The Needs of Young People aged 15-19

and

The Youth Work Response

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SUMMARY

This report is the first piece of work conducted under the auspices (and direction) of a research partnership between the University of Wales (Cardiff) School of Social and Administrative Studies and the Wales Youth Agency. Financial support for the project was provided by the Wales Youth Agency and Health Promotion Wales. At a time of local government reorganisation in Wales, the research group which oversees the work of the partnership felt that a research priority was to examine the extent to which contemporary youth work practice met the 'needs' of young people within the 15-19 age range.

Both youth work and the 'social condition' of young people have been subject to considerable change in recent years. There has been the growing imperatives around management, accountability and evaluation in all public services. Social policy affecting young people - in the arenas of formal education, health services, employment and training, housing and criminal justice - has altered quite dramatically, improving prospects and opportunities for some young people, but consigning many others to more difficult circumstances as they endeavour to negotiate a range of transition pathways to adult life. The youth service itself has been required to clarify its task and to set out a 'curriculum framework' within which its work is developed. These are the broad contexts within which the research reported here was formulated.

The focus on 15-19 year old young people reflected a broad consensus that this should be a key priority target group for the youth service, yet the youth service has often struggled to retain the involvement and participation of this 'older' age group. Some youth work settings have, however, managed to do so. Fourteen such settings throughout Wales were identified, following consultation with the professional staff of the Wales Youth Agency. These included provision in both the maintained and voluntary sector. They included both more traditional youth 'club' provision and newer types of 'projects', but they were all selected because they were fundamentally 'ordinary' youth work settings - typical of many more which had equal potential to develop constructive intervention with 'older' young people.

The research was not, however, an evaluation of the work of different youth work settings. It was to illuminate the ways in which youth work practice responded to the expressed needs of young people within the 15-19 age range. In all, 135 eligible young people were interviewed directly, individually and in groups, and a further 67 young people completed a short questionnaire which were left at each setting during a research visit. It is data from these two components of the fieldwork which convey the views of young people about their needs, the role of youth work in meeting such needs, the availability and accessibility of alternative provision in their localities which might also meet such needs, and the perceived outcomes accruing from their participation in, and experience of youth work.

These data provide a basis on which to consider the perspectives of youth workers, which were drawn from in-depth interviews with the senior worker at each setting and shorter interviews with nineteen part-time paid workers and fifteen volunteers. They were asked to consider the needs of the 'older' young people with whom they worked, the role of youth work in meeting those needs, and the implications and consequences of the current managerial demands around the youth work curriculum, administration, and evaluation and performance measurement.

The research was therefore concerned with the relationship between youth work practice and young people's needs. The additional resourcing from Health Promotion Wales meant that there was some emphasis on considering in more depth questions which arose around 'the health agenda' (both for young people and for youth workers), but in no way did this distort the primary task of the research.

Young people were rarely clear about distinctions between 'needs', 'issues' and 'wants'. It was clear, however, that their most pressing need was for provision which addressed the incessant boredom that many routinely experienced. There was a need for somewhere to go. Boredom was a key contributory factor in what was often excessive consumption of alcohol and, increasingly, participation in recreational drug misuse. Such behaviour was viewed by young people as problematic only insofar as it incurred costs they could ill afford and because, at times, it led to negative social consequences. Some respondents related the increasing criminal activity by young people to the 'need' to finance their alcohol and drug 'habits', although others argued that their drug use was an escape from otherwise rather mundane and conformist lifestyles. Many suggested that, if more constructive leisure-time activities were available (something to do), such behaviour would subside.

Young people identified the need to understand and resolve a variety of personal relationships: one-to-one, in peer groups and with families. Related to this was the need for personal advice (someone to talk to), on matters ranging beyond personal relationships to issues including policing and legal matters, pressures at school, sexual health, social security problems, and careers and employment. In their leisure time, young people craved social acceptance, arguing that they were invariably stereotyped as troublemakers when they were occupying public space, but private, more autonomous space in which they could congregate together (space of our own) was denied to them. Even youth work provision was often only available on one or two nights a week. The rest of the time they had no option but to 'hang around' in public, open space.

For this age group, youth work provision represented a valuable social meeting place, providing things to do and people to talk to. Such services may sound rather vague, but they appear to be of critical importance to young people, especially when many maintained that no relevant or credible alternatives were available in their localities. There often were, of course, other forms of leisure and social provision, and sometimes there were also other advisory and information services, but many young people did not avail themselves of them. Cost, accessibility, acceptance, and lack of trust were some of the reasons why young people did not make use of such alternatives.

Young people did not necessarily identify major developmental benefits accruing from youth work intervention and provision. Some noted that they had probably become more co-operative, tolerant and understanding. Others simply confirmed its role in keeping them 'off the street'. The activity provided (whether passive or active) did, however, serve as a diversion from engaging either intentionally or almost by default in more negative forms of behaviour: drinking, drug misuse and delinquent misdemeanours. What this age group valued most was a sense of autonomy - an opportunity to feel in control and to contribute to decision-making in the youth work setting, and thereby to their own confidence and competence. They also valued having access to youth workers whom they trusted and whom they believed would provide advice, guidance and information to the best of their ability and devoid of vested interests.

Youth workers, predictably, offered a more wide-ranging and sophisticated explication of young people's needs, ranging from their personal and social needs for 'supported space of their own', health needs (around drinking, drug use and sexual health), transition needs (around education, employment and housing) to information needs. These were connected and analysed in a variety of ways, but they broadly reflected both the 'bottom-up' personal concerns flowing from young people with whom they worked and the 'top-down' structural issues flowing from the changing patterns of opportunity and choice available to young people.

They saw youth work as providing space for young people, space in which there should always be the possibility of new experiences and opportunities. They also believed that youth work should take responsibility for challenging young people's assumptions, attitudes and behaviour and, whenever possible, presenting young people with positive options and choices. Formal, planned approaches were not necessarily the best way of achieving these ends. The general starting point, it was generally agreed, was to engage in conversation with young people. Through conversation and careful listening to issues raised by young people, relevant advice, information and support could be dispensed and provided. Youth work was about ensuring open access to all young people who required such support and it had an important role in combating cliques - ensuring that provision did not become dominated by one particular group or another. Simultaneously, it was critical that youth work promoted cultures of participation, in which all participants felt that they had a voice and a say in the content of provision.

Significant concerns were expressed about the proliferation of management expectations around the grass-roots delivery of youth work. While youth workers had become cautiously, but increasingly, receptive to the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales, they remained sceptical that many contemporary developments in the management of youth work were out of touch with realities on the ground - especially if it was considered important to keep 'older' young people (and especially those amongst them who were the most disadvantaged) in contact with the service.

The research suggests, therefore, that there is a fundamental difficulty in disentangling an often confusing array of needs, wants and issues. Yet it does not require a sophisticated analysis of 'need' to recognise the critical significance of boredom (particularly those aged around 15-19) in young people's wide-ranging accounts of their needs. Young people want somewhere to go, and something to do, and youth work settings have a clear potential to respond to such aspirations. Youth work settings can, however, jeopardise that potential by projecting the wrong image: the image of the setting (in terms of the age group it is perceived to cater for, the programme it offers, the regulations it applies) can easily deter prospective participants, if youth workers do not constantly bear this in mind. Likewise, there is always the question of whose agenda is informing youth work provision. The pat answer is 'the needs of young people'. This is naive. Youth work provision is always informed by some synthesis of political, professional and personal agendas; what is important is that young people's agendas do not get lost or subordinated to those of others. This is not to undermine the value of other agendas. The health agenda is a case in point. It has become a major agenda for youth workers (reflecting a broader social agenda), but it seems to be hardly any matter of concern to young people themselves. This does not mean that youth workers should abandon it; it means that youth workers have to think more critically and carefully about methods of broaching it. The 'brokerage' function developed by workers in some settings is a good example, the practical outcome of which has been the development of health clinics in youth work settings. Not only does this respond to some of the general health concerns of young people (about invisibility and confidentiality) but it provides a basis for stimulating debate about specific health questions within the general round of informal youth work practice.

Engaging in any such debate is not always easy, and it is imperative to be reminded of the fact that the quality of youth work is always contingent on the competence and quality of staff. Most staff at the 'coal face' are part-time and are rarely 'experts' on the range of issues raised by young people (a point to which respondents frequently testified). But young people were not particularly interested in expertise; they wanted trust and confidence. They wanted commitment from workers; in the words of one young person, they wanted "to know someone's still bothered". Youth workers have to be confident that expertise is not the critical factor, otherwise they will tend to develop practice based around their own backgrounds, skills and interests, rather than those deriving from young people themselves.

Confidence is at a premium in youth work. Managers and funders want visible, tangible delivery. But 15-19 year olds often want solid personal relationships, which are much more difficult to detect. This does not mean that they do not want programmes and activities, but a balance of programmes, participation and social space has to be struck. Too little space, too little participation and consultation, and too much planning and programming is unlikely to be an attractive balance of provision for this age group.

An extended version of this point becomes a critical issue for the future structure of youth service delivery. The least programmed and most 'drop-in' types of settings were the most successful in reaching the most disadvantaged within the older age group, those experiencing the most significant personal and structural difficulties in their lives. But, compared to more 'traditional' youth clubs, which were attracting a broad age range (including some aged 15-19) in considerable numbers, the numbers attracted to such projects was relatively small. There is an important debate to be had on the question of clubs or projects. Both styles of practice are defensible, for different reasons, and they are often subjected to ideological jousting: some more empirically based analysis is required to inform the debate.

In conclusion, youth work clearly has some capacity to meet the expressed needs of 15-19 year olds. While it cannot respond directly to their structural needs of income, jobs or housing, it can provide them with safe, supportive spaces and develop quality engagement and intervention - incrementally, through individualised attention, through supported collective development, and through sensitised brokerage and advocacy. It can be tough work with this age group. Many others will have lost interest in them, given up on them, or see little point in making an effort. Youth workers often experience instances of one step forward, two steps back. Some such young people will have 'learned' to resist any boundary imposition or regulation. Youth workers sometimes mistakenly offer unconditional acceptance. There will be struggles for control. These will not be assisted by youth workers looking over their shoulders at management and committee expectations of smooth running, clear programmes and visible outcomes.

Youth workers currently work in a climate of uncertainty, if not fear - about their jobs, their credibility, their professionalism. Yet this research uncovered a clear commitment to their practice, which was invariably far more imaginative, participative and sensitive than the simple provision of 'table tennis and pool'. Youth workers working with 15-19 year olds, especially those more disadvantaged, face the frustration of being unable to do much about their structural circumstances. But, given the political will and some managerial flexibility, the evidence of this report suggests that youth work does have some potential to respond constructively to some of the central needs identified by young people as important to them as they seek to negotiate the increasingly complex and often fraught routes to adulthood - notably the needs for space, for activity, for autonomy and for advice.

The needs of young people aged 15-19 and the youth work response

<u>Preface</u>

The research reported below is the first piece of work undertaken by a research partnership established between the Wales Youth Agency and the School of Social and Administrative Studies, University of Wales, Cardiff at the beginning of 1995. This particular research study was also supported by Health Promotion Wales.

The research partnership is intended to maximise opportunities to conduct policy and practice-related research programmes within the broad social policy context which impinges on the lives of young people in Wales. Conducted within a research unit located in an institute of higher education, the work of the research partnership is overseen by a Research Group (comprising representatives of both the university and the Wales Youth Agency). The Research Group guides the priorities around which research funding should be sought and advises on the most appropriate means of ensuring that results are disseminated to relevant audiences.

This piece of work was conceived on the basis that we know so little about the needs of young people as they begin to face the maze of contemporary pathways to adulthood. We know even less about the extent to which youth work is actually or potentially able to provide appropriate responses to such needs. The momentum concerning the development of a youth work curriculum - arising from three Ministerial Conferences on the Youth Service between 1989 and 1992 (see NYB 1990, NYA 1992) - has been primarily professionally constructed in response to political imperatives and expectations, with very limited input from young people themselves.

Thus we have very little information about young people's perspectives on the youth service. Moreover, while we can speculate on their 'needs' (which, objectively, are clearly about opportunities to make successful transitions into adult life in terms of employment, housing and personal relationships), their own hierarchy of subjective needs is likely to vary according to locality and personal experiences. Similarly, the impact of youth work provision will vary according to both the kinds of 'needs' expressed and the alternatives available locally to meeting those needs.

The broad intention of the research, therefore, was - through the use of qualitative methods - to explore how young people between the ages of 15 and 19 defined their needs, to unravel the extent to which those young people felt local youth work provision responded effectively to those needs, and to establish what kind of 'competing' alternative provision was available and whether or not it was used by young people.

The 15-19 age band is somewhat arbitrary but nevertheless consistent with the prevailing view that this is the proper priority constituency for the youth service. It is during this age period that more significant issues present themselves to young people - such as educational choices, leaving home, and health risk behaviours. [Indeed, support for the research by Health Promotion Wales derived from interest in determining the extent to which young people themselves considered health issues to be matters of importance.] While youth work often claims to respond in a variety of ways to the needs of this age group, we have no idea whether its curriculum interventions are perceived as relevant, credible or effective in the eyes of young people. Furthermore, there has always been a tendency for youth work provision to 'slip' down the age range, delivering essentially recreational programmes rather than

developing educational programmes based on the core curriculum principles of participation and empowerment.

There is, of course, plenty of discussion about the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales (WYA 1992), which enshrines youth work as an educational task, framed within principles of equality of opportunity, participation, empowerment and expression. Since the Ministerial Conferences on the Youth Service, there has been a proliferation of documentation: mountains of paperwork requiring business plans, unit strategies, curriculum statements, quality standards, monitoring and evaluation sheets, and so on. Indeed, in the course of the research we received our share of such material from the youth work settings in which we became involved. But such material may convey very little about what is actually going on. This may or may not matter. Or, perhaps more significantly, it may matter to some, but not to others!

What the research was concerned with was how young people defined their needs, whether or not local youth work provision was responding to them, and if so, in what way? Much of what young people told us was highly complimentary to the youth service. Some was more critical. Throughout our listening to young people's accounts, it was always tempting to interject with qualifications, questions or challenges, such as "that's a want, not a need" or "the youth service is expected to do it that way". Readers of this report will no doubt do the same. But we have elected to present what might cleverly be called the unadulterated perspectives of young people, before going on to consider the perspectives, explanations (and sometimes rationalisations) of the youth workers we interviewed. Contrasts and comparisons can then be located within the even wider political and managerial context within which the youth service operates, permitting an analysis of the extent to which the current trajectories of youth work may be at odds with the interests and preferences of young people and the ways in which they may be better synchronised. This, in turn, may form the basis for more effective advocacy for youth work in a period of financial and political turbulence.

Introduction

While it is important not to confuse some of the key messages emerging from the research by too many explanations and qualifications, it is equally important to contextualise the research by providing a brief sketch the wider social and professional contexts in which the research has been constructed and executed.

The wider contexts

(i) Management, accountability and evaluation

The last twenty years has seen the inexorable rise of pressures concerning public accountability and requirements to demonstrate 'efficiency, economy and effectiveness' in all services and provision financed by the tax-payer. This has led to the ascendancy of managers and accountants in the oversight of all professional practice: in education, criminal justice, housing, social work and health services. And in order to provide evidence of 'value for money' and a basis for evaluating efficiency and effectiveness, there have been increasing requirements to demonstrate clear indicators of performance in relation to evidence that priority target groups have been identified and reached - outputs against which resource inputs and professional practice can be tested and 'measured'.

The question of cuts in expenditure on public services is one which is now almost taken for granted: the political expectation is that quality services can continue to be delivered through 'efficiency gains' and more effective management, despite emerging views that many public services - especially those relating to children and young people - are now grossly underfunded (Holtermann 1995).

Services which are not a statutory obligation and which have struggled to produce clear, credible and reliable measures of performance have found it increasingly difficult to secure public sector resources (from both central or local government). This has made sectors of provision such as the youth service particularly vulnerable and is the reason for arguments to place it more firmly on a statutory footing (see Bell et al. 1994). Other equally vulnerable services include those concerned with drug and alcohol issues and non-statutory areas of social work intervention. All are finding it difficult to sustain their funding base in an era of tendering processes (based on purchaser/provider arrangements) in which the need to demonstrate tangible effectiveness in relation to monies allocated is paramount. Such arrangements, it has been argued (Small 1989), are not always rational but they have assisted prevailing political efforts to reduce public expenditure, even if they have often in fact only shifted the burden of cost into other arenas - sometimes personal (in, for example, the case of community care), sometimes private (in the case of health care) and sometimes simply displaced to other arenas of public policy (such as criminal justice or social security, where costs have risen dramatically). The 'market' approach to the delivery of public services, which current political dogma claims to be promoting both greater effectiveness and economy, has not therefore been embraced by all, and is subject to question on both fronts, but it nevertheless remains the guiding force in the development of public policy and the allocation of public resources. Even for those areas of policy in which it is conceded that an 'internal market' cannot be easily constructed (since the basic resources for a purchaser-provider-consumer set of relationships are not available), the language, ethos and mechanisms of the market prevail. The proliferation of 'citizen's charters', 'kitemarks' and 'quality standards' are testimony to this. The question remains, however, whether or not the packaging, marketing and management of provision conceals,

rather than enhances, what is actually going on on the ground in terms of professional practice with the target recipients of services.

(ii) Social (and youth) policy - the changing climate

Social policy in education, health, social security, housing, employment and training and criminal justice has altered dramatically in recent years.

After some 40 years of broadly consensual education policy, the 1988 Education Act heralded a 'sea change' in approaches to schooling: it established a national curriculum, created greater possibilities for parental choice, and introduced testing for 7, 11, 14, and 16 year olds. Despite frictions with the teaching unions, which delayed the implementation of some measures, responsibility for the management of schooling and the shape of the curriculum has been steadily removed from local education authorities and either allocated to central government or delegated to schools and their governing bodies. The Secretary of State for Education now has well over 400 specific powers over education policy (before 1988 they possessed just three general powers); schools which have opted out of local authority control now have greater possibilities of selecting at least a proportion of their intake. Finally, the production for public consumption of 'league tables' concerning educational attainment and truancy rates has concentrated public (and parental) thinking about 'good' and 'bad' schools, despite the fact that such tables take no account of pupils' socio-economic background or schools' selection policies; if tables were weighted to take account of these and other criteria which clearly influences performance, they would present a very different picture.

Health services have been at the forefront of the new market ideologies which have informed the re-shaping of all public services. The National Health Service - from hospital trusts to General Practitioner fundholders - has been radically restructured, although the balance between the 'white coats' of service delivery and the 'grey suits' of service management continues to be a matter of political contention. There is now a range of clearly documented health targets, set out in The Health of the Nation (Department of Health 1992) which, in Wales, was preceded by The Health for All in Wales Strategy (Health Promotion Authority for Wales 1990). Many of the targets within these documents relate specifically to young people (in terms of, for example, reducing the prevalence of smoking and the incidence of teenage pregnancy), and were confirmed in a subsequent report, The Health of the Young Nation (Binysh 1993), so it is ironic that the small health education units within health authorities, which had developed health-focused work with young people, were quietly abandoned some three years ago. Likewise, confusing messages about 'sensible drinking' and the increasingly easy access for young people to alcohol and tobacco (whatever the law says), notwithstanding recurrent allegations that some cigarette brands and alcohol products are specifically targeted and marketed at the young, is hardly conducive to the promotion of more healthy lifestyles. A much more radical and interventionist approach, inconsistent with the philosophy of choice on the open market, would be required to achieve such ends (see, for example, RCP/BPA 1995).

There have also been widespread reforms in the area of employment, unemployment (social security) and training policy (see Roberts 1995). The kinds of intervention in the labour market (job creation schemes, job subsidies, and training levies) have, by and large, been abandoned. Historical protections for young people in the labour market (such as night-time working, and entitlement to breaks) have been removed. Such developments - to progressively (a much used word, with its deliberate double meaning) liberate employers from regulation and control over their working practices - have taken place within the momentum to promote an enterprise economy, in which increased wealth creation will 'trickle down' and all members of society will ultimately be beneficiaries. There is, however, little evidence that this is

taking place. A central effect of these governmental measures, in conjunction with the usual effects of persistently high rates of unemployment, has been the suppression of wage levels, and particularly youth wage levels. Yet the lack of employment opportunities or issues concerning low wages (compounded by the abolition of Wages Councils) have been sidestepped in much contemporary employment and training policy; instead, attention has been focused on people's motivation to work, their lack of skills, and abuse of the benefits system. As a result, entitlements to income support have been reduced, even removed from groups such as 16 and 17 year olds. Pressure to participate in training programmes, whatever their actual or perceived quality and whatever their outcomes, has been increased. Young people in particular, said Norman Tebbit, should not have the option of unemployment. Decision-making around employment and training policy has been systematically devolved to a local level and placed in the hands of local employers, notably within the structures of Training and Enterprise Councils, whose primary responsibility is local labour market planning and enterprise development. The 'social agenda' around training and employment, which informed earlier programmes of intervention, is no longer a priority, if it exists at all.

In housing policy, there has been a rapid demise in the provision of public housing, achieved through the promotion of 'right-to-buy' schemes, restrictions on local authorities to engage in the building of new municipal housing, and the parallel encouragement of housing associations to provide accommodation for those unable to purchase their own homes. Definitions of homelessness and eligibility criteria for the limited public sector housing available has been steadily tightened. Provision for the more vulnerable - through special needs housing arrangements - is highly constrained, and young people are a low priority. Indeed, Margaret Thatcher believed there was no need to make housing provision for young people since they already had homes to live in - the homes of their parents. The Children Act 1989 recognised, however, that the housing circumstances of at least some young people might be 'seriously prejudiced' and sought to ensure that such vulnerable young people would receive necessary support. Insufficient resources to implement such provisions have meant that local authorities have generally been unable to achieve these goals (McCluskey 1994). Prior to the Children Act, the housing element within income support for the under-25s had been withdrawn and there have since been further restrictions on young people's entitlements to Housing Benefit, culminating in recent announcements that maximum housing benefit would be limited to the average rental levels in shared accommodation.

