

Extending Entitlement Revisited: The Maintained Youth Service 2002-2007

Paper Number 1 – Setting the Scene

The study was carried out at a time when the maintained Youth Service in Wales had become drawn into a political agenda created by the election of New Labour in 1997 and the subsequent setting up of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999. As a consequence of the particular circumstances caused by these two events there was an imperative for the maintained Youth Service to make a rapid transition from its historically marginalised position to one more central within the new young-people agenda. This investigation was concerned to determine if the maintained Youth Service was prepared and able to attain a new and strengthened position that made it secure in the long-term by adopting a strategic approach that promoted its young people first approach and maximised the opportunities presented to it by increased political attention and potential new resources.

The focus of the investigation which relied on data collected and analysed between early 2002 and 2007 was to establish if the maintained Youth Service in Wales was concurrently able to meet the needs of young people and the requirements of relevant Government Policy while maintaining its discrete identity as described within its purposes¹ and values² statements. Or was it in reality being drawn in different directions. Finding an answer to this question was important for those working within the Youth Service because it was becoming increasingly linked to the political decisions arising from the election of New Labour to UK government in 1997 and 2001 and by the setting up of the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) in 1999. As a consequence, the Youth Service in Wales had been given an opportunity, through new legislation, policy initiatives and methods of working, to contribute to the new politically driven economic

¹ To provide equality of opportunity for all young people in order that they may fulfil their potential as empowered individuals and as members of groups and communities - To support young people in the transition to adulthood - To assist young people to develop attitudes and skills which enable them to make purposeful use of their personal resources and time

² Which recognize: social education as the core process in youth and community work; the ability and inability of people to resolve problems and change themselves; the tension and distinction between empowering and controlling people; the rights to self determination; the importance of collective action and collaborative working relationships; and the value of co-operation and conflict

and social regeneration agenda, underpinned for New Labour by its key priority – education (Blair 1997, Blair 1998). To make the most of the opportunities arising from this new political environment, and to make sure it was capable of meeting enhanced competition from other organisations providing government-funded services to young people, the maintained Youth Service needed to both recognise and respond to the challenges resulting from the election success of New Labour.

A challenge of particular importance both to the maintained³ Youth Service and to this investigation was the link between the commitment of New Labour to education and the requirement that the expenditure of public money should be based on an ability to demonstrate (through the attainment of measurable outcomes) that specified requirements are achieved. This stance continues to be the predominantly accepted way of judging young people's learning in school. Driven by an examination culture, schools have increasingly refined their structures, management styles, teaching methods, monitoring and evaluation systems in an attempt to ensure that young people secure ever-improving examination results (Kendall and Holloway 2001). School-based monitoring systems are used to manage the effective knowledge acquisition of young people; these are concerned with keeping a continuous record of incremental learning of pupils through their involvement in standardised individual testing (ibid).

This stance had a significant effect on Youth Service practice, which become increasingly concerned with measuring its effectiveness – primarily through the use of school-based methods – in the quantifiable learning of young people involved in its work. This is a situation that cannot easily be avoided or dismissed for two fundamental reasons. First, the maintained Youth Service in Wales is clearly identified as an educational organisation (NAW 2000a). Second, its core funding is obtained from central government grants supported by income raised from the council tax (Young and Rao 1997). This funding situation makes the maintained Youth Service directly responsible and accountable to both local and national government for the delivery of appropriate elements of education legislation and policy. Both of these direct links to government control require the

³ The organizational framework (under the direct control of the local authority) within which a discrete way of working with young people is undertaken in accordance with an identified constitutional base.

maintained Youth Service in Wales to make decisions about how it can respond to the challenge of new government initiatives while attempting to maintain its predominantly non-formal education⁴ approach to learning.

Built on the work of educators such as Illich (1971), Brookfield (1987) Jarvis (1987) and Freire (1996), this non-formal approach challenges the overall effectiveness⁵ of formal education⁶, including its methods of measuring success, in isolation by offering a broader perspective of the values of non-formal learning as a complementary method to formal learning systems. Formal learning systems, these non-formal educators claim, offer certain types of arrangements which may not suit the needs of all learners, implying that the formal context offers some, but not all, an opportunity for learning. To overcome this, they suggested systems should be developed to:

“provide the learner with new links to the world instead of continuing to funnel all educational programmes through the teacher.”

