

WALES YOUTH AGENCY RESPONSE TO 'LEARNING IS FOR EVERYONE'

The Wales Youth Agency welcomes the publication of 'Learning is for Everyone' (LIFE), the first Green Paper for Wales on lifelong learning. We feel that the timing and context for the ideas of promoting Wales as a 'learning country' are apposite and reflect the growing understanding of a need to see learning as a continuing process. This is particularly so for our young people.

The Agency is delighted therefore to read of the importance given to the youth service in its contributory role in both retaining a connection with learning for many, and re-connecting with learning for others for whom the formal education process has been less successful.

The seven principles that underpin the strategy outlined in LIFE are welcomed. The Agency commits itself to working in partnership with the Welsh Office and others, in order to ensure that better education and training, and lifelong learning opportunities for all young people are realised.

We therefore support your proposal that by the year 2002, the government will, amongst a range of targets, have "secured a stronger youth service".

The Learning Challenge

The Learning Challenge (Chapter One) sets out the nature of the task, and it is appropriate that the youth service is seen as contributing to the "National Learning Strategy for Wales". It is also important that LIFE recognises the critical role played by the voluntary sector, and that it recognises the importance of "informal and incidental learning as vital to personal fulfilment" (page 7).

The Agency also strongly supports the need for a "professional modern and collaborative approach based on the principles of equality of opportunity and good value for money" (page 7).

The Wales Youth Agency agrees that the broad overview of Lifelong Learning is a fair one and that the seven key principles are appropriate. The Agency strongly supports the idea of a National Learning Strategy for Wales and its targets. We will assist in drawing up targets for the youth service's contribution to the strategy.

Information, Access and Opportunity

The Wales Youth Agency concurs with the notion that Lifelong Learning can break the cycle of educational and social disadvantage (page 9). It agrees that the youth service can play a large part in overcoming low expectations and poor self-esteem among young people. The Agency has welcomed the New Deal as one approach to addressing these issues, and agrees that the establishment of Learning Direct (page 10) will assist, as will the notion of Investing in Young People. The Agency welcomes

the recognition that the youth service has a role to play in partnership with employers, careers services and TECs in this context.

The Agency is supporting the establishment of the Millennium Volunteers programme in Wales (page 11) jointly with Wales Council for Voluntary Action and Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services. We support the development of good quality, volunteer opportunities for young people generally, and would wish to see full ACCREDITATION introduced for this important experience. The Wales Youth Agency strongly advises that all voluntary contributions by young people result in some form of achievement credit.

The section on the youth service itself is widely acclaimed throughout Wales as it recognises the unique contribution that local authority, voluntary organisations and independent youth organisations make, by "imaginative programmes already helping many young people who have failed in, or have been failed by formal education " (page 12). This is important, but the Agency is anxious to ensure that the wider contribution of the youth service to the learning achievement of many more young people is recognised. The youth service provides challenge, experience and a value-added learning to many 'ordinary' young people. It does of course offer more targeted and responsive programmes to those who are regarded as excluded or disaffected in some way.

The Agency is obviously pleased that it has been awarded an increase in budget of £300,000 in the current financial year to help tackle social exclusion in schools. It is felt that whilst providing a catalyst for pilot work, a longer term approach may be necessary to ensure that a more detailed review over a three year period would best capitalise on the first year investment. The Agency promises robust targets along with innovatory practice in this vitally important pilot project.

The Wales Youth Agency agrees with the contention that the youth service should offer a "straightforward strategic plan to lift results, not least through better staff training". It may be necessary to ensure that resources for training are more adequately secured under the GEST programme.

The Agency agrees that close collaboration with OHMCI is necessary in order to raise standards and that the recent OHMCI report 'Standards and Quality of Youth Work in Local Authorities in Wales' is key to driving any necessary developments of standards.