In the area of criminal justice policy, there has been a swing away from the diversionary and community-based measures which had proved relatively successful during the 1980s, constructed as they were on a broad consensus amongst most of the professional interest groups involved. The professional view was that custodial dispositions were 'an expensive way of making bad people worse'; the prevailing political view today is that 'prison works', a view which has seen the British prison population come to exceed 50,000, the second highest in Europe. Young people have not been immune from this new momentum, especially since the tragic death of Jamie Bulger and the conviction of the two 11-year olds who murdered him. This regrettably provided the political opportunity to announce the development of new custodial regimes for 12-14 year olds who are deemed to be 'persistent' young offenders. Certainly there are very authentic concerns about youth crime: some 50% of all reported crime is committed by people under 21. Yet there is consistent evidence that custodial measures are not only expensive but grossly ineffective in terms of recidivism rates. More constructive, community-based measures are not only far cheaper but also no less ineffective. Furthermore, there is absolutely no evidence that 'persistent' young offenders can be readily disaggregated from the general body of young offenders (Hagell and Newburn 1994), even if it is worth spending some £2,000 per person per week in their containment. Juvenile justice policy has always struggled with reconciling the competing demands of punishment/retribution and treatment/rehabilitation, and 'welfare' measures have been criticised in the past for their disproportionate interventions in young people's lives (in terms of the severity of the offences which precipitated such intervention). The Criminal Justice Act 1991, which restored offence

criteria to the centre of sentencing decision-making, but which also required custodial measures to be clearly a very last resort and did not permit a string of apparently unrelated previous convictions to lead to a harsher (or custodial) sentence, was a welcome and wise development. It has been superseded in parts by the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, much of which is in prospect a retrograde step, although there are now suggestions that provisions such as the secure training centres may not in fact come to fruition (Mills 1996).

Finally, it is useful to note that calls for a Minister for Youth (see Coleman and Warren-Adamson 1992; British Youth Council 1993a; Coles 1995) are both a product of concerns that young people's issues are being squeezed out of the policy agenda and a result of assertions that contemporary social policy lacks any coherence in its impact on young people and, indeed, is sometimes characterised by blatant contradiction. For example, while young people aged 17-21 are the highest priority in criminal justice policy, young people aged 16 and 17, and 18-25, are the lowest priority in social security policy - the impact of one upon the other is detrimental to constructive policy development in either (see ACOP 1992; ACOP 1993). Likewise, ineffective criminal justice interventions continue to be promoted while community-based youth services are cut, despite evidence (admittedly rejected as unpersuasive by the Home Secretary) that youth work can make a cost-effective contribution to the prevention and reduction of youth crime (Coopers and Lybrand 1994).

(iii) The social condition of young people

The consequence of such changes in the social policy climate has been the growing marginalisation, impoverishment and exclusion of a significant minority of young people. It is important to emphasise that, in spite of the ever more complex pathways to adulthood in the labour market, in domestic and personal transitions and in the housing market, the majority of young people still negotiate them in a relatively unproblematic way. To claim, as the British Youth Council have done (British Youth Council 1992), that all young people are oppressed and disadvantaged is to distort the truth to the detriment of those young people who are experiencing serious difficulties in making the transition to adulthood.

In education, greater numbers than ever are staying on beyond the minimum school leaving age. This has been heralded by those in government as evidence of the 'sea change' which has taken place in young people's attitudes to education, training and qualifications. They now recognise the importance of acquiring skills and competencies and are availing themselves of more flexible education and training provision to get them. Others have argued, however, that these developments are predominantly a result of the contracted youth labour market - since there are no jobs out there, you might as well stay at school or go to college. Support for this perspective lies in the fact that significant numbers (perhaps a third) of young people who do extend their education fail to complete the courses on which they enrol (Audit Commission/OFSTED 1993).

Below the statutory minimum school leaving age, educational performance by young people has improved. The requirement upon schools to produce information concerning attainment, for use in 'league tables', means that such educational performance is critical for marketing a school to parents of prospective pupils. The consequence, however, is a widening educational divide, evidenced most dramatically by the number of young people permanently excluded from school, which rose from 4,000 in 1992 to 12,000 in 1995 in England and Wales (Parsons 1995). Quite what these young people are doing with their time and the implications of this for the compounding of their underachievement, no one yet knows. What is clear is that young people with challenging behaviour and little likelihood of gaining examination success are undesirable commodities in the new competitive education market.

The dearth of job opportunities in many areas leaves the increasingly residual option of participating in youth training, yet there is great cynicism amongst young people about such programmes. They resent the poverty of the training allowance, which has not increased for ten years (and was considered a pittance then); they question the quality and relevance of much of the training on offer; and they see little point in pursuing any such training if there is no likelihood, let alone any guarantee, of a job at the end. This has led to a 'drop out' phenomenon (Istance et al. 1994; Wilkinson 1995) of considerable proportions, though official counts of who is doing what fails to acknowledge it. Certainly, since the introduction of YTS in 1983, some 30,000 young people have annually voted with their feet and not taken part in training schemes (Horton 1985, Maclagan 1992), despite being ineligible for income support (except in exceptional circumstances) since 1988. It is estimated that there are now between 100,000 and 150,000 young people annually who have no benefit and no work, and who are non-participants in education or training (Maclagan 1992; Shakespeare 1995). Whether or not this is their 'choice' or a consequence of the structure of provision is an issue which continues to be debated; what is not in doubt is that these young people are eking out a meagre existence and, quite probably, involving themselves in the informal and perhaps the illegal economy in order to 'get by'. Indeed, since youth wages are often appallingly low in the few 'real' jobs that may be obtained and since the youth training allowance is routinely considered by young people to be grossly insufficient (especially when parents are unable or unwilling to provide a range of hidden subsidies), there is an understandable inclination to become involved in what is often a more lucrative sub-economy. There may not be much of a future in it, but it suffices for now. Even those young people who are lauded for having embraced the 'enterprise culture' do so more as a result of the push of unemployment than of the pull of enterprise (MacDonald and Coffield 1991). Few succeed in becoming wealthy entrepreneurs; some fall by the wayside; most earn a meagre living until something better crops up.

While, therefore, better resourced and supported (and motivated) young people progress through the avenues of further and higher education into the labour market, other young people find themselves increasingly up 'blind alleys' and 'on the edge'. It is estimated that perhaps 150,000 young people under the age of 25 experience homelessness each year (Pollitt 1989), not the visible homelessness of cardboard cities, but the residential instability arising from temporary 'accommodation' on friends' floors and occasionally sleeping in bus shelters and barns (Darke et al. 1992). These issues have been explored in some detail in Wales (Hutson and Liddiard 1989, 1991) and provided the basis for a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of youth homelessness (Hutson and Liddiard 1994). Few young people make themselves homeless by 'choice'; they are more often propelled into homelessness because home circumstances become untenable as a result of physical, sexual or emotional abuse (see Strathdee and Coster 1994). Or because they had no home in the first place, and grew up in local authority care. Indeed, it has been suggested that half of young people leaving care are likely to experience homelessness and that one-third of homeless young people have been in the care system (Young Homelessness Group 1991). The provisions of the Children Act 1989, as noted above, have done little to rectify this situation; in most local authorities, being young and homeless is not in itself sufficient to constitute 'vulnerability'. Additional factors need to be present, such as being pregnant or having a drug or alcohol problem.

The Coalition on Young People and Social Security (COYPSS) found that there is a strong probability of impoverished and homeless young people becoming involved in crime - what it calls 'survival crime'(COYPSS 1991). Clearly it is important to distinguish between different forms of youth crime (particularly between the 'expressive' forms of crime, such as joy-riding, deriving from boredom, and 'instrumental' forms of crime deriving from the need, or desire, for resources). But the general point is that there is now a situation where up to one-in-three young men possess a criminal record. A vicious cycle of denial of opportunity is bound to ensue; having a criminal record is almost certain to consign those young people to the back of the queue for any work which may be available. This is not to argue

for the emergence of an 'underclass', which is an emotive, politically convenient and largely unspecific concept. Most young people, even those who have been propelled to the margins, have conformist and modest aspirations - given the opportunities to achieve them (see DES 1983, Davis 1990). All research evidence points to this; indeed, the theoretical contentions concerning the relationship between conformity and delinquency (and other 'deviance') on the one hand, and opportunity or the lack of opportunity on the other, have a long historical pedigree (see Thompson and Yeo 1973; Cloward and Ohlin 1961).

Health issues, despite being high on many political and professional agendas, can be difficult to unfathom with young people. Certainly there is evidence from one part of England that by the age of 16, some two-thirds of young people have been offered drugs and half have taken them (Measham et al. 1994; see also Parker and Measham 1995). In Wales, 40% of 15-16 year olds have experimented with drugs (most usually cannabis), a proportion consistent with findings elsewhere (Matthews and Trickey 1995), and the figures for both experimental and for current drug use almost doubled between 1990 and 1994: "drug experimentation among teenagers is not limited to a small, marginalised section of adolescents in Wales, but is becoming normalised within youth culture" (Health Promotion Wales 1994a, p.4), see also Smith and Nutbeam 1992). Smoking by teenagers, particularly young women (see Brannen et al. 1994), is increasing, in contrast to national trends in relation to other sectors of the population, although in Wales, it is increasing only amongst young women, with little discernible changes in smoking patterns amongst young men (Health Promotion Wales 1994b, see also Smith 1991). Alcohol consumption, as far as it is possible to determine, often exceeds recommended 'sensible' limits. A recent survey in Wales suggested that around one-fifth of young people aged 15-16 had been drunk on more than ten occasions (Health Promotion Wales 1996). And, despite the many advertising and information campaigns, there are suggestions that young people still engage in unsafe sex, often spontaneously at parties or when under the influence of drink or drugs (see Hirst 1993). The Welsh Youth Health Survey 1995 indicated that almost 10% of the 1,400 15-16 year olds surveyed were sexually active before the age of 14. However, of those who were sexually active, there was a high rate of contraceptive use and broadly accurate awareness of the risks of unprotected sex, although some young people were continuing to put themselves at risk (Health Promotion Wales 1995). The issue of diet is one that appears to be consistently neglected, though there are concerns about the consumption of 'junk' food by young people, the tendency of young people to 'skip' meals, and eating insufficient fruit. Improvements in the dietary habits of adults do not appear to be reflected amongst adolescents (Health Promotion Wales 1993). Of equal concern must be emerging evidence that impoverished young people simply do not have either the resources or the knowledge to maintain sufficient levels of nutrition (NCH 1993).

What is generally apparent from the limited literature we have on health and sexual health issues and young people is that most are aware of the issues but that this awareness has only a modest impact on their 'risk' behaviours (Plant and Plant 1993). Harm minimisation programmes are perhaps likely, and predictably, to be least effective with those young people who are at most risk of the harm being addressed. Young people often feel immortal; furthermore, most are immersed in an 'unhealthy' lifestyle culture from an early age. It is hardly surprising that relatively few internalise and act upon the educative messages to which they are exposed. During the twenty million pound anti-heroin campaign, it was said that the poster of the emaciated young man was a much-wanted acquisition for teenage girls!

In summary, then, despite the scare stories in the media and the academic concentration on the 'spectacular, deviant and bizarre', most young people today still tread a relatively conventional and 'ordinary' path to adult life. But the stepping stones for the many are simultaneously obstacles for a growing few, who often experience a concentration and clustering of disadvantage and risk: in family life, in education and training, in personal relationships, in health and sexual health risk behaviour, in the

criminal justice system, in the housing market and in the labour market. These young people may have elected to actively resist propulsion into policy provision about which they are cynical; more likely, they are passive recipients ('victims'?) of a sequence of events in their lives which have contributed to a 'tangle of pathologies'. Certainly a growing number of young people lack confidence in official social structures and in the political process (British Youth Council 1993b), but often their 'social condition' is as much a consequence of the abdication of intervention (by, for example, schools, the careers service, training providers and so on) as of some kind of active choice.

(iv) The youth service

The youth service is a very modest arm of public policy provision. Concealed (usually) within education structures, its flimsy statutory basis and funding source tucked away under 'other educational activities', it provides for young people in their leisure time. Even if it is not a leisure, but an educational, service it will be perceived as the former by young people. Leisure is the 'weak link in the chain of socialisation', hardly able (or willing) to compete with the much more powerful socialising forces of family, school and work. Despite the proliferation of leisure options for young people and the cross-over between the technologies of the workplace and the technologies of leisure, there is little evidence - to date - that the 'cultural creativity' of young people has made any significant inroad into the practices and experiences of education and employment (see, for example, Willis et al. 1990; Giacquinta et al. 1993).

Yet it is within this sphere that youth work seeks to educate and empower young people, through educative processes and practices of participation, equality of opportunity and expression. Its largely 'open door' policy means that it finds itself working with young people of a variety of ages, from a variety of backgrounds and with a variety of aptitudes and motivation. The structures of provision are equally varied - which is clearly not conducive to common targets and commonly agreed outputs, even if the work can be constructed upon common principles.

The evolution of the 'youth service' reveals many strands of development, in terms of ideologies, objectives, methodologies and structures. Its roots lie in Victorian times and philanthropic provision designed to promote physical activity in young people, provide space for association and, in the process, socialise young people into prevailing social, religious and political values. Provision made by the likes of the YMCA, the Boys' Brigade and the Scouts and Guides derived from these origins; there was, however, a more radical undercurrent in other, less noted, provision which sought to effect change in the lives of young people, rather than mould them to dominant societal expectations.

All this was largely voluntaristic; the significant shift towards provision supported by public finance took place during the Second World War. It is of note that the catalyst for the two Board of Education circulars which prefaced the flimsy statutory basis of the youth service within the 1944 Education Act was the poor physical condition of conscripts to the armed forces and concern about the effects on young people of fathers absented from their families through their obligations to the war effort. Both issues (health and family discipline) are reflected in contemporary social concerns about young people.

The 1944 Act placed a legal duty upon local education authorities to secure provision for young people (and others) of social, physical and recreational training, and leisure time activities. This could be achieved in part (or in whole, an issue confirmed by the recent High Court judgment concerning the youth service in Warwickshire) through co-operation with voluntary associations which made similar provision. Such a statutory duty, amended by the Education Reform Act 1988, represents the legal basis for youth service provision by local authorities.

The language of 'youth work' steadily changed from notions around objectives of character-building and moral socialisation, to ideas around the promotion of educative opportunities which would support personal development and the capacity of young people to become responsible members of society. The resourcing of youth work remained, however, flimsy until the late 1950s, when a combination of reality and myth concerning the emergent youth culture (about the generation gap, lawlessness, and rebellion) led to the establishment of the Albemarle Committee in 1958.

The Albemarle Report (Ministry of Education 1960) acknowledged the contemporary tension between young people seeking to assert their own cultures and styles and society's expectation that they should conform to prevailing dominant values. It coined the idea of 'social education' - the means by which such tensions might be reconciled. In order to deliver such education effectively, professional youth leaders would need to be trained and have the resource base to make relevant provision. The Albemarle Report led to the development of professional training courses, the building of purpose-built youth centres, the emergence of projects to connect with 'the unattached', and a greater focus on the relationship between the statutory and voluntary sectors.

The next significant milestone in the evolution of the youth service suggested that youth work should be more firmly grounded in participation and political education, enabling young people to develop skills and experiences which would permit them to become full members of an active society. These more 'radical' ideas and the subsequent recommendations by the Milson-Fairbairn Report (DES 1969) were not implemented by the government, despite the Secretary of State for Education's commendation of the report's "new and imaginative approach" which will "make a major contribution to future thinking about the development of youth work" (DES 1969, p.iii).

Recurrent efforts during the 1970s to place youth work on a firmer statutory footing through specific and explicit legislation failed. By 1982, another review of the youth service had taken place, which sought to bring its progress and development up to date and to map out the essential parameters of future provision. While there was a general consensus that youth work was about social and political education, there was a lack of clarity about how this was to be achieved. The Thompson Report (DES 1982) acknowledged that

> "the youth service has many different things to offer young people and it must continue to offer this variety, mixed in various ways and proportions to suit the needs of different communities and age-ranges. The proportions in which these offerings are mixed can only be a matter for local decision, with the full participation of the young people themselves, but it may be useful here to summarise the main elements as the five 'A's: association, activities, advice, action, access (DES 1982, pp.69-70).

It is noteworthy how closely such a perspective squares with the perspectives presented both by young people and youth workers reported in this research.

The Thompson Report led to some major reviews and reorganisations of the infrastructural support for the professional delivery of youth work (inter alia, a review of the National Youth Bureau and the establishment of the Central Council for Education and Training in Youth and Community Work) and encouraged many local authorities to reshape their services in the light of Thompson's emphasis on greater participation, concerns about ineffective management, and criticisms of relationships between the statutory and voluntary sectors.

These local reorganisations suggested that local authorities were grappling with the tension between supporting individual personal development and recognising the collective needs and interests of young people generally, and specific groups of young people (notably young women, or black young people) in particular (Smith 1987).

Throughout the 1970s, and perhaps even more so during the 1980s, different strands of the youth service identified a plethora of issues about which youth work should be concerned. Under the broad umbrella of social and political education, it sought to deal with questions such as homelessness, unemployment, health behaviour (especially drug misuse). It placed increasing emphasis on work focused on different groups of young people: a renewed attention to single sex work with girls and young women, and a new momentum to work with boys and young men. There was the development of work with black young people. Much of this further 'sub-divided' into more targeted specialisms: work with unemployed black young people; work with black young women; leaving care projects; street work with homeless young people; and so on. The range of methods used also expanded, with a shift away from 'traditional' activity-based and social group work provision made in youth clubs to special projects on specific issues or with specific groups, detached and outreach initiatives, advice, information and counselling services, youth exchanges and residential experiences.

Thus the 'youth service' was an amorphous animal, spanning a range of organisational structures in both the statutory and voluntary sectors, invoking a range of methods and taking place in a range of contexts, and often targeting different types of young people in terms of either age or other characteristics, or both.

Many viewed such diversity as a strength of the youth service: provision was tailored to the many different needs of different groups of young people in different localities. Young people had access to a raft of opportunities and possibilities which fell under the banner of the youth service. Alternatively, however, this 'youth service' could be conceived of as having grown like Topsy, with little rhyme or reason. It was this kind of perspective which informed the comments of the Under-Secretary of State for Education (Alan Howarth) at the first of three Ministerial Conferences on the Youth Service between 1989 and 1992.

The Minister asked the youth service to confirm its sense of purpose: what did it do?; who did it work with?; what methods did it use?; how did it measure its performance?; how did it evaluate its performance. He wanted the youth service to establish a clearer sense of direction, and sharper set of priorities and the relationship it had with other agencies working with young people. Did the youth service compensate for the deficiencies of wider youth provision (a 'deficit model' approach) or did it complement and supplement their achievements (a 'value added' approach). Predictably, in the consultations with the field undertaken by the National Youth Bureau in preparation for the Second Ministerial Conference, a more focused view of the role and function of the youth service proved difficult to formulate; respondents were either reluctant to prioritise, or they prioritised different dimensions of youth work practice. Nonetheless, a National (for England) Statement of Purpose was produced, outlining the dominant strands of practice, in terms of priority age groups and types of young people, priority issues, priority methods, and forms of measurement and evaluation. Primarily, however, this Statement set out the principles upon which all youth work practice should be constructed: participation, empowerment and equality of opportunity. There was also comprehensive confirmation that youth work was first and foremost an educative, and not a leisure or recreational, service.

It was during the formulation of the English Statement of Purpose that those representing the youth service in Wales sought to depart from a set of arguments and issues which they felt bore less direct relation to the Welsh context. This was by no means the first divergence from the English context.

Although, on the one hand, it might be argued that the broad condition of young people in Wales is not dissimilar to that of young people in England (in terms of structural issues such as education, training or employment, and in terms of youth cultural lifestyles), it must be argued on the other hand that there are also important differences, not least in terms of rurality and language. There are also important historical organisational differences in the character of youth work in Wales.

Such factors have influenced debate in Wales about suitable mechanisms for the delivery of youth work and the content of youth work practice which, while they might not always be at odds with what is going on in England, have often sought to strike a different balance. For example, probably as a result of the need to reach both workers and young people in more isolated geographical contexts, a greater emphasis has been placed upon information services. For similar reasons, closer inter-agency collaboration have always been advocated.

Distinct landmarks in the evolution of youth work in Wales include a report produced by a steering group appointed following a conference in 1978 which explored the links and services provided by the National Youth Bureau in Wales (see Welsh Youth Affairs Group 1980). This was followed soon afterwards by 'Survey 13', a report by Her Majesty's Inspectors on youth service provision in Wales, which was commonly viewed as Wales' equivalent to the Thompson Report (see Welsh Office 1984). Survey 13 criticised, amongst other things, the ineffective use of resources and the lack of planning in the development of youth work practice. The Welsh Office response was to establish the Wales Youth Work Partnership to provide information and training and thereby to supported the co-ordination and development of effective practice.

