

## **Extending Entitlement Revisited: The Maintained Youth Service in Wales 2002-2007**

### **Paper Number 4 – What Did the Politicians Want from the Maintained Youth Service in Wales?**

#### **New Labour – the big picture**

The New Labour campaign for the 1997 general election was driven by a vision of:

*“national renewal, a country with drive, purpose and energy. A Britain equipped to prosper in a global economy of technological change; with a modern welfare state; its politics more accountable; and confident of its place in the world”*

(New Labour 1997:2)

This was a message that resulted in their election to national government on 3 May 1997 with a majority of 179 seats over all other parties in the House of Commons (Savage and Atkinson 2001). The foundation of this success was the vision of New Labour, which was built on what was described as the *‘four building blocks of a more successful Britain’* (Blair 1996: xxi). First, there would be a new economic policy agenda designed to improve the living conditions of all the citizens of the United Kingdom, obtained as a consequence of an effective partnership between economic dynamism and social justice. Second, there would be a new social agenda designed to develop a modern society *‘based on merit, commitment and inclusion’* (ibid). The achievement of this agenda would be underpinned by the promotion of such notions as duty, responsibility and obligations and would, as a consequence, remedy what was described as the historic failure of the Left to value individual responsibility and the failure of the Right to recognise the influence of social conditions. Third, there would be a programme of decentralisation achieved as a result of political and constitutional reform, including plans for devolution, a bill of rights, electoral and parliamentary reform and freedom of information. Fourth, there would be a new foreign policy designed to recognise the link between the well-being of the United Kingdom and its influence abroad.

From these four building blocks, New Labour promoted a style of politics described as the ‘Third Way’, underpinned, in the opinion of White (2001:4), by three core concepts: *‘equal opportunity, civic responsibility and community’*. Adherence to these concepts would result, it was claimed, in the development of a society with all individuals having an equal opportunity to access strategic goods such as education, jobs, income and wealth (ibid:8). Pivotal to this approach was a political commitment to radical reform aimed at ending welfare dependency and encouraging self-reliance and the work habit, resulting in welfare-to-work initiatives for groups like single mothers and the young unemployed. It was also an approach concerned to reduce public expenditure on state-supported programmes to ensure competitive ability in the context of an economy increasingly affected by industrialised globalisation. Central to the achievement of the New Labour vision were the ideas of social interdependence, mutual obligation and social responsibility promoted as the stakeholder society, within which autonomous citizens would possess rights, assets and opportunities. In return, they would be expected to fulfil certain responsibilities and obligations driven by government policies on welfare, work and education.

For New Labour, both the embedding of the concepts of the Third Way and the achievement of its stated economic and social policy targets were dependent on the availability of enhanced educational opportunities and improved educational attainment for and by all young people (New Labour 1997). Education was promoted as the means by which individuals would be able to acquire stable sources of income, employment and security in an increasingly competitive global market. Education was also promoted as the key method to overcome social exclusion described as *“being more than just financial poverty; it describes a way of life where opportunities are few, services are difficult to access and people lose hope”* (HMSO 2000b: v). The political imperative for New Labour within this context was the promotion of the developing knowledge economy which increasingly involves the processing and communication of digital information (Bentley 1998). The importance of this was recognised by Blair (1997:40) who claimed that 50% of workers in Britain were employed in information processing and that *“70% of wealth will in the next century be created in information”*. It is recognised (Jones and Osmond 2000) that Wales does not have an appropriate share of knowledge-based

services which they claim is worth “£30 billion to the UK economy, more than the GDP of Wales” (ibid: 46). If there was the same proportion of jobs in the knowledge-based industries in Wales as in the UK, “97,000 additional jobs would have been created including 60,000 in business services” (Jones and Osmond 2000:46) One of the priorities in achieving a proportional growth in the knowledge economy in Wales was to raise standards in education which would take into account specific skills including effective communication, having the ability to learn, being able to operate effectively in a team, showing initiative and having the ability to follow instructions.

The philosophy of linking education with the economic and social well-being of the UK continued to be promoted during the early years of the first New Labour administration, as was the requirement to link increased investment to modernisation and reform (Brown 1998). An additional £19 billion over three years for education was announced in the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review, to be used to meet the 1997 Manifesto commitment to make education the priority for New Labour (New Labour 1997). Specific targets included:

1. reducing class sizes;
2. providing nursery places for all 4 year olds;
3. new strategies to increase school standards;
4. greater availability of computer technology;
5. the introduction of lifelong learning strategies; and
6. continuing increases in education budgets.