The Wales Youth Agency supports the six proposals for the youth service (page 12), and particularly welcomes the recognition that it is timely and necessary to clarify local authorities' duty to secure a youth service. It is extremely important to provide guidance on "adequate provision" and the Agency offers to work closely with the Welsh Office and the Local Government Association to help bring a satisfactory outcome. It is also important to ensure that local authorities secure value for money partnerships rather than competitive alternatives. The Wales Youth Agency also strongly supports the notion that "reasonable consultation" should be undertaken with young people themselves. The Agency is already doing much to develop this ideal, and further believes that it is important for a wider section of government and local government to consult with them; housing, employment, health, economic development issues all impact on the lives of young people. Better inter-relationships between these departments and others, will be assisted by securing the representative interest of young people.

The Wales Youth Agency agrees with the emphasis placed on the development of Basic Skills and particularly for those with learning difficulties and disabilities. The Green Paper's proposals relating to Community Based Learning, Further Education and Higher Education are generally welcomed, but it is felt that the introduction of fees

in Higher Education must not deter those who have taken a 'second chance' or gained from a 're-connection with learning'.

In all, the Wales Youth Agency welcomes the proposals for increasing and widening access for learning, and particularly supports the six point proposals for the youth service. It believes that the youth service's contribution to lifelong learning can be better secured by **a reinvestment of resources following a generation of cuts**, an improved in-service training programme linked to accredited recognition, and by better and more focused approaches to partnership ventures with careers services, libraries, schools, colleges and others.

There remains much to be done, however, and it is critically important that the new National Assembly establishes a National Strategy for Youth Work in Wales in order to secure youth work's contribution to lifelong learning. The Wales Youth Agency would commit itself to enabling the development of such a strategy.

Partnerships

The reiteration that education is not exclusively a classroom based activity is welcomed, as is the recognition that **partnerships** are essential if opportunities for lifelong learning are to be fully realised. The Agency supports the contention that the youth service should work collaboratively with a range of providers in order to develop a wider, flexible network of provision for young people's learning. These include working with health promotion and adolescent services in tackling drug and alcohol misuse and promoting safer communities. They also should include partnerships with the art, sports and culture sectors in order to secure young people's involvement in, and contribution to, important elements that secure a broad-balanced learning experience; it is also important for many young people to have the opportunity to use Welsh in community settings as extension to their Welsh medium education.

Qualification and Achievement

The Agency welcomes the development of a Single National Framework for Learning and is particularly pleased to see that achievement, in addition to qualification, is to be given increased status. Much is achieved by young people in their contact with the youth service. A growing list of organisations already ensure that this is so, and give due credit through National Records of Achievement and through other credit-based systems that recognise learning. This, however, remains underdeveloped. The value-added gains by young people must be recorded and capitalised upon. It is strongly felt that the addition of value-added achievement into schools performance reporting would both enhance the value of achievement and other non-examination success and help secure a sound basis for judgement on whole school performance.

International Experience

The Wales Youth Agency firmly believes that the learning gains by young people in international settings can be enormous, and recommends that a strategy be secured that ensures such opportunities are available to all young people. As well as the intrinsic value of experiences in other countries and communities, young people gain significantly from being able to develop social, communication and language skills in an international setting. This is particularly important if young people from Wales are to be able to contribute to the development of the European Union and to be able to play an active role in international citizenship.

RESPONSES TO APPROPRIATE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Is the government's view of lifelong learning a fair and valid one?

(Chapter One)

The Agency believes that the overview is a fair one, and there needs to be a holistic approach to learning beyond and outside school. It is important to note that learning cannot be for the sole purpose of securing economic benefit for the nation. Learning is important in itself as paragraph 5 (Chapter one) ably describes. Prosperity does not therefore relate only to economic gain, but to a richness of experience and opportunity. In this context, the youth service can provide young people with the skills needed for coping with contemporary life, which does in turn contribute to community prosperity.

