

## Education Select Committee Inquiry into Services for Young People, December 2010

### Response from the Regional Youth Work Unit at Learning South West

1. Input to this response has been sought from voluntary youth organisations and local authority youth work leads in the South West of England. At a time of unprecedented cuts in public services in general and work with young people in particular, we are pleased that the Select Committee has taken the opportunity to review services for young people, as the needs for such services are growing as more young people face the prospect of fewer and much more expensive education and training opportunities combined with fewer job opportunities in both the public and private sectors. 16-25 year olds in the South West were disproportionately affected by redundancies caused by the 2008/9 recession, and recovery is very slow for the main industries in the region. In these circumstances the benefits of engaging with services such as youth work, positive activities and targeted support aimed at specific at risk groups are crucial for a wider section of the youth population than in times of economic stability.
2. This response focuses largely on 'youth work' as a specific approach to working with young people. Youth work takes place in a range of settings – in youth centres, on the streets, in parks, schools, colleges and multi-agency youth projects – essentially working with young people in places that young people choose to spend time (the 'voluntary engagement' principle). The Youth Worker's role is that of an informal educator, working with individuals and (more usually) groups of young people to help them explore and understand issues that have an impact on them, their communities and the wider world, develop skills, knowledge and confidence and enable them to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Crucially, youth workers engage young people in a supportive, challenging, creative and enjoyable learning process. It is a complex and skilled profession, much appreciated by young people as evidenced in the [film produced by the Regional Youth Work Unit in 2010](#). The use of the term 'positive activities' to describe open access provision, has failed to articulate the skills necessary to undertake good youth work, resulting in a lack of understanding amongst senior managers and commissioners of the huge contribution that youth work can make to young people's achievement and development as individuals and members of civil society.

#### *Relationship between universal and targeted services*

3. South West Local Authorities and their voluntary sector partners have collaborated to support young people and good youth work is an essential element of these. Traditionally, youth work provides open access facilities and activities, though usually with the intention of engaging with young people who may not otherwise have the opportunities to get involved in challenging and creative activities and projects. Youth centres and facilities have been developed in places where there is community demand for somewhere for young people to go in the evenings and weekends, often in socially deprived areas. Detached youth work is often used to establish relationships with young people who may

not get involved with centre based activities, and can be an effective bridge to engage these young people with others in their community.

4. Regardless of setting, youth workers are adept at developing relationships with young people and helping to identify and provide more targeted support for those in greater need. Youth work has a long history of working in partnership with other agencies in their communities, including police, schools and health services, and developing targeted approaches for work with particular groups of young people, such as those involved in substance misuse, or at risk of exclusion from school. By focusing its efforts on peer groups of young people, youth work avoids the stigmatisation of young people so prevalent in more 'case work' focussed services, and as a result succeeds in retaining positive relationships with young people over long periods of time, often 5 years or more. This enables youth workers to provide on-going support and challenge to young people, and is an effective link with more specialist agencies such as Youth Offending Teams. The recent [OFSTED survey of Integrated Youth Support](#) highlighted some of the sophisticated partnership approaches which have developed with effective youth work as a core ingredient. [Somerset County Councils Quality Standards](#) for Transitions between open-access and targeted services shows how youth work can support young people as they exit from specialist services as well as providing supported referrals to specific programmes.
5. Specialist services that intervene at points of crisis in the lives of young people with complex needs account for a very large percentage of the overall costs of services for young people (See Appendix 1 for a model used in the South West). Youth workers tend to be at their most effective with young people who are at risk of disengaging and benefit from the additional support and challenge offered by youth work. As a result large numbers of young people are prevented from coming to the attention of specialised services, at a much lower cost to the state and community. Evidence from Youth Inclusion Projects established through Youth Justice Board funding to work with the young people most likely to become involved in criminal activity in a given area, showed that by involving them in regular and good quality youth work activities, those young people did not get involved in criminal activity and the overall reported youth crime rates in the targeted areas reduced.

### *Supporting Volunteering*

6. A high percentage of young people already volunteer in their communities and in other focussed opportunities. Youth work projects have a good track record of involving young people as volunteers, either directly as peer workers and leaders with younger children, or in specific volunteering projects. In the Gloucestershire floods in 2008, for example, local authority youth workers organised groups of young people to get supplies of drinking water from standpipes to elderly and disabled people. Devon Youth Service has organised inter-generational projects to involve young people in supporting older young people in their communities, for example by providing advice on using computers and mobile phones. Youth work projects also support young people in longer term volunteering

opportunities at home and abroad. The Tides Project in Weymouth, for example has encouraged a number of young people who were previously NEET to take up a full year of volunteering in Europe or beyond through European Voluntary Service.