(Illich 1971:73)

This philosophy has been promoted as the most appropriate approach for the Youth Service, which is described as a community-based organisation involved in a non-formal style of teaching and learning during the leisure time of young people (National Youth Agency (NYA) 2000a, Wales Youth Agency (WYA) 1995). The Youth Service achieved this aim through the use of participative and empowering methods, with the fundamental principle of its work with individuals and groups arising from mutual agreement between practitioners and young people. This basis of negotiation and contract serves as the foundation for a particular style of learning driven by a belief that:

“knowledge is assumed to be actively constructed by the learner, not passively received from the environment; and second, learning is an

⁴ Non-formal education is defined as any intentional and systematic educational undertaking (usually outside the structure of the traditional school) in which the content, methods, time periods, admissions criteria, personnel, facilities, and other components of the system are selected and/or adapted to maximise the attainment of the learning mission and minimise the maintenance problems of the system (Suhm 1979).

⁵ Achieving its stated purpose

⁶ A process typically provided by an education or training institution, structured in terms of learning, objectives, time or support and leading to certification. Formal learning is described as being intentional from the learner’s perspective (European Commission 2001)

interactive process of interpretation, integration and transformation of one's experiential world."

(Pratt 1993:17)

The importance of changing attitudes to learning – both in style, location and measurement of outcomes – became increasingly linked, both from an individual and a government perspective, to the need to ensure a competitive ability in an economy increasingly affected by enhanced globalisation, driven by a knowledge economy (Leadbeater 1997). Within this environment embedded assumptions regarding society's traditional economic and social model were challenged in a fundamental way. In the opinion of Jamar (1996) this will include challenging such notions as:

- Education prepares for a job, that
- This job could last a lifetime, and that
- Life itself is largely divided into a period of education followed by a long period of work, and a period of retirement

Consideration therefore needed to be given to the role of education and training within a reorganising working environment characterised by less certain employment patterns that make the concept of a lifelong career less possible. Individual life plans would need to be considered and would have to contain a combination of working and non-working time, improved management of leisure and a greater personal responsibility for the acquisition of both knowledge and skills appropriate for a changing society. Included within these descriptions would be attributes such as decision making, problem solving, and communication skills which could be used, in both working and non-working situations.

Other questions are also being raised (Jamar 1996) with regard to the reorganisation of working and non-working time, including the future expectations of both employers and employees, how skills, experience and formal qualifications will be measured and recognised and whether work will remain the dominant link to social integration.

In this context non-formal education approaches needed to be re-evaluated within a government strategy for education. It was the intention of this investigation to determine if the maintained Youth Service in Wales has the ability to both persuade the government

of its role and make an effective contribution to a changing economic and social environment.

The research framework

As a consequence of the formation of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999, policy for young people became concerned with an entitlement model which promised access to a range of services “*designed to promote their attainment and development as individuals*” (NAW 2000a:6). The intended outcome of this approach was an enhanced contribution by young people to the economic regeneration strategy of the Assembly with its related impact on its defined social regeneration agenda (NAW 2000a, NAW 2001a). This investigation was concerned, therefore, to evaluate the ability of the maintained Youth Service in Wales to contribute to those political aspirations as a collective national body identified by a commitment to working with young people in a particular way. This approach could be seen as unusual because the limited research into the Youth Service in Wales has usually focused on individual Local Authority provision or particular National Voluntary Youth Organisations. The decision to focus this investigation on the Youth Service across the whole of Wales can be justified because it is recognized that the “*present service is patchy with great variation in quality and coverage across Wales*” (NAW 2000a:47) and because there is a political commitment to ensure young people are not excluded from access to promised services as a consequence of where they live (*ibid*). For these two reasons, it is felt that any decision to carry out the investigation within a particular local authority or a small number of selected local authorities could result in an inadequate breadth and depth of information on which to base an answer to the research question. This investigation therefore considered the maintained Youth Service in Wales as a single case from which data will be obtained and analysed in order to determine how effectively it contributes, in a collective way, to the agenda of the then Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and the needs of young people. The information from this single case will be obtained from multiple sources of evidence, including a questionnaire survey, analysis of documents, and interviews.

