

The Coherent Route – An Introduction

In the mid 1980s there was a strong wish in Wales to develop a coherent route of training, which would be designed to meet organisational needs and to give part-time workers the opportunity of progressing to recognised academic and professional qualifications.

An attempt was made to achieve this in 1987 with the introduction of a Stage 2 part-time training course at the University of Wales, Cardiff, involving trainers and students from the old counties of Mid Glamorgan, South Glamorgan and Gwent. While this training provided a quality experience, students were left isolated, as the training could not be recognised either within an academic framework or by the youth and community work endorsing body. The failure of this training with regard to developments within a coherent route reinforced the importance of the need to ensure securely located training and proved to be a milestone in thinking within youth and community work training.

By 1990 a number of new developments highlighted the growing importance of the part-time youth worker. The first was the *Survey of Youth Workers in Wales* which was carried out by the Wales Youth Work Partnership. This survey involved almost 500 full and part-time workers and provided factual information on the changing role of the youth worker. Included in these changes was the reduction of time spent by full-time workers on face-to-face work and the resultant responsibility given to the part-time worker to deliver the youth work programme. Other developments were the core curriculum debate which was taking place at national level, and reports such as *Management Issues for the 90s*. Both were raising central issues about the management, direction and accountability of youth and community work and introducing new terminology to the profession.

Within this scene it was clearly recognised that high quality youth work would depend significantly on the part-time youth worker. (In this context a part-time youth worker applies to anyone working in a voluntary or paid capacity within the voluntary, statutory and independent sectors.) It was further realised that if quality youth work was to be developed and maintained, additional support of part-time workers through training would be required and that this training would need to carry both academic and professional recognition.

The historical divisions in training for youth and community workers are now closing. Traditionally, the training for part-time and voluntary workers has followed a path separate from that which has led to professionally qualified status. Increasingly the government, employers and workers are asking for all forms of training to lie within recognised frameworks, so that knowledge and skills become transferable currency.

The Coherent Route to Youth Work Training in Wales is currently being delivered within individual unitary authorities or through consortium arrangements, with all the 22 unitary authorities in Wales actively involved. In September 2001 a voluntary sector programme aligned to the Coherent Route commenced delivery giving workers in this sector parity within training within the newly delivered modules.

Although the starting point of the route has previously been seen to be at Foundation level, a large number of local authorities and voluntary groups have always been involved with delivery of 'pre-foundation programmes' which meet the professional needs of the organisation and the wider field. In many cases these programmes were validated through an academic body but only a tiny proportion have received any professional recognition. Through '*Guidelines to Accreditation*' all organisations can have these programmes recognised through meeting the criteria for professional recognition by aligning programmes already operating or by incorporating the guidelines within any new programmes to be delivered. These programmes are now seen to be the building blocks whereby the worker in training will receive necessary professional related training from induction through to preparatory programmes for the foundation.

This process, however, was never intended to be hierarchical as through this route workers are now able to undertake a process of continuing professional development at any level from, and including, Level 2.

The introduction of the coherent route is a positive development in Wales. It is designed to improve the quality of practice delivery to young people as well as offering workers the opportunity of progression through to the attainment of recognised qualifications.