

**RESPONSE of
NAYCEO
National Association of Youth and Community Education Officers
To Treasury Review**

Annex B3: Strategy for Youth Services

NB We have attached also our response to the Youth Matters Green Paper, as most of our observations there remain highly pertinent to this Review. It also includes a brief description of the role and scope of our organisation. Our responses are linked directly to the particular issues raised by the Review.

“Objective: To review the current provision of youth services and support for young people with a view to identifying longer term policy directions that will bring about improvements in the life chances of young people.

The scope of the review will cover:

the services / support provided for young people in the following areas:

- positive activities to engage young people and also places for young people to go;
- opportunities for active citizenship such as mentoring or volunteering;
- young people’s access to youth activities and places, for example their location and consideration of transport needs;
- the current role and practice of the youth worker and the support and advice they provide as an integral part of youth activities.

The review will examine existing provision, the impact of different services and support on outcomes for young people and how outcomes could be further enhanced. The review will also consider the role and opportunities for children and young people’s participation in the design of services and decision-making.”

NAYCEO COMMENT ON SCOPE OF REVIEW

The scope of the review as identified above fails to take account of what seemed a key assumption of the Youth Matters documentation, namely the potentially closer integration between ‘activities and citizenship’ on the one hand and ‘advice and preventative services’ on the other. In our view, neither Connexions nor multi-agency preventative services have yet taken full advantage of the youth work philosophy, which we know works well with individual young people, and can work more generally when properly resourced, and with a skilled and motivated workforce. For example, the Connexions service, which we believe should for the time being remain as a distinct service, could be better integrated and could build for example on good outreach and group work practice within Youth Services. Frequently, the Youth Service and the voluntary sector are not well represented at multi-agency coordination meetings.

The key questions the review will address:

What is the current distribution of youth services and youth engagement activities available across the country? How is that likely to evolve following the Youth Green Paper?

The Green Paper left far too much discretion to Local Authorities. Youth Services are one of the few areas where elected members can continue to make major structural and operational changes year on year, often based on subjective whim, and this is highly detrimental to continuity and the build-up of expertise. Resources are still distributed on limited timescales, so huge energy goes into funding bids, detailed monitoring against targets with a limited objective rationale, and meeting regular claim deadlines. This is replicated in every independent organisation, which results in a haemorrhage of resources away from front-line work, away from intensive quality development as opposed to 'ticking boxes'.

It is too easy for elected members to base the distribution of resources on political expediency, or on the views of a few young people who are open to manipulation. There should be far more research undertaken on the underlying needs, rather than only the expressed wishes, of young people.

Building on the Youth Green Paper, is there more that could be done to improve and sustain the effectiveness in the delivery of existing services and activities?

The cost of the infrastructure of both local authority and voluntary youth work sectors should be properly calculated. The workload of officers is often far too extensive, including quality development and monitoring, training and staff development, communications, needs analysis, policy development, accreditation, and youth involvement, as well as direct line management of staff and managing multiple projects and budgets, frequently without adequate administrative or technical support. Some resources should be specifically earmarked to provide the infrastructure both for local authority and voluntary organisations, and multi-year funding should be guaranteed for such core organisational costs. Project funding, too, should be allocated over time periods that stand a realistic chance of being able to secure desired outcomes. Extended schools and services can help, but schools need to be made to comply.

What are the particular barriers faced by different groups of young people, including disabled young people, in accessing services, and what are the policy issues that arise?

The most pressing issue is to identify the components of long-standing successful youth work practice with young people at risk of anti-social behaviour, and then to embark on a recruitment and training campaign to ensure that more youth workers specialise in this area of work.

This would move away from the current concentration of resources in youth offending teams, which have limited impact, usually too late, on the large number of young people who need earlier good quality youth work intervention. NAYCEO would be keen to be involved with a national project that develops work in this area, building on our long experience.

More funds should be available for the adaptation of premises, and more training and incentives should be available for staff to do youth work with young people with a range of disabilities and learning difficulties.

What is the national and international evidence on the effectiveness of different types of services and activities in terms of better life outcomes?

Detached youth work, residential youth work, and project oriented work with small groups at a time, are considered the most effective ways of working, but there needs to be much more funding available so as to reach young people through such small groups. Buildings should be well-resourced in order to accommodate such intensive work, often with several small groups simultaneously. This requires a substantial increase in workers able to work intensively with small groups, and in managers with sufficient vision and skill to enable groups to co-exist.

How can we best combine demand led provision for young people with provision that is planned and structured to have the best impact on outcomes for children and young people?

Young people in small groups should be able to contact a central point in each locality, and request assistance from a trained youth worker able to facilitate access to particular responses to identified need. The amount or volume of assistance would have to be worked out so that all young people likely to take advantage of this opportunity could receive adequate input – this would need to be differentiated according to their ability to sustain activities independently. A database would be needed in each locality concerning what opportunities had been requested and taken up by which young people – more useful than Opportunity Cards.

This approach would need to be balanced by a comprehensive range of provision to which young people can be progressively introduced, so that their concept of what is possible can be expanded.