7. The NCS will continue the development of volunteering opportunities for young people, although with its focus on short term activity over one summer it should be seen as complementary to longer term involvement with youth work projects and not as a free-standing alternative to long term investment in youth provision. One of the NCS's predecessors, the U project, which had a similar design, was successful in initially encouraging young people to enrol on courses or gain employment, but was unsuccessful in the long term, as when young people experienced difficulties a few weeks into their training or employment, the project workers with whom they had built relationships were no longer in post to provide advice and support.
8. Youth work is an important pathway for adult volunteers as well as for young people: in a recent survey, Devon Youth Service found that there were more volunteers than paid staff engaged in their youth projects. Because youth projects, whether managed by voluntary organisations or local authorities, are embedded in communities and operate in the evenings and weekends, they provide accessible opportunities for local adults to get involved as volunteers. This often opens up pathways to training and employment as youth workers, and helps to build social capital in disadvantaged communities.

#### *Young people's involvement in shaping services*

9. Over the past decade a great deal of activity has been focussed on ensuring that young people's voice and influence in the design and delivery of services is increased, and that services are transformed as a result. Excellent examples of participation in the South West include:
  - Developing local Youth Forums to work with community organisations and Parish/Town Councils to establish provision for young people in localities
  - Authority-wide Youth Parliaments/Councils, often linked to UK Youth Parliament, where young people are elected, often by tens of thousands of their peers, to represent the views of young people and campaign for priority issues
  - Youth Opportunity Fund Panels are a fantastic opportunity for young people to both design their own youth projects, and to take the role of commissioners/decision makers in assessing proposals. Significant transformations have been made as a result of YOF/Youth Capital Fund, though the decision to remove the ring fence on these funds at a time of substantial in-year cuts means they are much harder to sustain in the current climate. In a number of local authorities the concept of YouthBanks has been used to sustain and underpin YOF, and these are expected to remain in place after March 2011. The Youth Service in the States of Jersey has reached a sponsorship deal with Citibank which will see Citibank providing funding for the local YouthBank.

- Young Devon has been particularly successful in involving young people as assessors of services that impact on young people's lives. Young people are trained as assessors, and as commissioners, and have undertaken assessments of a number of different services. Several local authorities have also involved young people in internal and external inspections of youth work provision, while some Connexions providers have also developed effective forms of engaging young people, for example as 'mystery shoppers'.
- At regional and national level, the UK Youth Parliament has been a really effective way of engaging young people in decision making and campaigning. Elections for Members of Youth Parliament are always hotly contested, and MYPS and Deputies are trained and supported in campaigning and working with the media. A regional manifesto is produced annually and MYPs collaborate on priority issues across the region.

10. None of these activities would happen so effectively without the support of skilled professional youth workers in local authorities and voluntary organisations. Youth workers support, guide and provide feedback to young people taking on representative roles, and organise the often complex logistics of convening authority wide, regional, national and sometimes international young people led events. Because young people often make confident and inspirational input into adult events and meetings, it is sometimes assumed that they are naturally adept in these areas. However, the invisible hand of professional youth workers in supporting and encouraging young people from diverse backgrounds to speak out and organise for their peers must not be under-estimated, and will need to be resourced if young people's voice and influence is to be sustained and enhanced.

*Roles for local authorities, voluntary, community and private sectors in the provision of youth work*

11. Youth work has been delivered through a mixed economy since the 1940s, when the first local authority youth officers were established by statute. Several voluntary youth organisations with histories dating from the nineteenth century, YMCAs, YWCA and other, often faith based, voluntary organisations continue to play important roles in delivering youth work in communities across the South West. There are also a wide range of locally based voluntary organisations such as Young Devon, Young Bristol and Somerset Rural Youth Project which have their roots in the communities they serve and have been successful in engaging young people and local communities in developing an impressive range of open access and targeted services for young people. South West local authorities also provide in-house youth work, often in partnership with local communities. At local level, there tends to be continuous dialogue between local authority and voluntary sector youth work organisations, and in recent years this has often been formalised into partnership agreements (e.g. in Somerset, the County Youth Service helped to establish Somerset Rural Youth Project as a voluntary organisation with a Service Level Agreement to support work with young people in the most rural areas of the county). Often local authorities and voluntary organisations share arrangements for providing training and

qualification opportunities for staff and volunteers (in Gloucestershire, for example, the LA Youth Service provides accredited training at Level 2 for local voluntary youth organisations).

