

Implications of the Welsh Assembly for the Youth Service in Wales

Caer Beris Manor Hotel, Builth Wells, 13 May 1999

Group Discussion Responses.

Question 1

"What does the Youth Service need to do, in a corporate sense, in the short and medium term to respond to the challenges brought about by the Welsh Assembly"

Responses:

Carry out an Audit of the Youth Service:

- Appropriate decisions on the future of the Youth Service can only be made if supported by appropriate information.
- The Audit will identify issues related to resources, core funding and the redefining of the term adequacy.

Develop a Public relations strategy:

- Promote the Youth Service using the definition described in contemporary documents i.e. Mapping Exercise, Standards Development. Curriculum Statement for Wales National Training Organisation, (see question 2)
- Concerns were expressed about whether or not the Youth Service had a corporate identity - to narrow the focus we should adopt the definition that the Youth Service can be identified within the three strands of:
 - The Maintained Sector
 - The Voluntary Sector
 - The Independent Voluntary SectorIt was felt that Government persons/systems had a stereotypical view of the Youth Service which did not help there was a need to "educate" the Assembly to the in- depth role of the Youth Service and its diversity. This could be achieved by providing a group of youth work specialist/informed persons who could be made available to the Assembly for consultation and reference.
- The danger was recognised of relying too much on the W.Y.A.-that local Youth Organisations should be affecting change by lobbying (a) local aims and (b) the Regional committees.
 - Be clear about who we are
 - What we do
 - How we contribute to the government agenda.
- The Youth Service needs to provide positive messages and specific information about the outcomes of youth work short-term objectives-demonstrate efficiency.

- Examine existing agendas and identify areas of ownership-very important or the Youth Service will not survive. Short term/immediate objectives need to be articulated.
- Empower those who already have an interest in youth affairs / educate those who don't,
- Ensure local government strategy for youth work is in line with national government policy.

Question 2

"How best can the Wales Youth Agency assist the maintained, voluntary and independent voluntary youth services to respond to Welsh Office initiatives related to young people"

Responses:

- The Wales Youth Agency needs to develop a quick response "Publicity Unit" responsible for "selling" the service at a national level by providing information that could be used by corporate organisations, e.g. CWVYS, Principal Officers Group, CEYSAW etc as well as individual components of those organisations.
- Information role is very important, regular bulletin and executive summary of new documents is crucial
- The Wales Youth Agency should set up a system to interpret and distribute contemporary documents related to government policy for young people from a Youth Service perspective
- The Wales Youth Agency should produce as a matter of priority an Assembly Profile to include, for example:
 - National Committee Structures- particularly subject committees related to the Youth Service
 - Regional Committee Structure
 - Key Dates
 - Member Profile
- W.Y.A. must become more politically active and challenging - perhaps by the setting up of an active and on going lobbying strategy This should be carried out in a collaborative way i.e. W. Y.A. acting as a "political broker" to win the support of other agencies in work with young people.
- W.Y. A. should become proactive in influencing social policy which might well influence the lives of young people.
- At "youth work practice level" W.Y.A. should promote and encourage the political awareness of young people-both the promotion of ideas and relevant training. Good practice awards should recognise those initiatives that do make young people politically aware.

- Develop a research programme to produce Youth Service specific information as a means of promoting the effectiveness of the Youth Service in delivering the government agenda related to young people.
- There is a need to identify the "friends" of the Youth Service within the Assembly both at elected member and officer level.
- There will be a need to inform and educate the Assembly Members of the values and roles and functions of the Youth Service. It is also important to promote the broad base of Youth Service activity that is open to all. It is not a service for the "disaffected"
- There is an urgent need to raise the issue of split responsibility for education (pre and post 16) this is an obvious problem for the Youth Service given its agreed age range (Curriculum Statement for Wales)
- The Wales Youth Agency should be proactive in developing the Youth Assembly in Wales. There is a need to link current initiatives with local authority boundaries and to explore the pros and cons of citizenship within the National Curriculum.
- A key role for the Agency is to ensure that Youth Service interests are represented at committees concerned developing policy related to young people. There is a need for the Chief Executive to take a more active political role to ensure that the Youth Service is properly recognised.
- The Wales Youth Agency should not be afraid to make mistakes or to contradict government policy when it does not represent appropriately the needs of young people.
- There is a need to review the Youth Work Curriculum in light of new agendas. The review should recognise the new mood of participative democracy in Wales. Central to this is the need for the W. Y. A. to reinforce the principles and values that inform youth work.
- The Youth Service should be seen as a "professional" service that meets the criteria for professional status.
- The Wales Youth Agency should enable the co-ordination of partnership arrangements between the maintained, voluntary and independent voluntary sectors and other identified organisations.

All of the above comments were underpinned by a widely held belief expressed by a large number of participants that the Wales Youth Agency needed to respond to this unique time by developing a radical short term strategic approach. This could involve the short term restructuring of Agency Staff and the redefining of roles and functions as well as the reallocation of budgets focused on curriculum, training and information related to the Youth Service. It was believed that the only ringfenced resources would be those allocated to existing projects currently funded by government i.e. Youth Work and Schools Programme.

General Comments

- The current debate offers a high degree of optimism about the future of the YOUTH SERVICE, the cost of any future development will however require us to clearly describe what we do and how that links into government policy. It is a crucial responsibility of the Wales Youth Agency to give the Youth Service a lead in this.
- The Wales Youth Agency should "lead" not "assist"
- W. Y.A. should be "leaders" not "supporters"
- The resources of the Agency should, during the next year be focused on a small number of key priorities.
- The Wales Youth Agency needs to establish its relationship with the Welsh Assembly e.g. is it a lobbying organisation
- The Youth Service needs to wake up to the opportunities presented by the Assembly we must stop going round in circles.
- In raising awareness a follow up is needed to explore the ideas in depth - either regional or national, with more quality time to produce recommendations, perhaps a working group to produce a paper to further open up an action plan.
- Concern still about genuine youth consultation and mechanisms for this. Who represents what groupings of young people?
- Please take on board that if we have to have a place in and on the Assembly-then we must move now!
- Well done-essential work to be done!
- Very timely - extremely useful.
- Youth Service needs to sort itself out and clarify what it is doing-Youth Service must wake up.
- W.Y.A. should take an example from the way WCVA has laid out its stall

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