The Wales Youth Work Partnership undertook, as part of the consultation process to determine 'priorities' following the first Ministerial Conference on the Youth Service in 1989, a survey of youth workers in Wales to determine what they considered to be the most important dimensions of the youth work agenda. It is significant to note that 'health issues' were consistently high on that agenda (see Wales Youth Work Partnership 1990). A more thorough a repeated exploration of health issues as they relate to young people has been conducted bi-annually since 1986 by Health Promotion Wales (formerly the Health Promotion Authority for Wales). As reported above, this has provided information on the prevalence and behaviour patterns of young people around issues such as diet, smoking, drinking, drug use and sexual activity, and changes over time. The Welsh Youth Survey is one of the biggest lifestyle surveys of its kind, and highlights some major concerns about the absence of positive change - and sometimes trends towards negative change - in the health behaviours of the young, although findings do suggest some positive developments in the area of sexual health (see Health Promotion Wales 1995).

In 1992 the Partnership was superseded by the Cyngor Ieuenctid Cymru/Wales Youth Agency, a non-departmental public body established by the Secretary of State for Wales to assist voluntary and local authority youth organisations to develop the quality of youth work in Wales. One of its first tasks was to ratify the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales, which had been prepared by an interim 'association' (comprising the maintained and voluntary sector, training agencies, and representatives of youth workers and officers) prior to the forming of the Agency. This statement enshrined the principles of education, participation, empowerment and (critically, in terms of distinguishing it from the English statement) expression as the guiding framework for youth work practice.

Since then, the Agency has endeavoured to support the resource base and direction of youth work in Wales through a number of initiatives at the levels of both practice and policy. It has paid particular attention to information services, through publications both for youth workers (Ymlaen) and young people (Tabww) and to work with young people in rural areas (Wales Youth Agency Working Party 1993), which built upon an important report of a project which sought to reconcile the tensions which

often exist between indigenous (and Welsh speaking) young people and young people living in Wales as a result of in-migration by their parents (see Ioan 1993). In the field of training, Wales has developed - through the Wales Youth Agency - its own structures for the accreditation and endorsement of both part-time and full-time courses. In collaboration with the Welsh Joint Education Committee, the Agency has also pioneered new approaches for recording the achievement of young people participating in youth work provision (WJEC/WYA 1995). Finally, at a political and policy level, the Agency has sought to advocate for the youth service on a broad front, but especially in relation to current local government reorganisation which, once more, poses both threat and opportunity to the delivery of informal educational opportunities for young people (WYA 1994). Much of this debate is around securing the future for youth work and ensuring that there are mechanisms for the 'quality assurance' of future professional practice. What is lacking in much of the debate is the perspectives of young people themselves. Getting some grasp of those perspectives was the purpose of the research which is reported below.

A brief methodological note

> "Youth work requires absolute absence of pressure over young people, creation of a friendly atmosphere, trust, a mutual understanding and freedom of self-realisation with no discrimination against any group or individual" (young people in Russia, March 1995)

This definition of youth work was produced by a group of twenty young people (aged 18-25) in Moscow, having spent less than a week being informed of how youth work goes about its business in the United Kingdom (there is no youth service in Russia). It seems to be an apposite depiction of the broad consensus amongst young people in Wales about what they sought from the youth service.

In all research projects, certain quotations and observations leap out as representing a general framework of ideas which demand closer scrutiny and debate. This project was no exception:

> "Just because adults are older, they are not necessarily right. Although they were young once, they don't always know what we want, and we don't usually want what they want us to want" (young woman 17)

> "If they had too much of a programme here, we'd protest. We'd still just doss about. Or none of our lot would come, so it'd defeat the object. People would go on the piss and find somewhere else to hang about. As it is, the youth club is a good way of getting the education stuff over without stuffing it down your throat" (young man 17)

> "No matter how much they know, if they're unapproachable, you won't talk to them" (young woman 16)

> "In a variety of ways encouragement has been given to participants to develop new skills, widen their experiences and improve their awareness to others in the community" (one setting's Annual Report)

Such observations are, of course, not necessarily representative nor even objectively 'true'. But they do convey in a nutshell both the feelings of some of the older young people who participate in

contemporary youth work provision and the goals to which such provision should aspire. Putting the flesh on the bones on such statements, and checking how consistent they were across a number of youth work settings and amongst very different types of young people, is the focus of this report.

At the outset of the formulation of the research objective, the Research Group suggested it would be somewhat futile to engage in some kind of random selection of youth work settings. Nor was it relevant to concentrate on specialist or innovative projects working with the target age group. The Research Group's interest lay in 'ordinary' youth work contexts which had retained the involvement of older young people and developed additional work in order to respond specifically to their needs. It is important, in considering the messages contained in this report, to bear this point in mind.

Although the primary research task was to reach young people within the target age group, the longer-term policy objective was to provide evidence of the ways in which all 'routine' youth work practice could, if need be, redirect its priorities in order to serve this older age group more effectively.

On the other hand, there are potentially many ways to skin a rabbit, and young people aged 15-19 are hardly an homogeneous population. Youth service provision is equally diverse and it seemed important to make contact with young people who were participating in different kinds of provision. It must be emphasised, however, that the research was not about evaluating the effectiveness of particular settings: it was not some kind of inspection of practice. The use of a range of settings to reach young people was to ensure that a diversity of young people were contacted and interviewed: from highly disadvantaged young people seeking quite intensive support to relatively advantaged young people making use of local 'open access' provision. There were other a priori criteria which informed the selection of settings; further contrasts emerged as the research got underway.

As much as there was little point selecting settings which were known not to work with many young people within the target age group, there was equally little point in selecting settings known to do little that was constructive, creative or relevant for that age group. The important issue was to identify settings which reputedly endeavoured to respond to the needs of young people within the age group; only then could the perspectives of young people illuminate whether such provision was relevant or effective.

As a result, the professional staff of the Wales Youth Agency were asked to compile a list of youth work contexts with which they were familiar and which were known to have paid particular attention to developing work with the target age group. Fifty sites of youth service provision were identified in this way (some were listed by more than one member of staff). From this 'population', fourteen youth work settings were selected. [The original research plan was to cover twelve settings, but one was closely 'attached' to a highly-regarded project which could not be overlooked, and another - although heavily researched in the past few years - was considered to be too important to be ignored.] The final list of youth work settings were selected on criteria including whether they were youth clubs or projects, maintained or voluntary sector provision, and geographical location.

These youth work settings were contacted and asked to provide the research team with all relevant paperwork obtaining to the setting: such as business plans, club programmes, statements of entitlement, specialist initiatives, project work, or annual reports. It became very apparent from this paperwork just how diverse youth work provision can be! Beyond 'obvious' distinctions between voluntary sector youth work projects targeting more disadvantaged young people and maintained sector youth club provision providing an open door (although perhaps having specialist input for more circumscribed groups of young people), and between urban and rural provision (and the opening times and numbers attracted flowing from those different locations), there were striking differences in, for example, management

structures, staffing levels, the physical space and resources available, numbers of paid workers, funding sources, target groups, the balance struck between issue-based and activity-based practice, and the emphasis placed on structures and programmes.

The principal researcher then paid each setting a visit, in order to discuss with the senior worker the framework of, and rationale for, the practice undertaken in the setting. This completed the groundwork for the core objective of the research - to interview local young people about their needs and the youth work response. All senior workers undertook to make the necessary preparations when members of the research team gave notice of their intention to visit and to encourage relevant groups of young people to take part. After all, here was an opportunity for young people to express their views and concerns, both about their general needs and about local youth work provision.

The research design aimed to conduct a series of focus group interviews (Morgan 1988) with some twenty young people in each setting. [It also sought to talk more opportunistically with part-time and voluntary workers, non-participating young people and parents, all of which was achieved but on only a modest scale.]

The planned focus groups - and the target numbers - were not always secured. It was surprising how frequently members of the research team were told that they had come on a 'bad day': the regular group of older young people had not turned up, a planned session was taking place, no-one had said we were coming, there was no convenient space where a discussion could take place, there had been a disruptive event earlier in the week, the local fair was on, and so on. Indeed, one setting notified the research team that it was not even worth visiting because they were getting no-one in over the age of fourteen, and the 'attached' setting, an experimental voluntary initiative had been aborted by the time the fieldwork took place. In another, there were only six young people in attendance in all; the part-time worker conceded that this was typical, not unusual. All these explanations (and excuses) were no doubt true. We have no reason to disbelieve them, although the frequency with which they seemed to prevail must be cause for some concern. They stood in stark contrast with settings in which workers (and sometimes young people) had paved the way efficiently for the planned research work to happen; perhaps that in itself says something about the differential quality of provision in terms of involving young people in planning and exposing them to new experiences. However, these factors had two consequences for the research. First, qualitatively, the focus group approach was sometimes quite impossible to establish, and participating young people were interviewed more opportunistically and less intensively, both in small groups and as individuals. Secondly, it meant that the overall target numbers of young people were not achieved. In all, 135 young people were interviewed in twelve different youth work settings (the 'attached' project had ended by the time the fieldwork took place, and one other setting, where hours of provision had been significantly reduced, had no members over the age of 15).

Research of this nature is often unpredictable and difficult to sustain in harmony with the initial research design. In anticipation of such problems, a short questionnaire was left with workers in each setting, for completion if possible by target age young people who were not present when the research team visited. Only five settings returned any questionnaires. These had been completed by 67 young people and, by and large, provide corroborating support for the more detailed data secured through interviews with young people.

In addition to the fourteen 'key worker' interviews and the responses from young people (both through interviews and by the questionnaire), brief interviews were conducted by the research team with nineteen part-time paid workers and fifteen volunteers. Data from these interviews are presented to confirm or challenge perceptions and experiences expressed or described by both the key workers and the young people.

Similarly, fieldnotes were compiled by the research team on observations at the setting visited concerning, for example, whether there were young people hanging around outside, the activities being undertaken, the use being made of the space available, the physical environment (posters on the wall, loudness of any music being played), the interaction between workers and young people, and the interaction between young people, especially those of different ages or from different 'cultural' or stylistic groups. Such observations were primarily for internal research team use, helping us to interpret the perspectives being presented by 'key' workers and the young people willing to be interviewed. These visual guides to the type of work being undertaken and the method by which it was conducted (cf. the ways in which workers were intervening and communicating with young people) provide important signals about the atmosphere in which youth work practice is delivered - an intangible, but nevertheless often critical, indicator of both whether or not practice reflects the underpinning principles of youth work and, for the purposes of this research, a means of highlighting congruence between what is being said and what is being done.

It is important that the 'health agenda' - for which Health Promotion Wales contributed some additional funding - is not viewed as an eleventh hour 'bolt on'. The extra funding primarily permitted coverage of a larger number of research settings, since health issues were already a matter for the research agenda. The only real difference was that the researchers agreed to explore in somewhat more depth any health issues that emerged during the discussions with young people. In no way did the 'health agenda' distort the primary focus on youth work practice and young people's needs; it simply acted as a catalyst for ensuring that particularly attention was given to health issues when they arose.

There will inevitably be questions about the methodological validity of the findings generated by this research. This is always a concern amongst those preoccupied with almost a clinical, 'scientific', conceptualisation of social research. Yet a qualitative, exploratory, illuminative approach is quite defensible (see, for example, Britan 1981, Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, Delamont 1992). Rather than generating 'objective' conclusions, such research provides the grounds for further questions: by uncovering data (in this case, primarily the views of young people) which has largely remained hidden, the research can shed light on the value - or otherwise - of current policy and practice. Such policy and practice may have been premised on misguided assumptions. Or those assumptions may have been accurate. New, especially 'bottom-up', data can assist in establishing whether 'top-down' strategies are on the right track. Of course, consumer views are not necessarily 'right' any more than those which inform political or managerial directions: user satisfaction surveys may well gauge satisfaction, but this is very different from effectiveness. Nevertheless, only through locating any social policy initiatives within the context of the views and experiences of all parties concerned can meaningful mechanisms for change and development be implemented. And, ironically, in-depth interviews with the 'clients' of services can often yield a more valid picture than a more comprehensive, yet often also more superficial, survey (see, for example, Hirst 1993; Istance et al 1994; Butler and Williamson 1994).

The young people interviewed for this research came from a range of backgrounds. What they had most in common was their age. Beyond age, they were characterised by enormous diversity, in terms of family backgrounds, educational experiences, educational attainment, and current circumstances. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that they often identified very different needs; indeed, those from more comfortable and secure situations tended to express wants more than needs. What was surprising, perhaps, was that there was considerable consistency in their views about the role of youth work in their lives, irrespective of their social backgrounds and current 'social condition'. It is this consistency of perspective which emphasises the need to reflect carefully on current strategies and developments within the youth service.

The youth work settings

Although the purpose of the research was not to examine the differential provision within the different youth work settings contacted in order to reach young people, it is nevertheless important to sketch out the different kinds of provision made by these different settings, if only to provide a flavour of the different 'constituencies' of young people served by them.

The twelve settings which eventually formed the substantive focus for a full study can be usefully clustered into three broad types.

 (i) substantial maintained youth club provision

Four of the settings - funded by the local authority - were youth centres which were open routinely on a number of evenings a week, during which they offered a programme of activities, sometimes for different age groups. By and large, they were well staffed (some with a full-time worker on site), with a minimum of two paid youth workers per session (often three or four) and supported by paid instructors and coffee bar workers. These settings had considerable physical space and equipment available to them: indeed, the justification for the generous staffing allocation was as much on the grounds of the need for supervision of the building as for specific types of youth work intervention.

Such provision usually (though not always) attracted in excess of fifty young people per night, most of them aged between 11 and 16, although there were always 'residual' older young people in attendance.

[One additional setting was very similar to these, although it was a voluntary project developed through a range of partnerships between the maintained and voluntary sectors.]

(ii) part-time maintained youth club provision

Three settings delivered provision on no more than two evenings a week. Routinely they attracted around 20-30 young people (sometimes less) and were staffed by one, occasionally two sessional paid youth workers and supported by volunteers. Space was often limited to one main room in which 'routine' youth club activities such as pool and table tennis were available, and perhaps a 'side' room which could be used for
quieter activities and more sensitive discussion.

(iii) youth work projects

Four settings were voluntary-aided projects (albeit with a modicum of maintained sector support) which targeted 'more disadvantaged' young people in an older age range - from, say, 16-25.

Premises rarely permitted the provision of activity-based work which characterised conventional youth club programmes, since space was often at a premium. Likewise, staffing levels were also limited, often restricting opening hours or demanding that paid staff worked 'alone', albeit with the assistance of sometimes an impressive complement of volunteers, including - in some cases - regular participants.

The views of young people

It was these settings which formed the backcloth to making contact with a significant number of young people within the 15-19 age range. This section considers the ways in which these young people articulated their 'needs' and perceived the role of youth work (especially in terms of the ways in which it was considered to respond to those articulated 'needs'). It further examines the extent to which young people felt that there were alternative ways in which those needs might be addressed locally and, whether or not youth work was 'effective' in meeting their expressed 'needs', what they believed to be the 'outcomes' accruing to them from their participation in youth work provision.

The needs of young people

Given the very open-ended approach to asking questions of young people about their 'needs' and the general needs of young people in their area, it was hardly surprising that they produced a vast array of responses, from those that are perhaps symptomatic of the prevailing consumer culture ("a shopping mall like the one in Liverpool"; "a decent cinema with up-to-date films") to the kind of 'safe haven' to which teenagers have always aspired, out of earshot and view of the adult world. Inevitably, many of the needs expressed were inter-twined: young people themselves frequently pointed to the relationships between them. The prevailing themes of need will be considered at the end of this section, but here the broad thrust will focus on those areas of 'need' identified by young people themselves. The headings may not be technically correct (for example, below, the need is the alleviation of boredom, not boredom per se), but they are the way in which young people responded to the general opening questions concerning what were the main needs facing young people in their locality. Furthermore, technical distinctions between, for example, legal and illegal drugs did not intrude on discussions with young people - they slid smoothly, and constantly, between issues such as drinking and dope-smoking. It is important to retain a real sense of the ways in which young people themselves talked about their needs, untrammelled at this stage by revision, correction, explanation or interpretation.

Boredom

It was noted recurrently that, for young people in this age group, there was absolutely nothing to do, "except the pubs". While younger children were often involved in local activities and clubs, and supported in participating in them by their parents, by the age of 14 or so "you want more independence, or your parents force it on you".

For many of the young people interviewed, living as they did in relatively small communities, "it's the youth club or the pub". Their biggest need, they maintained, was "somewhere to go - somewhere where we can just mellow out". They wanted "a place to come and talk with your mates and listen to music". When the club or project wasn't open, they would endeavour to satisfy this need by sitting around the bus stop all night (and all day on the weekends and sometimes during the week), or hang around the streets, often drinking alcohol (see below) and experiencing pressure and harassment from local residents and sometimes the police.

Young people in a number of settings described their lives as "boring, sheltered and depressing"; in rural areas, they felt that,

> "everything is oppressive, everything is illegal... you're not allowed to hang around, you're not allowed to drink, you're not supposed to go in the pubs.. where else can you go?" (young man 16).

Some young people identified very specific provision which would meet this essentially leisure-time need: a cinema, an ice-rink, regular discos, a ten-pin bowling alley, excursions to nearby towns or cities, and nightclubs for young people. Clearly, youth work could play some part in fulfilling such needs, if only in a partial sense, particularly in assisting with transport, an issue identified by young people in more isolated rural areas as a significant need. Furthermore, some young people noted that the cost of that kind of provision would almost certainly preclude them from being able to use it on a regular basis.

In essence, young people were stating that a central need for themselves was to have a place in which they could congregate in each others' company, a point which was firmly corroborated in the responses to the questionnaire: "somewhere to go and relax", "somewhere to go to socialise, a break, no hassles...", "somewhere to go - to get away from schoolwork and parents".

Drink and drugs (and smoking)

In every setting, young people drew attention to the fact that there was "a lot of drugs and alcohol going round", although this was not unanimously considered to be problematic. It was, however, typically viewed as a consequence of having nothing else or nothing better to do. Drugs in particular were so accessible ("at some discos, there are more dealers than dancers") that it was almost inevitable that young people of their age would try them sooner or later. Boredom, they alleged, was the cause of a great deal of drinking and drug-taking by teenagers: "it's escape most of the time, because there's nothing else to do. After all, it is something to do".

Young people were extremely matter-of-fact about the prevalence of drug and alcohol use. Many commented that drinking was, if not encouraged, tolerated in their communities. There were always certain pubs which 'accommodated' the under-age drinkers and anyway "the supermarket will sell it to anybody". Drinking, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights, was an integral part of many local cultures and was widely accepted, even if it was being done by young people hanging around in the street. Parents, young people claimed, didn't mind. Sometimes they got drunk at home before going out on the weekend.

For many young people, drugs (primarily cannabis, amphetamines and ecstasy) have anyway taken over from alcohol:

> "Drugs are just everywhere... it's so widespread you can get them anywhere. There's kids hanging around everywhere spliffing up. It's cheaper than drinking alcohol" (young woman 16)

> "Yeah, drugs are the thing, but it's no big deal... Anyway, if they tell you not to do it, you're gonna try, ain't you. I mean, Night Nurse and Hactos are good, because they've got morphine in them, haven't they? Yeah, we've done a lot at school on safe use of different sorts of drugs, but there's not really any safe way of doing it... And there's lots of magic mushrooms round here, they're good in tea..." (young man, 16)

Very rarely did young people consider drug-taking, drinking or smoking to be a health issue. Indeed, they usually claimed to be fully aware of the health dimensions to these behaviours (largely from lessons at school in personal, social and health education) but were often dismissive of the naivety on the part of those who had 'educated' them. Their street knowledge, they asserted, was of far greater importance:

> "You can get anything you like round here: speed, X, hash, mushrooms, even heroin, crack and cocaine if you know where to look. We're mainly into dope and speed, 'cos it goes with the hard core music. But sometimes you just take what you can get hold of. I don't think any of us needs to learn any more about them. We all know the issues. All this crap about the pressure to take drugs. It's overstated. We do it because we want to. It's fun. It's a way of letting loose at the end of the week. People do their own thing. There's no pressure. Although I suppose none of us want to be left out. But it's just part of the way we live right now..." (young man, 17)

If smoking, drinking and drug-taking were issues for young people, it was because they were related to boredom, incurred costs that they could ill afford, or had social consequences which might cause regret. One group of young people deplored
the fact that their mates got 'pissed' simply because they had nothing else to do, whereas they got pissed as a way of "loosening up" for the weekend after working hard on their studies during the week:

> "After you're about 13, there's nothing to do, especially for girls. The boys at least still have their football teams. So younger girls, around 13/14, have to do older things, like getting pissed. It's not a big issue round here - anyone can get served. Getting pissed isn't the problem. Like we're aware of drink issues and we always go out and get pissed on the weekends. But kids of 13/14 shouldn't be getting pissed just because they're bored" (young woman, 17)

Other young people were concerned that the general preoccupation with drinking and drug-taking (whatever the underlying reasons) had led to more crime and 'thieving' by young people. They were convinced that the two were closely related. It was others (always others!), they argued, who resorted to thieving to support frequent alcohol and drug use. For themselves, their concern was that such (mis)use might get them into trouble, through being abusive or aggressive on the street. A few expressed concern that legal apprehension for what they considered to be 'harmless' (and certainly victimless) drug use might put their future (and already uncertain) employment prospects to which they aspired in jeopardy, but such anxieties were not so deep-seated as to deter them from engaging in regular recreational drug use which - like the young man from setting 8 quoted above - was considered to be a perfectly acceptable way of unwinding at the end of a hard week. At least while there was an absence of any equally attractive 'activity', it would continue.

