

Extending Entitlement Revisited: The Maintained Youth Service 2002-2007

Paper Number 9 – Findings and Recommendations

This is the final paper, in a series of 9, detailing an investigation to determine how effectively the Youth Service was able between 2002 and 2004 to meet the needs of young people and the requirements of relevant government policy while maintaining its discrete identity as described within its purposes and value statements. Three methods of obtaining evidence were used: document analysis, a questionnaire survey and individual and focus-group interviews. These methods were located within an evaluation research framework concerned to measure the extent to which a planned programme of activities achieves its desired objectives (meeting the needs of young people and the requirements of government policy) within the culture of the organisation being evaluated. In carrying out this process, it was recognised that the results of evaluation research rarely rely on the empirical evidence alone because there is a necessary compromise to be made between precision and the broad picture. It was also recognised that evaluation theory has been developed from the concept of managerialism, supported by what is described as the inaccurate assumption that both policy makers and managers are in control of decision making. However, the goal-setting environment promoted by government is of growing significance to the Youth Service, which is increasingly pressurised by government to introduce both more formal curriculum activities and accreditation mechanisms to its work with young people and more robust evaluation systems to ensure policy initiatives are adhered to. These politically determined results linked to government agendas appear to discount the more difficult-to-measure outcomes related to the more specific needs of young people in favour of more easily quantifiable measures of the sort most often found within the formal education setting.

However, for the researcher, the term evaluation was broader than an attempt to measure the effects of existing and particular government priorities. In the context of the investigation, evaluation research was concerned to understand the real effects of policies,

to compare the assumptions upon which policies are based with social experience and to assist in a considered assessment of their viability and appropriateness. To achieve this outcome, the investigation attempted to move away from a process driven by a hierarchical approach concerned with management-defined problems to one concerned to involve group discussion, negotiation and consensus. As a consequence, the investigation became a process both of identifying the value of a complex context through the collection of a range of evidence from individuals and groups with a relevant interest and of making judgements about what was obtained, which was measured against specific criteria. In adopting this stance, it was recognised that the investigation had a specific focus that precluded it from evaluating a range of organisational characteristics other than those identified. Consequently, certain issues were not considered, including finding out from young people themselves what they believed their needs were, evaluating user satisfaction, or asking young people to identify the benefits of their involvement in the maintained Youth Service. Throughout this process, the opportunity will be taken to make recommendations concerned to develop further the synergy between the elements of the research question as a means of providing conclusion that might lead a more effective service to the young people of Wales.

From the evidence gathered and analysed the maintained Youth Service in Wales was identified as an organisation located for most of its existence at the margins of government thinking. The exceptions being the short-lived effects of the Albemarle Report (Ministry of Education 1960) and the yet-to-be-measured impact of Extending Entitlement (NAW 2000a, NAW 2001c, WAG 2002a). It can be concluded that the reason for this marginalisation is the collective inability of the maintained Youth Service to promote its potential as a predominantly non-formal community-based education provider to the government that funds it. Consequently, the maintained Youth Service is an organisation removed from any significant influence within the policy debate relating to young people or education and supported by inadequate levels of funding. This marginalised position can be seen to be self-perpetuating because of the maintained Youth Service's periodic changes of organisational direction caused by the need to realign its identity in order to fit into particular funding criteria. Rather than adopt a defensible collective stance that reflects its tradition of voluntary association, debate,

dialogue and negotiation, the maintained Youth Service appears more concerned to shift the focus of its provision in order to gain what it thinks is greater financial security and greater political consideration.

Continuing marginalisation has caused the maintained Youth Service to attempt (within the environment of a centralising Labour government) to re-brand itself through the adoption of characteristics of the sort aligned to powerful organisations such as schools. This re-branding has manifested itself in a Youth Service ‘curriculum statement’, enhanced ‘managerial’ structures, ‘workforce development’ strategies, ‘formal measurement methods’ and the identification of the young people with whom it comes into contact as ‘customers’ or ‘clients’.

Some resistance to this re-branding was identified by approaches that reflect the tradition and history of the Youth Service, which generally remains a predominantly community-based organisation despite pressures to move it into, for example, schools or crime prevention arenas. As a result, some practice was discovered that operates where young people are and, when appropriately funded, it was identified as operating at the times young people needed it. It is at times an organisation that brings young people into contact with well meaning adults who support their involvement in a wide range of activities, of benefit both to themselves and often to their communities. Because of its community location and its voluntary association, the maintained Youth Service remains an organisation able to make and maintain contact with many young people who are not in touch with other structures in society, such as school or the workplace.

