

## Speaking Notes

### **TAG Seminar UWTSD Carmarthen: Young People, Resilience and Well-being John Rose, 4 May 2018**

The context for the thinking underpinning this presentation is identified by the following two quotes. Both of which have helped me to find a foundation for much of what I have written previously:

*“My fundamental assertion is that Youth Work is an exercise in moral philosophy in the sense that it enables and supports young people to ask and answer the central question of self- ‘what sort of person am I’ ‘what kind of relationships do I want to have with myself and others’ and ‘what sort of society do I want to live in’. Integral to this process is the issue of identity, ‘who am I’ – a concept which refers not only to a person’s self-image – their description of self, or knowledge of membership of a social group, but also of their self-esteem – an individual’s evaluation of self, or the value and emotional significance attached to membership of particular social groups.”*

Kerry Young “Art of Youth Work”

*“I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious. I want them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place. Knowledge is not the same as morality, but we need to understand if we are to avoid past mistakes and move in productive directions. An important part of that understanding is knowing who we are and what we can do... Ultimately, we must synthesize our understandings for ourselves. “*

Howard Gardner (1999: 180-181)

I am going to attempt to provide an overview of the policy context in Wales as this has an impact and influence on the lives of young people and directs the organisational behaviour and wellbeing of the Youth Service. When doing this I want at least to touch upon how that policy – once it has passed across the desk of the Minister – is then interpreted and implemented. It should be remembered that translating policy into practice is not a science.

It is a process within which it is possible to have many interpretations and many alternative priorities during implementation.

New political thinking was possible in Wales because the election of New Labour to UK government in 1997 led to the setting up of the National Assembly for Wales two years later, with responsibility for a wide range of policies and public services previously controlled by the UK government through the Secretary of State for Wales. From its very beginning, the National Assembly claimed it was keen to promote a new way of operating, promoted as 'Team Wales'. This was an approach designed to maximise the relationship between the private, public, and voluntary sectors as a means of delivering three major themes of:

- ***sustainable development,***
- ***social inclusion, and***
- ***equal opportunities***

These themes were to be linked to new education and training initiatives with the intent to:

- ***liberate talent,***
- ***extend opportunity,***
- ***empower communities, and***
- ***help create wealth***

The 'Made in Wales' theme was continued throughout the initial strategic plan of the Assembly with the claim that the approach would be used to tackle the particular economic and social conditions of Wales through greater investment in knowledge-generation and knowledge exploitation.

Early in 2000 this new process of policy construction was implemented to meet a commitment of the Assembly that its Policy Unit would undertake a study that would inform the development of the Assembly's policies for young people. This was made possible because it had received agreement from the UK Cabinet for the inclusion of Welsh clauses in the Learning and Skills Bill. Under Section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act (2000) the National

Assembly had the power to direct local authorities to *“provide, secure the provision of or participation in the provision of youth support services”*.

Youth support services were defined 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 lives of their communities”.

At this stage a Welsh approach was implemented and two key documents were produced by the Assembly because of these new powers. First, the Policy Unit produced a Report *Extending Entitlement: supporting people in Wales (WAG 2000)* which led to the production of *Extending Entitlement: support for 11-25-year olds in Wales Directions and Guidance (WAG 2002)* with its links to the Green Paper *Learning is for Everyone (Stationery Office 1998)*. This was different to the Connexions approach taken in England.