However, in keeping with New Labour philosophy, the investment of public money was linked to continuing modernisation and reform of the education system, which would include new targets for literacy and numeracy, assessment of both pupils and teachers, and increased central powers (Kendall and Holloway 2001). This was a process designed to introduce new standards of efficiency, scrutiny and audit which had been introduced to ensure that stated government targets were met and every penny of public money was spent well (Brown 1998).

Unlike the previous Conservative Party, New Labour was prepared to recognise the link between low economic performance, low educational attainment, high sickness levels,

and high levels of criminal involvement leading to social exclusion. A government report (HMSO 1998: iv) made a key statement that set the tone for the government's developing disaffection strategy when it stated:

*“The key task in tackling disaffection should be to provide challenge, restore motivation and engender key skills. Maximising formal educational achievement for those young people must be at the heart of the intervention”*

The response of New Labour to youth disaffection was the setting up of the Youth Access Initiative (Estyn 1999a), a three-year programme introduced to address the issue of disengagement of young people from school, work or training. Its initial outcome was the reintegration of those identified as socially excluded back into mainstream education and employment, primarily through the promotion of basic skills improvement. Its long-term outcome was planned to be both a reduction of the financial cost associated with poverty and criminality and a reduction of government expenditure on unemployment. This was an approach originally promoted by the Social Justice Report (Commission for Social Justice 1994:19), established by John Smith, the Labour Party leader before Tony Blair, which claimed *“social justice was not simply a moral ideal but an economic reality”*.

Further action to support the emerging economic and social agenda of New Labour was taken through the setting up of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) by Tony Blair in 1997 to:

*“develop integrated and sustainable approaches to the problems of the worst housing estates, including crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown, and bad schools”*

SEU (2000:5)

Its first publication (SEU 1998) proposed the setting up of 18 cross-cutting Policy Action Teams (PAT) to develop key policies related to disaffection. PAT 12, led by the Department for Education and Employment, was asked to produce a report for government on young people focusing on:

- the cost of youth disaffection and suggestions for identifying the most effective way of dealing with its causes;
- detailing the respective roles of different agencies;

- planning procedures, to ensure strategies are planned, co-ordinated and targeted to reduce disaffection;
- developing support strategies for families; and
- involving young people.

The findings of PAT 12 once again reinforced the complex disadvantage faced by certain groups of young people, particularly those in care, those affected by endemic poverty, those living in deprived neighbourhoods or those doing badly at school. The report also identified a lack of co-ordination between government provided services and inadequate systems for dealing with the needs of young people, which were described as being “*provided haphazardly or on a restricted basis*” (ibid: 9). The report recommended that there was a need to set new objectives and create new structures to improve the way government develops and implements policy for young people. It also recommended developing new priorities to prevent young people from encountering the worst problems (rather than fire-fighting when they were in trouble), improving individual services for young people and involving young people in the decisions that affect their lives.

As a consequence of this developing political approach, the Youth Service in England and Wales was asked a number of questions related to how it would contribute to a political agenda that required it to increase the numbers of young people staying in, or returning to education (Welsh Office 1999a, NAW 2000a). Within this setting, the work of the maintained Youth Service in Wales was being coerced through financial pressures to introduce systems that reflected a growing accountability model driven by a continuing political agenda that prioritised economy, effectiveness and quality (Brown 1998). It was an ideology underpinned by systems which allocated financial resources based on an ability to demonstrate, through the attainment of measurable outcomes, that specified requirements were being met. Consequently, additional bidding, monitoring and evaluation processes were being introduced to ensure that funders, often the government, were abler to control ‘delivery’. This approach, continued from the previous Conservative Party era, also become the accepted way of judging young people’s learning within the New Labour era. Already driven by a well embedded examination culture, schools continued further to refine their structures, management styles and teaching methods in an

attempt to ensure that young people secured ever-improving examination results, school-based monitoring systems were also enhanced to ensure the management of effective knowledge acquisition of young people. Such systems were concerned to keep a continuous record of the incremental learning of pupils through their involvement in standardised individual testing, with the overall evaluation of the process, as a means of judging school effectiveness, being measured against the attainment of stipulated outcomes. The ability or inability of individual schools to attain the outcomes led to schools being perceived as ‘successful’ or ‘unsuccessful’. The promotion of this approach has had a significant effect upon Youth Service policy development and practice, with both increasingly becoming driven by a belief that the primary outcome measure of educational attainment is examination results (WYA 2000c).