From the range of evidence examined, it can be concluded that the maintained Youth Service cannot be described as a clearly bounded group (or groups) of people interacting together to achieve a particular goal (or goals) in a formally structured and co-ordinated way. Rather, it can be identified as a disparate, uncoordinated organisation with a wide range of understanding of its purposes, principles and outcomes, characteristics which are too often defined by individuals or small networks of workers. As a consequence, the term Youth Service can be seen to be a contested term subject to a wide variety of interpretations between and within the occupational strands of the organisation. Three key

themes could be identified from the evidence collected during the research to indicate why this is so. First, there were the particular circumstances in place at the time of the investigation. Second, there is the ambiguity of maintained Youth Service identity as a consequence of an ineffectual Curriculum Statement. Third was the role of young people using the maintained Youth Service.

Particular circumstances at the time of the investigation

The interrelated circumstances in place at the time of the investigation created a unique context for the delivery of work with young people through their involvement with the maintained Youth Service. These circumstances included:

- the setting up of the National Assembly for Wales with its interest in education, youth inclusion and participation;
- the development of a national government strategy for working with young people in Wales with its intent to develop a coherent approach within a Young People's Partnership framework;
- the creation within the National Assembly for Wales of a Youth Policy Unit with a responsibility for promoting the legal base of Extending Entitlement; and
- the expansion of resources for the Youth Service.

The result of these developments has been the rapid, generally uncoordinated expansion of the maintained Youth Service, which did not have sufficiently robust mechanisms in place to maximise the new opportunities being presented to it because of its weak organisational foundation. This organisational weakness ensured that the large number of new recruits to the organisation were both uninformed of the purposes of the maintained Youth Service and inadequately prepared for practice through qualifying training, induction programmes and continuing professional development.

This inadequate preparation meant that many workers were separated from both the philosophical position of the maintained Youth Service and its history prior to their employment. As a consequence, many of the recruits to the maintained Youth Service following the allocation of New Burdens money can be identified as being unable to

articulate the purposes, principles and values underpinning their work, or to provide cogent arguments to counter the particular practice stance being advocated by Welsh Assembly Government officials with the responsibility for translating government policy into practice. The rapid expansion of an organisation in poor health as a result of a number of years of neglect within the previous political era meant that it continued to be driven by a range of differing priorities and understanding between the occupational strands both within and between individual local authorities. These differing priorities and understanding have become so pronounced that it is possible to conclude that they have separated the occupational strands of the maintained Youth Service (Principal Youth Officers and regional/specialist managers, full-time workers and part-time workers) in such a fundamental way that they could legitimately be described as operating in three separate ‘young people’ organisations. This position appears to be so well embedded that the possibility of an organisation-driven conciliation process concerned to bring about a collective understanding of purposes, principles and values can legitimately be described as remote.

This conclusion was arrived at because the Principal Youth Officers, as the managers of the Youth Service at a local authority level, were identified as being primarily concerned with macro-management issues, key to which was the continuation and possible growth and status of their specific local authority Youth Service. The focus on this priority has led at times to the distortion of the synergy between organisational purposes and organisational principles and values, as funding streams rather than organisational identity drives the work of the maintained Youth Service. This situation has been exacerbated by the increase in special projects driven by a focused funding regime linked to the delivery of specific services for young people, which are often contrary to the young-people-first approach of the maintained Youth Service. The purposes of the maintained Youth Service were also identified as being confused at a strategic level by the emergence of Young People’s Partnerships, which were perceived by the Principal Youth Officers to be taking a more central responsibility for developing an holistic approach at a local authority level for the delivery of services to young people, often without the involvement of the Principal Youth Officer.

Full-time workers, who should have been providing the core professional integrity of the organisation, were identified by the evidence contained within the investigation as being too often separated from direct contact with young people and, as a result, provided limited input into a form of practice that ensured a robust adherence to the philosophical position of a predominantly non-formal community-based education service. As an occupational strand, full-time workers have also been influenced by the rapid expansion of the maintained Youth Service, which resulted in 45.9% of the full-time workforce being unqualified at the time of the investigation. From the evidence examined it is possible to identify that the outcome of this untenable position is a group of key full-time workers who are unqualified, unable to recognise the purposes of the maintained Youth Service and dislocated from maintained Youth Service history, and as a result, they are isolated from traditional ways of working. As a consequence, the maintained Youth Service was identified as being more susceptible to the contemporary young-people agenda as interpreted by civil servants with the responsibility for turning government policy into practice. Arguments were presented by both Principal Youth Officers and full-time workers during the investigation to suggest that although many workers were unqualified, they were undertaking qualifying training concurrently with their employment. This line of argument would have been more persuasive if the numbers of unqualified workers were less than those identified.

