

The Youth Service in Wales

John Rose explains the background to this text, which was produced as a leaflet and disseminated throughout Wales earlier this year.



This document was produced by the Wales Youth Agency in consultation with representatives of the voluntary and maintained sectors of the youth service in Wales. Its main purpose is to help promote the scope and ability of the youth service to operate and contribute effectively to both the core agenda of national government and the National Assembly for Wales. It has also been produced to ensure that the youth service moves on from its long held position of uncertainty about its core roles and functions.

There are a number of initiatives emanating from both national government and the National Assembly to suggest a more positive future for the youth service in Wales. It is expected that these initiatives will result in a more focused approach to the delivery of youth service provision and be related to national government's core agenda of economic and social regeneration. It is likely that the youth service will now play a more central role in issues related to education, training and employment with young people attaining the skills identified by the Education and Training Action Plan (ETAP). This will involve the youth service working with young people to acquire communication, problem solving and team working skills. Of crucial importance will be the way the youth service links this new role to its traditional values-base, including its commitment to a voluntary relationship with young people. It is important for the youth service to remember in this time of change that it has a positive effect on issues such as crime reduction, health promotion, and employability not because these issues are its main focus but because of effective youth service practice. It is also important to recognise that the purpose of the youth service in Wales has never been clearer following the production of the documents on Occupation and Function Mapping and Standards for Youth Work.

Effective Youth work is delivered as a partnership between the government's agenda, the youth service and the identified needs of young people. It is delivered in a clearly defined framework that includes:

- The Maintained Youth Service in existence since 1939
- The National Voluntary Youth Organisations in Wales which came together as a corporate body in 1943 and
- The growing Independent Voluntary Sector funded by such organisations as the European Social Fund (ESF) and the National Lottery.

Although youth work is still often delivered in buildings, either purpose built or adapted for use with young people, there has been a significant trend in developing alternative youth work settings including:

- Special projects which address specific issues such as drugs, criminal behaviour, homelessness, health, truancy, discrimination and the environment.
- On the streets, in cafes and in pubs.
- In information, advice and counselling centres

- In mobile youth clubs and services.
- In centres specialising in the arts, sports or outdoor activities
- In residential centres.

Young people find the Youth Service attractive and value the opportunities it provides. In Wales over 250,000 are in contact with a wide range of youth work on a regular basis.

It is recognised that the Youth Service has many measurable outcomes that impact on the lives of young people, the communities in which they live and the wider society.

There is a ready market for the facilities of the Youth Service, recent research claims that at some point in their lives 90% of young people are in touch with the range of organisations and facilities that comprise the Youth service.

The Youth Service in Wales is a cost-effective service through efficient use of partnership arrangements between the maintained and voluntary sectors.

The Purpose of Youth Work is:

"To facilitate and support young people's growth through dependence to interdependence, by encouraging their personal and social education and helping them to take a positive role in the development of their communities and society"

DfEE (1997)

Age range between 11-25 years, with priority given to 13-19 year olds.

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The corporately developed Curriculum Statement drives the Youth Service in Wales and is deeply embedded in youth work practice. Its stated aim is to provide opportunities for young people that are

Educative
Participative
Empowering
Expressive

The Curriculum is delivered in a wide range of settings often with partners including Schools, FE Institutes, Social Services, Probation and Police by using a number of diverse activities involving young people in:

- Discussing issues relating to health, relationships, sexual behaviour, responsibilities and the care and nurturing of children
- Becoming sensitive to their community, the local and global environment, and to their cultural heritage and linguistic background, and those of others
- Finding challenge, recognition and achievement through adventurous activities.
- Receiving information and advice through the availability of published material, guidance, counselling and group discussion
- Developing skills through coaching and playing individual or team sports, and taking part in informal recreational activities in a safe environment.
- Developing expressive skills through participation in dance, music, visual arts, drama and role-play.
- Travelling; experiencing residential opportunities and hosting incoming visitors.

The curriculum is most effectively delivered when there is a partnership between the maintained and voluntary sectors of the service.

The Youth Service is increasingly able to articulate the outcomes of its work in relation to the non government agenda:

- The Education and Training Action Plan for Wales claims that the current and future skills for the labour market include the need to develop **communication and team building skills by those who are able to show initiative.** Many young people who come into contact with the youth service attain these skills, which are recorded within the Records of Achievement programme. It is the intention of these to be complementary to those recorded at school; for many young people who use the Youth Service they often become their only measure of success.
- Issues of community and personal safety are also important measurable outcomes of youth service provision, with a Home Office report stating that:

"Youth Workers are in a unique position with regard to young offenders: they can divert them from the criminal justice system whilst simultaneously helping them to a more rewarding position in the wider society"

The Youth Service achieves these positive outcomes by basing its diverse range of activities on a set of clearly articulated Principles and Values and by a developing Code of Ethics.

Central to the Principles and Values of Youth Service practice is the **voluntary engagement** of individuals and groups in a learning process that promotes equality of access and opportunity. Youth work in Wales is delivered within the context of, and contributes significantly to, the Lifelong Learning process in Wales;

The Youth Service is clearly in tune with two key strands of the Government's Agenda i.e:

1. **Economic Regeneration:** concerned with Education, Training and Employment.
2. **Social Regeneration:** concerned with issues such as Active Citizenship, Personal and Community Safety, Social Inclusion and Healthy Living.

Programmes are being developed to ensure that the Youth Service plays an active part in the implementation of this agenda.

Youth Service Priorities



1. **To secure sufficient core funding to develop and implement a comprehensive strategic plan for the Youth Service**
1. **To improve the structural deficiencies of the Youth Service, particularly the ratio between full-time and part-time staff.**
1. **To ensure that a contemporary and relevant curriculum is delivered to agreed standards.**
1. **To develop a multi-skilled and flexible workforce.**
1. **To play an effective part in delivering the government agenda related to economic and social regeneration through initiatives such as:
Youth Access Initiative Programmes
Youth Service and Schools Programmes
16+ projects
Standards Development**

There is a statutory duty for Unitary Authorities to ensure that there are adequate facilities for Youth service provision in their area. This responsibility is contained within section 11 of the Further and Higher Act 1992 by the statement that local education authorities have a duty to: "secure adequate facilities for further education". The Welsh Assembly intends to "improve, strengthen and establish a strategy for the Youth Service" (Learning is for Everyone 1998)

For further information please contact John Rose Assistant Chief Executive, Wales Youth Agency (address on p.2)