



**Principal Youth Officers'
Group:** Inspections of local
authority education services
for children & young people
- local authority Youth
Service

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Inspections of local authority education services for children & young people - local authority Youth Service

This paper is an aide memoir for new and established local authority youth service leads and is intended to inform, support and guide. This paper may also provide a catalyst for discussions around the future role of the Youth Service in assisting local authorities to discharge their statutory function in relation to Youth Support Services.

This paper is developed in conjunction with the *PYOG Estyn Comments* paper, which includes comments specific to the Youth Service extracted from Estyn inspections of local authority education provision between 2004-2012. This includes themes of good practice observed in the sector during this period.

Background

The Youth Service in Wales has seen the focus of inspection evolve from a full and specific inspection of the service to specific feedback as part of a broader inspection of Youth Support Services (YSS), to no specific feedback under current arrangements for inspection of local authority education services for children and young people (LAESCYP).

The PYOG Estyn Comments paper shows that the majority of comments attributed to the Youth Service in this 8 year period are positive and reflect that the quality of youth work delivery in particular is good. However, whilst not reflected in Estyn inspection reports, feedback from Youth Service lead officers involved in recent inspections indicate that there is an increasing pattern of certain lines of questioning, and expectation by HMI of the local authority Youth Service having a higher level of responsibility for areas of work, particularly in the field of wider youth support services (YSS). This is concerning as it is a responsibility which local authority Youth Service leads are not charged with under current legal frameworks.

Legislative requirements of a local authority in relation to YSS

Section 123 of the Learning & Skills Act (2000), states that a local authority has a duty to:

“provide, secure the provision of or participate in the provision of youth support services. Youth Support Services is defined by the Act as services which, in the opinion of the Assembly, will encourage, enable or assist young persons (directly or indirectly) –

- (a) to participate effectively in education and training,*
- (b) to take advantage of opportunities for employment, or*
- (c) to participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities”.*

Further analysis of LAESCYP Estyn inspection reports shows that, in the main local authorities meet their statutory duty to ‘provide’ and ‘secure’ the provision of youth support services but fail to ‘participate’ in the provision of youth support services. Common recommendations within reports focus on the lack of knowledge of the wider YSS network which impacts negatively on the effectiveness of planning, data collection and analysis, performance management and resource allocation to meet young people’s needs.

Local authorities and Welsh Government need to work closely to ensure that statutory responsibilities are effectively discharged. The current streamlining of the statutory planning framework and move towards single integrated plans has presented some challenges, particularly with the removal in some areas of Children & Young People's Partnerships. Where this has occurred, youth support services need to realign and consider how process and activity will be coordinated.

There appears to be an expectation by Estyn and Welsh Government that Local Authority Youth Services will take more of a strategic lead in meeting the statutory duty. The following sections explore what a Local Authority Youth Service can, or cannot, do to aid progress in this area of work.

Defining Youth Support Services

It can be difficult to draw a line around or specify what constitutes Youth Support Services, a partnership of service delivery including statutory services and voluntary sector organisations. Youth Support Services include any service, activity or experience together with the support needed to access these, which contributes towards improving outcomes for young people aged 11 - 25, enabling them to access education, training and employment and to take part effectively and responsibly in their communities.

The Youth Service

The Youth Service (as a youth support service) offers a specific and valued role and is often delivered as a partnership between local authority and voluntary sector. It is a framework by which youth work is carried out. Youth work is the longest established profession within the wider youth support services and has clear academic benchmarks for training, robust validation systems over that training, national JNC terms and conditions for all those working full and part-time in the field, strong occupational standards (which have very recently been reviewed), a profound value base and an unparalleled, though undemonstrative popularity with the public and young people.

Youth work supports learning – and is fun!

Youth work is an intervention that combines opportunities for creating learning and safe, supportive environments for young people.

There is a big focus and debate currently in Wales around the levels of literacy and numeracy of our children and young people. It is the role of schools to deliver formal programmes of Basic Skills to improve the current concerning levels. Youth support services have a role in this process in overcoming any barriers to accessing formal learning and, in some cases e.g. alternative education programmes a more direct role in supporting young people in improving their basic skills levels. However, basic skills delivery ought to be done by qualified basic skills tutors. This is not to say that youth workers can't or don't support young people in improving their basic skills if they are not qualified to do so, but youth workers are for example also not Counsellors unless they have the relevant formal training and are qualified to deliver formal counselling.

The relationship of adult and young person lies at the heart of youth work. The primary role of a youth worker is to act as a facilitator of learning, personal and social development through conversation and dialogue. In complimenting formal education the

benefits of youth work include increased confidence, learning new skills, making decisions for themselves and feeling more confident about asking for help and information and developing emotional resilience – this includes those severely disengaged to those who are already on the pathway to success and who are set to achieve in the mainstream.

It is accepted that there is a need to evidence the progress of young people coming into contact with the Youth Service (discussed further later in this document). This can be achieved in a number of ways, though the measurement of 'soft' outcomes can be a more challenging process than those of 'hard' outcomes.

As part of the Youth Service "offer", young people can often achieve **qualifications and accreditation** - for some young people this can be their only opportunity to learn. However, young people choose to engage with youth work for a variety of reasons which may for them be more about learning whilst having fun in a safe place than to achieve recognition via accreditation. There are numerous qualitative and quantitative methods for capturing such progress and both used together can provide a wealth of evidence – accreditation levels are captured in the Welsh Government audit.