In an attempt to achieve its purpose, the investigation was concerned to examine three broad areas: the maintained Youth Service; government policy related to young people;

and the needs of young people involved in the Youth Service. Each of these areas provided the opportunity for extensive research consideration in its own right. The justification of the research and its claim to originality is, however, the consideration of the interconnected relationship of the three areas within the Welsh context. Attempts were made to obtain answers to the following questions, which will be asked of the maintained Youth Service across Wales:

1. How knowledgeable is it of its discreet identity, as evidenced by:
 - the level of collective knowledge and understanding by those working within it of its purpose and associated principles and values?
2. Is it appropriately resourced as evidenced by:
 - the availability of suitable levels of suitably qualified and trained workers?
 - the available levels of financial and physical resources?
3. How is it organised as evidenced by:
 - levels of contact with young people?
 - the age, gender and academic attainment of those young people using it?
 - the methods used by workers to identify the needs of the young people they come into contact with?
 - the identified needs of young people?
4. What does it do and how does it measure the outcomes as evidenced by:
 - the programme it offers to young people?
 - its planned outcomes?
 - its methods for measuring its outcomes?

Limitations of the research

In developing this broad-based approach, it was recognised that a number of potential limitations of the research needed to be considered. First, the investigation is located within the maintained Youth Service with a level of confidence that suggests such an organisation exists with a range of characteristics clearly recognised and understood by those who work within it. The reality for some, however, is an organisation which has treated its history in a cavalier manner and in doing so distorted its identity to a point where it is neither clearly understood by those whom it employs or by those who pay for

it or those young people who are potential beneficiaries. Second, within this uncertain environment it would be those employed within the maintained Youth Service who would be asked how they ensured synergy between the three elements of the research question. There was no intention to question the government directly about their intent for the maintained Youth Service within their overall strategy for young people. Neither was there any intent to question young people about their needs and the role of the maintained Youth Service in meeting them. The investigation would be dependent on the level of knowledge and understanding of those employed within the maintained Youth Service of its discrete identity, the needs of young people it was in contact with and the requirements of relevant government policy. The quality of this knowledge and understanding would be dependent on the efficacy of local authorities' recruitment and training programmes during a time of potential expansion. Third, government policy relating to education, young people and the Youth Service was developing at an unprecedented speed, as was the increase in funding. The full effect of these developments would have had little time to impact on how the maintained Youth Service would operate, for example, within Young People's Partnerships (YPPs) (NAW 2000a) or its relationship with the new Youth Policy Unit established within the Welsh Assembly Government. This developing relationship would, it was recognised, be dependent on the priorities of the new Youth Policy Unit and the choices it would make between, for example, developing strategies focused on a universal non-formal education approach or a social care approach focused on those most in need.

However, despite these potential limitations, it is believed that the approach taken will help provide results that could be of use to:

- policy makers within the Welsh Assembly Government;
- those involved in the strategic development of the Youth Service, including Chief Executives of Local Authorities, Directors of Education, and Principal Youth Officers; and
- Youth Service practitioners and other professionals working within related fields, such as Social Work, Education, Police, and Careers.

The investigation is also underpinned by a belief that the results will make a contribution to future Youth Service practice delivered in Wales by:

- suggesting ways in which the potential opportunities presented by the election of New Labour (with its focus on educational priorities) are not missed by the Youth Service in Wales;
- ensuring that the Youth Service is neither misunderstood nor overstated within current developments, but is rightly recognised as an effective contributor to both the education and learning of young people and the core agenda of central government; and
- providing a foundation for future practice as it relates to meeting the needs of young people and the requirements of appropriate government policy.

Justifying the research setting

Two particular reasons give legitimacy for carrying out the investigation specifically within Wales. The first is the little-recognised historical differences between the Youth Services in Wales and in England. The second is the setting up in 1999 (as part of the programme of devolution introduced by New Labour following their UK election success in 1997) of the National Assembly for Wales, which resulted in both a ‘Made in Wales’ approach and the introduction of specific National Assembly initiatives for the Youth Service.

Historical differences

Throughout its history, the Youth Service in Wales has been linked to the Youth Service in England (Ministry of Education 1960, Welsh Office 1984). In taking this approach, a number of opportunities have often been missed to examine a range of differences cultivated, it is claimed (Jones and Rose 2001), by distinctive social, political, and economic variance between the two countries. These include:

- a chronologically short industrial expansion within a narrow range of heavy industry;
- the system of local government in Wales;

- the effects on the Welsh Language as a result of immigration over a relatively short period of time;
- educational developments specific to Wales;
- the comparative weakness of the middle class and the effect of that on philanthropic activity related to young people;
- the importance of the Welsh Nonconformist movement as a working-class religion; and
- the dominance of the Labour Party at local government level.