The challenges faced by youth workers within this new setting (in which it had arrived after facing many years of financial neglect and being divorced from political and policy influence) appeared to be little understood by government. The political position appeared unambiguous. To secure government support, that is, financial resources, the Youth Service had to identify the outcomes of their interventions in relation to their contribution to the delivery of the government’s economic and social agenda. As a consequence, those working within the Youth Service were asked to identify how they contribute to, for example:

- Increasing the numbers of young people staying in, or returning to education;
- Preparing young people for the world of work;
- Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour;
- Improving health; and
- Raising levels of political awareness and political involvement.

Failure to achieve the above goals on time and to a specified standard placed the Youth Service at risk of being isolated both from strategic decision making and by the withdrawal of funding. The Youth Service was, as a result of government policy, becoming more like other ‘human service’ organisations because it was starting to be controlled by the threat of having its funding removed if it did not adhere to the priorities of government. It was also being faced with increased competition from other

organisations working with young people and it was being subjected to increased bureaucracy and external inspections.

## **New Labour and the Youth Service**

Perhaps there was no surprise when the Youth Service was not mentioned by New Labour in their 1997 election manifesto and they paid little attention to its existence in their election campaign (NYA 1997b). An exception to this political indifference was the claim by the Labour Spokesperson on youth issues that the “*informal education offered within the Youth Service would be taken very seriously indeed*” (Kilfoyle 1997:16). Following their election victory, some insight into the early thinking of New Labour can also be found in the comment that the importance of the Youth Service was its role as a provider of personal and social education for young people. This role, it was later claimed, was central to New Labour’s ‘New Deal’ (DfEE 1997) with young people and its lifelong learning strategy because of the Youth Service’s ability to develop meaningful links with those who had “*slipped through the net*” (NYA 1997c:21). The Youth Service, it was further claimed, had a “*mainline to young people who cannot see a future for themselves*” (ibid:21). Its role was also centrally linked to leisure and culture, and the key issue of what was described as the “re-entry” of significant numbers of young people into education, training and employment. The Youth Service was clearly being required by government to become part of its social inclusion agenda (Welsh Office 1998) by taking a more active role in providing support for disaffected pupils and young people through stronger links with schools and careers because it was perceived as an organisation with the ability to make contact with the most disaffected young people (ibid). There was little or no recognition by government of the potential of the maintained Youth Service to contribute to the learning of young people in the community through the use of non-formal education methods grounded in the work of a range of educationalists, as described previously.

The principle of appearing to value only education of the sort found in school that leads to formal qualifications was further supported by the findings of the Education and Employment Committee of the House of Commons, who claimed that to combat

disaffection, *“all interventions should have the aim of reintegrating young people into mainstream education”* (HMSO 1998: iv). There is no intent in this investigation to dispute the importance of school or the success young people find there. There is clear recognition of the positive impact of formal education on the lives of young people in the way that it encourages academic success and both protects and cares for young people; there is, however, a suggestion that formal education based in school should not be seen as the only environment within which young people learn. Opportunities do exist for significant performance gain by young people through learning in the community, which does not appear to have gained recognition within the current political environment. This view was supported by the description of the role of the Youth Service in the process of reintegration, which was to become more closely aligned to schools who would be encouraged to make greater use of the expertise of Youth Service staff in providing appropriate support to disaffected young people. The Youth Service was also expected by government to use its skills in working with young people as a means of encouraging the *“very disaffected to re-engage in training”* (HMSO 1998: xi). The pattern that appeared to be emerging at this early stage in the life of the New Labour government was to see the Youth Service as a peripheral organisation to its agenda, only valuable because it operated within local communities and because it had a reputation of being able to build and maintain positive relationships with many young people that other organisations had lost contact with. The government did not appear to value the Youth Service based on a recognition of its potential to work with young people in a way guided by the purpose and values of its work and, through doing so, its ability to contribute to the government’s agenda in a way different from, but no less valuable than school.