Are the seven key principles right for LIFE? (Chapter One)

Broadly speaking, the Agency agrees with the seven principles, **but the youth service will, after a generation of resource reduction, need a process of reinvestment if it is to play its potential role to the full.**

Do you agree with National Learning Strategy for Wales and the targets it features? (Chapter One)

There is support for challenging and rigorous target setting if attainment levels are to be raised. It is felt important however, to add a range of 'softer' targets that would reflect additional gains from young people's connection with youth work, and a recognition that for many young people, 'small step' achievements should be valued and credited. These softer targets, and 'small step' achievements need to relate to the process of learning as much as the outcomes. Youth work can raise self-esteem, increase confidence and self-reliance and enable choices based on personal judgement rather than external pressures. This helps to develop attitude, meet challenges, and increase motivation. These targets, if met, would enable many to reconnect with the formal learning structures and would reflect some of the key comments of employers in their response to the Bearing Review.

How should broader provision for information, advice and guidance be organised? (Chapter Two)

It is argued that young people's information, advice and guidance needs are best met by an information strategy for young people, including for example, a 'one stop shop' infrastructure with a common corporate image. This may be shop fronted in a large town or city, be part of broader community provision (in a library or health centre) or by 'virtual shops' on the Internet. This would do away with unnecessary and costly duplication and create a co-ordinated approach, linking careers, health, housing, social services, counselling, libraries and leisure, and other information services.

This network should work to common quality standards and to minimum specification requirements. The Wales Youth Agency has designed and distributed an Information Database for Young People to a range of purchasers in Wales, including local authorities, voluntary groups, schools, colleges and libraries. This development has, in itself, increased access and equality of opportunity across Wales, and could be used a template for an integrated information approach.

What more needs to be done to increase the take-up of 'Investing in Young People?' (Chapter Two)

There is a need for enhanced co-operation between services and agencies in order that a national strategy can develop to assist the 'Investing in Young People' process. The youth service is keen to establish true partnerships, and secure its potential role as a social education provider.

How can the Youth Service's contribution to Lifelong Learning be improved? (Chapter Two)

Undoubtedly the youth service has a significant role to play. It needs support to enable young people to capitalise on its unique contribution. **The service is generally operating with a dangerously low level of full-time professional workers.** This is identified by OHMCI as a key limiting factor, as the service cannot be delivered successfully by part-time workers and volunteers alone. The service's support structures are underdeveloped and whilst its initial and qualifying training routes are secure, in-service training and development remain inadequate. In all, youth work's unique contribution may be best secured by:

- an unequivocal statutory basis for youth work placing a duty on local authorities to secure sufficient youth services within their areas in partnership with voluntary organisations;
- consistent public funding for youth work, based on need and on development plans;
- a recognised distinctive place for youth work in delivering national programmes, for example in community service, health and training for employment;
- new machinery to co-ordinate the National Assembly's responsibilities for youth policy;
- improved arrangements for quality assurance, including a strengthening of HM Inspectorate;
- a coherent framework of training and qualifications for youth workers, whether full or part-time or volunteers;
- a vibrant national infrastructure to support effective local youth work and to give a voice for young people themselves.

What are the best examples of community learning and why? (Chapter Two)

There is a range of excellent examples of the youth work contribution to community learning in Wales. These include projects which are wide ranging and broad based, including examples which are:

- improving essential basic skills
- encouraging participation in decision making
- challenging criminal behaviour

- addressing key health issues
- offering international and other residential experiences
- meeting the information needs of young people
- providing quality volunteer experiences
- engaging in community arts
- developing job seeking skills
- setting up community businesses

These are successful where there is clear evidence of local need, when partnership approaches are secured, appropriate community settings developed, and most importantly, where they use the best practice and principles of youth and community work.

In what other ways should LEAs improve standards and extent of provision for Lifelong Learning? (Chapter Two)

Local Education Authorities should develop their 'enabling' role and be required to work in partnership with voluntary organisations in the delivery of youth work. This will allow more appropriate responses to the changing needs of young people, be more cost effective, and would require true consultation with young people themselves. It would also begin to redress the lack of resources currently invested in the service which have reflected the financial constraints faced by LEAs in recent years. LEAs need to develop, in conjunction with OHMCI, a range of quality standards and quality assurance processes that secure good youth work delivery. This will better enable targeting of young people on issues like crime, health promotion, unemployment, citizenship and basic skills. It will also better secure a range of challenging and participative opportunities for young people by providing value-added experience in addition to the school curriculum.

