

Wales Youth Agency Response to 'Consultation on the Draft Direction and Guidance for Extending Entitlement'

Strong Partnerships Require Strong Partners

1. INTRODUCTION

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the implementation proposals for 'Extending Entitlement'. We see 'Extending Entitlement' as a major opportunity for both youth work and the Youth Service in Wales. We also see 'Extending Entitlement' as a major challenge to a relatively small and under-resourced Youth Service.

The following comments are offered as a way to improve the chances of success of these proposals to extend entitlement to young people, and concentrates on the role of the Youth Service, working in partnership with other services for young people. We also focus on the Wales Youth Agency (WYA) itself, because we continue to see the role of the WYA as primarily to develop the Youth Service (both maintained and voluntary sectors).

2. PARTNERSHIPS

Whilst we will comment on a number of the organisational proposals this will be done through an emphasis on the nature of partnership proposed in the Young People's Partnerships, that are now coming into existence and starting their work. We do this, and give our response the above title, as we believe that the nature of partnership will be the key to the success or failure of this strategy.

We see it as entirely appropriate that the NAW puts a strong emphasis on partnership, has issued guidance on partnerships and is commissioning research into effective partnership working (Draft Guidance paragraph 6). However, we believe that the considerable experience of the Youth Service in working in partnership (at neighbourhood, local authority, national and international levels) indicates that there are particular issues that apply to the involvement of the Youth Service in partnerships. It is critical that these are made explicit at the start of new partnerships.

The following 5 principles (in italics) would seem to relate to all partnerships, and thus relate to paragraphs 1 - 24 of the Draft Guidance, in particular paragraph 7. The commentaries draws on the specific experience of the Youth Service in partnerships, drawing in particular on 'Strategies for Intervention' (H Williamson, K Weatherspoon, University College Cardiff, 1985), a study of interagency working in Ely, Cardiff in the mid 1980s.

Good Partnership working requires:

1. *Clarity of purpose and roles, and common recognition that new purposes can only be achieved through partnership, and these purposes go beyond what can be achieved alone.*

Because youth work is founded on a set of intervention principles (see 'Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales' - annex 8) which involve both starting from young

people's perspectives and a voluntary relationship, purposes can appear both very broad and somewhat vague in comparison to other services to young people. The 7 point Entitlement statement in the original document (paragraph 1.8) has now usefully been extended to 10 points (with 3 additional contextual statements) (paragraph 1 of requirements). This should help in establishing **both** a role for the Youth Service **on its own** and new roles that can only be achieved in partnership with other agencies i.e. the new Youth Support Service. It is important that the Youth Service continues to provide its traditional social and recreational opportunities in informal learning settings, whilst also continuing to develop targeted programmes around the social inclusion and employability of young people, both on its own and in partnership with others in the Youth Support Service.

2. *Commitment to diplomacy and respect, reciprocity and exchange by all partners.*

The achievement of 'equal status' (paragraph 7 of Guidance) or 'parity of esteem' cannot and should not depend on services being of similar size, or representatives being of similar rank/pay level. Nor can the number of representatives be the key factor. However, it does need to be recognised that the Youth Service (broadly defined) will only have a maximum of 5 members in a potential group of about 30 (annex 2) and their status, in their other work roles, may well be less than other partners. We do therefore recommend that Principal Youth Officers are allocated automatic membership rather than being one of four with only three places (annex 2). However this does not resolve the issue of equal status. Once any partner feels it is an unequal relationship, and senses colonisation by others, the potential for real partnership working is often doomed. The Youth Service has long experience of working in what are formally unequal relationships, and of struggling to make the partnership real between the maintained, voluntary and independent sectors. For the Youth Service it is important that other partners recognise their professional credibility for their on-going independent work, just as it is important that the Youth Service gives professional recognition to other services to young people. The specialist strengths of all services involved or partners need to be recognised **before** the new potential of partnership working can be developed. The identification of specialist roles in relation to the Entitlement statement will help in this (see point 1 above). It is also important that no existing service is put in the position of being expected to cut back on their existing work as a way of funding new partnership work.

3. *Commitment to attracting new additional sources of funding from outside sources, based on an increased knowledge of the needs of young people.*

Funding often requires partnership working and new agendas open up new funding streams. It is important that the rationale for new work and priorities are established jointly prior to new bids. Community profiles focussed on young people (or the audit of need, provision and resources - paragraphs 12-19 of Guidance) should provide the basis for this, as well as giving greater credibility to the partnership from funders, and the local community including young people themselves.

4. *Recognition that partnership requires both personal and professional motivation by workers, involvement of young people, and is likely to remain in a 'precarious equilibrium'.*

In as much as any partnership comes together for specific purposes, and some purposes may not be achieved (at least not in the expected timescale) they are 'precarious'. The unclear boundary between the personal and professional in youth work, and the strong

commitment to involve young people in decision-making is a complication to a rational output-led management model. However, these very elements can provide a strength of commitment to the partnership that can be of critical importance in difficult times. Partnerships may need time to learn to work together as a group, and for reciprocity, exchange, trust and respect to develop.