This position reflects past government interest in the Youth Service, underpinned by its recognition of the ability of the Youth Service to develop positive relationships with young people, many of whom could be seen to be involved in particular moral panics. Governments have often attempted to link this relationship to changes in young people’s attitudes to unemployment (Williamson 1993), to youth offending (France and Wiles 1996), to sexual health (Teenage Pregnancy Unit 2000), and currently view it as a panacea for youth disaffection with its interrelated negative factors, including poor school attendance and low academic attainment (SEU 2000). These and other initiatives,



including the linking of young people to the Youth Service within a school setting, appear to be unaware of or disinterested in the purposes and values of the maintained Youth Service. Strategies that do not adhere to key principles of the Youth Service, such as voluntary engagement – a difficult process in a school or prison setting, or as a result of a requirement to attend a youth club or youth project – became a process more concerned with control and the solving of a contemporary social problem than with using a young-people-first approach. As a consequence, the Youth Service can be seen to be diminished within such initiatives rather than enhanced. Instead of becoming a vibrant organisation within a political agenda driven by education, the Youth Service ran the risk of becoming little more than a classroom assistant, responsible for providing alternative activities for disruptive pupils. The Youth Service, it can be argued, has a positive role to play in the lives of young people through a partnership with schools and a range of other agencies, but to be fully effective it has to do so from a position that allows it to become a healthy organisation able to fully utilise its purposes and values.

## **The National Assembly for Wales**

The National Assembly for Wales accepted that their particular strategic challenges were associated with eradicating the negative economic and social conditions specific to Wales (NAW 1999). In particular, it was recognised that the endemic economic conditions resulted in *“the persistent and substantial gap between the levels of prosperity in Wales compared with the UK and the rest of Europe, Welsh per capita GDP is now only 82% of the EU average”* (European Task Force 1999:5). Regional disparities were also recognised, with east Wales attaining the EU average for Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while in west Wales and the south Wales valleys, the GDP per capita is only 71% (Morgan and Morgan 1998, Hill 1999). It is claimed (Higgins and Morgan 1999) that the reasons for this prosperity deficit are easy to recognise and include low employment activity rates, low economic output, low investment in innovation and entrepreneurship and low levels of education, training and investment. The European Task Force (1999) claims that the problems associated with poor economic activity in Wales include the lowest household income in the UK as well as disproportionately high levels of dependency on social security benefit. Those affected by these circumstances are also

often identified with poverty, crime and family instability and by their isolation from mainstream society (Blair 1996). This interconnection of negative factors affecting the lives of people in Wales was further highlighted (NAW 2000a) by the claim that social exclusion becomes an outcome and describes a way of life where opportunities are few, services are difficult to access and people lose hope. Young people were, it was claimed (NAW 1999), disproportionately affected by social exclusion, with 37% living in poverty in that they lived in households with less than 50% of the average income. Of households with dependent children, 18% did not have anyone earning money, and in some areas the figure approached 60%. 3,400 children were looked after by local authorities and 2,500 children were on the Child Protection Register. Over 5% of young people left school with no qualifications and one in seven 16 to 17 year olds were not in education, training or work. Unemployment and low pay was also seen as a contributor to the economic and social position of Wales with the Assembly (NAW 1999) claiming that in 1996-1997, 25% of households and nearly half a million people in Wales received income support or family credit.

The National Assembly for Wales, influenced by the findings of PAT 12, confirmed education as the catalyst for addressing these negative factors, with greater educational attainment described as the means of developing a more inclusive society within which opportunities would be made available to ensure all young people had the chance to reach their potential. This maximising of potential would be achieved through the introduction of a broad-based, continuous education strategy described as crucial for “*improving the social and economic conditions for everyone*” (Welsh Office 1998: iii). An integrated system was proposed involving schools, sixth forms, training providers, employers, further education (FE) and higher education (HE) institutions, and voluntary sector bodies to encourage a “*single seamless path from childhood to retirement and beyond*” (Hain 1998:1).

