

- `AGENDA FOR A GENERATION` - building effective youth work –

Executive Summary of Action Points

Young people and those working with them will be helped by the following:

- 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 national government'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.

`AGENDA FOR A GENERATION` - building effective youth work

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Foreword

*Young people matter today and are our future.
The youth organisations and services of the United Kingdom
play vital roles in their social education and personal development.
To meet young people's need properly, the country needs a fully developed and
Properly resourced youth policy now.*

*This paper, prepared by a UK-wide alliance of representative youth work bodies,
sets out the basis for such a policy.*

*`AGENDA FOR A GENERATION` is aimed at policy-makers, local and national,
with the intention of seeking **your** support and action.*

*`AGENDA FOR A GENERATION` is not a shopping list. We believe youth work
to be a highly cost effective investment and a proven alternative to the costs of
not addressing the concerns and needs of young people – the costs of vandalism
and crime, of youth unemployment, drug misuse, of failing to engage all young
people in education, training and economic activity.*

*`AGENDA FOR A GENERATION` is about taking youth work seriously. It
presents the case for an effective statutory base, for coherent central and local
government policies and structures, for sufficiency and quality of provision; for a
guaranteed place for young people's voices to be heard as decisions are made.
Help us to make youth work across the UK an investment now for young people,
for all our future.*

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This booklet has been produced by the United Kingdom Youth Work Alliance comprising:

British Youth Council	Scottish Community Education Council
Community and Youth Workers' Union	Scottish Youth Work Forum
Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services	Standing Conference of Principal Youth and Community Officers (England and Wales)
Further Education and Youth Service Association of Wales	Voluntary Youth Network for Northern Ireland (YouthNet)
National Council for Voluntary Youth Services	Wales Youth Agency
National Youth Agency	Youth Council for Northern Ireland
Principal Community Education Officers' Group Scotland	YouthLink (Scotland)
Scottish Association of Community Education Staff	

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Youth Work Today

- Youth work offers a wide range of informal educational activities in the community which provide young people with opportunities for their personal and social development. It is often fun but differs from other leisure-time opportunities by its specific intention of creating settings within which young people can learn and develop.
- The family and the school have the central roles in helping young people to grow up but the wider community also has a vital part to play: it offers a context for maturing young people to find safe spaces to be themselves; to try out new roles; to extend their horizons; to find enjoyment, friendship and support from their peers and committed adults.
- For some young people the paths to adulthood may be blocked, for example, by the absence of jobs or by their own lack of social skills; some are tempted into crime. Effective youth work, statutory and voluntary, intervenes to help young people to deal with such roadblocks, to develop their potential as valued individuals and to become responsible citizens.
- Three out of five young people voluntarily participate in youth work as they grow up. They are helped by over 500,000 volunteers, 50,000 part-time and 5,000 full-time youth workers. Provision is made by local authorities, by voluntary youth work organisations and by a myriad of local community groups. The gearing effect of public investment is considerable; voluntary effort multiplies some eight times the financial contribution of the State. These partnerships result in a great diversity of practice to meet the needs of young people and to tackle social issues.

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- The range of youth work includes: youth clubs; uniformed organisations; faith-based groups; specialised centres in the arts or sports; counselling, information and advice centres; voluntary service; outreach and project work. This mosaic reflects and contributes to our pluralist society. The dedication of personnel has largely maintained the volume of provision despite financial retrenchment, but the erosion in quality and scale is beginning to show. Survey figures suggest that youth work in many areas has suffered substantial cuts in state support over the last five years. The most recent 'Government Expenditure Plans 1994-95 to 1996-97' taken together with the relevant Local Authority Association's Expenditure Report (both for England) clearly anticipate a continuing fall in this support. This attrition must cease and the unacceptably wide variations in finance must be narrowed.

- There are many positive outcomes of participation by young people in youth work. Whatever the setting, effective youth work enables young people to:
 - develop their capacities / physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual, social and emotional;

 - identify and accept their responsibilities, as individuals, group members and citizens;

 - understand and act on the personal and social issues which affect their lives, those of others and the communities of which they are part.

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Youth Work and Urgent Social Issues

- Youth work, when adequately, responds well to the generality of young people but much more needs to be done to help those who are experiencing difficulties and become marginalised and disaffected. These include young people who fail to realise their potential in personal, social, academic and vocational development. They may face difficulties in securing housing or work: 600,000 young adults are unemployed; 100,000 do not have secure housing; one child in four is growing up in poverty.
- Periods of unemployment and fragmentation in family life can produce discontinuity for individuals and diminish the availability of good role models. Many young people do not participate fully in the democratic process. Substantial numbers drop out of education or training and/or are tempted into drug misuse or anti-social activity. Each single youth crime costs the country £2,500. It costs £300 a week to keep a young person in custody. Crime prevention is not youth work's primary task but a recent study by Coopers and Lybrand demonstrated that if a youth project prevented only one in five of its participants from committing just one crime a year it was already cost effective for the taxpayer. Youth workers engage within communities, with other parts of the education service, and other relevant agencies to tackle social issues affecting the young.
- Youth work is responding now to these major social imperatives:
 - building capability in young people: their skills in using language, in information technology, in flexibility and self-reliance, in creativity and enterprise;
 - encouraging active citizenship and awareness of rights and responsibilities so that young people can participate fully in the democratic process;
 - promoting social inclusion by providing programmes which meet the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, accrediting learning so as to enhance employability.