Personal relationships

Although it was less commonplace, the need to discuss personal relationships arose in most of the focus groups. Young people emphasised that this was not to do with any kind of pathological problem, but was a routine dimension of adolescence:

> "most young people round here are pretty well adjusted, but everyone's got some problem sometime... and you need the opportunity to talk it through with someone... (young woman, 17)

> "We get a lot of pressure from our parents to do well in education... They bribe us,
> blackmail us, pressure us in a load of ways. It's not that we don't want to do well, but we
> want to get there in our own way, and we want to have fun as well..." (young man, 15)

Young people wanted to be able to talk through these issues with adults in whom they had confidence
and whom they trusted: youth workers potentially fitted this bill but, depending on the specific issue, so
did teachers, neighbours and relatives.
Where no such 'trustworthy' adults were apparently available, young people felt that problems got worse
and became increasingly difficult to resolve:

> "As long as I've got someone to talk to, I'm OK. I need to talk things through with
> someone, if only to get it off my chest. If I don't I sit in the corner and bottle things up,
> and then I get mad with myself or take it out on other people" (young man, 16)

The main 'personal relationship' needs identified by young people fell into three broad categories: one-
to-one close relationships, usually concerning 'best friends' or boy/girl friends; peer group relationships,
including bullying and acceptance or rejection by the 'crowd'; and relationships with parents and within
families, especially as older teenagers staked them claim for autonomy and independence.
Understanding the reasons for tension and conflict and having the opportunity - on neutral ground with a
sympathetic ear - was considered to be an important need by many of the young people interviewed.

Personal advice

In a similar vein, young people presented a catalogue of 'problems' which they typically faced and about
which they sought independent advice: "someone you trust to talk to about these things". Beyond
troubling personal relationships, young people experienced "police harassment on the street", "pressures
at school around exams", "trouble with the law", "worries about contraception and getting pregnant"
(particularly having sex when you're drunk), "problems about getting benefit", and "getting the right
kind of advice about careers and jobs for the future" (see below).

"Somebody to listen to you", in a confidential and non-judgmental way, was therefore viewed as a
central need, particularly in those local contexts where specialist professionals were perceived with
some modicum of cynicism (in that their agendas had little to do with the actual concerns of young
people) or were considered to be too bound up in local networks to be trusted with confidential
information.

Social acceptance

Young people constantly alluded both directly and indirectly to ways in which they were "stereotyped",
picked on and "all tarred with the same brush". This was deeply resented, although even those who
proclaimed to be largely conformist and law-abiding conceded that there were times when they revelled
in "winding adults up". Public visibility did not, however, automatically mean that they were engaging
in deeply anti-social activity - an assumption so often leapt to by passing adults, particularly
representatives of officialdom:

> "Kids of our age can't win. There's no-where for us to go, so we hang about by the Spar,
> 'cos there's a bit of light and you can get something to eat and drink when you need it.

Then people moan at you cos you're in the way of them doing the shopping. Or Plod comes along and tells you to move on - where are we meant to go? If we sneak in the pub, sooner or later, you get thrown out for under-age drinking. You just get non-stop hassle...." (young man, 16)

Spar could be substituted by 'chip shop', bus shelter, off licence, or any number of other focal points in the centre of towns or villages where young people in their mid-teens tend to congregate (usually either through boredom or as a more active celebration and defence of some collective space of their own). But the experience reported was very much the same.

As a result, young people expressed a need for "a place where you're still given a chance":

"What we need most is some space where you're not immediately labelled as a trouble-maker. People who are willing to give you a chance. I'll be straight with you. I've got a bad reputation - partly because I don't put up with any shit. I'll fight back. I can give as good as I get. But even I'm not causing trouble all the time. I want to be able to go somewhere where there's people who are willing to see all sides of me, people willing to listen, not just write you off straight away - again!" (young man, 18)

For older young people who had moved away from home and were living independently, a sense of isolation and lack of positive support was particularly acute. They saw a central need for 'companionship' and 'company' - somewhere where they could meet up with friends where they were not vulnerable or likely to be victimised and somewhere which was cheap. Although the pub was technically one such venue, it incurred costs they could ill-afford. Moreover, they often attracted negative (and hostile) attention from regulars who seemed to take pleasure from baiting unemployed young people. These views were expressed consistently by young people attending three of the youth projects and highlight the general call by young people for a 'safe haven' in which they were accepted for themselves.

Personal futures and structural needs

Although a significant minority of young people interviewed clearly had a clustering of contemporary pressing needs, many other young people pitched their presentation of 'needs' at a level of relative generality, arguing from a position that, by and large, their current lifestyles and circumstances were not particularly problematic and were reasonably 'sorted'. No young people interviewed, however, were immune from deep anxieties about what the future held in store for them - there was a constant preoccupation with the need to make the right careers choices, to maximise their access to current (often very limited) benefit entitlements, and to rectify 'errors' made earlier in their lives.

These issues may be conceived of in terms of the structural needs of young people actually or soon to be making their way in the world independently. The main concern was getting a decent job, but many stepping stones to this end were acknowledged - stepping stones which might turn out to be major obstacles standing in the way of their aspirations.

While in some focus groups, the question of the dearth of decent jobs locally arose spontaneously, in others it required a trigger:

Interviewer: "None of you have said anything about jobs?"

[Lots of laughs] "Because there aren't any. That's why we're all at college, or will go to college when we leave school. Of course, there are jobs - basic jobs, with low wages. Steve here was stacking bread for £1.50 an hour; he's got three 'A' levels. At Safeway, they had 3,000 applications for 500 jobs, most of them part-time. That's why you stay on in FE. If you haven't got any qualifications, you've got no chance. You've got no chance anyway, really. But you've got to better yourself. At the end of the day, we'll have to move away, if we want to get jobs that fit our qualifications" (young woman, 17)

In a number of contexts, the proliferation of part-time and Saturday jobs was an interim bonus for young people still at school - they did provide new opportunities for earning money. But most respondents were aware that their futures in the locality held a strong probability of extended periods of unemployment, especially for young men: "there's no work really for the boys; girls can usually find something in a factory or a supermarket, if that's what they want".

Work was available, it was acknowledged, but it was invariably poorly-paid, often seasonal, short-term and, increasingly, part-time. The benefits system was equally 'unjust' to young people, with no eligibility for income support for 16/17 year olds ("so we get forced on to crap schemes that lead no-where") and reduced rates of income support and housing benefit for 18-25s. For those young people already living independently, major needs revolved around basic living items such as getting a bed (rather than just a mattress on the floor) and trying to keep warm in the cold and damp bedsits or flats in which they lived: "a dog shouldn't be allowed to live in some of them".

Young people still continuing their education and still (usually) living in the parental home were acutely aware that soon they would have to face a choice of (probably) either living on the dole or moving away in order to seek work. On either front, the prospect to them looked bleak. Many simply did not have the personal or family resource base to consider either option with any confidence. As a result, some elected - Ostrich-like - to "live for today, that's what you've got to do if you want to stay sane", while others constantly explored and endeavoured to evaluate the ever-expanding maze of educational, vocational and training routes. Their problem, they argued, was finding some kind of 'neutral ground' upon which to consider such supposed options: they were not oblivious to the increasingly high-pressure marketing of different options:

"you go to the careers and they try and force you on YT; all colleges want to tell you is how wonderful all their courses are; and schools encourage you to stay on there. And then your mates who've been through it say it's all a waste of time. It just does your head in - who are you supposed to believe?" (young man, 16)

So, although in some respects, these young people felt they were broadly 'tuned in' to the realities around the transition to adulthood in the mid-1990s, in other respects they felt they needed detailed, but dispassionate, guidance to avoid the many pitfalls they anticipated lay in their path. They often viewed with caution those who appeared to be most willing to dispense it.

To summarise, then, young people were expressing four distinct, but closely related 'needs':

* the need for association - "somewhere to go"
* the need for activities - "something to do"
* the need for autonomy - "some space of our own"
* the need for advice - "someone to talk to"

The next section considers young people's perceptions of the role and place of youth work in their lives and the extent to which it can (and does) respond to these expressed needs.

The role of youth work

If we accept the classification of needs proposed above, then there appears to be considerable evidence that youth work provision, at least as it has been theoretically formulated, has real potential in meeting those particular needs. Young people were asked why they attended the youth work setting. Their answers ranged from the rather bland and predictable ('nothing else to do') to some quite sophisticated expositions of the reasons for involvement. Youth work had quite clear limitations - it could not, for example, directly provide housing or jobs - and it was often only provided on a couple of evenings a week. Within these 'vertical' and 'horizontal' parameters, however, much of the youth work practice experienced by the young people interviewed was highly valued. It was valued, though not always unconditionally, for three specific reasons.

The social meeting place

> "It gets us out the house, but keeps us off the streets - it's the best place to meet our
> friends. When it's not open, we just hang about outside" (young man, 16)

Pitched both negatively and positively, virtually all young people testified to the importance of the youth work setting as a social meeting place. While some respondents talked of the youth club's role in 'filling time', others said that it was "a big social thing, where you meet up with your friends, and it's a place you can be yourself". The idea of youth work settings offering an escape from wider pressures is not always one which finds favour, but it is consistent with responding to the expressed need for some autonomy (which may, in itself, be a building block for developing effective participative practice):

> "This place is for getting away from school, and from home, to unwind - for relaxation,
> to doss around with your mates, to get away from it all" (young woman, 15)

The phrases most often repeated by young people were 'get away from home', 'keeps us off the street', 'be with friends', a 'safe space', a 'warm place' and, less frequently, 'home from home'. The latter observation is, however, very important in relation to those youth projects which targeted older, more disadvantaged young people, since their very purpose is to provide the infrastructure of a surrogate home. And this is very much how such projects were perceived:

> "There's always somebody to talk to here, it's the place we come to meet our friends and
> that. A lot of us live in grotty bedsits, which are cold and there's no-one to talk to. Here
> it's warm and friendly" (young woman, 20)

What is important in these observations is the fact that it is the space to socialise in a free and unpressured atmosphere which is first and foremost in the minds of young people in this age group when they are debating the merits and attractions of youth work. This is not to say that they do not want to do activities or engage in more formal programmes (see below), but this is not what springs to their minds

in the first instance. Nonetheless, the second key dimension of attractive youth work was the provision of things to do.

Things to do

There was differential value placed upon the activities and events available to young people in different settings. Not only were distinctions made between what might be called traditional 'activity-based' provision and more contemporary 'issue-based' provision, but young people were also discerning between how things were made available and what was actually available - a critical distinction reflecting levels of quality of youth work practice. These points will be addressed in turn.

(i) activities, trips and 'special projects'

Young people embraced many of the activity-based aspects of youth work provision with a great deal of enthusiasm, although some emphasised that "that's not the main reason" for taking part. Nevertheless, the internal provision of routine youth club activities (such as pool, table tennis, darts, arts and crafts, dance, indoor games, etc.) as well as 'extra-mural' experiences such as mountain-biking, outdoor pursuits, ten-pin bowling, and inter-club competitions were applauded by most young people, the sole criticism levelled usually emanating from young women who alleged that too often "too much is dominated by the boys". Special projects and events - such as photography or discos - were equally welcome.

(ii) issue-based interventions and discussion

Young people were less enamoured with the provision of structured sessions on 'issues' which purportedly were relevant to their lives, such as drugs, HIV/AIDS or diet. Not that they were considered unimportant or irrelevant, but young people were either not attracted to the relatively formal approach or felt that they knew enough already:

> "Yeah, we've had a few structured sessions like that, but sometimes you're just going through the motions - we know more than they do half the time!" (young woman, 15)

> "They do do stuff like videos, safe sex, first aid, drugs, smoking - but it's mainly common sense. Just tells you what happens, the risks and the effects. If they do too many lectures, it gets too boring and people won't turn up" (young man, 15)

Although they acknowledged that generally their views were respected and that they were treated 'maturely', there was a strong ambivalence about the structured interventions to which they were exposed. On the one hand, they were easily dismissed as being "too much like school" but, on the other, it was recognised that they might enshrine issues and information of value to them - and they would not know unless they "gave them a try". This is, of course, the mirror-image of the dilemma which constantly faces the conscientious youth worker, who is forever attempting to apply a raft of interventions, knowing full well that some will be resisted however 'valuable' they are meant to be:

> "The workers sometimes try things we don't want and it's only fair to tell you that sometimes we just tell them to fuck off, we're not interested, but then again sometimes we've done things they've wanted us to do just for the hell of it and they've turned out to

be interesting. Yeah, some of the courses and workshops have been useful and interesting...." (young woman, 18)

(iii) participation

The key issue for these young people lay in the extent to which the activity and discussion base of youth work provision was contingent upon their having a say in what was provided. However, 'having a say' conceals a multitude of sins, from some kind of one-off brainstorming and no more, to a very active engagement from original conception to execution. Contrast the following observations:

"Basically they organise things for us. We give them ideas and they try and arrange it... yeah, they do it all for us, all we do is put ideas towards them and then turn up and pay our money" (young man, 16)

"It's all based on consultation and participation here. We do have quite a lot of power. A lot of the developments and ideas have come from us. There's nothing we can't do here - if we really want to do it. But it's down to us. If we're not really that interested, then it won't happen. The staff give us time and encouragement, but if we want to make things happen, then we've got to put the effort in. We've done the fund-raising; it's our money - we decide what we want to do with it" (young woman, 18)

"We suggest issues and things to do. We take responsibility. We're always consulted. They encourage active participation. That helps us in wider parts of our life. Everything we do here comes from our ideas. If we organise a trip, then we get a certificate for it, showing what we've done. It gives us a sense of achievement" (young woman, 16)

"Although the club is only open one night a week, we do an awful lot of things: sports, quizzes, dance, discussion. The inter-county events. There's something for everyone. It's very popular. We have a lot of responsibility and help with the decision-making. Everyone gets involved, chips in with ideas. They would do things if no-one was that bothered. The workers come up with suggestions, but we're the ones who decide if we want to go down that road or not" (young man, 18)

The first quotation came from a setting which attracted very few young people over the age of 15. The other three came from settings which either explicitly targeted older young people or continued to attract them. The nurturing of such 'cultures of participation' is directly related to meeting the need for a sense of autonomy and space. It is closely related to what Bernard Davies has described as the winning of consent (rather than the coercing of compliance) (Davies 1986). It is also closely related to the third reason given by young people for their continuing involvement in youth work settings: the availability of 'someone to talk to'.

People to talk to

"Nobody can sort you out except yourself. But one day you wake up in the morning and think your life's a mess. You look in the mirror and think you've got to get your personal act together if anyone's ever going to give you a job. That's when a project like this really means something. They can give you the encouragement and support you need to start living your life differently" (young woman, 20)

"They're just there - not for any specific reason, but in case we need them" (young man, 16)

Unlike younger participants in youth work, who tend to highlight the tangible provision it makes as the central reason for participation, older young people lean heavily on the more intangible dimensions of provision, notably the accessibility of advice, support and guidance on an informal, non-judgmental and confidential basis. The research generated a vast catalogue of positive comments on this front (although it may be useful to note that they came largely from 16 and 17 year olds; whether such perspectives are shared broadly with, say, 15 or 19 year olds is a matter which remains unresolved):

"It's a place to talk. The last thing we want is to be preached at. But we've got a lot of confidence in the youth worker. We trust her. We know things won't go any further, not without our agreement. Everything's confidential. She asks what we want her to do - if anything - about things we tell her. She never takes control. She's non-judgmental" (young woman, 17)

"There's always someone to talk to - you can have formal, private counselling, a private talk, or just a chat. It depends what you're looking for - if you want listening, or something more, like actual advice" (young woman, 17)

"You can always talk to the youth leaders here, about anything you want, like the police, school or private relationships. They're there for us, no matter what. The youth worker is always understanding. If you're down, he tries to cheer you up, give you some support. There's no embarrassment. It's easier to talk to him than to my parents. I trust his advice more than anyone else's. He wouldn't tell anyone" (young man, 17)

"...if I had a problem I could go to the workers and I could trust them to keep what I say confidential and I could trust them to help... I suppose I could go to professional councellers [sic] but I find it better to talk to someone I know quite well than I could with a stranger" (questionnaire response, young woman, 16)

Such apparently unequivocal testimonials to the value of youth work in responding to their need for advice in fact conceals a more discriminating analysis which distinguishes both between individual youth workers and the quality of advice on offer.

For young people, it was critical that they perceived youth workers to be unconditionally concerned with their interests and concerns and that they had absolute trust and confidence in a worker. Some workers did not fit this bill. Some were viewed with suspicion, with young people expressing doubts about whether they could confide in them, largely because they felt the workers were not really interested in them:

"Some people come to work here just for their CV. I ignore them, they're only in it for themselves. They're here to help themselves more than to help us. But most of them are OK" (young woman, 18)

"Some are here for us, others have come and gone; it's easier to talk to some than others" (young man, 17)

Where such perceptions of workers held sway, it was tantamount to a breach of trust - and trust was the essential ingredient in effective relationships between young people and youth work staff. Trust was, indeed, far more important than the capacity of any individual to dispense accurate or competent advice:

> "Some of the staff can be a pain, but basically you relate to the people you get on best with. They might not know everything you want to know about, but trusting them is much more important. If you don't trust them, you won't tell them things. People you trust can always check things out for you" (young woman, 18)

> "Trust is the most important thing. A worker can find things out if they don't know. But if you don't trust them, you won't even talk to them or even ask" (young man, 16)

> "Trust is always more important than their experience or training or what they know. No matter how much they know, if they're unapproachable you won't talk to them" (young woman, 16)

Young people recognised that youth workers did not have all the answers. Indeed, young people often did not even want answers; they wanted support, reassurance and encouragement, and unloading their concerns on a trustworthy adult and eliciting such responses was all they sought. On those occasions when they did require advice, however, they were satisfied with workers whom they were persuaded were willing to 'do their best for you'. The depth or accuracy of information dispensed was a secondary consideration:

> "There are no specialist counsellors here. But it's like a stepping stone - if you want to get somewhere or sort something out, you can sort things out here first and then go on to a specialist place. And if you're nervous about that, the people here will help you" (young woman, 18)

> "I don't know how accurate their advice is. I don't really care. What they do is give you the best of their knowledge or whatever they can find out. They do it in their own way. But they do their best. They're just friendly people trying to help as best they can" (young man, 17)

> "Whatever you ask for, they'll try to give you. Sometimes you want information, sometimes you want guidance. I respect whatever they tell me" (young man, 17)

> "The workers always do their best for you; if they don't know, they'd do their best to find out. They give you time when you need it" (young woman, 17)

The credibility of any advice and information made available was wholly contingent on the credibility and trustworthiness of particular workers. Young people constantly differentiated between workers in whom they were willing to confide their very private feelings and concerns, those few whom they steered clear of, and those with whom they made small talk but were reluctant to broach deeper issues. In one setting particularly, the full-time worker was accorded such deep-rooted respect by young people that it threw the limitations of others workers into relief:

> "Youth work is about helping young people. If they're not prepared to help young people, they shouldn't be doing it. Some are alright for activities and trips, but you can't really communicate with some. Others are more for a chat. But basically if you've got something serious to talk about, you go to x. We trust his advice more than anyone

else's. He wouldn't tell anyone. Trust is the most important thing... you've got to know
they won't tell anyone else. If I didn't trust someone, I wouldn't tell them anything. I
trust him enough to tell him anything. We'd recommend him to our friends!" (young
woman, 16)

All this is highly consistent with Eggleston's finding that what young people most wanted was a
'counsellor' - a helpful adult in whom they could confide and against whom they could bounce ideas
(Eggleston 1976). It does not mean, however, that all young people want is "someone who'll listen to
you without judging you". Indeed, it was the capacity of youth work settings to develop ideas and
initiatives based upon a general understanding and interpretation of the needs and concerns of the
specific young people who attended. Girls' or young women's groups, unemployment projects,
photography, creche facilities, youth exchanges, confidential health clinics, were all examples of
tangible manifestations of the fact that workers had listened carefully and closely to young people's
expressions of need - and had 'done their best' to act upon them and involve young people in the process
of their development.

There were, conversely, illustrations of developments within the youth work arena which seemed to
derive more from the interests and preferences of the worker(s) than from the needs or demands of
young people. There is clearly a place for some such 'unilateral' interventions (as we shall argue below),
but what was important was that youth workers understood the strengths and weaknesses of alternative
local provision and attempted to complement rather than replicate it. Few youth work settings can, in
any event, compete with sports centre facilities or the expert medical advice available from a GP, but
they can - probably far more than many currently do - deliver brokerage or bridge-building interventions
where alternatives have discernible weaknesses in the eyes of young people; and they may, in some
contexts, in fact be the only alternative available.

Alternatives locally?

The immediate retort of young people, when asked what alternatives exist for them locally, is frequently
that there is nothing. That may be a quite legitimate perception, but it is rarely true. In terms of leisure
provision and advisory networks, there is usually a range of options and possibilities, even in relatively
small communities. However, young people may not make much use of them, for a number of different
reasons. It seemed important, therefore, to ask young people about both the availability of local
alternatives to meeting the needs they had outlined and their perceptions of those services and sources of
support.

Leisure and social alternatives

Many young people reiterated that the only leisure alternative available to them was the pub. In some
localities, or within a manageable travelling distance, this was supplemented by a sports or leisure
centre. Young people claimed that they made limited use of such facilities for two reasons. Firstly, they
complained about the cost, particularly if there were travel costs on top of entrance charges. Secondly,
and more importantly, they argued that they were not welcome. If they wanted to sit around in the
canteen, for example, they were often asked to leave as soon as they had finished their cup of tea. They
were made to feel as if they were invading somebody else's space. Such feelings applied equally to
pubs, discos, the rugby club and nightclubs:

"The pubs and clubs are full of older people. Everybody sits in the same seats - 'you're sitting in my seat'. You get the feeling they don't want you there" (young man, 15)

Of course, many such alternative venues are technically out of bounds to young people within the age group under consideration. But, as we have suggested, pubs in particular (or at least some pubs) made space for them. Likewise, for young women in particular, nightclubs were accessible: one 15-year old young woman noted that "as long as you wear a short skirt, there's no problem getting in".