Part-time workers were identified as being concerned with a generally naive young-people-first approach generally through the delivery of low-level leisure provision which failed to recognise the challenges associated with providing predominantly non-formal community-based learning that is intentional and appropriately planned, delivered and measured. This occupational strand has most contact with the young people who use the maintained Youth Service. The ultimate consequence of this predominantly low-level leisure provision approach is the continuation of a disparate uncoordinated way of working with young people with a wide range of differing community, local authority and national priorities resulting in a minimum of intentional learning of the sort advocated by the philosophy of non-formal education. Part-time workers have also been influenced by the rapid expansion of the maintained Youth Service and 47.9% were unqualified at the time this investigation was carried out.

The effect of the Curriculum Statement on the maintained Youth Service in Wales

The second theme identified was the ambiguous environment created by the production of the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales, the purpose of which was to provide a foundation for the work of the maintained Youth Service. The evidence obtained during the investigation, however, identified a significant level of confusion (particularly amongst full-time and part-time unqualified workers, who rely on the publication for the direction of their practice) about the relationship between purposes, principles and values. This conclusion is not to suggest that there is a general lack of knowledge by workers about maintained Youth Service purposes, principles and values, which are well documented in a range of contemporary publications (NYA 2000a, WYA 2002b). It is more about recognising the difficulties associated with extracting a collective understanding of the ‘essence’ of youth work and the difficulties related to agreed definitions of what youth work ‘does’, how it ‘does it’ and what ‘results’ are planned and achieved through the information contained within the Curriculum Statement. For many workers involved in the investigation, the important content of the Curriculum Statement was in the process statements, which identified the work of the Youth Service as being ‘educative’, ‘participative’, ‘empowering’ and ‘expressive’. While these four statements underpinned their work, this did not ensure that the work was part of a process that, for example, engaged with young people through their voluntary association, was age specific and concerned to start from a point determined by young people. The outcome of this lack of recognition of the starting points for the work of the maintained Youth Service was a programme of activities for young people that, in general, seldom rose above a process-driven activity separated from a clearly articulated purpose or intended outcome.

Evidence was found to identify a level of high-quality provision delivered by both full-time and part-time workers which reflected an appropriate philosophical position. This work was also identified as being under continual pressure as a consequence of the conflicts many workers encountered as they attempted to maintain a professional code which advocates attention to the expressed needs of individuals and groups and opposes bureaucratic pressure for increased efficiency and compliance to predetermined

outcomes. This conflict is constantly exacerbated by the need for workers to maintain their levels of professional knowledge in a rapidly changing policy and practice environment, which often challenges their philosophical and knowledge base, with little opportunity to take part in a coherent continual professional development process.

The maintained Youth Service and its relationship with young people

The third theme identified by the evidence obtained during the investigation was the lack of collective understanding across the occupational strands of the role of young people within the maintained Youth Service. At the root of this uncertainty was confusion about both the voluntary attendance of young people and the predominantly non-formal education approach driven by an intentional learning process determined by them. It would be possible to conclude that an approach driven by these two characteristics should result in young people being centrally involved in the development, delivery and measurement of the programme delivered by the maintained Youth Service. However, there was little evidence to suggest that this was happening as an embedded process adopted by all the occupational strands in contact with young people involved in the maintained Youth Service. The reason for this lack of collective understanding can be linked to the lack of opportunity for full-time and part-time workers to be introduced to the organisational characteristics of the maintained Youth Service through appropriate qualifying training and induction programmes. A consequence of this failure is a too-often individualised concept of the purposes and linked principles and values of the organisation that employs them.

Unfocused and unsure

It can be concluded that the combination of these three themes has resulted in the maintained Youth Service becoming unfocused and unsure of its purposes as it switches primarily between education, leisure/play, caring, and employment preparation responsibilities. It has become an organisation easily distracted from its agreed philosophical position into forms of work determined by particular government policy, including, for example, such initiatives as crime reduction and the management of disruptive school pupils. It can be concluded that the reason for this distraction is the lack

of a dominant organisational culture and the proliferation of a number of sub-cultures with a disparate range of interpretations of key Youth Service concepts between and within occupational strands. Education, participation, empowerment, creativity, and transition, for example, have all become terms with a wide variety of interpretations dependent on the sub-culture group making the interpretation.