The Directions and Guidance document contained several challenges for the Youth Service, including ambiguity of language and the possible isolation of the local authority Youth Service from the strategic management of Young People’s Partnerships. I will deal with these one at a time. In terms of language the document made random and interchangeable use of terms such as ‘Youth Service’ and ‘Youth Support Services’ a term described by the Principal Youth Officers Group in their response to the Directions and Guidance as a concept (a virtual service) whose main function is not the employment of operational staff, but the co-ordination of services. Despite this response the confusion was carried over to the Assembly Plenary debate relating to the Youth Support Services Direction (Wales) (NAfW 2002) when the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson) talked about the Directions providing *“for the first time in Wales a statutory basis for youth support services”*. Helen Mary Jones (Plaid Cymru AM) supported the motion and claimed, *“Giving the Youth Service a statutory foundation once again in Wales is a positive step”*. Christine Chapman (Labour AM) welcomed the intention of Extending Entitlement *“to place a statutory requirement on all local authorities in Wales to secure a youth service as described in the Curriculum Statement for Youth Work in Wales”*. Eleanor Burnham (Welsh Liberal Democrats) contributed to the

debate by giving her party's support to these directions as *"we support youth services to aid the development of our young people"*. Later in the debate the Minister added further ambiguity to the efficacy of the debate by introducing another description when she stated, *"The Assembly is taking an impressive step today, namely to make youth work statutory in Wales"*.

In terms of isolation from strategic management of Young People's Partnerships, the Principal Youth Officers Group in a further response to the Directions and Guidance expressed concern that a corporate manager of the Youth Service was one of four options for the 3 local authority representatives. This, their response claimed, had the potential of allowing Young People Partnerships to operate without the benefit of a Youth Service specialist.

There were four significant outcomes for the Youth Service arising from the Directions and Guidance debate. **First**, the decision and actions to end funding for the Wales Youth Agency by the Assembly was started in 2004 and the Agency ceased to operate in December 2005. Among the reasons given for its closure was its clear focus on youth work rather than fully encompassing Youth Support Services/Young People's Partnership agencies. **Second**, Young People's Partnerships became the priority for the Civil Servants in the new division, with the individual elements of each partnership becoming subservient – to a greater or lesser extent – to the framework within which they were expected to operate. The Youth Service faced a threat in this process as its non-formal education and informal learning approach was devalued in favour of an educational approach that emphasised quantifiable outcomes in the form of accredited learning. Youth Workers were under constant pressure to provide hard evidence of the distance travelled by young people because of their involvement in Youth Work activities. In addition, there was also more concern with young people NEET and keeping young people close to school, therefore prioritising the (a) and (b) elements of the Youth Support Services Act.

**Third**, Civil Servants within YAPP extended their role regarding the Youth Service from one concerned with involvement in policy development – setting priorities and monitoring and evaluating the outcomes – to a role that interfered in the direct delivery of Youth Work. Because of these actions, the Youth Service in Wales has, in many instances, lost its core

identity because it was directed into ways of working with young people that had little resonance with what it is intended to do.

**Fourth**, this loss of core identity was exacerbated by the reality that financial resources for the Youth Service allocated by the Welsh Government are not a ring-fenced budget. Welsh Government funding is passed to 22 Local Authorities through an agreed funding formula where its use is determined locally. The consequence of this has been a direct reduction of Local Authority spending on the Youth Service. Even when this does not appear to be the case there is clear evidence that money from the Welsh Government allocated for the Youth Service is being spent on young people but not in a way identified in such policy documents as the National Youth Work strategy.

When approved the Extending Entitlement Directions and Guidance document required the 22 local authorities in Wales to set up Young People's Partnerships (YPP's) as the primary vehicle for maximizing multi-agency activity to deliver the 10 stated entitlements to 11-25-year-old identified in the Extending Entitlement strategy. These were planned to:

- better equip young people to make an effective transition into independent adulthood;
- ensure young people can access their full entitlement and contribute to the social and economic prosperity of Wales; and
- enhance cultural life.

Young People's Partnerships would be underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which the Welsh Assembly Government has translated the UN Convention into 7 *Core Aims* which state that young people should:

1. Have a flying start in life;
2. Have a comprehensive range of educational and learning opportunities;
3. Enjoy the best possible health free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation;
4. Have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities;
5. Be listened to, treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised;

6. Enjoy the benefit of a safe home and a community that supports physical and emotional well-being;
7. Not be disadvantaged by poverty.