Some localities had a cinema and others had alternative youth clubs but, by and large, young people had few other options. For most, it was a case of making the most of the youth work provision available, staying in or hanging around on the streets.

Advisory and information alternatives

Young people pointed to a web of potential alternative sources of advice and information: friends, family, social workers, school, Childline, libraries, the Careers Service, Citizen Advice Bureaux, Health Centres, GPs, and specialist drugs services. Some felt that these sources were equal to, or better than, the support available from the youth work setting, either because of a deeper level of trust or because of a long-standing relationship (the two are, of course, often closely related). One young man said he would call on his social worker for support:

"I'd talk to my social worker. He can work things out and sort things out for me" (young man, 15)

Some young people expressed most confidence in particular teachers as the best source of advice:

"We'd probably talk to one of our teachers. Everyone's confident in her. She's been around for six years and everyone trusts her" (young woman, 17)

"I'd talk to the headmaster. I don't really know why. But I trust him; he seems to have the answers on the spot" (young woman, 16)

In one setting, young women reported that they often made use of the 'open door' philosophy which had been developed by the local surgery, where they could go and consult with the practice nurses at any time:

"We can go down the health centre and see x [practice nurse] at any time - you don't have to have an appointment. A lot of us use it for contraception and if we're worried we might be pregnant" (young woman, 16)

And while young people frequently talked to their friends "to get things out of my system", many did not feel that friends could come up with constructive ideas or solutions: "but you can't always trust your friends to know the right things".

Most young people, however, expressed reticence about making direct approaches to either individual professionals or agencies. If they did not make use of the youth work setting as an exclusive source of advice and support, then they used it as a channel for accessing more specialist advice:

> "There are places that know better than here, like the CAB, but I'd always ask here first, because we know them better here: it's always better to start with people you know" (young man, 16)

> "There a drugs agency that's good for specialist advice, but I'd come here first and phone them from here. The workers here would be around to help if I got stuck" (young man, 16)

> "I wouldn't use any of them directly. I'd go through the staff here" (young woman, 17)

Despite such views, the most prevalent perspective was that, even where alternatives existed, young people were reluctant to make use of them. There was a deep mistrust in the quality of advice available, in commitment to confidentiality, in a genuine willingness to listen and in other people's understanding of the contemporary situation and dilemmas of young people. Schools, for example, often used the police and drugs agencies to provide information on drugs, but,

> "it's always how bad they are for you, all about abstinence. There's nothing about the 'safe' use of drugs, because they aren't willing to accept that a lot of us decide to do drugs in order to have a good time. There's a lot of good things about taking drugs, but you'd never know it from what you get in school" (young man, 16)

Similar critical and jaded views were expressed about visits to the GP:

> "if you're depressed, he'll just give you some Temazepam and tell you to go away. He won't bother listening to what you've really got to say" (young woman, 17)

But the overriding concern amongst young people about making use of other advice agencies, especially those concerned with health, was to do with being seen - with the word getting out that you had been there and people speculating why. A recurrent observation was that confidentiality would not be respected, either deliberately or unintentionally (as above, it should be noted that such perspectives were held predominantly by 15-17 year olds and they may not be so prevalent with the younger or older age range):

> "The FPA have a session at the clinic once a month - some of us go, but a lot of us don't. The GP knows everyone and you never know who they're going to talk to" (young woman, 17)

> "There's the Health Centre, but I don't really trust them. It's such a small community, everybody talks to each other about everything" (young woman, 17)

> "You could go to the clinic, but news travels fast: if one person knows it the whole town know it, it gets around, so watch what you say and what you do" (young man, 16)

> "And there's the clinic, but people might see you coming out, and then everybody knows" (young woman, 15)

We return therefore to the question of trust and the development in youth work settings of trusting relationships within a framework of confidentiality, which is the essential pre-requisite for meeting any further needs of young people. Young people were adamant that it was this ingredient which made

youth work special and it was the perceived absence of this ingredient which, in contrast, made them wary of other sources of apparently similar support, even those explicitly targeted at young people:

> "There isn't really anywhere else, 'cos you don't know the sort of people there. You have to get to know people before you feel OK talking to them" (young man, 16)

> "I'd never go to one of those official agencies. No way could I talk to a complete stranger. It'd be difficult to express your feelings" (young woman, 17)

Sometimes, therefore, even when real, apparently relevant alternatives exist to meet the expressed needs of young people, youth work remains the only arena which young people
feel is genuinely operating on their behalf and responding accurately to those needs. Of more importance, perhaps, given that youth work cannot (and should not) offer direct service delivery across such a broad spectrum of needs, the youth work setting is often viewed as the first port of call and the stepping stone to accessing more specialist support. At an individual level, it performs this role effectively when it is called upon to do so, but perhaps youth work initiatives should pay greater attention to ensuring, at a collective level, that both leisure provision and advisory services recognise the concerns of young people and that mechanisms are improved so that young people are better motivated to make use of them. In one or two localities, there were hints that innovative youth work practice (particularly in relation to health, employment and training) had had a significant effect in achieving such objectives. Far from serving as some kind of 'Trojan Horse', operating on behalf of the agendas of other agencies (even if that might be part of the explanation), it had responded creatively to concerns identified by young people. The provision of health care and advice at the site of youth work practice is a case in point.

Perceived Outcomes from Youth Work
(and their relationship to expressed 'needs')

Young people were asked what they considered to be the outcomes that had accrued to them from their participation in youth work provision, particularly in relation to the needs that they had identified.

Their responses were pitched at a level of generality, which makes it difficult to link young people's observations to their expressed needs. Nevertheless, it was still possible to relate, in general terms, the range of responses to the four broad areas of need suggested above.

In relation to the need for association

Young people suggested that their youth work experience had contributed significantly to their social skills and personal relationships (see De Wachter et al. 1995). Although they had become involved primarily to be with their friends, they claimed to have developed a heightened sense of responsibility and "greater self-understanding". This, in turn, had improved their capacity to work (and play) together with other young people, to be part of a team and to develop their organisational skills. It had also made some more tolerant of other young people:

> "I think I've become more aware of other people, like their needs and respecting their space. I've learned that there are alternative ways of dealing with things - instead of blowing a fuse, which was the only way I knew before" (young man, 17)

Others, however, saw the outcome of their participation as little more than "just keeps us off the street" and "it stops the boredom and gets you out of the house".

In relation to the need for activity

Predictably, many young people highlighted specific activities and experiences as the tangible outcomes of their involvement with youth work. However, the undercurrent within many such observations was an emphasis that the opportunity to participate in constructive activity diverted or deflected them from more negative pursuits:

> "It's changed my drinking habits! Now I've got things to do, I don't think about getting pissed. I used to drink all the time because I had nothing else to do" (young woman, 17)

> "The main benefit is having things to do, not just being on the streets, being tempted by drugs, alcohol, and crime. It keeps the local 'pigs' off our backs. It is enjoyable and good fun at the Centre" (questionnaire response, young man, 17)

A second undercurrent related to the fact that, in most (though not all) settings, young people felt that they had a stake in the development of activities. It was the opportunity to contribute to decision-making and organisation, and a sense of involvement, which made the activities in which they were involved more meaningful and delivered a greater sense of achievement. This point - a central philosophical thread in the raison d'etre of youth work - also has a strong bearing on young people's need for autonomy.

In relation to the need for autonomy

Being encouraged to present their own ideas and preferences and to elect whether or not to take part was an important strand in conveying and re-affirming young people's autonomy in the youth work setting. Such processes were put into effect in different ways, with workers taking ideas forward at different stages. So some young people 'simply' made suggestions, while others were encouraged, even expected, to engage fully in the task at hand if they wished to see it come to fruition. Clearly, some young people embraced such expectations more enthusiastically than others, but there seemed to be a prevailing view that the classic saying that 'the more you put in, the more you get out of it' applied. More committed young people only occasionally took issue with the fact that others just 'came along for the ride'; they conceded that workers had cajoled, encouraged and sometimes pressured them, but recognised that they had benefited in a variety of ways from seeing things through. Examples included a club newspaper, an information flier for parents about teenagers and alcohol, a carnival float, and a car push as well as more routine activities and events. Other ideas and aspirations bit the dust long before they were anywhere near completion; sometimes they never really got off the ground.

The important point, however, is that young people felt in control and that their perspectives and demands carried at least equal weight to those of others. Young people were not dismissive of the contribution that others might make, but they revelled in the feeling that it was their club, their project, in which their ideas had pole position. Indeed, resentment surfaced quickly when young people

commented on workers (and, more often, management committees) who had apparently instituted practices or rejected ideas without even listening to the views of participants. Or at least that was what young people assumed. Not that they expected that their position would automatically be adopted, but they expected it would be given due consideration in the light of the prevailing rhetoric which was applied in all the youth work settings studied (and should apply in all youth work settings): that the work was about educating and empowering young people through encouraging their participation and expression. When this patently did not happen, the adults responsible were considered to be a bunch of hypocrites, as bad as the many other adults in their lives who exercised authority over them in (what they perceived to be) arbitrary, often illogical and contradictory ways, solely on the grounds that they were adults who 'knew better'.

In stark contrast, settings which consistently consulted with young people, developed practice from their ideas and involved young people centrally in that development instilled and fomented confidence and self-worth in young people. Indeed, confidence was the most often-cited outcome by young people: a confidence in themselves that their ideas held value and that their views could be respected:

> "When everybody else has written you off, you come here and they listen to you as an individual who's got something worthwhile to say. You're not treated as a nobody. It's given me a sense of self-worth. It's given me confidence in myself" (young woman, 17)

'Having a say' which counted, and feeling in control ("if we want something to happen, it's up to us") was an essential component in building trust and confidence in adults, a rare commodity in many young people's lives. Workers could open up new directions and opportunities and present them to the membership - but young people wanted to feel that they could accept or reject them. Of course, they could always reject them (if only by walking away), but they wanted to be able to do so within the context of the youth work setting without themselves being rejected. They were particularly averse to feeling compelled to take part in anything; the personal development they believed took place was a product of consensus and a genuine capacity to exercise autonomy. Youth work stands alone in adopting such an approach as a central principle of its practice, but it is the application of this approach which maintains the attractiveness of youth work settings to older young people who are starting to assert and enjoy a quasi-adult independence.

But, despite the internal responsibility engendered by this approach, more sceptical young people noted that it has limited transferability to other aspects of their lives, in which they remained relatively powerless - "it hasn't done that much for me, it can't change the rest of my life".

In relation to the need for advice

The paradox of the lives of older young people is that while they publicly proclaim their growing independence, they often privately continue to seek guidance and advice - albeit on different terms from that which obtained in their childhood. The former often conceals the latter, yet one outcome noted by young people about youth work was the reassurance deriving from "knowing that someone's still bothered". Having access to "support in times of crisis" and "getting support when you need it" were considered to be central benefits arising from participation in youth work:

> "For me, the most important thing is to have access to someone you can talk to, someone you trust..." (young woman, 17)

But advice and information flows both ways and is not just a result of requests from young people. Although young people were somewhat critical of formal interventions (such as workshops on health or sexuality), less formal interventions on a host of issues, springing from spontaneous discussion, can impart knowledge and information which assist young people to bring new perspectives to their lives:

> "Since I've been coming here, I've got a much better understanding of wider issues, like AIDS, and racism and what's going on in Ireland. I wouldn't have learned about things like that anywhere else. It's really broadened my horizons" (young woman, 17)

Young people spoke constantly of the 'casual conversations' which had made them stop and think. In fact, the outcome specifically identified by one young person was,

> "Conversation, discussion, talking and listening" (questionnaire response, young man, 15)

Another questionnaire respondent highlighted the fact that "you can ask any questions....", implying that there were no boundaries on the subject matter which might be broached. In a sense, the identification of youth work settings as "a place where you can communicate and socialise with other people" takes us back full circle to the point that, through providing a social meeting place which fulfils young people's primary need for association, the framework is in place for fulfilling further needs for activity, autonomy and advice - both advice which is proactively sought and 'advice' which is spontaneously and informally delivered.

Perspectives of youth workers

The needs of young people

Youth workers identified a vast range of 'needs' affecting young people, most of which they connected together in one way or another. They are separated below for the purposes of presentation, but the linkages most frequently and firmly put forward are discussed at the end of this section.

The ways in which their perspectives on 'need' had been compiled were immensely diverse. Some drew upon pseudo-objective evidence gleaned from local community profiles and 'needs audits'. Others based their comments on what they suspected young people would say. For most, however, it was a personal synthesis of fact, perception and impression gained, obviously, from experience of close contact with young people in the locality. Few were able to relate their observations to supporting statistics (from, for example, school league tables, unemployment figures, or drugs agency referrals), however flawed the latter might be.

Personal and social needs - supported space of their own

Virtually all youth workers suggested that a priority need of young people was to have somewhere to "socialise, mix and talk" - to have space of their own, "space for their own personal development":

> "For me, the really central thing about youth work and the needs of young people is that young people need a place where they've got their own space. Anything beyond that is a bonus, but I think that we do provide that bonus, we do do quality work. But no-one is forced to take part in anything they don't want to. We couldn't do that even if we wanted to..."

> "Youth work is about defending some space for young people which adults don't dictate and control. Young people relish the freedom they are given through that"

The thread of "somewhere safe and secure" ran through all opening observations about the 'needs of young people', implicitly suggesting a youth work version of Maslow's well-established self-actualisation theory (Maslow 1954). As one worker put it:

> "They need security, safety... Support. Advice. Interest in them. Someone to talk to. That's the first level of need. After that comes the usual things. Unemployment - they all want a job, but how realistic is that? Money - things like benefit entitlements. There's things relating to crime. Personal relationships boyfriends and girlfriends. Homelessness - they've usually got somewhere, but it's often really crap accommodation, so coming here offers them an escape. At least here it's airy and bright..."

Those working with more disadvantaged young people emphasised that isolation and unemployment - and the concomitant boredom - often led young people into 'negative routines' (especially drug misuse and crime - see below); their 'need' was therefore to discover or be provided with new, constructive opportunities to learn, within an environment which provided support, encouragement and reassurance:

"You have to remember that many of the young people we work with often have no structure in their lives. They don't look to the future, not beyond the next Giro. There's nothing for them to get up for. We try to give them a sense of purpose, something to be interested in. So one way of tackling the drug 'problem' with those who are regular users, is to offer them alternatives - to give them ideas about different ways of using their time.... But we don't force anyone to get involved. Young people must want to help themselves"

In harmony with the views of young people, many workers identified boredom ("nothing to do except the pubs") as a key issue affecting young people. Their need, therefore, was for something and somewhere to occupy their time. Such a need was especially acute for those (unemployed) young people who had a disproportionate amount of unoccupied time on their hands.

Health needs

The second area of need routinely identified by youth workers clustered around health issues. Virtually all respondents highlighted drug and alcohol misuse. However, in different settings a different emphasis was placed upon these two issues, both in terms of their relative prevalence and in terms of whether or not such misuse was considered locally to be a problem or simply part of cultural routine.

"The biggest issue round here is drinking. We've had at least half a dozen people hospitalised through drinking too much. It's a far bigger problem than drugs. Often the parents are at fault, but they'll blame the youth centre, and so on. Young people are very clever about it - often they buy small quantities and stock it up for the weekends, for Friday nights. There are loads of issues for us. If they're paralytic, do we let them in, do we take them home? Generally we don't let kids who are drunk in - obviously, because they present a risk and a danger to themselves and others. On the other hand, we do let them in if they're obviously 'at risk'. Then, sometimes, we'll take them home. But we can't stop them drinking, even if we wanted to. Like everything else, we can raise the issues, provide them with information, give them choices, make them aware of the risks and consequences"

Drinking by young people had, in some settings, been the catalyst for renewing and reshaping local youth work provision, either in terms of developing specific projects or in terms of more focused targeting of young people who were hanging around drinking on the streets. Local community concern about under-age drinking (and associated anti-social behaviours such as swearing and vandalism) had suggested that youth work practice might assist in resolving such problems:

"Under age drinking by 13- and 14- year olds in the Town Centre was getting to be a major problem, and so a meeting was called with the police and the Licenced Victuallers' Association and other interested parties. The finger was pointed at Off Licences selling to adults who were buying booze for these kids, and sometimes just serving them directly. The meeting considered how to reduce the problem. One thought was to open the Youth Centre on Saturday nights, with a focus on music skills. They would try it for a year and, if things worked out, extend and develop it. It's also the reason for the development of the non-alcoholic bar...."

The paradox noted by some workers was that alcohol use was so embedded in local culture that it was hardly surprising that young people also wanted to engage in it and themselves considered it to be

unproblematic. For young people, getting drunk on Friday and Saturday nights was a completely normal part of growing up, consistent with typical patterns within the adult community:

> "Everyone goes to the pub or club on the weekends and drinks more than they should. That is the model for young people. And when they're too young to go to the pubs or clubs, they get their booze from the Off Licence and drink it on the street corner. It's just their version of what's going on elsewhere. People talk about drugs, but it's a relatively minor problem round here. Alcohol is a much more major issue"

In some settings, however, the easy access to drugs meant that drug misuse had taken over from alcohol (though never entirely). A number of respondents claimed that their location was viewed as a local 'drugs capital' (of, for example, Mid Glamorgan, west Wales or mid Wales). They conceded that it was hard to put their finger on the scale of the problem, but their impressions were that a significant number of young people in the age group under discussion were regular users of cannabis and often experimented with amphetamines (speed), and sometimes ecstasy and 'poppers':

> "Getting hold of drugs is not a problem for young people. It's often part of their lifestyle, either to escape from the boredom of unemployment or as some kind of hedonistic reward on the weekends if they've been working hard at work or at college all week. It's often cheaper than buying alcohol. And I suppose it's part of their youth culture - a bit of rebellion and the thing to do when you're going to parties or into particular kinds of music"

Beyond drink and drugs, youth workers identified issues around sex and sexuality as being the other key dimension in the health needs of young people, with particular concerns expressed about teenage pregnancy, single parenthood and anorexia. One (male!) youth worker observed,

> "We have our share of teenage pregnancies, and the related problems that go with that. One ex- youth club member came up to me in the street the other day and shouted out 'I'm pregnant' - everybody stared at me! Single motherhood is certainly a big issue and something we should be doing something about, offering advice and support"

The issue of teenage pregnancy was becoming more acute in the face of the dearth of employment opportunities, particularly for those with few educational qualifications:

> "A lot of young women around here don't even think about work when they leave school. They get pregnant, so the reality is that perhaps we need to do something about education for motherhood (around things like the realities of living on the social, desertion by the boyfriend and isolation"

The same observations were made in yet another setting:

> "Pregnancy is a big issue round here for young people. A 21 year old girl having her first baby is old. We want to develop an ante-natal clinic here. The Community Midwives Team, who are fairly young themselves acknowledge that many of their 'customers' are young. They want to use places like here, where young people feel comfortable"

Youth workers also suggested that young people's 'needs' around sex and sexuality encompassed awareness of safe sexual practice, information concerning the transmission of HIV and other STDs, and

support in counteracting the pressures to conform to media stereotypes of 'ideal' sexuality (such as waif-like supermodels) and in developing a tolerance of sexual diversity, especially in combating pervasive homophobia. However, it was conceded, often reluctantly, that these and other health and health-related issues were hardly top of young people's own agendas. Only one worker was completely blunt on this front:

> "We haven't really even talked about health. They're not interested. They don't want someone telling them how they should live their lives. Snippets do come up in casual conversation, more informally, and these are usually dealt with by volunteers"

Transition needs

Within the life course, young people not only make the transition from school to the labour market, but also two parallel transitions: from family of origin to family of destination, and from family dependency to independent living. Research has, until recently, tended to focus on the first 'route of transition' (and the ways in which this has been 'fractured' in the past two decades), to the exclusion of the others, although this neglect has been somewhat rectified in recent research on the 'life course' (Jones and Wallace 1992, Coles 1995).

Youth workers consistently highlighted unemployment as often the central issue facing young people in the 15-19 age range. The absence of sufficient work threatened the credibility of training schemes and, increasingly, motivation at school, contributing at one end of the spectrum to non-school attendance and, at the other, to poverty and the risk of homelessness. For many youth workers who were interviewed, unemployment - through denying young people both resources and status within their communities - was the root cause of many of the other needs and problems they identified. And the core concern related to those young people who were, or were becoming, most excluded:

> "The big thing is still employment and training. I did some 'research' recently and identified about 100 young people (strangely about 50/50 boys and girls) locally over the age of 16 who are not in education or training, and who haven't got jobs. I thought we could/should develop something for them. Of course some would not be interested because they're getting by hobbling [fiddling], others are into the drugs scene and some are single parents. But if we could develop something we should attract around 10%......
> The other issue I'm concerned about at the moment is non-school attendance. Why are some young people so alienated from school? I suppose it's because they're thinking 'where does it lead?'. What can we do for them?....
> The problem these days is knowing when young people become adults. In my day it was quite clear. You left school on Friday and started work on Monday. Now that continuity has been broken and you get a lot of grown-ups who are still in fact 'young people' in terms of their attitudes and their relation to the community...
> So unemployment is the main thing, there's a lack of vision for the future, which is not surprising given the situation. They don't know where they fit in. And then there's the associated problems that go with unemployment, like the growing drugs problem, and more and more unsupported and isolated young people who live for themselves and play no part in their communities"

Most respondents subscribed to this general (and gloomy) perspective, maintaining that more able, talented and qualified young people tended to move away in search of work, threatening the continuity

and stability of local communities, and leaving a 'residuum' (see Stedman-Jones 1971) of more marginalised and excluded young adults behind.