Assuring Quality

YSS are accountable for the delivery of services for which they are responsible under the partnership and arrangements may include joint commissioning and pooling of budgets to achieve improved outcomes. However, it is expectations around this accountability which is causing some uncertainty e.g. small voluntary sector organisations and sports/arts representative bodies are sometimes not included in local partnerships, nor are local employers. They do, however, have a key role in delivering this agenda and are partners in the delivery of YSS but where accountability really lies can be less than clear cut.

Service Level Agreements (SLA's) are one mechanism for assuring accountability, particularly where services are procured or commissioned, but what is less clear are expectations around the next level of

SLA's, once they have been agreed - lines of responsibility for organisational policies and daily practice. When entering into an arrangement with a provider, the LA Youth Service should do all that is practically possible to ensure that relevant and robust safeguarding, child protection (where relevant) and health & safety procedures and training are in place. It is expected thereafter that such procedures and policies are adhered to by relevant staff and volunteers when charged with the care of young people on behalf of that organisation. Further powers of accountability for wider youth support services other than those vested in the lead individual for the LA Youth Service (and/or other sections of LA for which the appointed Youth Service lead has authority) are not currently invested in these individuals, neither are sufficient resources available currently to support this.

Data collection, measurement and analysis

Data is collected by the Youth Service at the 'front line' on Management Information Systems (MIS). Though these MIS are designed to carry out a number of functions for the Youth Service e.g. planning, monitoring and evaluation, data collection is an important part of their role in providing a 'picture' of service delivery and impact at local level.

The data collected is submitted annually to the Statistical Directorate of the Welsh Government, who took on responsibility for the compilation of data in April 2010. This is then aggregated at national level covering four areas – membership, projects, workforce and finance and informs the development and continuous improvement of the Youth Service, enabling practitioners to increase participation and support young people

to overcome the barriers to learning, and realise their potential.

Whilst a valuable tool in its own right, to add further value to the data collected, the PYOG has engaged with the Local Government Data Unit to carry out more in-depth analysis for the purpose of service improvement. This work links directly with the new *Performance Improvement Framework*, as introduced in April 2011 with support from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) co-ordinating committee, SOLACE Wales and the WLGA Improvement Board.

Though service improvement data will not be published, it will offer a platform for a bench-marking hub, where local authorities will be able to access a range of service improvement benchmarking data.

Outcomes

Although a number of Youth Services have been engaged in the methodology of Results Based Accountability (RBA) locally, at national level discussions around the application of RBA to youth work have only recently commenced.

Whilst a number of authorities have embraced Results Based Accountability (RBA) as a methodology, its use more broadly in other partner organisations is mixed and the use of RBA and full understanding of the methodology is still in its infancy. Also, it is commonly accepted that the experience of those authorities who have sought to embed the approach suggest it requires a significant commitment in terms of human resources and culture change. In addition, there can be a time delay for measuring the impact on some high-level outcomes and partners will need to find a way of ensuring robust performance management in the short term.

Resources

In a climate when services for young people are in greater demand, resources in contrast are reducing. As with all public sector services, the Youth Service is consistently looking at innovative ways to improve service delivery within the context of reducing budgets, without

compromising quality. Whilst youth work skills are in high demand, expectations of what the Youth Service is able to deliver need to be realistic, unless appropriate extra resources are allocated to support any expansion. Youth work has consistently been shown to offer excellent value (the average spend per head of population for the Youth Service in 2009-10 (based on core funding) was £72.16 compared with £5,595 per head for the same year in schools, but should not be seen as a cheap option.

The total of core Youth Service budgets in Wales in 2009-10 was £24.1m (including a sum of £2.9m for capital funding, which is no longer available), a 4% decrease on 2008-09. In addition to the core Youth Service budget, the total budget for the Youth Service in Wales for 2009-10 included income of £18.8 million from other sources, accounting for 44 per cent of the total income. £5.6m of external funding sources came from Cymorth; the Cymorth grant has since shifted focus to Families First and indications are that a large percentage of this grant, which historically has come into the Youth Service from Cymorth will be redirected. For the 15 local authorities within the ESF Convergence zone, funding which has been available in recent years is also coming to an end in 2013.

Summary

The Youth Service in Wales supports youth workers in making a valued and impactful contribution to the lives of young people. It will continue to provide this highly valued service to young people in the context of wider youth support services and strives to improve service delivery and produce robust evidence on the impact of its work with young people.

The current focus on the role of the Youth Service in the context of YSS is welcomed but there needs to be further discussion between the PYOG, WG, Estyn and partners as to how this will develop as we enter a new phase and context, as well as a new Estyn inspection cycle.

It seems apparent that there is sufficient confidence in the local authority Youth Service to carry out a facilitative/ supportive role with wider Youth Support Services during and in between the inspection process. With its well established procedures, protocols, professional networks and links with local voluntary youth organisations, these robust structures would appear to lend weight to this view. Far from 'resting on its laurels', the PYOG, partners and relevant stakeholders continue to strive to improve these processes for the benefits of young people but requires the necessary recognition and investment to support its efforts.