### **National Assembly for Wales and the maintained Youth Service**

The political strategy to combat disaffection and the role of the maintained Youth Service in Wales within it were identified through the Green Paper on Lifelong Learning (Welsh

Office 1998), which stated the role of the maintained Youth Service would be to *“help build bridges and open pathways of success for young people”* (ibid:12). The Youth Service would also increasingly develop the capacity to confront hard social issues such as homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, and crime, and to develop strategies with young people for the reduction of these problems. The role the Youth Service would be expected to assume within the new learning strategy was reinforced when it was stated that:

*“most of all the Youth Service will need to work more closely with the Careers Service companies to help ensure that de-motivated youngsters return to learning”*

(Welsh Office 1998:12)

There was no suggestion in this key strategic document about developing the non-formal community-based teaching and learning responsibility of the maintained Youth Service. What appeared to be suggested was that those working in the Youth Service should use their skills of relationship building with young people to persuade them to return to school or further education. The maintained Youth Service contribution to the Learning Country agenda was envisaged as being to *“make a substantial contribution by helping young people either to maintain their interest in learning or to return to learning”* (ibid:12). This statement could be interpreted as a clear indication of the government’s rejection of the learning of young people through their involvement in Youth Service activities within the community. It was a position, it can be legitimately claimed, that was to permeate throughout the key education documents published by the Assembly during the time of this investigation.

Many of the ‘Third Way’ policies of New Labour were taken forward in Wales (Welsh Office 1998), particularly those focused on education and the development of lifelong learning strategies. A central aim of the Welsh Office was to establish Wales as a learning country, which was seen as a catalyst for *“improving social and economic conditions for everyone”* (Hain 1998: iii). To ensure the implementation of this vision, the new National Assembly made the decision to introduce specific Welsh clauses to the Learning and Skills Bill which would enable comprehensive Welsh strategies for the support of young

people in Wales to be introduced. Central to these strategies were responses planned to improve the educational attainment of young people as a means of ensuring the specific economic and social agenda targets of the Welsh government could be reached (NAW 2000a, NAW 2000b, NAW 2001a, NAW 2001b).

The Assembly requirements of the maintained Youth Service within this agenda were described in the explanatory notes of the Learning and Skills Act (HMSO 2000c:91), which stated that the organisations' responsibilities would include providing "*organised leisure-time occupation*" for young people. The interpretation of this statement, supported by additional comments in the explanatory notes, indicated that this would involve young people in a range of youth-centre-based activities which would include providing information and support to young people, and specialist activities such as outdoor education, sport, drama and art delivered as a universal entitlement for all young people with a growing commitment to working with young people at risk. The provision of these sorts of activities would be contained, as would the Youth Service, within a broader 'services for young people' strategy focused on "*encouraging, enabling or assisting young people*" to take part in education and training, to take advantage of opportunities for employment and to take part in the lives of their communities (HMSO 2000c:39). The style of education for the Youth Service was described as "*offering opportunities for non-formal types of learning... which do not necessarily lead to a qualification*" (ibid:19).

In an attempt to develop a framework for the more effective delivery of its economic and social regeneration agenda, and to fulfil the obligation of the National Assembly to provide more appropriate systems for supporting young people, a group identified as experts (including Youth Service specialists) were brought together to produce a document that took a strategic view of how the needs of young people in Wales would be both identified and responded to. The initial document, '*Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales*' (NAW 2000a), attempted to define the principles underpinning future policies and to determine the interface and level of effectiveness between existing policies. Priorities were also determined which would be delivered through a multi-disciplinary approach, involving a wide range of organisations working with young people, co-ordinated through Chief Executives of Local Authorities for the purpose of "*reviewing and developing services for the entire cohort of young people in*

*their area*” (ibid:75). This new partnership would include the “*authority’s Youth Service – reflecting the service’s direct links with young people and its ethos of informal learning and inclusion*” (NAW 2000a:75); it was a partnership approach with a statutory base derived from the Youth Support Services Directions and Guidance (Wales) 2002 under Section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (HMSO 2000d) and would direct local authorities to set up Young People’s Partnerships (YPPs) as the primary vehicle for co-ordinating multi-agency activity to deliver the 10 entitlements described in the Extending Entitlement Report (NAW 2001c). The YPPs would not have a significant budget to carry out its co-ordinating role but were expected by the National Assembly for Wales to influence and co-ordinate the spending of individual partners and to commission activities so that services would become more focused on the priorities of the Extending Entitlement agenda.

A key component of the agreed approach was a commitment by the National Assembly for Wales to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989), which became the foundation of principles, values and standards for dealing with young people in Wales. As a consequence, policy development was concerned in a fundamental way with developing systems to ensure the protection of young people, to ensure their access to proper standards of physical care, learning and health, and their rights to participate in matters that affect them, which requires access to appropriate information.