The 'pressures of educational achievement' - "the pressure and stress of school work" - in some such communities were "enormous", since formal qualifications were viewed as the only way of escaping prospective unemployment. Thus there were 'mirror-image' needs in this domain: a need to support low-achieving young people destined to face a future of unemployment and therefore likely to lack motivation and a 'vision for the future', and a need to provide space without pressure for young people subjected to high expectations concerning educational attainment. In both cases, young people were often struggling with more 'domestic' issues around remaining in the parental home or leaving home in order to study or secure greater independence; these were often 'invisible' needs which remained largely unaddressed. Similarly, young adults already encumbered with their own parental responsibilities and with aspirations to construct an 'ordinary family life' often faced enormous obstacles in doing so, primarily through a lack of resources resulting from prolonged unemployment. Youth workers alluded to all these points, but invariably returned to the central question of unemployment.

Reference was also made frequently to problems of homelessness and crime, emanating from being unemployed, particularly by respondents working in youth work projects targeted at more disadvantaged, and older, young people.

Homelessness was not often visible, in the sense of young people sleeping on the streets, but more a case of young people having been ejected from the parental home and sleeping on friend's floors on usually a rotating basis:

> "Getting accommodation is a real need for a lot of local young people. There's a lot of invisible homelessness: young people doss on other people's floors until they get fed up with them, then they move on to somewhere else..."

In half of the settings, youth workers made reference to the problems young people faced around leaving home, including the potential for as well as the actuality of homelessness (see Jones 1995). Concern was also expressed in a number of settings about the isolation experienced by, and lack of support available to, the growing number of young people living 'independently' in privately rented and housing association bedsits:

> "And homelessness is beginning to surface. I don't mean young people sleeping on the streets, but you do get quite a number of unsupported young people, on their own, mainly young men, allocated housing association bedsits, who become a magnet for local young people, who somehow see them as romantic in some way, presumably because they can do exactly as they please, stay up to whatever hours they want and play their music loud! They are independent, I suppose - too independent. They don't necessarily see things as a problem, but others do. They also need support, rather than just being dumped. They need something like someone to 'oversee' a block of bedsits in return for a lower rent. It is becoming an issue locally"

Youth workers appeared somewhat reticent about making close connections between the related transition problems of unemployment, family tensions, and homelessness, and tendencies towards involvement in criminal activity. Indeed, crime (excepting drug misuse) and young people's relations with either the police or the criminal justice system was rarely mentioned in terms of young people's needs. Instead, however, there was an almost implicit assumption that if cultural patterns of consumption (trendy clothing, for example), living costs and the high usage of alcohol and drugs could

not be financed by legitimate employment, then inevitably it had to be supported through petty crime. Likewise, it was argued that boredom was the source of vandalism and public nuisance: "for a lot of young people, they've got nothing better to do". The relation between young people and the informal and criminal economies was therefore, perhaps surprisingly, not expressed as a need or an issue of concern by most of the youth workers interviewed.

Transition needs, for the youth workers in the settings surveyed, reflected a complex web of issues, stemming primarily in the eyes of youth workers from the dire lack of employment opportunities, which influenced young people's attitudes to, participation in and commitment to schooling and training, affected their relationships with their families of origin and their capacity to make decisions about leaving home 'on a level playing field', which often culminated in 'crisis' housing transitions for which young people were ill-prepared and unsupported. Lack of income resulting from growing up in impoverished family circumstances or from prolonged unemployment, coupled with the attractions of drink and drugs, was also contributing to the growing prevalence of petty (and more serious) offending by young people. That at least was the kind of analysis propounded by many of the youth workers interviewed, with various levels of sophistication. Youth workers attested to the inter-relationships of various phenomena, though they rarely dwelt on cause and effect. These were clearly issues - in youth workers' eyes, needs - which were typically experienced by many young people and for which there was rarely an obvious solution, unless an appropriate raft of employment opportunities could be re-constructed:

> "The needs of young people? Well they obviously vary enormously. There is a very high percentage of young unemployed (who are big users of the Centre). And associated problems of drug and alcohol misuse, especially at weekends. And further associated problems, such as thieving, which many young people see as the only way to get by. Without a job, it probably is"

Information needs

The final area of need identified by youth workers was concerned with information and advice. Attention was directed especially to young people who lacked confidence and social skills and who needed the opportunity to talk through issues which were affecting them in a non-judgmental and non-directive context. Young people needed a space for "listening and discussion":

> "Young people often need advice and someone available to give it when they need it. But we must also be aware that young people often know much more than we do - they just want confirmation and reassurance"

Access to valid, up-to-date, accurate information when they sought it was viewed as an imperative need of young people in an increasingly complex, bureaucratic and contradictory world:

> "Young people need information they can trust. They won't go to the CAB, because they see it as middle-aged, middle-class and judgmental. They don't trust a lot of people, even if the advice they give is sound. Young people are suspicious of a lot of specialist agencies. They've got to trust the people giving out the information before they'll even think of doing anything with it.... And then you get people giving out different sorts of advice. Young people don't know which way to turn"

The capacity to make 'informed choices' has become something of a catch-phrase in endeavours to promote the empowerment of young people. 'Youth information' is currently a policy priority in youth services, so it is perhaps no wonder that youth workers, almost rhetorically, placed an emphasis on young people's need for information. Equally, however, youth workers expressed concern that, too often, young people were making some kind of 'choice' on the basis of inaccurate or distorted information, particularly in relation to sex and increasingly in relation to education and training:

> "There's so much pressure for 'bums on seats' these days. Young people bring money to institutions: schools, colleges, training providers. So, everywhere they look, they're told this is the best thing for them and for their futures. This simply doesn't square with their informal knowledge and experience. It's a recipe for complete confusion. They need more dispassionate advice, from people who don't have vested interests"

The 'need' for information was, therefore, almost taken for granted. Without it, young people were prone to be pawns in other people's games. They needed, so youth workers contended, information but also support in how to make sense of it and what to do with it.

In summary, then, youth workers suggested that the 'needs of young people' fell into four broad camps. They needed space of their own in order to foster their own personal and social needs. They had health needs, particularly around alcohol and drug misuse, and sex and sexuality, though rarely were these articulated by young people themselves (and health issues such as smoking and diet are only conspicuous by their absence in all accounts). They had a maze of transition needs, in which the most significant influence was the prospect or reality of unemployment and the impoverishing and marginalising experiences which flowed from it. And, finally, they had wide-ranging information needs, which would only be met effectively if they were provided on neutral and trustworthy ground. All such needs were, however, to a greater or lesser extent, inter-twined, with some young people experiencing a far more intense clustering of need than others. The next section explores the views of youth workers about the capacity of youth work to respond to 'the needs of young people'.

The role of youth work in meeting the needs of young people

There was at times a naivety about the capacity of youth work to meet the self-evidently broad spread of needs affecting young people. It is, however, important to recognise that youth work - even at its most intense levels of provision with the most committed and involved young people - can only do so much: it can hardly reverse the countervailing structural forces which so often compound the difficulties being experienced by young people. The following claims - for they are no more than claims which often cry out for firmer empirical verification - must be considered within this context.

There was also, as might have been expected, recurrent use of the rhetorical language of youth work: 'to educate young people, not to alienate them', 'to build relationships and establish trust', 'to seize the moment for educative interventions'. This is all very well, but it remains difficult to pin down from such statements how youth work practice actually responds to the 'needs of young people', as articulated by young people themselves and as perceived by youth workers.

It is helpful to differentiate between what might be termed the cornerstones of practice - what do youth workers believe they are doing, with and for young people? - and the methodology by which they achieve such goals - how do youth workers go about developing such practice?

Core elements of practice - what?

The most common observation made by youth workers was that they provided - and defended - space for young people, a safe space in which young people could 'be themselves' and express themselves freely:

> "We provide a space which is young people's space, where their opinions count and where they're free from pressure. Where else in their lives do they get that?....
> We're not always in need of grandiose ideas. At the end of the day the popular view of youth work - getting the kids off the streets - is not such a bad starting point. What's wrong with that? That's the way a lot of people still see it. When people want a youth club set up, it's to get the kids off the streets. I've got no problem with that"

It was considered by some respondents to be important that 'real space' was maintained for young people, that they did not get railroaded into activities or programmes in which they were not interested, that there was always flexibility in the ways young people made use of the space that youth work provided:

> "Not everyone gets involved. Some of the members may want to be in a competition which can take them forward into county an national finals organised by Youth Events Wales. Others may just want to come in and sit in the corner listening to music. Others will be doing something else. There's got to be an element of socialising, or just coming in out of the rain! That's fine by me.
> We need time to work with young people. We need space for all young people. I certainly don't want to get into providing for some kind of elite. They get plenty of resources and attention already - look at the investment made in more able young people who carry on in formal education"

Yet few youth workers rested on the fact that their provision created some kind of autonomous space for young people. With admittedly different levels of emphasis, they saw a core responsibility of youth work being to expose young people to at least the possibility of new experiences and opportunities, in part in response to the expressed wishes of young people but also through challenging young people's assumptions, perspectives, attitudes and behaviour and presenting them with positive options and choices.

> "It's a synthesis of me and them. Of course it's about 'what are you interested in?', but it's also about what I think they might be interested and what I think they should be interested in. They don't always know what's available, they don't know that things can be done differently - I have to point them towards it. It's about exposing young people to new experiences in non-threatening ways..."

> "Everything we do is part of a jigsaw: asking young people what they want by also thinking carefully about what they need. We established Go Karting and quad biking activities because they seemed to be a natural preliminary to the motor project, allowing younger young people to be involved in that sort of thing.... So it's a mix, inevitably. A

blend of management committee ideas and the expressed wishes of young people. Many of the youth team - the volunteers who staff the youth clubs - are past members, who feed their views into the management committee. Of course, in a voluntary project, there are always resource issues. We often have to go for the money and then encourage involvement. The level of involvement demonstrates that we are responding to a need, and satisfying that need... The safe environment here is the critical thing. Obviously you fail with some. Some get fully involved with the project. Others just dip in. You don't have all the answers, but then nor does anybody else. But, whenever possible, we try to broaden horizons"

"Youth work has a responsibility to intervene. Yes, we try to keep things loose and relaxed here, spend time talking to young people and responding to things they raise. Young people come here to socialise and meet each other and then we pick up things with them while they're here. They're not pressurised to do anything at all. We try not to tell young people what to do, but sometimes you can't just let them get on with it. Sometimes they have to be led, sometimes I have to prime them. I provide ideas, show them things I've seen and see what their reaction is..."

Fostering a culture within which such a negotiated practice can be constructed is considered more fully below, as it is clearly part of the process of effective youth work. What is clearly recognised in these quotations, however, is that youth work is not an arena for the unilateral expression of young people's wants, needs or interests. It is, as one respondent above put it, a synthesis of agendas, at minimum the agendas of young people dovetailed with 'agendas' identified as the professional responsibility of youth workers and, increasingly, also including wider social agendas around schooling, training, health and sexual behaviour. This is a point of some importance, to which we shall return in our analysis, but it merits some further comment here, drawing on the experiences of a voluntary project heavily dependent upon 'external funding' though still insistent that it is first and foremost a project based on youth work principles and practice:

"Youth workers generally tend to be better at responding to grounded wants. We try to focus more on collective issues affecting young people, such as school failure, lack of confidence, lack of social skills, access (or the lack of it) to training... We then do our best to link what we see are the issues to available sources of funding. Our job is to tread the line between supporting others' agendas and promoting our own agendas, which is to provide quality provision in relation to what young people want...."

Interviewer: So what exactly do you mean by that?

"No-one comes here to do anything. It is a drop-in facility. They can do whatever they want. If they just want a cup of coffee, that's fine. We don't pressurise them into anything. But we do offer a range of things in which we hope they may get involved. Young people who come here are very open. There's a good atmosphere. It's not judgmental... So we can be the acceptable face of unacceptable provision. A lot of these young people, for example, are hostile to training provision, but we might offer tasters in computers which just may get them interested in doing more training in that area. A lot of what we try to do is about renewing motivation and restoring opportunities which sometimes they have rejected earlier and think it has now passed them by..."

Interviewer: So isn't this a kind of Trojan Horse - using the youth service to gently get young people back into provision they are tending to reject?

"We are enabling young people to find their own way. To do what they want to do. We give them support, guidance, advice. We try to instil confidence. We provide bits of experience, give them a chance to dabble in things, give them responsibility. We always assume that people have ability. Anyway, they'd see straight through you if you tried to bullshit them"

The presentation of 'positive' choices extended well beyond institutional provision to the more interpersonal relationships which characterise the daily interaction of young people, amongst each other and between young people and their wider communities:

"Round here, girls tend to talk to their mums. Boys tend not to talk at all about personal things. Individual young people invariably appear pretty blasé in front of their mates, but they're rarely as confident as they think or appear. I think that it is important that youth work should present positive options, should get young people to think that it is OK to talk about your feelings, to express your emotions: you know, boys can cry, it's OK to hug each other and give out 'warm fuzzies', best friends can be of the opposite sex without anything going on - things like that"

The efficacy of all such practice is firmly hinged on the trust established between young people and youth workers. Such trust, it was argued without exception, derives from conscientious dialogue and communication with young people. Conversation - talking with and listening carefully to young people - was constantly emphasised as central to effective youth work practice (see Smith 1994). Not only was it the starting point for developing the more tangible strands of practice (activities, issue-based workshops, novel experiences) but it was also the only basis for dispensing advice, information and support, and developing advocacy and brokerage functions which would be received with credibility by the young people concerned. One respondent provided a crisp commentary of the youth work possibilities accruing from even apparently purposeless conversation:

"It's difficult to pin down the distinction between wants and needs. In one group I was working with there was a lot of racist comment and behaviour, which I questioned and challenged and asked why they held such views. I wasn't telling them to do things differently, more exploring why they had the views they had...
Young people often don't see things as needs; they express wants. They want to go rock climbing; I see that they need excitement and challenge.
The key lies in talking to them, one-to-one and groups. You can make jokes which reinforce your message, but gradually you identify need through discussion. Youth work provision must always try to balance activities (to stimulate them) with listening (to what young people are saying). Listening may be dismissed as a waste of time, particularly in this day and age when so many people want to see something happening, but it does a lot of things. Sometimes you hear the same story over and over again. And they could be telling you anything. But you can still pick up a lot of things simply because they are telling you something:
- it cements relationships with young people
- it confirms the comfortableness of the current relationship
- it can break down inhibitions
- it conveys that you're willing to give them time (no-one else would)
- it's an opportunity for smiling and humour, showing you're interested in them
- it can be a base for identifying future possibilities for intervention (from canoeing to health education), perhaps as part of something like the D of E Award scheme"

Few youth workers presented such a cogent and broad-based rationale for placing conversation at the very heart of the professional practice of youth work, but most supported the view that "the main job of youth work is listening to young people". A key role of youth work as a result of such listening was the delivery of advice, information and support. This took a variety of forms, and 'counselling' was a much over-used word. Only in one setting were formal counselling sessions available to young people. Others provided relatively structured information and advice sessions, and specific sessions on issues perceived to be of common concern to participating young people, such as training or drug misuse. For the most part, however, advice, information and support was offered on a one-to-one and informal basis, acknowledging that youth workers were not necessarily 'experts' on the many issues which cropped up in conversation with young people:

> "You can only do so much. The staff use their own initiative. They are parents themselves, although obviously there are times when it may be appropriate to check things out with someone with more expertise. But basically you give the best advice and support you can offer in the circumstances. Sometimes, of course, staff encourage young people to divulge sensitive information to others, but they wouldn't go to anyone else without the consent of the young people concerned. Things are always dealt with confidentially, unless young people want staff to pursue things on their behalf"

Full-time youth workers recurrently defended the commitment of the part-time staff with whom they worked (and who are always represented in official documents as the 'backbone of the service'), but simultaneously emphasised that they were not, nor could they be expected to be, 'experts'. This did not preclude them from playing an important role in listening to, and supporting, young people with whom they worked:

> "They're [part-time youth workers] not experts. They can't respond to everything. With the predictable things, the staff are encouraged to do voluntary training, things like sexuality and First Aid. So they have a basic youth work training and a bit more besides, but more importantly they've got lots of life and youth work experience. I'm all for training, but you can't substitute for experience. Sometimes training is almost for the sake of training....
> And, anyway, who knows what kinds of issues are going to crop up: school, parents (family - there are always issues around families), anything ('I hate my paper round, but I need the money'), little issues and big issues... We can challenge things, offer views, try and find things out, use our experience. But I don't expect the staff to be experts. That's not what it's about"

Beyond private and confidential advice and support, some settings saw an increasing role for youth work as lying within what might be called an advocacy and brokerage function. Two settings in particular viewed themselves as playing a pivotal role between more marginalised young people and the institutional provision which impinged upon their lives. Advocacy was concerned with supporting young people in securing the best possible service delivery for them, in terms of, for example, access to benefits or independent housing. Brokerage was concerned with 'educating' service providers about how best to reach young people whom they were currently failing to serve, and with collaborating in the development of alternative mechanisms of service provision:

> "Quite a few agencies ask to use our space; they want to get access to the kinds of young people we work with. But we are emphatic that it is, in the first instance, young people's space. But of course there is a balance to be struck. So we check out carefully what

they want to do. This is a kind of brokerage function. We try to work in partnership.
But those agencies don't just come in and do their own thing. Before that, they have to
learn what we are trying to do...."

Forging or renewing connections between institutional provision (in areas such as health, training and
schooling) and young people was one element within broader concerns about connecting or re-
connecting young people with their local communities. 'Community involvement' was a phrase often
used by respondents, but few tangible illustrations were provided as to how this was implemented in
practice. One worker observed:

"I've always tried to create links between young people and the local community.
Young people are often feared, much more than is justified, but they can look very
threatening. I try to build bridges which show young people in a good light"

Another respondent pointed to 'community involvement' as the 'finale' of young people's participation in
the regular cookery class held at the youth club, something which some would suspect was a residual
feature from a bygone age, but such a view would be rigourously contested:

"All our instructors are also youth workers. If it was just a cookery class, they could do
it in school. But there's a lot more to it than that - the listening, the discussion. And the
culmination of the year for those involved in the cookery sessions is the annual 'Posh
Nosh', where young people prepare a meal and decide on who to invite. They send out
invitations to people such as local councillors and other prominent members of the local
community. So it becomes simultaneously an opportunity for community involvement
and a mechanism for marketing the youth club. With a captive audience present, the
youth club members take the opportunity to present a disco dancing display (who,
incidentally, have also done displays at old people's homes and the local hospital, as well
as in the usual competitions), invite people to walk around, and so on. Visitors get a
positive image of young people and the youth club; young people relate to the visitors -
it provides an environment for mutual learning (as well as for impression management!)"

Throughout this section, there has been constant reference to the ways in which youth work endeavours
to respond to the needs of participating young people - namely, apparently those who are already
involved. There is often a risk that youth work provision becomes 'dominated' by a particular group of
young people (defined perhaps by gender, age or 'style'). While this group may benefit considerably
from youth work interventions, other young people may be deterred from participating by its presence.
It was interesting, therefore, that some (although by no means all) respondents identified a role for youth
work as 'combating cliques', as a significant contribution to the broader task of breaking down barriers
between young people and developing more constructive mutual understanding. So, while a role of
youth work was to defend space for young people, it was certainly not to defend space for any particular
group of young people:

"I suppose it's almost inevitable, but you do have to keep alert to the place appearing to
be 'controlled' by one group of young people or another. You can't really stop any group
becoming the sort of clique that can dominate these kinds of places and you certainly
can't stop perceptions about cliques. But when we see one becoming established, we try
to broaden possibilities to attract other types in. At first, this was very much a drop-in
and we got the sort of young people who just wanted to use the place as a drop-in. But
we now want to attract others who would not want to attend a drop-in, so we're in the
process of developing a range of activities, which are what young people locally have

said that they want. That should broaden the base of participation and stop one group monopolising our provision...."

Youth workers were clearly confident about their capacity to provide space and the develop new experiences and opportunities for young people. They were equally confident about their role in offering advice and support. They were also convinced that they were usually quite effective in combating cliques and ensuring that all local young people potentially had equal access to their provision. They appeared less comfortable about challenging stereotypes. Few suggested that advocacy and brokerage was a core role of youth work. And, while many felt that 'community involvement' was an important dimension of youth work, few were able to provide concrete examples of how this was put into practice.

Nevertheless, this sets out the ways in which youth workers define the key elements of youth work practice. The question which remains is how they go about achieving such ends.

Methodologies for developing such practice - how?

The relationship between youth workers and young people is based upon a voluntary commitment; that, in a sense, is what makes youth work unique in professional services to young people. There is no possibility of even latent coercion: young people can simply walk away. Thus any 'contract' between youth workers and young people in no more than implied and based upon negotiation. Youth workers have no option but to win young people's consent for their practice; they have no authority to coerce compliance (see Davies 1986).

Thus the development of professional practice is, potentially, fraught with difficulties, especially if it is focused upon young people customarily suspicious of adult professionals, or even hostile towards them. Furthermore, principles such as 'participation' and 'anti-oppressive practice' are often quite outside the cultural experiences of many young people. It was not surprising, then, that youth workers made constant references to the need for time to develop appropriate responses to young people's 'needs'; things could not be constructed overnight. Admittedly, some youth workers had well established 'programmes' within their settings, which they maintained could be adapted and tailored to new cohorts of young people. Others, in contrast, indicated that their approach rested heavily on "spontaneous reactive approaches to articulated concerns". For most, however, the methodologies through which they shaped practice fell somewhere in between. It may be of some interest that, in a number of settings, youth workers commonly used angling/fishing terms to illustrate their method, including images of dangling bait, and 'hooking' young people. Others used agricultural analogies, such as planting seeds which might only yield crops many years hence:

> "It's a constant cycle - of facilitating space, generating ideas based on young people's needs and wants, developing provision, and then usage of that provision confirms the need that was first identified. And the provision is also a vehicle for teasing out further needs, because it's a way of building relationships and establishing credibility in order to provide support and information which will help them deal with things more confidently......"