Within this environment, it can also be concluded that the attention given to the maintained Youth Service following the publication of the National Assembly's strategy for young people, Extending Entitlement, resulted in the identification of incorrect priorities. Rather than providing additional resources to improve its infrastructure through the recruitment and training of additional workers, it can be concluded that the key priority should have been the production of a national Youth Service Strategy focused on a range of priorities that would enable it to make a contribution to the new policy agenda in a way that reflected its organisational identity. A Youth Service strategy would also have needed to contain the priorities necessary to re-energise an organisation suffering from almost 30 years of neglect, including, for example:

1. a refocused purpose (and a collective agreement to it) with clear unambiguous links to agreed principles and values;
2. a building refurbishment programme to bring dilapidated buildings up to standard;
3. defining an appropriate structure which focused resources on maximising contact between workers and young people;
4. identifying agreed outcomes for young people through their involvement with the maintained Youth Service;
5. agreeing methods for measuring the outcomes for young people through their involvement in maintained Youth Service programmes;
6. describing the environment within which the predominantly non-formal community-based education activity of the maintained Youth Service is delivered;
7. having a strategy for training and inducting the significant numbers of workers being recruited into the service;
8. the writing of National Standards for the maintained Youth Service;
9. developing an appropriate maintained Youth Service budget; and

10. detailing partnership working relationships within and between the 22 local authority Youth Services as a means of ensuring the more effective delivery of a predominantly non-formal community-based learning experience for young people.

The current disparate nature of the maintained Youth Service has, from the historical and contemporary evidence examined, become so embedded that there appears to be little opportunity for the position to be effectively improved without radical intervention. There is therefore a need for a more far-reaching reconstruction of work with young people in the community as a means of ensuring that they have a range of appropriate non-formal community based learning opportunities in addition to those available in school. The elements of this reconstruction are described in the following analysis and recommendations.

Recommendation 1

That a national Youth Service be created which would be identified by its non-formal community education approach planned to meet both the identified needs of young people and the economic and social regeneration priorities of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Recommendation 2

That the national Youth Service be identified by a statement of intent (not described as a curriculum statement with its formal education connotations), which would be linked to an agreed set of principles and values, including its:

1. voluntary association with young people;
2. particular educational approach;
3. focus on an age-specific group of young people;
4. value of young people for who they are rather than what they can achieve; and
5. universal approach.

Recommendation 3

That National Standards be produced to provide the foundation on which the Youth Service delivers its work. These standards will be concerned to identify a range of elements essential for the delivery of an effective high quality non-formal community based education service.

Recommendation 4

That the national Youth Service changes its focus to become an outcome driven organisation rather than the predominantly process-driven organisation it is currently. This change of focus would be underpinned by its non-formal education approach which places both the ownership of learning and the assessment of that learning in the control of young people through a range of activities into which they enter voluntarily.

Recommendation 5

That the national Youth Service be located within a system that is not dependent on its organisation, management and delivery being within 22 local authorities, where there is a potential to dilute its collective ability to adhere to a core philosophical position which is often subsumed by competing political and managerial priorities.

The levels of human and physical resources of the maintained Youth Service in Wales

Human resources

The issue of resources for the maintained Youth Service in Wales is linked to two themes: does it spend what it has in an efficient way; and does it have sufficient resources for it to operate effectively? In determining whether the maintained Youth Service spends its budget in an efficient way, consideration needs to be given to its most important resource, those whom it employs. There are, it can be concluded, two main reasons why consideration should be given to its employees. First, the maintained Youth Service is an organisation dependent, for both the process and the product of its work, on the quality of the relationship developed between the adult worker and young people. The quality of

this relationship is not based on, for example, paternalism, friendship or traditional hierarchies but on a foundation created by the voluntary attendance of young people, the consequence of which is the shift in the balance of power away from the adult to the young person. In this relationship, there is a critical need for workers to negotiate with young people the framework for the relationship, which can be ended at any time by the young person without penalty. Failure to recognise the expectations of young people within this relationship can result in the adult worker being left without young people to work with. Understanding the importance of the voluntary relationship and developing approaches to work within it requires skilled workers who are appropriately recruited and trained to enable them to respond adequately to the challenges presented. These challenges include, as examples, managing the shift of power in favour of the young person, seeing young people as young people, starting from a point determined by young people and recognising young people as individuals capable as change.

Second, the workers across the occupational strands of the maintained Youth Service are responsible for 68% of its total budget expenditure (WYA 2005), which places on those responsible for the strategic direction and operational management of the maintained Youth Service a fundamental requirement to ensure the workforce is adequately prepared to carry out its responsibilities as described within a range of documents (NYA, 2000b, WYA 2002b.).

