

The Wales Youth Agency – An Inside View

'What is the Wales Youth Agency and what does it do?' These questions are most frequently asked, so here Ymlaen offers a brief guide...

The Wales Youth Agency was established by the Secretary of State for Wales in April 1992 as a Non-Departmental Public Body to support the development of services to young people throughout Wales.

It is governed by a Management Board made up of individuals and representatives from organisations in Wales, supported by sub-committees and by planning and working groups.

The Wales Youth Agency's purpose is to promote, support and assist both the voluntary and maintained sectors of the youth service to develop and improve the quality of youth work practice in Wales.

Within this, the Agency has five main functions:

- to assist the development of the youth work curriculum;
- to promote staff development and the accreditation of training;
- to facilitate communication systems, marketing and information services;
- to encourage and develop the partnership with young people and between statutory and voluntary organisations;
- to support collaborative responses to identified priorities.

SO WHAT CAN THE WALES YOUTH AGENCY DO FOR YOU?

The Agency can provide you with training. Priority is given to identifying the training needs of youth workers, managers and trainers, and to the promotion and the securing of accreditation of that training.

John Rose, Assistant Director of the Wales Youth Agency and responsible for training told Ymlaen that the major change in the training field is that the Agency has now assumed almost complete responsibility for ensuring that quality standards are met in Wales in the training of youth workers. Hitherto, the task had been carried out by the Leicester-based National Youth Agency, a situation that some youth organisations in Wales, particularly those rooted in the Welsh language, felt was inappropriate.

Work is also underway to design youth work training so that it fits in with other training areas within education, and that youth work qualifications are 'transferable'. The Agency is also working to ensure provision of training in such areas as business planning and corporate planning together with training on new legislation such as the Children Act and Charities Act.

The Agency can provide you with information through an advice enquiry service, a variety of publications and through the Resource Base.

Liz Sharp is Development Officer for youth worker information. This magazine, Ymlaen, is quarterly and is circulated to youth officers, and full and part

time youth workers in the voluntary and statutory sectors throughout Wales. In addition, a bi-monthly information pack, called Pigion, with details of courses, conferences, funding and new resources, is mailed to more than 650 full time workers, centres and individuals.

The Agency Resource Base holds over 1,000 titles, including books, practical packs and videos and most are available on free short term loan. A catalogue of these resources is now available.

The Electronic Noticeboard (ENB) project potentially allows more than 70 centres in Wales to communicate through a computer and modem via the telephone network. Messages can be left, and information exchanged. The Resource Base Catalogue and Youth Service Directory can also be viewed. The ENB system is currently being developed to hold information on the work of the major youth organisations in Wales and a comprehensive section on youth information is underway.

As far as the provision of information for young people is concerned, the Agency gives priority to researching needs, and devising and developing information systems that use a range of delivery methods.

Elise Stewart is Development Officer for Youth Information at the Wales Youth Agency. She told Ymlaen that six methods of delivering information to young people are currently being piloted, with a view to determining the best method. The projects being developed include a newspaper by school leavers in Gwent, an advice and counselling centre in Llandrindod Wells, and a video produced in

Llanelli for young people setting up enterprises.

The first steps towards publishing a youth information magazine have been taken with a residential weekend at the end of October, and the formation of a planning group. Potential sponsors and advertisers are now being approached in an effort to raise the finance needed.

Also in October, the first regional youth information seminar was held, bringing together a range of agencies and interested parties in Dyfed and West Glamorgan. The aim of the seminars, to be staged throughout Wales, is to establish on a one- or two-county basis a network of information providers to young people.

The Wales Youth Agency supports the work of the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services. CWVYS is a registered charity with more than 30 member bodies. It works to promote and support co-operation between voluntary youth organisations and the youth service in Wales.

Gareth Ioan, Senior Development Officer at the Agency with responsibility for the voluntary youth sector, was heavily involved with the November 23 CWVYS general meeting in Cardiff. On December 3 the National Conference on Youth Work in Wales will, among other issues, discuss the impact on the voluntary sector of the reorganisation of local government.

Gareth reminds voluntary groups in Wales that have their own constitution and an annual income of more than £1,000 that they must register with the Charity Commission by the end of December under the 1992 Charities Act or pay a fee to register after this date. Previously, a national organisation's registration would cover all local branches; now these must register individually if they exceed the income ceiling and have their own constitution.

The working group on Youth Work in Rural Areas, set up by the Agency earlier this year, has produced a report making recommendations for future action by the Agency.

The Wales Youth Agency also supports the Wales Youth Forum, an organisation which seeks to secure the wider participation and empowerment of young people in youth service affairs.

Liam Kealy, Development Officer with responsibility for youth empowerment at the Agency, told Ymlaen that the recent conference of the Wales Youth Forum in Aberystwyth in September, brought together 50 young people to consider an agenda chosen by the participants. This included housing, the environment, disability, empowerment, crime prevention, drugs and alcohol, and equal opportunities. The conference began work on a document, now in draft form, that contains a statement of the rights and needs of young people, and of the provision needed to meet these aspirations.

A second conference, targeting young people in rural areas, will be held in March 1994.

Training for Participation, an initiative linking young people

In all, the Agency is concerned with quality — with the quality of its own work and responses to the needs of youth workers and young people, and with the quality of youth work itself.

Brian Williams, the Agency's Executive Director, reaffirmed the Agency's responsibility to:

- ensure that youth work has a positive image and a high profile;
- create, within its own corporate identity, a vision shared by its Management Board, staff, and those with whom it works;
- share that vision with others including local and central government, through active engagement and debate;
- develop and enhance the professionalism of youth work and the services through which it is delivered;
- foster a spirit of true partnership between all youth work providers by valuing the unique contributions made by both voluntary and maintained sectors and by resolving to harness their independent and collective efforts on behalf of young people; and
- ensure that the contribution of young people is recognised; and that accessible, participative and empowering notions underpin its work so that the view of young people contribute positively to the central thinking that shapes its policies and practice.



Gareth Ioan (l) and Liam Kealy. Both joined the Wales Youth Agency in April '93

from a number of organisations, as well as youth workers involved in training young people, aims to extend empowerment. It is currently designing a recognised training course for young people who have taken responsibility within their organisations.

If you would like further information on any aspects of the work of the Wales Youth Agency, a list of the staff and their respective areas of work is given on page 2. We will be pleased to help.