> "It was after that that we dangled the idea of a personal development course. Like everything else you have to dangle things in front of them, to see whether they 'bite' or not. About fifteen single mums under the age of 25 got involved..."

"Good youth work hinges on the charisma and commitment of the workers but also, and equally, on identifying the interests of young people: that is the hook on which you have to build anything else"

Two critical points emerge from these general observations about the process of practice development. The first concerns the reference to youth workers as individual personalities, a point which senior workers were often somewhat reticent to comment upon since - if character and charisma influence the effectiveness of practice - this threatens the professional basis of youth work. Yet, in work which relies heavily on the relationships between workers and young people and the credibility of workers with young people, this issue simply cannot be sidestepped:

"Of course it's a synthesis of me and them. Of course it's about 'what are you interested in?', but there's no getting away from the fact that one of the things they're particularly interested in is my views, what I think about things, what I've done.... Personalities are bound to play their part. The project would be very different if it wasn't me but someone else. Young people judge you on your personality and things build from there..."

The second point relates to young people expressing their views, preferences, aspirations, wants and needs. This requires an environment in which they feel comfortable to do so. A number of workers identified the importance of what one called "fostering a culture of participation", but it was more than that. It was also about establishing a culture of acceptance but also about establishing a culture of what was and was not acceptable:

"We have a philosophy of equality of access and opportunity. Anything that runs counter to that philosophy is challenged. It can be gently challenged. Some of our volunteers, because they are local people, have quite traditional and perhaps prejudiced views (the whole culture is racist, etc.). We sit down and talk about them - we sit down and talk about anything. The idea is to create a safe environment for staff and young people alike. And we have to accept that we may be fostering a culture in the project which may clash with assumptions in the local culture. We had some young people coming to the youth club wearing swastikas - that's something that needs to be confronted (if we didn't challenge it, no-one else would). But there are always ways of talking things through, giving reasons, explaining why attitudes and behaviour are unacceptable. A lot of the young people who come here aren't used to an approach like that; it takes time for them to get used to it"

Only within such a framework of equal opportunity could a culture of participation and empowerment be developed:

"There is an approach that we try to foster right from the very start of a new intake of 11-year olds. We might ask them if they would like to go ice-skating: who wants to go? You get a lot of interest. Who wants to organise it? They look apprehensive and ask you know you do it. With support, you get one or two individuals to do the booking and to collect the list of names of those who want to go... That's the first sort of induction into our approach, which we've developed over the years. Obviously it works more with some than with others. But it's about fostering a culture, an atmosphere. It's now well established, and new young people absorb it. Because of this culture where we try to encourage young people to do things for themselves, some things don't happen - young people don't want to take lead roles. We have to accept that. And I do think it's also important to recognise that it's much harder for part-time workers to establish this kind

of approach, because they're not around so much. It's always much easier to put a notice
up with a price and get young people to sign up. So not all the staff are at the same
point, but that the kind of culture we have tried to develop"

It is probably fair to say that neither are some full-time workers at this point but this section has pointed
to the ways in which youth workers perceive the role of youth work in responding to the needs of young
people. There is clearly a synthesis of youth work agendas - around issues such as equal opportunities,
participation and empowerment - and what youth workers take to be the needs of young people, which
themselves are broadly consistent with young people's own statements about their needs. What is also
clear, however, is that tangible strands of practice (activities, information and advice, community
involvement, etc.) must be firmly embedded in a culture, atmosphere or environment which is consistent
with the core principles of youth work, now enshrined within the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for
Wales (WYA 1992). Different settings had clearly developed such a culture to differing degrees.
Superficially, practice may appear to be much the same, but there were observable differences in the
methodologies by which that practice had evolved. And, significantly, levels of participation (cf.
attendance) by older young people appeared to reflect the process behind the practice: far fewer were
involved where there was less potential for ownership and control. This suggests a tension within the
'new world' of youth work which is preoccupied with planning and programmes, yet which also
continues to emphasise principles of participation and empowerment. Youth workers were largely
highly ambivalent about the new managerialism within the youth service, particularly as it might affect
their capacity to work effectively with the older age group of 15-19 or 16-24 year olds. The softly-
softly, negotiated, individualised and often invisible approach did not fit comfortably into new
requirements, according to some workers, who also expressed some resentment at the lack of
recognition of their effectiveness in working with this age group to date, despite the fact that many
young people in this age group faced an uphill struggle in moving towards adulthood. Despite the
mixed metaphors, one respondent summed things up:

"You're dealing with some pretty difficult young people, whose main goal in life is
looking after number one. They're often sexist, racist, xenophobic and the rest. The
adult world has hammered them. They come here, let's be honest, because there's not
much else for them to do. And they're often surprised what they find. We're interested
in them. We're honest with them. We listen. We're open. Through listening and
negotiation, we develop building blocks to provide them with opportunities. There's a
sense of ownership. They like the atmosphere. You can't always be too PC. It's like a
dripping tap. There's learning by example (like, don't laugh at their racist jokes). You
have to take things slowly. You plant seeds. It's a kind of trickle down awareness,
which filters out into the community. Strong bonds have developed outside of the
project, which started within the project. You hear stories of young people from here
challenging their mates in the pub! Some of the young people have changed
phenomenally and we like to think some of that's down to us; some have hardly changed
at all. But that's life.... We're not going to change the world, but it would be nice to be
appreciated for some of the effort we have made"

Curriculum, administration and evaluation

Since the Ministerial Conferences on the Youth Service (see NYB 1990; NYA 1992) and the
establishment of a Statement of Purpose for England and the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for

Wales, different local authorities have interpreted and implemented a 'curriculum for youth work' in different ways. In broad terms, the 'curriculum' has elicited a spectrum of responses and reactions, from vitriolic criticism to unconditional praise. Reaction has often been premature and based upon partial knowledge and information, but increasingly political and financial support for youth service provision has been based upon some level of conformity to local curriculum guide-lines. How have youth workers responded to this new framework and these new expectations? To what extent have they themselves welcomed or resisted it? And how do they see it relating to their practice with young people, especially those within the age range with which we are concerned?

There were extremely mixed responses, further confused by the fact that some workers had now reconciled themselves to what, initially, they had opposed. Very few were still firmly positioned against the 'curriculum' though, equally, few embraced it unequivocally. Indeed, even those youth workers who detected considerable strengths in curriculum guide-lines also expressed continuing concerns and criticisms.

Youth workers acknowledged that there were now "tremendous pressures to fulfil curriculum requirements" and some were concerned about a growing rigidity around curriculum expectations, particularly in terms of the paperwork which had to be completed. This threatened the flexibility which was considered to be an essential part of negotiated practice with young people:

> "I do think that we're at risk of drowning in paperwork. Paperwork is a weight around my neck. I try to protect the other workers from the paperwork. Stuff gets filed, but what else happens to it? It's almost as if they don't trust us. I suppose it's paper evidence that something's happening, but it may not demonstrate evidence of anything any good!"

Full-time workers, whatever their prevailing attitude to the proliferation of curriculum-related and monitoring and evaluation paperwork, accepted that it had to be done but sought, where possible, to avoid burdening their part-time workers with it. Indeed, a number of part-time workers interviewed were adamant that the imposition of any further paperwork would lead them to seriously consider their commitment to youth work: "I came into this to spend time with young people, not sit in an office filling out bloody forms".

It was also felt that it was difficult to plan ahead, if the needs of young people was the central organising principle of youth work, but that the curriculum framework was useful for reflecting back upon recent practice:

> "We've covered the curriculum in training courses, but I don't really take much account of it in planning the programme. That depends very much on what young people want to do. It can be useful, though, when you sit back at the end of the year - yes, I did that, and that..... but it's very difficult to plan ahead..."

Further concerns will be considered below. However, respondents in most settings broadly welcomed the curriculum developments, considering it to be the 'right move' in the current political and economic climate:

> "Yes, I think it has been the right move. I must admit I was suspicious at first and not sure of its relevance, but then I realised that good youth work was already delivering it. Good practice just needed to be put into a formal framework. The problem has been persuading part-timers of its value. That has been, and remains, very difficult....

But the curriculum principle is to seize on meaningful moments and issues concerning young people. You can't do all the curriculum. But I think there should be a planned programme which is agreed with me beforehand. The important thing is that workers come with something in mind. That doesn't rule out flexibility. The plan can be adapted and changed, even abandoned in favour of something more spontaneous. But, as a manager, I want to avoid drift. I don't want workers just turning up without a clue what they're intending to do. The curriculum helps give a structure to our work"

Few workers embraced the curriculum wholeheartedly, yet most acknowledged some role for the curriculum, usually less in terms of planning work, more in terms of reflection, analysis and evaluation of recent work, and most in terms of articulating to the wider public what actually goes on in youth work, and why. It is important to note in the following quotations that the youth work curriculum is implicitly conceived of not as a prescriptive strait-jacket (as more ardent critics perceive it) but more as a means of packaging and classifying the work that has been done (and thereby, in some settings at least, identifying strengths of practice and areas for development):

"The curriculum has been helpful. It describes our work. In [this county], they have identified five areas for curriculum development. Our work falls into these five areas. The staff have accepted it. It's not relevant to the kids directly - they don't come here to be curriculumed. But it's useful, because it's another way of analysing our work.... The paperwork and the recording framework are tools to demonstrate to HMI and other managers that we're doing the business. We're in a competitive world. I'm the buffer between this club and the outside world. I can see why part-timers don't like it, but I can also understand the need for these things in the current climate, with compulsory competitive tendering and all that. We've got to have the ammunition, and I've got to be provided with the ammunition in the first place, which is why I require my staff to record their contact with young people, although I know that because they don't like doing it, they're not always faithful to the paperwork. But there's a lot of people out there who think they can do youth work, who are quite capable of putting it down on glossy paper and looking good, but I don't believe they can. Even so, we've got to defend what we do and justify the way we do it"

"I had a lot of scepticism initially - but in fact these expectations can be quite useful to justify and explain our work. They provide an opportunity for reflection and they can assist planning and development. They're particularly useful as a means of formalising what we do and marketing ourselves to a range of outside scrutineers... We've always worked like this. The curriculum reminded me what youth work was about. It helped us to put headings on the areas of our work. I think there has been a lot of unnecessary opposition to the Curriculum Statement. People heard it was happening and decided to oppose whatever came out. And of course there's still a lot of youth workers who just open the door and that's it - they were bound to be anxious..."

Other youth workers testified to the fact that the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales had helped to "articulate what we do; it has put a framework around it". It was, at minimum, a reference point for retrospectively allocating different elements of practice to different headings within the curriculum statement. Although some workers continued to take the view that "a lot of it is spiel, tailoring evidence to the requirements of funders", others had increasingly used the curriculum statement as a guide-line for the consolidation and development of professional practice as well as for more overt 'political' purposes. For those who now largely subscribed to the curriculum statement, their residual

concern was that it should never take hold in such a way that it somehow prevented spontaneous or opportunist intervention in work with young people:

> "We do try to cover it all. It has its place. We try to fit our work into it. But it mustn't stop spontaneous activity, you must be able to let young people express themselves. The curriculum mustn't be the overriding thing - it would cramp their [young people's] style. But it's good for funding and it does make us think carefully about the work we're trying to do..."

However, beneath this residual concern amongst those who broadly supported the curriculum statement there lay a raft of criticisms and complaints expressed by those who remained sceptical, cynical and opposed to either the curriculum statement per se or, more often, to the evaluation criteria which purportedly judged whether or not the curriculum was being delivered effectively. Youth workers were particularly concerned about being sucked into a 'numbers game' which, in their view, was hardly a valid measure of the 'real' objectives of youth work, many of which were invisible and therefore extremely hard to quantify and assess:

> "Youth work is very hard to evaluate. It's not as if there's a start and a finish, it's all part of a process. Life is all about learning, continuous learning... You can produce numbers, how many ask for or take condoms, pregnancy tests, how many go on trips, and so on. But that isn't really what it is about. All the projects we do, discussions we have.... Some things we do might not trigger off until much later; other things we do just help things to fall in place for young people.... you just don't know. So as far as measurable outcomes are concerned, that's bullshit. I just don't think you can"

> "You can't, can you? You can only go by how you feel. I suppose the numbers who use the place tells you something [interjection by young woman, aged 21: 'If it wasn't any good, we wouldn't be here']. We're in a chicken or egg situation. Without funding, how can you plan? Without planning, you don't get funding. So basically we make it up as we go along. If people out there need the paperwork and the statistics, we will provide it. So we'll live with what's expected of us. But it's not real, even if it looks good. The real stuff is talking to those who really need you and listening to anything they want you to, and no more... I think what's happening from above is mostly silly games. They want projects, but that usually involved the good kids. Then the real youth work ends up being done outside, with the kids who are hanging around, who aren't really even part of the club... I suppose we'll have to go along with the curriculum thing. But I still think it's important to recognise that older kids are less keen to get involved in planned and structured things. They still bring up the issues, when they want to... That's the important difference..."

> "There is a numbers game going on, and your numbers do have a bearing on resources. There's a sense of threat around: if you're not getting the numbers in, then your resource base may be reduced. People will ask why you're paying perhaps four staff for such small numbers. And it's sod's law that you get an official visit when the numbers are low... But I accept that we have to play various games to get the resources we need. Numbers are just one aspect of that. And they can help you think through the work you do - in terms of who you're doing it with, who you're spending the time on - more than the feeling and instinct we used to use. But how valid they are in proving effectiveness is another matter. I don't know. How can you measure atmosphere, culture, participation?"

"Evaluating youth work is very difficult. There is often no physical evidence, no stamp of approval. There is obviously my own assessment: improved approachability, trust, young people coming to me for information and advice. How can you prove that a young person has developed (except in practical skills)? I will - or may - know, but how will funders know? It's not like school or even the D of E scheme. There is no set syllabus to follow. Even the D. of E. scheme only provides evidence of tangible things... You can't prove anything. Managers who 'know the score' need to set the criteria. Too often, they're set by people who don't really understand what youth work is about. Let me give you an example. A local boy and girl were having a baby: I did a lot of work with them about their relationship and their responsibilities. I think there was a discernible change, but it was the result of a lot of intensive contact with just two people, and managers are usually really only interested in bums on seats, or the numbers in a club....

Youth work is not about a programme, although that may be the peg on which you hang the work. It's about interaction with young people, engagement with young people in a way where they are not labelled, not judged. Young people are part of the community, with rights of their own. Locally, though, they're seen as problematic and should be off the streets. Local people often see a youth worker's job as keeping as many young people as possible off the streets and stopping them from being a problem"

Managers who patently did not 'know the score' were routinely held to blame for imposing increasing bureaucratic demands on youth work settings, even modest one-night-a-week clubs run by part-time workers. Some such workers conceded that they knew very little about the actual Curriculum Statement; in contrast, they were all too aware of the burgeoning paperwork which occupied the middle ground between the curriculum statement and their practice (and from which full-timers endeavoured to shield part-timers in settings which made more substantial provision). They detected a growing divide between managerial requirements and the realities of youth work practice, and resented the incessant form-filling which compounded, rather than filled, the breach. The most vitriolic commentary on this front was as follows:

"The new requirements involve a mass of form-filling. The new forms look worse than they actually are, but the staff are still suspicious of their value in genuinely assessing what is going on. I accept that there are real problems with evaluation. You can do short-term things, like somebody has learned to play the guitar or made something in crafts, but that's not really what the work is, or should be, about. How do you write down that someone has 'grown up'? How do you measure feelings, attitudes? How do you assess your contribution? Over what time-scale are you supposed to measure your impact? How do you ever know? You can write down what you do, but (a) what about confidential information and (b) where is the time for such recordings. There are a lot of things you do, which is good youth work, which should not be recorded. Managers go on about wanting you to act like professionals, but then they keep on treating you like amateurs. Most managers are completely out of touch with the reality on the ground... The bullshitters will take over the madhouse. The youth service will become more about form-filling than about working with young people. But I think having the thanks of young people for something you've done (or they think you've done) is worth more than any report. A kid will remember when you've read them a story, not when you've ironed their pyjamas...."

Such concerns were echoed, usually more diplomatically, by other youth workers, who repeated that young people did not attend youth work settings to be 'curriculumed' and were anxious that, in the absence of tangible measures of what they considered to be 'real' youth work, the 'approximate' measures (see Coopers and Lybrand 1991) represented by business plans, monitoring and evaluation forms, records of attendance, and a variety of 'tick-sheet' forms around so-called 'quality standards', would secure too great a hold on the funding and development of youth work - a hold disproportionate to any proven relation to effective youth work. The 'political' preoccupations of full-time managers around securing a funding base for youth work were clouding both the realities of professional practice and the realities about those who were at the front-line of that practice delivery: part-time workers doing a handful of sessions, often over and above a daytime job. The scope for managerial dictate was therefore constrained, especially in more rural areas where both recruitment of appropriate staff and the possibilities for staff development were relatively limited, and full-time practitioners pleaded for more negotiated and incremental approaches to the promotion of effective youth work practice:

> "I have to accept and value what I've got, not worry about their weaknesses. I work with individuals and accept differences. I try to move them in certain directions where that may be possible. A dripping tap approach - it's my only choice. I'm looking for gradual change. Some will take things up, others won't. We use the paperwork as joint working documents, for discussion and reflection....
> The clubs I am responsible for are building blocks. They respond to the social needs of young people. You can't ignore that, and I will always defend it on that basis. Youth clubs are the only space away from teachers and parents.
> But it must always be remembered that it is still only for one evening a week: a spit in the ocean. What is still important is that young people have a space to meet. You need workers who can given them some attention, self-esteem, hopefully contribute to their empowerment. You offer bits in a jigsaw which helps with their personal development. The staff usually do what they can to respond to issues. There's quite a lot of homelessness in M. - kids sleeping on floors and such. The part-time worker there offers information and advice around all that. But they can't always attend training and be 'skilled up' - they're all in full-time jobs and have family commitments. Let's live in the real world"

These observations might be an apposite summary of the general thrust of youth workers' views about the needs of young people, the youth work response, and the youth work curriculum. The needs of young people, as youth workers see them, break down into a number of categories but youth work responds most obviously in terms of their personal and social needs. This does not rule out its capacity to address wider information and advice needs or even elements of their structural needs, but this is clearly contingent upon the resource base of the setting, in terms of finance, accommodation and staffing. If youth workers are right and the interpersonal relationships between young people and youth workers is the critical dimension of youth work (and the foundation for all other effective practice), then staffing is the most important of these. But coal-face staffing of youth work is largely by part-time practitioners, who require both motivation and training in order to make effective provision. Yet however well motivated and trained they may be, their contribution to the lives (and needs) of young people remains relatively limited, even in settings where provision is made on a number of evenings or daytime sessions a week. Thus the exercise of too firm a managerial hand around curriculum expectations is likely to be counter-productive, not only because this sits uncomfortably with both the expressed and perceived needs of young people in the older age band (and especially more disadvantaged young people) but also because it is unrealistic in terms of the delivery of, say, two sessions of youth work a week. That does not mean that it is unimportant. But, like youth work practice itself, it requires procedures which secure the consent of part-time workers (through education, training

and negotiation) and which acknowledges youth work's role in contributing significant pieces to the jigsaw of social education and personal development of young people - a process which rarely lends itself to early performance indicators, but to which (if both young people and youth workers are to be believed) youth work can make a relevant contribution.

Commentary and analysis

This section draws together a number of key themes which emerge from both young people's depictions of their needs and the youth work response, and youth workers' views about young people's needs and the capacity of youth work to respond to them. Although the themes identified will be located within the empirical data secured during the fieldwork for this study, they will be developed through more theoretical and analytical commentary and observation, raising questions for further consideration rather than conclusive points.

Needs, wants and issues

The concept of 'need' is a highly elastic one and, further, is often confused with 'wants' and 'issues'. It is also important to emphasise that even young people's self-defined 'needs' are not the only basis for the development of professional youth work practice, even if that may be - perhaps even must be - a central point of departure. However, such 'needs', as they are articulated by young people, are often in fact 'wants'. As they have been articulated by youth workers (and, indeed, other adults) 'the needs of young people' has become a rhetorical device which in its generality is devoid of meaning. 'Meeting the needs of young people' crops up in innumerable documents on the youth service, but need is both diverse and objectively and subjectively layered. Unless we resort to Maslow (which may, paradoxically, actually be increasingly necessary in the 1990s with the growth of youth unemployment and youth homelessness), it is extremely difficult to specify need without reference to specific individuals, groups or communities. Issues affecting young people may be a much more useful approach to clarifying contemporary preoccupations and experiences of and for young people, and the possibilities and limitations of developing youth work responses to them. If we restrict ourselves to young people's own definitions of 'need' (or 'want'), then it becomes easy to overlook and neglect and variety of issues which should be addressed by an educative service. These would include, for example, anti-racist interventions or work around the environment - issues which young people themselves would not directly identify as either wants or needs.