It can be concluded that the ability of too many workers employed by the maintained Youth Service to carry out the range of complex responsibilities associated with their work is significantly diminished by their unqualified status. The extent of this position is demonstrated by the information which identified 45.9% of the 159 full time workers involved in the investigation as unqualified in accordance with the requirements of the Joint Negotiating Council. A similar proportion, 47.9%, of part-time workers was also identified as unqualified.

The financial implications of these high levels of unqualified staff within the maintained Youth Service can be estimated from the maintained Youth Service budget for 2001/2002, which was identified as £29.639 million. Of this figure, 68%, £20.15 million

was spent on employing staff. From the audit figures for the maintained Youth Service for 2003-04 (WYA 2005), the total number of managers was 119, the total full-time workers 363 and the total number of full-time equivalent posts, calculated from the total number of hours worked by the 2367 part-time workers, was 251. The total number of full-time equivalents was 731. Therefore, the total proportion of full-time equivalent workers employed in the maintained Youth Service during the time of the investigation that were unqualified was 40.6% (297 full-time equivalents). The total estimated cost of unqualified workers can therefore be calculated as £8.18 million. Of even more concern than the spending of a significant amount of scarce financial resources on unqualified staff is the potential for a diminished standard of work being offered to young people in the community in the name of the maintained Youth Service. From the evidence available, it is possible to conclude that the maintained Youth Service does not manage a significant part of its financial resources in an efficient way to the detriment of its ability to deliver in a discrete way a service that meets the needs of young people and the requirements of government policy.

Recommendation 6

That the numbers of full-time workers be increased to ensure a minimum ratio of 1 worker to every 400 young people within the priority age range of the national Youth Service.

Recommendation 7

That a minimum of 90% of the staff employed within the national Youth Service would have undertaken appropriate qualifying training prior to their employment (the attainment of this level of qualified staff would bring the new service into line with levels that exist in the maintained Youth Service in England).

Recommendation 8

That all those employed in the national Youth Service have access to professionally endorsed Continuing Professional Development opportunities.

Physical resources

The evidence obtained during the investigation identified the maintained Youth Service in Wales as continuing to be embedded in a culture of financial poverty within which aspiration by workers to work in high-quality buildings, both appropriately staffed and resourced, was at a very low level. There was, in too many instances, a resignation to badly maintained, poorly decorated and ill-equipped premises, often inappropriately located within the community to meet either the needs of young people or the requirements of government policy. The New Burdens Group (NAW 2000d) had identified the acuteness of this particular problem and concluded that the maintained Youth Service was in need of an immediate £20 million to refurbish existing buildings and that additional funding would be required to develop new facilities in areas where none existed. Alleviating this particular deficiency is seen as critical in realising the articulated needs of young people for places to meet.

At the time of the investigation, relatively insignificant amounts of money had been passed to local authorities for the refurbishments of maintained Youth Service buildings through New Burdens funding. It was also identified during the investigation that much of the money that was allocated by the Welsh Assembly Government as a result of the New Burdens recommendations was not used for the purpose for which it was given and was diverted into other local authority priorities. The maintained Youth Service audit for 2003-04 concluded that the capital expenditure for the year was £429,852, which is more than £3.5 million less than the amount proposed within New Burdens (NAW 2000d). The outcome of this level of underspending year on year is a continuing deterioration of the fabric of the buildings being used by the maintained Youth Service with the implications this has on the delivery of high-quality work.

The evidence obtained from the investigation also identified the low level of spending per head by the maintained Youth Service on the 11-25 year olds in Wales, which was calculated as £53.73 per year. This was not, however, the amount available to be spent directly on a programme of activities for young people. Rather, this figure was divided between staff costs (68% £36.50), renting accommodation (10% £5.40), resources (7.2% £3.90), grants to the voluntary sector (3.3% £1.80), training (2.4% £1.30), capital

expenditure (1.5% 0.81p) and other spending (7% £3.80). The amount of money supplied through the local authority for the delivery of a programme that would maintain the interest of young people in the activities of the maintained Youth Service would have to be found from 7% under the heading ‘other’, or £3.80 per head for young people aged 11-25 per year (WYA 2005).

Simply stated, the maintained Youth Service in Wales is grossly underfunded to carry out its work in a way that consistently meets the needs of young people and the requirements of government policy. Underfunding continues to provide insurmountable difficulties for the staff of the maintained Youth Service to attract and work in a positive way with young people, who are often affected negatively both by the condition of the buildings within which they meet and by the lack of equipment and facilities.

