted projects and how these were able to make a contribution to the focus of the investigation. This would be necessary because of the open-ended questions in the application which asked applicants to identify the most successful aspects of the project submitted and the benefits of the project to young people. To ensure consistency in the analysis responses in these sections were coded based on a specified interpretation of key

words or concepts. Third, the distribution of the questionnaire coincided with a period of time when the numbers of workers were expanding significantly. There was a clear recognition by the researcher that within this environment there was the possibility that many of those recently employed would be unable to complete the questionnaire from a position of knowledge because they were isolated from both the policy and decision making process of their employer and by the use of the specific language of the maintained Youth Service. Fourth, the decision was taken to distribute a common questionnaire to both full-and part-time workers in an attempt to obtain a consistent range of evidence across the occupational strands. This decision was taken with the recognition that many part-time workers might have some difficulty in answering all the questions and, as such, could affect the reliability and validity of the data. Fifth, it was recognised that the issues related to the questionnaire survey also affected the interview process although it was also recognised that this process would be supported by the interviewer within a semi-structured process.

Analysis of data

The evidence obtained through the use of the selected research instruments provided a pool of information from which conclusions to the four questions will be reached. By adopting this integrated approach, a particular research instrument will, in some instances, be more appropriate in answering certain of the questions than others. As an example, part of the questionnaire survey will provide a range of quantifiable information of use in answering elements of question two which relate to the characteristics of those employed in the maintained Youth Service. Evidence from the questionnaire survey was, however, supported through the use of some or all of the other selected research instruments.

It was recognised by the researcher that the data collected from the methods described previously would be in two forms. First, quantitative data would be provided through the relevant sections of the questionnaire survey, which would be of a quantifiable nature. This data will be analysed through a system of pre-coding and the use of a suitable computer-based program, which will provide statistical data that can be represented most effectively in the form of pie charts, line graphs, bar charts and tables. A similar process was used to analyse the information contained within appropriate sections of both the Youth Work in Wales Excellence Awards and the Estyn Inspection Reports.

Second, qualitative data produced from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire, the analysis of documents, the Youth Work in Wales Excellence Awards and the interview process required a different method for its analysis than the quantitative data because of its propensity to generate a *“large corpus of unstructured textual material”* (Bryman 2001:387). Having considered the options available for qualitative analysis (May 1996, Denscombe 1998, Silverman 2000), the decision was taken to use the approach promoted by Glaser and Strauss (1967:5) during their discourse on ‘grounded theory’, which claims that the process of qualitative analysis should be driven by *“guidelines and rules of thumb not rules”*. It is an approach described by Strauss (1987) within which it is not possible to impose a set of methodological rules that suit every occasion, where a *“standardization of methods (swallowed whole, taken seriously) would only constrain and even stifle social researchers’ best efforts”* (ibid:7). This position is further supported by Denscombe (1998), who suggests that qualitative social researchers should start their enquiry with an open mind, with the investigation conducted without a rigid set of ideas that could shape its focus and so becoming a true voyage of discovery. The consequence of an approach open to new factors suggests that the elements of the research, that is people, instances or location, cannot be predicted at the start of the investigation, with *“each new phase of the investigation reflecting what has been discovered so far, with new angles of investigation and new avenues of enquiry to be explored”* (ibid:216). It is recognised by the researcher that there are inherent difficulties in adopting this approach and obtaining trustworthy answers to the research questions. To ensure such trustworthy answers are achieved, a significant amount time was invested by the researcher to read, sift, order, synthesise and interpret the data. The purpose of this procedure was the effective management of the data through a process of review, labelling and synthesising, leading to the identification of descriptive and illustrative accounts within which explanations are developed about why the data take the forms that are found and presented. The analysis of qualitative data obtained was managed through the development and use of pattern codes which will follow the guidelines presented by Strauss (1987:81) and adapted by Robson (1998:386). These codes will be used as appropriate devices to *“label, separate, compile and organise data”* (Charmaz 1983:186), although it is recognised that coding in qualitative analysis is often in a state of revision and change. The process of coding will allow the identification of portions of the transcripts as a means of reducing the raw text, which will assist in making sense of the evidence. Care will be taken to ensure that the analytical ideas and concepts that develop are grounded in the data, which will require, in the opinion of Spencer et al (2003:210), a *“structure that allows emergent ideas,*

concepts and patterns to be captured and revisited.” By adopting this approach and by taking note of the concerns related to the analysis of qualitative information (Robson 1998, Bryman, 2001, Silverman 2000), it is believed that the interpretation of the data made available to the investigation will determine both the level of collective knowledge and understanding by those involved in the maintained Youth Service of the three elements of the investigation and the link they make between these in their practice.

Conclusion

It is acknowledged that the methods used to obtain information relevant to this investigation will provide a number of substantial challenges because of the significant amounts of data that will be generated through the methods selected. The management of this information could also be problematic because of the possible complexity of the data from across the occupational strands of the maintained Youth Service and from external scrutiny of documents. The reason for choosing this challenging and complex process is, however, deliberate, as it attempts to replicate as closely as possible the preferred choice of method - the anthropological ethnography approach. Because of logistical difficulties, use of this method was not possible but it is believed that the selected methods will offer an opportunity to gain an understanding of the essence of the maintained Youth Service. It is recognised that this would not be a quick process but one that would require careful planning and execution to ensure the data is understood and interpreted in a way that ensures the findings are reliable, valid, capable of replication and able to provide a sound foundation for further research.

John Rose 2017, taken from PhD research

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