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Providing Youth Work Locally

- The partnership between voluntary organisations and local authorities is highly cost-effective. National and local government can make it more so by creating stability and helping to ensure quality. The key tasks are>
 - **Establishing priorities for local youth services based on identified needs**

Local authorities and voluntary organisations need to take a strategic view to identify needs, co-ordinate their endeavours and to ensure that young people living in the authority have access to appropriate services. Local authorities and voluntary organisations play a crucial part in developing local communities, enabling local groups to take voluntary action and promoting and supporting representative youth forums.

A committee charged with cross departmental policy for young people would live the basis for co-ordinated development across a local authority in response to their needs.
 - **Ensuring diversity of opportunity for young people**

Young people come from diverse backgrounds with a range of needs and aspirations. Local authorities are well-placed to provide particular types of service in certain locations, especially for vulnerable groups. Voluntary organisations often provide a service defined by a particular set of values based on faith or other beliefs or to reflect the needs of distinctive groups and communities. Voluntary organisations should continue to play to their strengths of independence, flexibility and responsiveness without being over-burdened with bureaucracy.

Youth work providers responding to diverse needs require sustained and flexible funding arrangements.
 - **Exerting influence on behalf of young people with decision makers**

Youth work organisations have good awareness of the needs of young people and speak out on matters which concern them. Effective local strategies can help to ensure that the needs of young people are taken into account by other service providers such as housing departments.

The voices of young people must be directly heard at local, regional and national level, in the structures of their own organisations, and through youth councils and forums.

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Creating a Sufficient and High Quality Youth Service

Powers and Duties

- The current legal bases for youth work within the United Kingdom are inadequate. Local authorities should be given explicit and unequivocal powers, and a duty, to secure the provision of sufficient youth services within their areas in partnership with the voluntary youth work providers.

In England and Wales, the legal framework for the youth service rests on Section 11 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (which imposes on local education authorities a duty to secure adequate facilities for youth service activities) and, in Scotland, youth work is provided as an integral part of community education provision under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 which also places on every education authority a duty to secure adequate and efficient provision.

- Although the precise legal position varies, for the majority of the young people in the United Kingdom the legal duty to provide for the youth service rests on a notion of 'adequacy', and nowhere outside Northern Ireland are the necessary powers explicit. During the debate in 1992 on the Further and Higher Education Bill, it was acknowledged by the Government that 'sufficiency' imposes 'a somewhat stronger duty' than 'adequacy', in that sufficiency 'contains the principle of meeting the reasonable needs of all persons to whom the duty extends.'

We urge all those concerned to agree that local authorities should be given explicit and unequivocal powers, and a duty, to secure the provision of sufficient youth work services within their areas in partnership with the voluntary youth work providers. And we call on Government to commit itself to the necessary legislation.

Sufficiency

- A sufficient youth service is not simply a question of more resources. It will involve formalising a number of requirements to ensure quality and encourage good practice. These will need working out in detail at local level but, in overall terms, its components include:
 - a clear statement of purpose, together with an outline of the curriculum entitlement;
 - arrangements to ensure both access and equity and to secure appropriate quality;
 - an outline of the partnership arrangements between the local authorities, the voluntary organisations, and the young people themselves; and the arrangements for consultation and joint planning in each area;
 - proposals for securing sufficient trained staff, both employed and voluntary, to deliver and to support the provision; and
 - formal procedures for the consistent designation of resource allocations, both capital and revenue, appropriate to the delivery of the curriculum entitlement.

On this basis, the Government should require all local authorities to audit the existing youth work provision in their area, and to prepare five year development plans to ensure its sufficiency. Those plans should be published for consultation; and, when completed, be public documents.

Quality Assurance

- The quality of youth work is often extraordinarily good, especially considering the resource constraints under which those responsible for its delivery have been labouring. Nevertheless, there are weaknesses. Some work is itself poor. Most premises are shabby and unkempt. Access to a full range of youth work (especially to information and counselling services) is patchy. Vulnerable groups have restricted access to innovative youth work programmes.

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- The first priority in quality assurance terms is that those engaging with young people are themselves `fit and proper` for the purpose. We have already made a joint submission to the Dunblane enquiry being conducted by Lord Cullen on some aspects of this requirement. Thereafter, the issues are those of curriculum content, working method, facilities and training. The first responsibility for quality assurance must rest with the providers themselves in setting standards and evaluating quality. However, there is an acknowledged need for quality assurance support external to the providers and, in recent years, the capacity of HM Inspectors to carry out such a function has been reduced. As an integral part of all education services, youth work and training for it, should be an explicit – and properly staffed – part of the responsibilities of HM Inspectorate.