Recommendation 9

That £20 million, plus inflation from the year 2000, is made available to refurbish the existing building stock currently used by the maintained Youth Service. This would be in line with the recommendations made in the New Burdens Report (NAW 2000d).

Recommendation 10

That a minimum of £4 million be allocated on an annual basis to the national youth Service to continue upgrading buildings and purchase new equipment. This would reflect the requirements of the New Burdens Group.

Recommendation 11

That the national Youth Service develops a network of existing physical resources across Wales which will be converted into centres of excellence concerned to involve young people in a wide range of non-formal community based learning through, for example, the performing arts, sport, outdoor activities and the visual arts.

Recommendation 12

That a core budget allocation of at least £150 per year be made available for every young person in Wales between the ages of 13-19, which is the current priority age range for the maintained Youth Service. This figure would reflect the aspirations of an organisation ambitious to embed its approach within the Life Long Learning Framework of the Welsh Assembly Government

The organisation of the maintained Youth Service in Wales

The maintained Youth Service is organised in such a way as to remove those who should be most able to understand their role – the full-time workers – from direct contact with young people for significant periods of time. Direct contact with young people is, as a consequence, devolved in general to the part-time workers. The extent to which this happens can be illustrated by evidence which identifies that 48% of the full-time workers' time is spent in contact with young people, while part-time workers spend 74% of their working time in the maintained Youth Service in direct contact with young people. It has also been identified that the 52% of time spent by full-time workers away from contact with young people is spent on a range of tasks including management. The significance of this situation is further emphasised by the results of the 2003-04 audit of the maintained Youth Service (WYA 2005); in 1999, there were 75 designated managers, (WYA 2000d) whereas the WYA audit identified that by 2003 the number of managers had reached 119, an increase of 59%. Additional information is required to establish the reasons for the proliferation of managerial posts within the maintained Youth Service and the effect this situation might have on the quality of delivery to young people.

Further evidence identified the full-time workers as being in contact with both under 8 year olds and 8 to 11 year olds for a combined total of 3.7% of their time. Both of these age groups are outside of the specified age for the Youth Service and it can be concluded that this figure should be deducted from the time full-time workers are in direct contact with young people, which reduces the overall direct contact time to 44.3%. Part-time workers were also in contact with under 8 year olds and 8 to 11 year olds for a combined time of 13.6%, which reduces their overall contact time with young people to 61.4%.

Recommendation 13

That a strategy be developed and implemented to ensure that full-time workers in the national Youth Service, in the normal course of their work, are in contact with young people for a minimum of 75% of their time and that part-time workers in the normal course of their work are in contact with young people for a minimum of 90% of their time.

Recommendation 14

That the work of the national Youth Service focuses on its agreed priority age range, that is, young people aged 13 to 19 years.

Recommendation 15

That the structure of the national Youth Service be developed in such a way as to reduce the numbers of manager's currently in post and that the amount of time spent by full-time workers on management tasks is minimised.

Recommendation 16

That a reconfigured national Youth Service structure ensures the continuation of local delivery of agreed programmes. Strategic management and the management of corporate activities such as training, quality standards and quality assurance systems, and programme development should, however, be carried out on a regional or national basis.

Becoming a universal service

From an analysis of the evidence examined, it is possible to conclude that the young people involved with the maintained Youth Service in Wales during the period of the investigation can be identified by three major characteristics. First, they are predominantly within the 12 to 15-year-old age group; second, they are mostly male; third, a significant number of them are not successful within the formal school system. This user profile does not adequately reflect the universal commitment of the maintained Youth Service.

Recommendation 17

That the national Youth Service develops and implements a marketing strategy for widening its contact with young people as a means of ensuring its universal principle. A key element for inclusion in this strategy will be the marketing of a process that young people will see as being both enjoyable and of use to them both in their working and non-working lives. To be successful this marketing strategy will need to be supported by a local infrastructure capable of delivering high quality support to young people in appropriate, well-resourced buildings in suitable locations.

Recommendation 18

That the national Youth Service develops strategies to more appropriately meet the needs of young people by maximising the times their service is accessible to young people by opening more often at weekends and during school holidays.