The need for a specific Young People's Partnerships and Plans were superseded by the production of the Children Act 2004 whose guidance required local authorities to co-ordinate – from 2007 – collaborative working arrangements identified in an overarching Children and Young People's Plan for all children and young people aged 0-25. Incorporated within the Children and Young People's Plan would be the collaboration and planning requirements for 11-25-year olds that had been set out in *Extending Entitlement*. The Children and Young People's Partnerships were also required to consider the Welsh Language Act 1993, Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 which makes legislative provision in respect of four key areas;

1. Child poverty
2. Integrated Family Support Services
3. Play, with reference to the needs of children who are disabled; and
4. Participation

An eventual Welsh Government response to the comment in the Directions and Guidance publication about having a Youth Service in each local authority was the writing of a *National Youth Service Strategy* (WAG 2007). Within this the Youth Service was described as the structure within which a form of work with young people took place. The strategy also described the Youth Service as an organisation with a positive view of young people with the capability to provide a unique learning environment that would be built on the quality of the relationship developed with the trained and skilled adult worker and the voluntary attendance of the young people it met. The outcomes for young people from this learning environment were identified as: *active participation; wider skills development; and enhanced emotional competence*. Supporting the development of the strategy were the UK wide National Occupational Standards (LLUK 2007, LSIS 2012) which identified the purpose, principles and values underpinning the Youth Service approach to working with young people.

In 2012, the Welsh Government challenged local authority areas across Wales to improve by April 2013 the way they worked together to benefit the local area. The challenge was to develop a single plan for partnership working, which was called a Single Integrated Plan (SIP), and to streamline the arrangements for partnership working to avoid the possibility of local authority plans working in isolation. The expectation was that all local authority areas' SIPs would replace the proliferation of other partnership plans, including the Children and Young People's Plan, to streamline the local area partnership arrangements by at least half. The Welsh Government released statutory guidance on Integrating Partnerships and Plans called *Shared Purpose: Shared Delivery*. An analysis of these documents would reveal that the confused policy position of the Youth Service within the Directions and Guidance and the subsequent confused plenary debate resulted in a diminution of its identity in the Young People's Partnership Plans which reduced its identity and importance in the Children and Young People Plans which in turn reduced its identity and importance in the Single Integrated Plan.

Another policy driver which has changed the focus of provision for services for young people in Wales – including the Youth Service – is the *Youth Engagement and Progression Implementation Plan* (WG 2013), which provided non-statutory guidance towards reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). It is based on 6 key elements:

- *Identifying young people most at risk of disengagement*
- *Better brokerage and co-ordination of support*
- *Stronger tracking and transitions of young people through the system*
- *Ensuring provision meets the needs of young people*
- *Strengthening employability skills and opportunities for employment*
- *Greater accountability for better outcomes for young people*

The *National Youth Work Strategy for Wales* was revised in 2014 and set out a 4-year vision (2014-2018) for youth work in Wales. The revised strategy is clearly linked to the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework with a requirement for the contribution of youth work organisations to be better connected with broader support services as a means of supporting a more consistent and integrated offer to young people.

The National Youth Work Strategy also comments on the benefits of open-access provision, which it describes as being available to all young people, regardless of their background or circumstances – unfortunately it is this type of activity that is the first to experience financial cuts. In addition, it identifies youth work as being beneficial in providing safe places for young people to relax and have fun, which provides an environment where potentially vulnerable young people can identify themselves and be identified as requiring further support. The personal and social skills gained via youth work programmes are essential for future employment and functionality in communities for young people of all abilities. The strategy also recognises youth work as being well placed and having the necessary skill sets to provide the ‘lead worker’ role for many young people as part of the Youth Engagement & Progression Framework. Despite this positive rhetoric there is little evidence available to find this type of activity across the local authorities in Wales.