How can effective partnerships, other than schools and colleges, be established and sustained to promote Lifelong Learning? (Chapter Three)

Partnership-working should be a requirement placed on LEAs in order to best secure a range of appropriate opportunities that contribute to the lifelong learning process. LEAs development plans must include the youth service, and should require collaboration with voluntary organisations (including Local Councils of Voluntary Youth Services), and formal and informal consultation with young people. This requirement will allow the development of local partnerships and create a scenario where consultation is the rule rather than the exception.

Additionally, the development of interdepartmental service groups has successfully enabled excellent partnerships in some local authority areas (e.g between economic development, housing, transport, schools and the youth service). The Agency would offer to consult with the Welsh Local Government Association in the further development of interdepartmental partnerships which better secure the interests of young people.

What should government's strategic objectives be for the future of arts, museum, library, youth service and others in this context? (Chapter Three)

In relation to young people, a strategic objective might establish the 'formal' recognition that a range of other services are essential in the contribution to the post-16 learning scenario.

These services should include the youth service, adult education, libraries, recreation and leisure, museums, arts and cultural services. This would reinforce the notion of learning in its broadest sense, and establish 'learning partners' with formal education institutions.

What more can be done to promote increased access to learning services in rural communities? (Chapter Three)

Much research has been undertaken on the effects of isolation of young people in rural communities. The youth service would welcome a strategy for inclusion and access across Wales to tackle rural, and indeed, other access issues.

Provision would need to be flexible and responsive to community need. Obviously IT links are critical, as can be visiting and mobile services. With some thought and co-operation, the duplication of services can be reduced, enabling a more intensive use of collaborative ventures without increasing resources. Rural youth work can be expensive to provide and yet poorly accessed. The issue needs addressing in order to provide equality of opportunity for all young people.

What more should be done to develop the single national framework for qualifications and progression? (achievement) (Chapter Four)

The Agency supports the notion of a Single Framework for Learners. A great deal of work has already been undertaken in the development of credit awarding schemes for young people in Wales. It is imperative that this work gains wider recognition in order that many more young people can obtain transferable credits for successful achievement gained in their contact with the youth service, incorporating academic, vocational and personal development achievements. It will be necessary to ensure that the single framework recognises and argues for the broadest view of achievement to be recognised. It is important that the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) considers the use of its resources in youth organisations in order to deliver accredited training within the single national framework.

Is the government doing enough to promote educational opportunities through medium of Welsh? (Chapter Four)

Much needs to be done to secure continuing opportunities, particularly in social settings, for young people who receive Welsh medium education (as a first and second language). The development of language initiatives (Mentrau Iaith) has assisted, but the use of Welsh may only be assured as a social language through the further development of informal learning opportunities for young people and their families.

In what ways can LEA's community education service better serve needs of employers? (Chapter Five)

Youth work can provide young people with a range of 'soft' skills that employers see as important (as related by employer's responses to the Dearing Review). The securing of this range of key, transferable skills might be best served by LEAs recognising the youth service as a provider of challenging experience, and developer of communication skills, empowerment, team working and building, problem solving and decision-making opportunities for young people.

CONCLUSION

The overwhelming view of the Wales Youth Agency is one of constructive support for the ideals set out in the Green Paper. The Agency accepts its responsibility to ensure that there is constructive support for youth organisations in order that they might develop youth work practice capable of responding to the changing needs of young people, and within the learning environment and employment context of today.

In all, the Green Paper is felt to be positive, innovative and achievable, particularly because of the way in which the role of the youth service is woven into appropriate chapters throughout. The Wales Youth Agency recognises the role it can play, and offers its support to the Welsh Office, and to the National Assembly for Wales, to secure a sound youth work contribution to meeting the stated objectives of 'Learning is for Everyone'.

**Wales Youth Agency
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