This is not to claim that each of these elements has an equitable effect on the development of the Youth Service in Wales, but to recognise that each has had an influence that has, to some degree, shaped Youth Service practice in a way that can be described as specifically Welsh. These differences include:

- the setting up of the Wales Youth Work Partnership (WYWP) in 1985, which led to the establishment of the Wales Youth Agency with its specific responsibility to support the development of a Youth Service that reflects the economic and social conditions in Wales;
- the production of a Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales;
- the introduction of an Education and Training Standards Committee in Wales, leading to the development of a training route peculiar to those working in the Youth Service in Wales;
- Youth Service reports and documents specific to Wales;
- setting up of the National Assembly for Wales; and
- a specific agenda for young people in Wales.

These characteristics, identified by the Wales Youth Agency in 2000, were also recognised by the National Assembly for Wales (NAW 2000a:8), who claimed the “*building blocks*” were in place across Wales for the introduction of a strategic approach leading to the development of “*a specific Welsh system for the support of young people*” (Michael 2000:1).

Devolution

The new National Assembly for Wales was created by the Welsh Government Act 1998 (HMSO 1998) and assumed responsibility for a wide range of policies and public services previously controlled by the UK government through the Secretary of State for Wales, including:

1. setting policies to improve the Welsh economy and the quality of life for people in Wales through integrated strategies for the reduction of poverty and the improvement of health;
2. secondary legislation powers as a means of influencing the body of law which governs Wales;
3. developing the policy context within which Welsh public bodies operate, including a reduction in the numbers of non-elected bodies;
4. issuing guidance and directions on a range of issues, including job creation and child care provision; and
5. becoming the forum for national debate on issues facing Wales.

The people of Wales invested the achievement of these new responsibilities in 60 Assembly Members who are elected every 4 years. Of these, 40 are elected through a simple plurality election reflecting the existing UK Parliamentary constituencies. The remaining 20 are chosen through an additional member electoral system, which reflects the five former European Parliamentary constituencies. Each of these electoral regions selects 4 members. It was intended that this process would improve the *'democratic deficit'* arising from limited UK government accountability to the people of Wales (Welsh Office 1997). To further embed this concept of democracy and to ensure equal consideration to all parts of the political spectrum in Wales, the structure and functions of the Assembly are divided into subject committees, membership of which is in proportion to specific party representation. The chairs of each of the subject committees are drawn from the Assembly Cabinet. There are also 4 Regional Committees for Mid, North, South East, and South West Wales, made up from Assembly Members for the relevant constituencies and regions who represent the interests of those areas. This new political framework was also promoted as a new style democracy, which would:

“let Welsh people express their own priorities – for better schools and health services, for bringing the quangos under control and into the open; for directing the £7,000 million of Welsh Office spending where it is most needed. The environment, housing, transport and business would all benefit from a strategic view based on the needs of the whole of Wales.”

Davies (1998:5)

This was a key message delivered by the Labour Party in Wales during the election campaign and the first years of the life of the Assembly. The Assembly would be for the people of Wales, it would be accountable to the people of Wales, and its priorities would be to ensure their economic and social well-being. From its very beginning, the National Assembly was keen to promote a new way of operating, described as ‘Team Wales’. This was an approach designed to maximise the relationship between the private, public, and voluntary sectors as a means of delivering its three major themes of sustainable development, social inclusion, and equal opportunities (NAW 2000b). These themes would be linked to new education and training initiatives with their ability, in the opinion of Davidson (2001a:1), the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, to liberate talent, extend opportunity, empower communities, and help create wealth. To achieve this ‘Team Wales’ approach it was recognised that Wales would need, at times, to develop its own strategic direction from England through developing its own policy direction. This position was reinforced when it was claimed “*we aim to do things differently in Wales – through our ‘Made in Wales’ approach...as a means to create unique Welsh solutions to Welsh problems*” (Davidson 2001b:1). The ‘Made in Wales’ theme was continued throughout the strategic plan of the Assembly (NAW 2001b) with the claim that the Team Wales approach would be used to tackle the particular economic and social conditions through greater investment in knowledge generation and exploitation.

John Rose 2017, taken from

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