5. *Attendance of partnership members, involvement of 'significant' players, importance of Chair, and effective servicing of the partnership.*

Whilst 100% attendance of members at meetings is a laudable aim, it is not likely to be achieved, especially with the importance of including 'significant' players who are often heavily committed to a range of other bodies. The importance of cross-fertilisation between different partnerships has been recognised (paragraphs 1-3 of Guidance). The importance of the Chair to provide leadership is also recognised and the involvement of local authority Chief Executives is promoted, at least initially, (paragraphs 8, 9 of Guidance). It may be valuable in the spirit of partnership to arrange to have the position of Chair rotating between the members (and provide training for the role). Equally important, especially if 100% attendance cannot be expected of all members, is efficient servicing by administrators/secretarial staff to provide records of proceedings that are communicated to all members. The importance of elected members has long been recognised in Youth Service management, and it may be important to have more than 1 elected member, to get a range of political perspectives (see Annex 2 for membership). In terms of the overall size of the group, effectiveness may be enhanced, and group dynamics promoted, by a group of 20 or less but this may occur by less than 100% attendance rather than reducing the membership.

3. THE ROLE OF THE WALES YOUTH AGENCY

The above has a number of implications for the setting up of effective partnerships, and suggests a greater role for the WYA than is suggested by the Draft Directions and Guidance. The WYA is only mentioned in relation to the Curriculum Statement (annex 8), Training Issues (annex 9) and one of the Good Practice examples (Youth Work and Schools Partnership Programme). This would not seem to sufficiently reflect the broadening of the WYA remit as suggested in the original document (recommendations 1.8 page 8). If, as is suggested here, strong Young People's Partnerships require strong partners, then the WYA could have a key role in promoting strong partners.

In addition to evaluating the effectiveness of professional youth work training through the ETS Committee (in particular the extent to which partnership working is promoted and evaluated through training - point h in annex 9), there would appear to be an in-service training role for existing workers (point c in annex 9) that the WYA is well placed to facilitate with the creation of the Staff College.

In our view careful thought needs to be given to support structures for Young People's Partnerships, and these need to be in place quickly to help in the critical first year. It is almost certain that the diversity of people involved in the partnerships will sometimes lead to conflict situations, that need to be resolved, or maybe even more problematic there may be a loss of commitment by one or more partners. Intervention may be helpful if the structures give legitimacy to 'trouble-shooters'. Clearly this must be done in a way that does not undermine the autonomy and ownership of the process by the local partners. The WYA may be well placed to take on this difficult role.

Also the dissemination of good practice examples, beyond that already provided in the documentation, could be facilitated by the WYA, as could other examples of partnership working facilitated by WYA staff (as with the example of Youth Work and Schools Partnership). It is likely that a variety of models will emerge that will have relevance across a number of local areas, and further discussion and debate through publications and conferences, could well help local partnerships in deciding their priorities.

4. OTHER POINTS

- Involvement of young people.

We recognise the difficulty of the decision about whether to include young people directly in the partnerships (accompanying letter to Draft Directions and Guidance), and believe the potential for 'tokenism' should be avoided. Annexes 5 and 6 give some useful pointers to the continuing importance of consultation, and the inclusion of points 10-14 in template 1 (annex 7) is critical. The complexity of the task needs recognition by the partners, as does the experience of the Youth Service in this area.

- 5 year rolling strategy

On balance we feel that a commitment to a 5 year strategy is to be preferred to a 3 year strategy. In a field which has often suffered from 'short-termism' this gives a clear message which will be enhanced by giving a statutory base to youth work in proposed legislation. It is valuable that it is recognised that the clarity/detail will be less in years 4 and 5, but it may be preferable to have an internal mid-term review i.e after 27z years, in case there is a need to adjust priorities.

- Timetable

The timetable as outlined in annex 3 is ambitious and is rightly recognised as aspirational (in accompanying letter). We believe that as long as sufficient information is available from the audit of existing provision, need and resources a tight timetable (with the strategy to start implementation in September 2002) is appropriate. It is essential that Youth Services (both maintained and voluntary sectors) make this a top priority with dedicated senior staff involved from now on (if this has not already occurred). Equally, if the above proposals about the increased role of the WYA are accepted then staff would have to be allocated from early 2002, despite the on-going review of the WYA.

- Resourcing the strategy and delivery plan

Paragraphs 43-45 of the Guidance rightly recognise the potential for outside funding coming from partnership working. However, we are concerned that the partnerships start their work knowing that existing funding is secure and that additional core funding from the Assembly (from whatever heading) is potentially available to Young People's Partnerships. It will be essential to know the level of Assembly support for match funding bids. Please note our concerns above in relation to funding in the section on partnerships (point 2 above).

- Links to other plans/timescales/strategies

We note that the relationships between the Young People's Partnership strategy and other elements of Assembly policy is qualified in annex 1, and that different charts have been produced e.g in Communities First. In our view whilst a range of links need to be put in place it is important that local priorities and needs should not be over ruled by NAW policy. We have some concern that the essential vision of Extending Entitlement to young people could be diluted by more of a 'care' emphasis if Young People's Partnerships are subsumed within the Children and Young People's Framework. Whilst links to children's services are crucial, especially around issues of combating social exclusion, it is equally important that young people are recognised as the future of their communities. Important developments such as 'Communities First' which will almost certainly involve work with young people, must not become detached from Young People's Partnerships, and in general youth work needs to be seen as integral to community-based learning and development (as in PAULO, the National Training Organisation for this area). Whatever relationships are decided as the critical ones for Young People's Partnerships it is important that these are clear as there is a danger that the complexity of the range of strategic and thematic plans will make the process too bureaucratic. Only the close inter linking of these plans will avoid this.

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