What more can we do to support and enable young people to exert a strong demand side influence on provision? What would we expect in return from young people – their rights and responsibilities?

The above suggestion, which NAYCEO could help to pilot, would vastly increase the demand side influence. It requires an increase in trained and motivated workers. The current position, whereby a small number of young people can have an influence over a small budget, does little more than provide new skills for the young people directly involved.

What principles and priorities should guide the allocation of current and future resources? And who do we need to target?

Training and motivating and managing good youth workers must take priority over other resourcing, because skilled workers will be able to help young people to access resources and facilities already available.

While youth work and its main component, informal social education, needs in principle to be available to all, some young people will in reality get more opportunities than others, eg through higher education or through structured activity clubs for which they are able to pay.

Therefore there must be targeting of young people who are less likely to access such opportunities by themselves, including those who are at risk of, or actually engaged in anti-social behaviour – these should NOT be refused good youth work, but on the contrary need it to a greater extent. However, it is important that more sophisticated or independent young people need also to be able to learn from those who are less so, so youth workers need to create opportunities for interaction between such groups, and in general between groups with different cultures and viewpoints. Good youth and community work is the best method of securing greater community cohesion. Its previous under-resourcing is certainly a major cause of the current alienation of some young people.

What measures and milestones need to be in place to ensure that performance can be assessed and delivery monitored at a local level.

Rather than reliance on ‘measures and milestones’, performance is likely to be enhanced far more by youth work being regarded as a potentially highly skilled profession, with a clear relationship between level of skill and level of pay. However, the range of work regarded as of good quality needs to be expanded, to encompass many, particularly in the voluntary sector, whose skills often currently go unrecognised by the local authority youth work sector.

In general, the outcomes of good youth work need to be predominantly learning outcomes, such as can be recognised and measured by young people, improvements in Awareness, Ability, Attitude and Achievement.

Supplementary questions posed as part of the ‘call for evidence’:

- What are the barriers and enablers of effective Third Sector provision, including statutory commissioning capability?

This question seems to beg many others, such as whether tendering and commissioning processes are a good thing in the first place. However, if a commissioning approach exists, then it is important for each aspect of the statutory sector to be as subject to it as others are.

- What can be done to improve the ability of universal provision to identify and provide a service to those with greater needs?

See above under 'principles and priorities guiding resources'. The main point is to get the 'mainstream' to realize that they need to learn from those with 'particular needs', many of whom may actually be more progressive, and more likely to be those who herald the future world. In other words, training and social policy needs to stop trying to enforce conformity. People respond much better to being treated with respect.

- Which projects and programmes in the last five years have had a proven and sustained impact and brought innovation to delivery of services for young people?

Connexions has mostly been good. Why has the Government lost its original Connexions strategy vision, when young people have not?

Children's Trusts would be much better if they were about Young People, and not so dominated by the same local authority influences.

'V' has so far been a huge disappointment for a very large number of people in the sector, as it is not genuinely about youth action on things that matter. It is perpetuating the myth that only certain kinds of young people volunteer. There is almost no reporting so far of its activities.

- What encourages young people to try new and different kinds of activities from those they already do?

The focus on 'activities' in the Green Paper is not helpful. 'Positive Activities' is a concept still currently linked too closely with PAYP.

Good youth workers will work within young people's world view, working initially with their own ideas, and gradually expanding them. This can take some time, or where a youth worker has a certain charisma, young people may well follow wherever they are led (There is nothing wrong with charisma in itself, but clearly there are dangers with untrained and unmanaged charisma). Above all, a youth worker needs to enjoy being with young people, and to enjoy the sense of discovery that can be experienced. Ideally, a good worker wins the trust of young people and their parents, as someone who can always think of a new angle, and can then introduce new activities without the heavy hand of planning and risk assessment being evident at first, as this can stifle a sense of adventure and spontaneity.

- What evidence is there of the benefits that arise from young people's involvement in design and provision of their activities? What evidence is there of how outcomes have improved as a result?

It is important not to restrict youth participation to design of youth activities – young people are often at their best when commenting on national and international issues, and then working from the macrocosm back to the microcosm, not vice versa.

- What attracts people to the youth work workforce? What is less attractive about membership of this workforce?

People are attracted often initially because they like young people, who can often be characterised as having fresh ideas and fresh energy. They are likely to have discovered that they get a positive response from young people because of their willingness to listen, and to understand young people's viewpoints, while also being able to get young people to see other viewpoints, and take advantage of new opportunities, without seeming to criticise or present too great a challenge. Many come to be youth workers because they have experienced good youth work, and want to put something back, and replicate the good they know it does.

It used to be that many staff, especially mature women, found a way in as a way of earning extra money while bringing up a family, and then discovering an aptitude and taking up training. The changes in access to degrees and grants has had a marked effect on this route.

Many young people/careers staff will not consider youth work as a career choice unless they have personal experience of it. Much more needs to be done about marketing it as an option, particularly among young men. More workers would also lead to a better work/life balance.

Youth workers are often undervalued within a local authority, often because of inadequate provision, but often the fault for this lies in inadequate resourcing, and inadequate management structures.