This approach could be seen to be linked to the conclusions of PAT 12 (SEU 2000), which recognised the need to develop systems capable of co-ordinating services for young people in a coherent way. The key strategic objectives identified by the ‘experts group’ also had similarities to the objectives of PAT 12 in that they were concerned to be:

1. coherent and responsive to the needs of young people;
2. able to link with community regeneration initiatives;
3. able to identify and support those at risk; and
4. able to identify gaps in provision and reduce duplication and complexity.

The planned outcome of the Extending Entitlement strategy, underpinned by these objectives, was to be a system within which young people were “*participating*

*successfully within education, training and work as well as contributing as citizens within their communities and beyond*” (NAW 2000a:7). The document also claimed (as had PAT 12) that support for young people would be most effective when it was part of a broad network, open to all young people, within which policies were determined and delivered through a multi-disciplinary approach. This approach was broadly welcomed (WYA 2000c) because there had long been recognition in the Youth Service that young people do not organise their lives to fit neatly into the boundaries of government departments (Wylie 1999). Because many of the issues affecting young people are multi-faceted, no single service or department is able (particularly at the neighbourhood level) to respond effectively. Thus, Wylie claims, there is a need to work across service departments (for example, education and social services), across sectors (public and private), and across agencies (statutory and voluntary).

This position was recognised by the ‘experts’, who concluded that there was a need both to identify existing policy strands related to young people and to introduce strategies capable of improving and coordinating them as a means of ensuring a *“more holistic and responsive approach to young people”* (NAW 2000a:2). The Extending Entitlement report placed three key requirements on the Youth Service in Wales. First, the Youth Service would work directly with young people to provide accessible information, support and opportunity. Second, it would work strategically with other young people’s services in order to make an appropriate contribution to the health, learning and employment agenda of government. Third, it would encourage young people to contribute to the decision-making processes that affect their lives. The processes the Youth Service would use to realise the requirements of government were described as the provision of *“clubs, centres and projects, information shops, residential provision, issue based provision, group work, outreach and detached work, generic or focused”* (NAW 2000a:45). The outcomes of work provided by these and other means would be focused on learning and skills development for those young people involved. A significant weakness of the document, however, was its failure to identify either the philosophical position of the maintained Youth Service as a predominantly non-formal community based learning organisation or the methods that would be most appropriate for the organisation to measure the achievements of young people through their involvement in

its activities. This provided a vacuum which was easily filled by the adoption of many of the methods of measurement of attainment used by schools.

The 1992 Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales (WJEC) 1992) was written to give the Youth Service both its direction and a hoped for legitimacy as an education service. The Statement, which was 10 years old at the time of the investigation, had been constructed to address a different set of political priorities. Concerns were, however, being raised by those working in the maintained Youth Service not about its philosophical position (as expounded in the Curriculum Statement) nor its ability or inability to measure, in an appropriate way, the outcomes of its work but rather how it would achieve – in a pragmatic way – the priorities set by the experts group. This group had identified that the Youth Service was faced with what were described as “*practical constraints*” (ibid:47), which included patchy provision and significant variation in quality and coverage across Wales which would preclude it from contributing in an effective way to the new Assembly agenda (NAW 2000b). The remedy identified in the report was to introduce a range of mechanisms designed to:

1. enhance the training of the existing workforce;
2. improve facilities and equipment;
3. ensure the supply of high-quality trained staff; and
4. redress the inadequate levels of resources.

The recognition of these organisational weaknesses, which were seen to preclude the maintained Youth Service from effectively delivering better support and opportunity for young people, was not supported by any comment in the Extending Entitlement report about how development initiatives would be funded. This lack of resources had the potential to cause future organisational problems once the early euphoria of the document’s release had dissipated. Neither was any mention made about how the maintained Youth Service would be both re-energised following its low ebb at the end of the Conservative Party’s period of time in office and reintroduced into the macro-policy-making arena from which it had, in the main, been excluded during the period between 1979 and 1997.

Key strategy documents with the potential to affect the lives of young people living in Wales were also produced by the Welsh Assembly Government at this time. They included *betterwales.com* (NAW 2000b) *Putting Wales First* (NAW 2000c), and the *Plan for Wales* (NAW 2001b) which reinforced the priority of the new Assembly to develop a modern economy, the achievement of which was dependent on widening opportunities for learning, the improvement of skills and the construction of a more securely embedded knowledge base. However, these strategic documents failed to identify what was meant by the term ‘widening opportunities for learning’ and in doing so diminished the potential of non-formal community based learning of the sort offered by an effective Youth Service to contribute to the government’s economic and social agenda (WYA 2000c).