HM Inspectorate should be diversified and strengthened to enable it to play a key role in the quality assurance of youth work. In particular, it should be required to provide an objective national evaluation of youth work provision to be laid annually before Parliament.

A vibrant national infrastructure to support effective youth provision

- Local youth services – voluntary and maintained – need to relate to a national infrastructure which affords guidance and support. Voluntary groups often benefit from their affiliation to a national headquarters which provide support rooted in the values of the particular organisation. Opportunities to share practice, agree standards and affirm values benefit diverse local services.
- Representative bodies, national agencies and other support organisations play a major part in ensuring that youth work is provided effectively, takes account of and responds to national trends and priorities. The increased mobility of young people points to the desirability of improved UK-wide collection and analysis of data and research on their needs and views.

Government should recognise the need for a properly resourced national infrastructure to co-ordinate and lead youth work providers.

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Training and Staff Development of Youth Workers

- Local authorities in the UK employ some 50,000 part and full-time professional youth workers. The vast majority of these are part-time staff. Voluntary organisations have extensive networks and currently recruit in excess of half a million volunteers and enable them to work with young people in their communities.
- This is skilled educational work so those who engage with young people need to be appropriately recruited and trained to enable them to respond adequately to the challenges presented.
- Effective youth work provision depends on the existence of a core of professionally qualified youth workers. The skilled support from this group provides an essential foundation given the increasing complexity of the work and the increasing responsibilities at different levels, for example, as a result of the introduction of the Children Act.
- The need for better trained youth workers at all levels has been acknowledged for some time. That need becomes more pressing with the development of new curricula for youth work and new approaches for engaging marginalised young people. There is, therefore, understandable concern at recent cuts in in-service training.
- Whatever their setting, youth workers initiate contact with young people and then carry out four main tasks. They:
 - create informal experiences from which young people can learn;
 - use their specialist skills to promote personal and community development;
 - offer information, advice, counselling and support for learning;
 - act as advocates of young people's needs with other groups.

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- The changing legislative and social policy context requires increased knowledge and skill if such tasks are to be accomplished successfully. It is vital to have good initial training and continued staff development for all staff and volunteers including those taking on managerial responsibilities.

Effective arrangements need to be put in place to:

- establish a coherent framework of training qualifications for voluntary, part-time and full-time staff;
- properly resource existing professional endorsement bodies;
- promote coherent and co-ordinated staff development programmes;
- develop a national pattern of training for management.

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The Machinery of Government

- Current governmental arrangements provide no mechanism by which the needs and interests of young people can be identified – still less protected – when legislative or administrative action by different departments is proposed. The formal links between departments having responsibilities for issues which directly affect young people are limited: inter-departmental consultation is perceived to be grossly inadequate: ministerial leadership is missing and joint action is virtually non-existent.
- Yet the needs of young people, especially the most vulnerable, are multi-faceted. Governmental co-ordination in other areas (e.g. drugs) has shown that effective action can be promoted when there is a clear focus of responsibility and, as required, a designated unit with dedicated personnel. In any proposed change to public policy, or when legislation is planned, consideration should always be given to the possible impact on young people. Moreover, the views of young people themselves should be sought in a structured way. Civil servants should invariably be required to include youth affairs assessments in both 'scoping' and 'proofing' documentation on policies.

The Government should designate a Minister, within an education portfolio, to hold a specific brief for youth policies; to signal the political will to secure the overall co-ordination of youth affairs matters; and to promote greater alignment in policies affecting young people. Responsible Ministers should also be appointed in the Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh Offices.

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European Dimension

- The European Union has competencies in the fields of training, education and youth and other areas of policy which affect the lives of young people. Current EU priorities include citizenship, social inclusion and youth information and it is critical that UK youth work interests and the voice of young people be heard in shaping such actions and programmes. These areas of interest are already reflected within youth work in the UK and so joint approaches can provide synergy for further development.
- Youth organisations have long been active in helping young people to extend their horizons and distinctive EU programmes, such as Youth for Europe, have enabled many more young people to participate in a range of challenging initiatives. But our young people do not benefit as fully as they could from the European experience.
- Youth organisations have endeavoured to play a full part in Europe but governmental participation in the councils of European youth affairs needs to be better informed through a closer knowledge of national and regional youth work and the needs of young people. By this means the UK will be able to exert greater influence on EU policies affecting young people. Youth work agencies and young people themselves must be supported and engaged to articulate their concerns and to shape emerging programmes.

The United Kingdom government should play a more active part in European youth policy within the EU and the Council of Europe; enable youth work organisations to contribute to the development of policy and encourage more young people to influence and benefit from EU programmes.

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Conclusion: An Agenda for Action

What altruism has long urged, self-interest now compels: we need as a priority to bring many more young people into the social, political, economic and educational mainstream. As a nation we can endure the regular 'slow riot' of violence, drug misuse or adolescent criminality. Or we can embrace a youth work policy which is based on an agenda of social renewal: the achieving young person; the empowering youth group, the inclusive community, the enabling state.

Accordingly we believe that young people and those working with them will be helped towards these goals 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 national government'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 to young people themselves.