Strategically, the revised National Youth Work Strategy resulted in the setting up of a Youth Work Reference Group to support Welsh Ministers and the Welsh Government to:

- develop and implement a National Outcomes Framework aligned align other relevant Welsh Government outcomes frameworks
- suggest ways forward to identify and effectively share good practice and develop good practice in respect of this strategy and wider Welsh Government priorities
- explore future options for how technology can create and sustain effective engagement with young people
- explore the most appropriate arrangements for supporting the voluntary youth work sector beyond 2016
- advise on the criteria for the evaluation of the impact of youth work
- guide an independent review into effective youth work practice in schools
- advise on the scope and delivery of youth work programmes in schools
- advice on the merits of statutory guidance for youth work
- explore youth work practice across the UK, Europe and internationally and consider the merits and risks associated with alternative models of youth work delivery and contracting



These priorities give a clear focus to the way the Welsh Assembly Government intends youth work to develop.

Informing this approach is the work of Professor Donaldson in his publication 'Successful Futures' which is seeking to reform the school curriculum by designing a curriculum for life. This involves schools working with a wide range of external partners to develop a breadth of opportunities and activities beyond the traditional learning environment of the classroom. This approach is also being enhanced through the establishing of the Education Workforce Council and its registering qualified youth workers from April 2017.

More recently the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 was passed, whose purpose is to make public bodies think more about the long term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach. The Act also established a Commissioner for Future Generations to advise and assist public bodies in doing things in accordance with this Act. The title of the Act clearly demonstrates a commitment by the Welsh Government to young people as the future generations of Wales.

An early task for the new Minister was to provide an update on progress made towards meeting the recommendations of the National Assembly's Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee's "snapshot" inquiry, into youth work in Wales, published in December 2016. In February of this year the Minister wrote to the Chair of the CYPE Committee detailing progress against each of the Committee's 10 recommendations. In her letter the Minister committed Welsh Government to developing a new youth work strategy "....co-constructed with young people and the sector [which will] set out the steps required to deliver on a long-term vision for youth work in Wales". In a written statement, widely welcomed by the sector and timed to coincide with the national youth work conference on 21 March, the Minister commented that the Welsh Government will be: "... clear about the contribution that youth work will play, not just to our young people, but to our wider social, economic and political ambitions in Wales. In doing so we will seek to elevate the profession, so that youth work is a strategic service that will help deliver prosperity for all".

Also in March 2018 Welsh Government published Margaret Jervis' report "Our Future", a commissioned review of Extending Entitlement (2000), Margaret's report set out 9 recommendations, chief amongst which was a call for a new, longer-term and renewed national strategy for youth work. In agreeing to the development of such a strategy, the Minister indicated her intention that it be subjected to annual planning and review, which was not the case for the 2014-2018 strategy which expired at the end of March.

The Youth Work Reference Group (YWRG) has continued to meet under an updated term of reference and with a revised membership. There is to be a new Interim Board for Youth Work (as part of arrangements for the establishment, over time, of a Youth Support Services Board) and the Welsh Government has recently advertised for its Chair as a public appointment. Early indications are that the YWRG will continue as an advisory committee to the Interim Board.

It seems to me that the fundamental challenges for the Youth Service in Wales is to consolidate its corporate identity and approach and then to promote its ability to make a specialised contribution to current and developing social and economic agendas of the Welsh Government.

There is I believe an optimism for the Youth Service. There is renewed interest in our work and we must make collective use of it. We need to recognise that that the interest is because of the current crop of moral panics. To maximise this positive opportunity, we also need as an organisation to quickly get up to speed with the new science on adolescent brain development and the opportunities that come from this. We need to rediscover the reality that positive activities and experiences during adolescence play a key role in how young people are enabled to contribute to making the world a better place. We also need to recognise that these activities, including support from positive adult role models, would have an impact on such things as the current debate on Adverse Childhood Experiences.

**John Rose**  
**4 May 2018**