During the time following the production of *Extending Entitlement* (NAW 2000a) there was considerable optimism felt by those working in the maintained Youth Service that there would be overt government recognition of the range of learning opportunities available through the scarcely tapped potential of the non-formal community-based learning of the Youth Service (WYA 2000c). It was hoped that such recognition would result in an expansion of such learning for young people through their involvement in a wide range of community based activities, including sport, drama, music, travel, community involvement and much more. Disappointingly, however, it appeared that those in the Welsh Assembly Government with the responsibility for turning policy into practice interpreted the concept of ‘widening opportunities for learning’ to mean encouraging young people, including those who had abandoned school, back into formal styles of learning measured predominantly by the methods many young people had previously rejected.

To meet the aspirations identified in the three key strategy documents described previously, the Assembly published *The Learning Country* (NAW 2001a), which reconfirmed the role of learning as the means of “*liberating talent, extending opportunity, empowering communities and helping create wealth*” (Davidson 2001a:1). Those aged 14 to 19 years (a similar age to the 13 to 19 priority age range of the maintained Youth Service) were identified as central to the Learning Country strategy because they were seen to occupy the pivotal transition period between compulsory schooling and post-16



education and training. Consequently, young people within this age group became the focus of a number of key politically-determined initiatives which continued to reinforce the need to increase the base of educational attainment, primarily within the formal education sector, to improve both economic competitiveness and employment opportunities and to reduce levels of exclusion and welfare expenditure (Davidson 2001a). The Youth Service was excluded from this process, and its existence was not even recognised within the publication, which continued to promote what could justifiably be described as a one-dimensional approach to teaching and learning, predominantly within the formal education arena of school. An opportunity to describe what the Welsh Assembly Government required from the Youth Service was diminished because the publication continued to fail to recognise the potential of non-formal community-based education of the sort that could be delivered by an effective Youth Service. As a consequence, another significant opportunity to embed the relevance of out-of-school learning in a key government document was missed.

Shortly after the publication of the Learning Country came the second publication of *'Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales'* – a consultation on the draft directions and guidance (NAW 2001c) which continued to support the principle of providing a framework for the delivery of its lifelong learning, inclusion citizenship and safety agendas. This document clearly described what the Assembly required of the Youth Service in Wales by again stating that its responsibility within the new political agenda was to make a contribution to the personal and social development of young people through what was described as informal rather than non-formal learning. To achieve this contribution, the maintained Youth Service would seek to engage young people in a process of lifelong learning and encourage them to take a more positive role in the life of their communities; it would provide information, support and opportunity and it would make a contribution to the health, learning and employment agendas of the Assembly. The role of the Youth Service within this framework was described by the new Assembly as being to use its expertise as informal educators and promoters of lifelong learning (NAW 2001c). The Youth Service would also, the report claimed, support other agencies to develop effective styles of work with young people as well as using its historical practice of youth empowerment and participation to ensure that young people

became decision makers within the local services for young people. There was again little direction or guidance about what these terms would mean in practice for the maintained Youth Service with its predominance of part-time workers. Key concepts such as ‘informal education’, ‘lifelong learning’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘participation’ were ideals that needed to be introduced to a rapidly expanding maintained Youth Service with some alacrity.

The third and final ‘*Extending Entitlement: support for 11 to 25 year olds in Wales Directions and Guidance*’ (WAG 2002a) detailed the structure within which the Youth Service would operate. It also identified the universal entitlements for young people agreed by the Welsh Assembly Government after a period of extensive consultation with those individuals and organisations working with young people (NAW 2000a). These Directions and Guidance laid out the framework for the delivery of services, including a number of key principles of importance to this investigation. The education and training process would need to be what was described as ‘evidence based’ (suggesting the need to use quantifiable measures) and capable of evaluation: as such, it would provide a firm foundation for knowledge exploitation and enterprise. It would also need to be a process that could justify, in a quantitative or qualitative way, a return on government funding and furthermore, it would be a process within which standards, results and outcomes would matter more than inputs.