12. While there are sometimes tensions in the partnerships between the local authorities and voluntary youth organisations, usually about how funding is allocated, there is generally a shared vision for young people in the area, and considerable common ground about how that vision can be achieved. At present there is very little private sector involvement in the delivery of youth work in our region, probably because levels of funding for youth work are low and it is hard to see how profit could be extracted either from contracts with local authorities or central government, or from young people themselves. If there is a role for private sector involvement, it is likely to be in the provision of back-office support rather than frontline services. Private sector sponsorship of particular events and projects could be further explored, and some large youth facilities such as Torbay's myplace project are actively seeking partnerships with private enterprises to deliver specialist facilities.

#### *Training and workforce development for youth work*

13. We are disappointed that £25million allocated for youth sector workforce development in the previous government's strategy 'Aiming High for Young People' has not been managed in ways that would provide lasting benefits for the sector. Youth work is very rarely the beneficiary of central funding for workforce development, and we maintain a rigorous process of professional validation for the 50+ HE level qualifications in youth and community work through a small team based at the National Youth Agency and the voluntary effort of youth workers, managers and academics. We have worked with LLUK and their predecessor PAULO to establish National Occupational Standards and qualifications and Apprenticeships at Level 2 and 3 awarded through a number of Awarding Organisations. There is a constant demand for places on these programmes, despite the lack of any incentives to universities or students such as those offered to trainee teachers and social workers. None of the funding noted above was made available to support qualifications in youth work: instead, much of the funding was spent on ill-conceived research and over-complicated models for skills development and of new national competence frameworks. A potentially useful project to provide training to voluntary sector workers with young people has only been made operational in the last six months of the three year funding package, and will therefore not have the lasting impact which could have been achieved. Only the Leadership and Management Programme for the youth sector has been rolled out effectively and on time. Inappropriate project management and refusal to listen to voices from the field by CWDC and DCSF meant that this opportunity has been largely wasted.

#### *Developing young people as leaders*

14. Youth work has a long and successful tradition of enabling young people to develop their skills and confidence as leaders, through active engagement in running youth organisations and through accredited training and development programmes such as those established

by Young Devon and others. There is real scope to expand on this positive work as youth workers become more adept at combining accredited learning frameworks with their ability to work comfortably and creatively in informal settings.

*Impact of spending cuts and how available resources can be used most effectively*

15. In some South West authorities preventative services for young people are facing cuts that are far greater than the overall percentage reduction for local authorities. LAs follow DFE guidance on protecting schools budgets, and are mindful of the need to retain spending levels on high tariff child protection services, leaving young people's services exposed as a result. Both directly delivered LA services and contracts with local voluntary youth organisations are affected with budget reductions as high as 75%. Infrastructure support organisations such as Councils for Voluntary Youth Organisations and the Regional Youth Work Unit are also anticipating large scale reductions in their funding from LAs which will make it more difficult to deliver savings in areas such as training and quality assurance. The proposed Early Intervention Fund could provide some funding for youth work, but may be too little too late. However it will be important to use this fund for early intervention across the 0-19 age range, rather than only in early years.
  
16. Many local authority commissioning models actively work against building social capital through supporting local community organisations to deliver in their areas. More emphasis should be placed on developing symbiotic relationships between local authorities and local voluntary organisations and communities rather than business based models of commissioning, which tend to favour larger national organisations which may be capable of delivering the contract but will not see the need to invest in building local community cohesion

*Impact of local and central government structures and statutory frameworks*

17. The previous government introduced many initiatives that impacted on youth work and wider services for young people. However, these were not always co-ordinated and were often short term. Some were particularly useful in enabling services to develop to meet young people's needs (e.g. Youth Opportunities Fund and Capital Fund). The Statutory Guidance on Positive Activities proved useful in building better strategic planning between youth work, sports and arts providers and commissioners, resulting in a more unified offer to young people across a local authority area, though it has not provided a sufficiently robust statutory framework to protect work with young people from disproportionate cuts. Youth work fits well with the notion of localism, as communities and young people often want to have a voice in determining the provision in their areas. Youth work has an important contribution to make to raising young people's aspirations and achievements, and it would be helpful if government policy could acknowledge this and encourage local authorities and other statutory bodies to continue to invest in it as part of an overall strategy to help young people make successful transitions to adulthood.

### *Assessing value and effectiveness*

18. The most significant outcomes from engaging with youth work tend to be recognised in the longer term rather than immediately, making them difficult to quantify. Templates for assessing value and effectiveness in future should include:

- The views of the local community about the impact of youth work in their area
- Young people's own views (Dorset County Youth Service conducts a detailed annual survey of young people who engage with their provision which includes their ratings for youth workers)
- Demonstration of effective contribution to partnership working
- Extent to which provision encourages and supports volunteers, both adults and young people
- Development of effective MIS, an area where there has been insufficient investment in the past