Working with young people

‘Conversation’ with young people was described by those employed across the occupations strands as the most appropriate way to determine needs and was the method used by 85.4% of workers. From the evidence examined, it is possible to conclude that there is an over-reliance on conversation as a means of determining the needs of those young people with whom the maintained Youth Service is in contact. This conclusion is not intended to criticise conversation as a method because it can be clearly identified as being appropriate for an organisation driven by a young-person-first approach. The concern is related to two significant deficiencies in the process. First the effectiveness of the process is dependent on the young people using the maintained Youth Service being able to participate fully in a conversation with an adult worker and being able to articulate clearly what they need from that relationship. It would have been useful to have seen a range of other methods identified by respondents including, for example, greater use of observation and assessment forms, reflection, role playing, surveys, reading and research. Second, conversation was a method for determining need only with those young people who were already in contact with the maintained Youth Service. There was no evidence to suggest a strategic approach to engage with a range of young people, through

conversation or other means, who were not in regular contact with the maintained Youth Service.

There is also some concern that the emphasis by respondents on conversation as a method for determining the needs of young people is, at least in part, a result of the influence of contemporary policy developments including Extending Entitlement and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child with its strong focus on consulting young people about issues that affect them. Conversation could therefore be seen as *the* outcome of effective Youth Service practice rather than part of a process that leads to agreed action and the attainment of appropriate outcomes. This position was identified from evidence contained within a number of comments made by workers within all of the occupational strands, which were summed up by a focus group of part-time workers who made the claim:

“the outcome of our work for young people is to get them talking, telling us what they want, how they want it and when they want it. If we manage that then our job is done.”

Recommendation 19

That a marketing strategy, linked to the market research strategy, is developed and used by the national Youth Service to keep those between the ages of 11 – 25 aware of the opportunities available to them through their involvement in the organisation. This strategy would be focused on promoting a style of personal development, the outcomes of which would be of use to young people in both their working and non-working lives and capable of making a contribution to the social and economic agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government.

What the maintained Youth Service does and how it measures the outcomes

The maintained Youth Service offers to young people a range of opportunities predominantly during their leisure time after school, sometimes at weekends and sometimes during school holidays. These opportunities include providing somewhere for

young people to go where they can become involved in a wide range of activities, including, for example, sport, art and outdoor activities. From the evidence available, it is possible to conclude that there is a commonality of outcomes for young people identified by the investigation which are achieved through their involvement in these and other activities. Both those working full-time and those working part-time describe the outcomes of their work as being to enable the further development of a range of personal and practical skills of use to the young people with whom they come into contact. There was no evidence obtained during the investigation to indicate that young people become involved in the maintained Youth Service as a conscious act to become more competent in the described ‘practical attributes’ of, for example, communication, team-working, or problem solving. A small number of Principal Youth Officers, regional/specialist managers and full-time workers recognised both this position and the skill required by workers to deliver activities that are of interest to young people and which could be used to achieve outcomes linked to the development of the identified ‘practical attributes’. Evident from these respondents was a position that identified the vehicle of work with young people (for example sport, art, outdoor activities, performing arts) as a way of obtaining relevant outcomes for young people, such as those described as ‘practical attributes’, in an enjoyable and appealing way. It was also recognised by a number of those involved in the interview process that young people who attained and developed these and other ‘practical attributes’ were, as a consequence, more able to obtain employment, security and status and to take a more active part in their neighbourhoods, wider communities and society. For the government, young people who gain these attributes become both part of a workforce that is more able to compete in a global market, underpinned by a knowledge economy, and contributors to its citizenship and wider social regeneration agenda.

Recommendation 20

That those working within the national Youth Service be directed to link the skills development of young people to an intentional learning process that is voluntarily entered into by young people, through a broad spectrum of activities that young people find enjoyable, challenging and appealing.

How the maintained Youth Service measures its outcomes?

There is a lack of formalised systems or procedures to manage or measure, in a collectively agreed way, the outcomes of maintained Youth Service programmes in a manner that reflects a non-formal education approach. Diametrically opposed positions were identified: one group of workers across the occupational strands indicated that learning by young people as an outcome of the work of the maintained Youth Service is most appropriately measured by the sort of testing process used in school; a second group claimed the maintained Youth Service provided free-time activities for young people within which a formalised programme linked to any form of attainment measurement would be an imposition. Common ground for both groups was a belief that effective programmes, either planned or spontaneous, result in young people developing a wide range of ‘soft skills’, including ‘emotional intelligence’, or ‘key skills’, including an enhanced ability to communicate, work in teams, solve problems, and develop self-esteem or display ‘initiative’.