Potentially, there was much in the document to confuse the maintained Youth Service. At a philosophical level, the rhetoric of valuing non-formal education appeared to have been diminished in favour of a process concerned to replicate the government’s control of school-based education. Similarly, at a practical level, the importance of the Youth Service appeared to be diminishing, with such actions as not giving it an automatic place on the management group of the new Young People’s Partnerships (WAG 2002a:29). This confusion of status and role was further exacerbated by the publication of the government’s strategy for training and education for those aged 14 to 19 (WAG 2002b), which gave only nominal recognition to the role of non-formal community-based education of the sort delivered by the Youth Service. This strategy document had two main foci. The first was linked to formal education and the increased attainment of

academic qualifications. The second was to ensure that school leavers had obtained the skills necessary for employment, which included what was described as a range of ‘soft skills’ such as working with others, problem solving and improving personal learning. Opportunities to obtain and develop these skills were identified within the ‘Code of Practice for Out of School Hours Learning’ (WAG 2002c). Once again, no significant mention was made of the Youth Service, its non-formal education role or its ability to work with the most disaffected of young people. What was being proposed through the introduction of this new prospectus was an opportunity “*to reinforce the good work achieved by teachers during the school day*” (Davidson 2002b:1). It was an opportunity (albeit an unfulfilled one at this time) for the Youth Service to establish a role for itself which would maximise its non-formal community-based approach. However, the Youth Service was only mentioned in a peripheral way, the case studies used to describe effective practice were primarily school based and its users described in the main as pupils. This apparent diminution of the maintained Youth Service as a direct education contributor to the government agenda appeared to contradict the findings of the Welsh Affairs Committee Report on social exclusion in Wales (HMSO 2000e: ix), which claimed that it had:

*“become depressingly clear to us during our enquiry that our education system is failing to meet the needs of a significant minority of young people.... Thankfully, some of these young people had been reengaged and remotivated by the Youth Service...by offering informal courses in car maintenance...and programmes of skills confidence building to unemployed young people who are not ready to progress into employment or mainstream education and training”.*

## **Summary**

This paper set out to identify the government requirements of the maintained Youth Service in Wales. As a consequence of devolution, the government in question is predominantly the Welsh Assembly, although it is recognised that the context within which the Youth Service in Wales is delivered is also affected in a significant way by the macro-political agenda of New Labour. Consideration of policy developments produced

both by New Labour and by the National Assembly for Wales identified the following themes, which provide the context within which the maintained Youth Service operates:

1. identification of education attainment as the engine of the government's economic and social regeneration agenda;
2. recognition by government of the link between economic and social conditions prevalent in Wales;
3. commitment by government to addressing social exclusion and disaffection;
4. recognition by government of the relationships between issues such as low education attainment, poor employment prospects, poor health, family breakdown, and involvement in crime;
5. recognition by government of the need to reduce welfare dependency; and
6. limited acknowledgement by government of the potential of non-formal community-based teaching and learning as a contributor to the economic and social regeneration agenda.

Within this context, the government requirements of the maintained Youth Service in Wales can be identified as:

1. increasing the numbers of young people staying in, or returning to education;
2. preparing young people for the world of work;
3. developing the organisational capacity to confront hard social issues such as homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse and crime prevention and to develop strategies with young people for their reduction;
4. improving the health of young people;
5. raising young people's levels of political awareness and political involvement.
6. developing meaningful links with those young people who had "*slipped through the net*";
7. taking a more active role in providing support for disaffected young people through stronger links with schools and the Careers Service;
8. involving young people in a range of youth-centre-based activities, which would include providing information and support, and specialist activities such as outdoor education, sport, drama and art delivered as a universal entitlement for all young people; and

9. supporting other agencies to develop effective styles of work with young people as well as using its historical practice of youth empowerment and participation to ensure that young people became decision makers within the local services for young people.

A reward was offered by government to the maintained Youth Service for their involvement in attaining this long list of requirements which would be both an increase in funding and a promise of a greater say in how the policy agenda would be developed to meet specific economic and social regeneration agendas. This could be seen to be, as it always has been, irresistible to an organisation, with its historic low levels of funding. The inherent danger in this offer, again as it always has been, was that the funding would not be to deliver the ‘core work’ of the maintained Youth Service but to carry out specialist functions with young people that would meet the requirements of government but not in a way that reflected the Youth Service’s specific purposes and values.

**John Rose 2017, taken from PhD research**

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