The fieldwork suggested that very few youth workers adopted any systematic approach to identifying 'need' within their localities. Conceptions of need were framed by what young people said, or what youth workers thought - which may be fine in terms of drawing attention to certain issues - but they were rarely, if ever, substantiated or questioned by wider evidence, such as Census data or local unemployment statistics (however fallible those might be!). Nor was there much indication that youth workers had any framework for establishing 'need', in terms of, for example, statements in policies, local profiles or defining target groups of (perhaps) disadvantaged young people. Indeed, only in one setting did the senior youth worker refer to broader methods by which issues were confirmed of local importance and ways in which groups of young people in particular 'need' were targeted.

The approach, therefore, was in effect to function internally and reactively: to offer a space, or a programme, or a facility and to relate to the young people who crossed the threshold. And while all respondents could reasonably legitimately claim that they met at least some of the 'needs' of the young people who did cross the threshold (evidenced by the continued participation), the research secured little sense of the extent to which the 'needs' of participants compared to the 'needs' of those who remained

outside. This begs all sorts of questions about the image of the setting, whose agendas were being served, staffing and programmes - points which will be addressed below.

The critical significance of boredom

Young people expressed a wide range of 'needs' and made many different arguments about the capacity of youth work to meet them. The common need they served, however, was the combating of boredom. It is perhaps surprising when there is theoretically more than ever for young people to do that young people still claimed to have 'nothing to do' when youth work provision was not available. Yet, beyond youth work, there are no social meeting places for groups of teenagers seeking to mix informally with their mates. There may be structured, supervised clubs and there may be commercial premises (such as cafes), but neither caters for this need. Without youth work, or when youth work provision is not open, young people in their mid-teens develop their own response, which is either to hang around the streets or masquerade as old enough to frequent pubs or clubs. Hanging around the streets is the common response, and young people said that this was often accompanied by drinking and drug misuse, and sometimes petty crime. Alternative space and alternative activity could displace such behaviour - and youth work could provide it, so long as it was not over-regimented. The way youth work could respond here was to present an illusion of unsupervised space, exercising only more apparent supervision once trust and credibility had been secured. [Youth work provision perceived as too structured and supervised was more likely to be rejected by older young people - a point made by young people and youth workers alike.]

The image of the setting

A number of youth worker respondents referred to the problem of 'cliques'. It is a problem which is, to some degree, unavoidable in youth work. If it is not objectively true, there will be subjective views that a setting is 'controlled' or dominated by one type of young people or another. Even if that 'type' is not clearly distinguishable (by youth cultural style, for example), there will always be a boundary between the established and the outsiders:

> "There's always a problem integrating the 'outsiders' with the more established membership, who often think of a club as their place. You'll always get cycles of membership - sometimes attracting the 'snobs' and sometimes different types of young people. The image changes constantly and we have to be honest that the image can obviously affect the attractiveness of the club to one group of young people or another"

The important issue here is that it immediately raises the point that youth workers can never just be responding to the internal constituency of the setting, but must be constantly alert to the fact of the wider constituency of young people 'out there'. Different strategies can be adopted (some of which are highlighted in this report) to ensure that the accessibility of provision remains as open as possible, both objectively and in terms of perception. If a setting is viewed by older young people as a 'club for little kids', then it is no wonder that they will never even cross the threshold. Youth workers need to remain

alert to any entrenchment of image about a setting (one young person said the setting she attended was seen by some local people as "the place where the druggies go") and find ways of combating it.

Whose agenda?

Youth work is clearly not just about working on agendas identified by young people. It is about balancing a number of hopefully complementary, but sometimes competing, agendas emanating from different sources: from young people, from the youth work profession, from youth service managers, and from funders and the political arena. Tensions arising from these different agendas have to be managed sensitively by youth workers at the sharp end, for there can be dire risks in alienating any of these constituencies. The clearest tensions may be seen in attitudes and concerns about the curriculum framework (and the paperwork which has accompanied it) and in the requirements in some counties that youth work settings should be involved in county-wide and national competitions and events or in specific work such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. No youth worker was hostile to any of this, but some were concerned that the pendulum had swung too far away from young people's agendas: youth work practice was being shaped more from the top-down than from the bottom-up, giving a lie to principles of participation and empowerment and alienating a key target age group (15-19) in the process.

Youth workers did their best to accommodate political directives and managerial expectations within their daily practice with young people. What seemed at times to have been squeezed out was the professional agenda - the opportunist but educative interventions on matters such as anti-racism, anti-sexism or, indeed, healthy eating. Only one voluntary youth work setting, less constrained in the immediate term by external pressures, portrayed this agenda as being really significant in informing practice:

> "The project tries to cover the range of what young people are interested in and to relate closely to the lives they lead, but it goes further than that. Like, there used to be a lot of jokes about the junk food they consume, but this was the catalyst for looking at the possibilities of more healthy eating. And when I started I noticed there was a lot of racism and racist language around; I had to challenge it. So I got two mates, who were Asian, from college to come down and do a workshop on it; some of the young people then visited some multicultural areas; then they laid on some 'ethnic' food one evening; some attended an Asian festival.....
> Those are examples of my belief that young people often are not exposed to opportunities to learn. I think my job is about creating experiences that I've been fortunate to have. A lot of things we do are steered by me. Many of the prejudices and false assumptions held by young people are because they haven't had chances, tried new things, been exposed to different ideas. They have to be challenged, but they also need encouragement and reassurance that these things are safe, that they can be tried - whether it's eating, perspectives, attitudes, behaviour.... Youth workers are abdicating their professional responsibilities if they don't do these things"

This quotation reiterates the idea that good youth work practice is always a synthesis of agendas, building on the lived experiences and articulated concerns of young people. The extent to which political and managerial imperatives suppress rather than facilitate effective youth work, particularly as regards the age group with which we are concerned, is a matter for further debate.

The health agenda

Despite the proliferation of youth work initiatives around health issues, young people rarely identified health matters as a need. Health issues such as the prevalence of smoking and drinking amongst young people were not considered problematic in any way by the majority of young people; such behaviours were an accepted part of local culture. There was almost universal comment about drug misuse as a local issue but, once again, young people did not view this as a problem - indeed, drugs were often seen as a cheaper alternative to alcohol. On awareness about drugs, and indeed matters concerning sex (and particularly safe sex and the risk of HIV), young people claimed they were already well-informed as a result of school-based interventions. So although these issues were not always seen as unproblematic, they were equally not seen as something they expected or wanted the youth service to do something about, except sometimes at an individual, advisory, level. It was around the health agenda that there was perhaps the greatest divergence between the views of young people and those of youth workers in terms of identifying 'needs'.

The best impact youth work often has is that it diverts interest away from alcohol (and maybe drug) misuse through the provision of an alternative location and alternative activity, although it could be argued that such diversion allows young people to accumulate resources to use on alcohol and/or drugs at times when the youth work setting is not open! However, there is very little evidence that youth work interventions - like educational interventions on these matters more generally (see Whitbread et al. 1995) - influences general behaviour or attitudes. Young people certainly do not suggest they do.

However, it does seem to be around health issues that youth workers have made most progress in forging inter-agency links, thus creating at least the possibility of, on the one hand, the more effective delivery of health services to young people and, on the other, improved access to such services for young people. This 'brokerage' role - one to which Alan Howarth alluded at the first Ministerial Conference - was epitomised by the practical development of health clinics in some of the settings surveyed. Such practice conveyed the fact that dialogue was taking place between local primary health care workers and local youth workers, permitting the cross-fertilisation of ideas and shared learning. This is an important dimension of contemporary youth work practice and provides a transferable model which might be usefully considered in terms of other issues such as training, enterprise or housing. The key issue, common to all such arenas, is the suspicion with which formal (sectoral) provision is often held by young people, and the need to construct a framework or climate of confidence (confidentiality) and trust (rather than expertise) before young people are likely to give such provision serious consideration (or, perhaps more critically in many cases, re-consideration). Youth work appears to be well placed to facilitate such objectives.

The competence and quality of staff

It is important to note the massively different staffing levels and the very different balances between paid staff and volunteers in different youth work settings. This is not to pass any judgment on the different quality of practice in different settings. However, given the recurrent emphasis on the construction of personal relationships as the cornerstone for the development of relevant and effective

practice, the issue is one which merits closer attention. So does the confidence of staff to deliver effective intervention, despite the frequent observation - by both young people and youth workers - that the capacity to build trust and confidence with young people is more important than specific knowledge or skill.

The other question here is the extent to which the backgrounds of youth work staff influence the emphasis given to different aspects of youth work practice. There were indications that ex-teachers and sports leaders were more inclined to give preference and priority to the provision of competitions and activities as a mechanism for promoting participation (here defined as taking part) and expression; in contrast, those trained professionally in youth and community work placed a greater emphasis on discussion, issue-based intervention, advocacy and advice/information work as the mechanism for promoting participation (here defined as playing a part) and empowerment. It could, of course, be argued that workers with different backgrounds have elected to work in settings which historically have given priority to their preferred methods of work, and clearly there are other mediating factors at work - but this is nevertheless an issue which calls for further exploration, since concrete practice may be more a product of worker preferences than any expressed 'needs' of young people.

Programmes, participation and social space

'That's fine by me' was a phrase commonly used by workers commenting on young people who just wanted to come and hang about, even if they hoped that young people would engage more actively in already planned programmes ('participation' as taking part) or contributing to future developments ('participation' as playing a part). But the emphasis was squarely on an absence of pressure - which is reminiscent of the definition of youth work composed by young people in Moscow, which introduces this report.

Programmes, according to all respondents (both those who diligently constructed them and those who were more reluctant to do so), were the visible, but superficial, manifestation of youth work practice. Effective practice was harder to detect, since it lay below the surface of visible programmes of work. (Indeed, it was noted that visible programmes of work could also conceal quite ineffective youth work practice.) Effective practice had relatively little to do with the successful delivery of tangible programmes and everything to do with personal relationships, especially with older young people. The less visible and unspoken dimension of good youth work practice was about young people having:

> * a sense of purpose
> * a sense of belonging
> * a sense somebody cares
> * a sense you're not alone
> * a sense that you are central to things
> * a sense of achievement

These were particularly critical in work with more disadvantaged young people, who were unlikely to be given the support to achieve these ends in other areas of their lives. Such ends might be achieved through a variety of mechanisms, of which planned programmes were but one.

Clubs or projects?

The settings surveyed for this research included both conventional youth club provision and more recently developed youth work projects. The latter tend to have a higher profile while the former have often been subjected to unsubstantiated criticism, particularly with regard to their alleged ineffectiveness in sustaining the involvement of an older age group of young people. Yet most (though not all) of the clubs surveyed still catered for young people in the older age range. There is, it might be argued, an ideological battle being fought on this matter, which has little to do with actual practice; in times of scarce resources, there are clearly some tough choices to be made.

Both sites of practice would claim to be making relevant provision. Clubs tend to claim that they use structured programmes as the foundation for development and learning. Project tend to claim that they use informality and 'drop-in' as the basis for 'stretching' young people, and exposing them to new ideas, experiences and opportunities. To what extent do such patently rhetorical claims square with reality?

It was clear that only the 'drop-in' youth work projects were really reaching out to the most disadvantaged older young people, those experiencing major personal and structural difficulties in their lives. Most youth clubs have lost these young people long ago, if they ever catered for them.

On the other hand, some youth clubs were still providing for the older age group, who were clearly not without 'need' even if it was only for space and autonomy. Such provision took place in the context of making provision for larger numbers of (generally) younger young people and meeting their needs for association and activities. Youth work projects, in contrast, provides for much smaller numbers of usually older young people and addressed more specific issues in their lives, in particularly their need for advice and advocacy.

Both styles of practice therefore are defensible, for different reasons. Ultimately it will be political decisions, rather than any evaluation of the quality of practice, which prioritise one over the other. By and large, despite some potential overlap, they deal with different constituencies of young people and require different forms of provision in order to meet their needs. A key question, however, is the extent to which the demand by older young people for more space and more autonomy can be reconciled with provision for a younger age group even if, as one respondent argued persuasively, it is through initial work with the younger age group that the 'fostering of a culture of participation and empowerment' takes place.

The role of youth work in meeting young people's needs - three points

1. Youth work: safe, supportive spaces

In contrast to being on the street, isolated at home, or stereotyped and judged in other social contexts, youth work settings offer young people autonomous space of their own, where their views are respected and their concerns are heard. The lack of alternatives ('nothing else round here') is rarely objectively true - many young people did identify local alternative sources of advice, places for activity and association, and so on - but those alternatives were commonly perceived as inaccessible because they conveyed an absence of trust, confidence, affordability and acceptance. Although there is clearly a role

for youth workers in promoting the accessibility of such alternatives, for they cannot provide everything, this is the prima facie case for the making of distinct youth work provision. There is without doubt a need for young people to have access to 'protected space' which responds to their need for autonomy, which embraces their basic need for somewhere to go (and hang around, keeping them off the streets!). Within this space, it is then possible to respond to more sophisticated personal and social needs (for activity, advice and so on) in a context where young people are valued for themselves and not pressurised by others' agendas.

2. Developing quality engagement with young people

The history of youth work is peppered with accounts of missed opportunities. Younger age groups may be well satisfied with activity-based provision (as, indeed, may be the wider public), but older young people bring to youth work a more complex range of demands. Not all youth workers, even those who are professionally trained, are able to rise to the challenge, especially if they are cautious about risk-taking or feel constrained by political and managerial demands. This research has highlighted the concerns emanating from the actual or apparent imposition of the youth work curriculum. It has also drawn attention to the fact that older young people are not looking for 'experts' and in fact want youth workers willing to respect their 'space', but it is equally clear that effective and responsive youth work is only made possible through recurrent intervention - constantly seizing opportunities for discussion and development.

There is an implicit sequence referred to by respondents in all accounts of 'good practice' with this older age group. Space and time is required to develop the trust and confidence of young people ('things can't be done overnight'). Slowly, issues (needs and wants) can be explored and agreed, through the synthesis of young people's agendas with wider agendas. This provides the framework for practice development, for the development of responses at both collective and individual levels, involving young people in their framing and shaping, with youth workers acting as a resource and catalyst. Young people talked a lot about the buzz and enthusiasm of (some) workers, through which they themselves were motivated to take ideas and projects forward. They also identified workers in whom they had no confidence and whom they perceived to have little interest in them or in doing anything with them. This is a downside of youth work's capacity to respond to the needs of young people. First and foremost, youth workers have to connect with young people; if they are unable to do that, everything else counts for nothing. If they are, then incremental practice can be developed, first through individualised attention, interest, reaction and responsiveness, secondly through supported collective development, and thirdly through sensitised proactive intervention and advocacy. The fieldwork generated many accounts of such practice evolving in a variety of settings.

3. Limitations and obstructions

Such a process is always vulnerable to a number of obstructions. First there is the reticence of young people themselves, who may be wholly unaccustomed to such approaches. There will be many instances of 'one step forward, two steps back'. Youth workers may wish (or be expected) to move at a pace which is not acceptable to the young people involved. Ideas may evaporate; projects may be abandoned. This is all part of 'learning by experience', but it may be judged differently by those on the outside.

Secondly, there are obstacles at the professional level. These are often attributed to a lack of training (which is clearly an important issue), but they are also a product of a lack of confidence and misguided

assumptions about what counts as appropriate professional practice. 'Acceptance' of young people risks slipping into an unconditional acceptance of young people's behaviour which, in turn, may be perceived by young people as implicit condonement of that behaviour. In observation of practice, some youth workers appeared reluctant to challenge or upset conventions, justifying their lack of action or intervention in terms of conforming with local (youth) cultural norms. This may equally be interpreted as a form of collusion, which is not an acceptable dimension of good youth work practice. There is a delicate line to be drawn which conveys to young people the professional task of youth work; it establishes a de facto contract between youth work provision and young people who elect to participate in it. Only in three settings were guide-lines publicly proclaimed, not so much in the form of 'rules' but in the form of a charter: what young people could expect and what was expected from young people. Without some sense of such mutuality, purposeful youth work intervention becomes much more difficult.

Thirdly, effective youth work risked being obstructed by regulations and expectations imposed by 'out of touch' committees, managers or politicians. Many youth workers felt that they themselves had been disempowered to exploit an eclectic range of methods in order to work with diverse groups of young people through having their work mapped out for them from the 'outside'. We have seen that curriculum issues are differentially understood, interpreted and applied by different workers. Of greater concern was the alleged 'interference' by professional managers (and, even more, by voluntary management committees) about the programme of work to be followed - because they themselves were concerned about visible practice and tangible outcomes. Full-time youth workers and project leaders found themselves expending their energy in dealing 'upwards' with the hierarchy to which they were accountable rather than in improving their service delivery to young people.

There is, undoubtedly, a climate of fear surrounding the delivery of youth work on the ground. Full-time workers fear for their jobs, part-time workers are concerned about their sessional employment. There are mixed feelings about the growing bureaucratic demands placed on face-to-face practitioners. Despite this, youth workers in the settings surveyed displayed a clear commitment to engaging closely with what they perceived to be 'the needs of young people'. Such perceptions were, in many respects, not dissimilar to the needs articulated by young people themselves. Few settings surveyed were still peddling the stereotypical youth work line of 'table tennis and pool'. Many had developed an imaginative range of experiences and opportunities for young people, ensured that those young people had been at the centre of those developments and had endeavoured to represent the interests and concerns of young people in wider contexts. Equally, however, it is clear that youth work can do little to address some of the more structural, transition needs of young people; these demand broader change in other areas of social policy, and anyway the resources of youth work are too small. It is important to be constantly reminded of the fact that however effective youth work interventions may be, they remain only a modest influence on the lives of all but perhaps a tiny handful of young people. No more than Canute does youth work have any power against the prevailing cultural and structural tide. But, if we acknowledge this modest role and the very small resource base from which all youth work is conducted, then the evidence of this report suggests that, given the political will and some managerial flexibility, it has the potential to respond constructively to some of the central needs identified by young people as important to them as they seek to negotiate a variety of routes to adulthood - notably the needs for space, for activity, for autonomy and for advice.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Youth service provision, for those who participate in it, remains an important dimension within the choices available to young people during their leisure time. It is valued, at minimum, for the recreational space it offers. That meets the need of "something to do" but it does beg the question of whether the level of priority given to such essentially leisure provision and the level of resources currently allocated to it by the youth service is still appropriate, particularly as the youth service has increasingly set out its stall on a more educative platform. On the other hand, we should be careful not decry the recreational, activity-based, function of the youth work where no other recreational alternatives are available, or are apparently denied to young people for reasons such as cost or acceptance. Furthermore, it has always been argued that activity-based provision within youth work is not the end in itself, but one mechanism or method by which the personal development of young people can be achieved.

More significantly, youth work offers a social space within which young people are able to congregate and socialise. This meets the often expressed need for "space of our own", something which is rarely available to young people in other contexts. The provision of such space is the platform upon which more ambitious dimensions of youth work practice can be constructed. It requires youth workers to adopt a very different approach to relationship-building and intervention than that which prevails in, for example, schools, the home, or the local pub, for it is contingent upon respecting the relative level of autonomy secured by young people within the youth work setting - the essential reason why young people find it an attractive place to go. That is why, despite the value of having opportunities to participate in a programme of structured events and activities, it remains important not to overwhelm youth work provision with too full a programme, or too high expectations around levels of involvement. Not only does that deny the participative potential which allegedly informs youth work practice, but it almost certainly also guarantees that (particularly) older young people will seek other spaces in which they can "do their own thing" - in a friend's house, in the corner of a local pub or on the street corner.

Such alternatives might meet the proclaimed need for a 'space of their own' but they would thereby deny young people an effective response to their universally expressed need for advice, information and support from someone in whom they had trust and confidence. The youth service - with its relative independence and person-centred philosophy - can and should meet this need more effectively than any other context of young people's lives. Not all the settings studied rose to this challenge; instead, they charted their effectiveness in terms of tangible events and programmed activities. These are clearly important building-blocks - in the sense of promoting involvement and working alongside young people - for developing the trust and confidence to which older young people constantly referred, but they are, equally clearly, not enough. Where older young people really valued a youth work setting, it was because it provided a safe space for considering personal beliefs, attitudes and behaviour - both individually and collectively - especially on matters such as alcohol and drug misuse and personal relationships. It was widely recognised that youth work in itself could do little to address some of the 'core' needs identified by young people, such as unemployment and housing, but nonetheless, effective youth work could ensure that young people were equipped with a full picture of possibilities and limitations on these fronts in the local context. This might be through exploration of specific issues on behalf of an individual, supporting young people in exploring specific issues for themselves, inviting a 'specialist' in to provide information, or simply orchestrating an internal debate. The most telling statement throughout the whole of the research was that young people were less concerned about the competencies of youth workers than about a feeling that youth workers (and, as noted, usually a specific youth worker) would do the very best for them. In conclusion therefore, while the 'needs' (or wants or

issues) affecting young people may vary according to levels of disadvantage and the contexts in which they live, the acid test of the quality of the youth work response lies in the unconditional commitment of youth workers to 'do their best' for participating young people, and a concomitant perception by those young people that that is the case. Careful listening, close understanding and sensitised interventions (at individual, group and setting level) were the benchmark of practice which had achieved this quality of provision. This was inevitably assisted by what might be called 'charismatic' leadership and by long service in the same setting, as well as sometimes by a personal commitment to the locality, but none of these was an essential pre-requisite to maintaining the engagement of older groups of young people, for whom the youth service may be the only possibility of a safe haven in their (sometimes troubled) lives. Where this was not taking place, it was because both youth work managers and their part-time colleagues were riddled with anxiety and preoccupation with contemporary managerial imperatives: the numbers games, the paperwork and the visible programme of events. These may be a necessary infrastructure for sustaining political and managerial support for youth work practice but, increasingly, they have become almost its raison d'etre - at the expense of making the appropriate connections with the needs of young people, particularly but not exclusively those lacking support in other aspects of their lives, and constructing suitable responses to those predicaments.

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