Developing appropriate systems for the external measurement of these skills is problematic, particularly through the use of external measures such as those plagiarised from the formal school setting. For example, workers lack access both to the point that young people have reached prior to intervention and to the extent to which other, parallel, learning experiences contribute to change. As a consequence, there is no credible ‘external scale’ able to measure the ‘distance travelled by young people’. Even if it were possible to develop the tools to measure progress, a problem would remain: the philosophical position of the non-formal education approach of the maintained Youth Service locates the ownership and assessment of learning with young people themselves, which requires an approach that recognises the intrinsic value of learning managed through the development of the skills of action and reflection (Freire 1974). However, such approaches have little credibility within an environment that perceives monitoring and evaluation as management tools whose primary function is to ensure that set objectives are achieved within the cost calculations imposed by policy makers. The consequence of this managerialist environment for the maintained Youth Service is all too obvious. There is a growing trend to provide activities for young people that lend themselves to monitoring and evaluation processes linked to outcomes measured by

external sources. Open College Network (OCNs), National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Youth Achievement Awards and their like are proliferating within a new youth service environment driven by political dogma.

Throughout its history, there is little evidence to be found of a collective commitment to working with young people in a developmental way if the outcomes of such an approach conflict with government priorities. There should be no surprise in this position given that the maintained Youth Service is funded directly by government. It can also be concluded that as a consequence of its responsive nature to government directives, the maintained Youth Service has generally been unable to develop its philosophical position with sufficient rigour to persuade any government of its potential as a non-formal community-based education service capable of contributing to the appropriate education needs of young people.

Recommendation 21

That the national Youth Service be directed to develop a range of appropriate methods for determining the outcomes of its work with young people. These methods should reflect a non-formal education approach and recognise the role of young people in measuring their own learning

Summary

This investigation set out to answer a question with three interrelated elements - the maintained Youth Service in Wales, the needs of those young people with whom the organisation was in contact, and the requirements of appropriate government policy. Each of these elements had to be identified before the effectiveness of their relationship could be judged. After carrying out this process, it can be concluded that the maintained Youth Service cannot in general meet the needs of young people and the requirements of appropriate government policy while maintaining its discrete organisational identity. The most pertinent reason for this is that significant numbers of those working in the maintained Youth Service are incapable of identifying the characteristics that make it

discrete. It can also be concluded that it is an organisation that sometimes meets the needs of young people, not always as a thoughtful process but as a consequence of intuitive practice based on an understanding of young people developed as part of its high-quality-relationship-building role. It is also an organisation that sometimes meets the requirements of government policy, most often, it can be concluded, as a survival mechanism rather than as a process concerned to make a contribution to the economic and social regeneration agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Despite the criticisms identified in this investigation, the maintained Youth Service in Wales does remain an organisation with significant strengths, particularly its ability to develop positive relationships with young people in community locations. It is an organisation capable, at times, of producing high quality work of considerable benefit to young people who make contact with it. The challenge for a national Youth Service is to unlock its full potential so that this high quality work becomes the norm. To achieve this, a national Youth Service will need to both collectively organise itself and convince those who fund it that it is capable of making a significant contribution to young people, the Extending Entitlement agenda, the Learning Country agenda and the economic and social regeneration aspirations of Wales.

John Rose 2017, taken from PhD research

ROSE, J., 2007. *Researching the Maintained Youth Service in Wales: Is it Drawn in Different Directions?* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis). University of Wales Cardiff.

Bibliography

FREIRE, P., 1974. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. London: Continuum.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 1960. *The Youth Service in England and Wales*. London: HMS

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES, 2000a. *Extending Entitlement: Supporting young people in Wales*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES, 2000d. *Extending Entitlement: Report of the New Burdens Working Group*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES, 2001c. *Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales - Consultation on the Draft Direction and Guidance*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

NATIONAL YOUTH AGENCY, 2000a. *National Occupational Standards for Youth Work*. Leicester: National Youth Agency.

NATIONAL YOUTH AGENCY, 2000b. *England's Youth Service – the 1999 Audit*. Leicester: National Youth Agency.

WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT, 2002a. *Extending Entitlement: Support for 11 to 25 year olds in Wales Directions and Guidance*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

WALES YOUTH AGENCY, 2000d. *Audit of the Youth Service in Wales*. Caerphilly: Wales Youth Agency.

WALES YOUTH AGENCY, 2002b. *Response to the Consultation to the Draft Directions and Guidance for Extending Entitlement*. Caerphilly: Wales Youth Agency.

WALES YOUTH AGENCY, 2005. *Audit of the Youth Service in Wales 2003/04*. Caerphilly: Wales Youth Agency.