



Positive for Youth Discussion Papers: a response from the Regional Youth Work Unit at Learning South West

The Regional Youth Work Unit at Learning South West is submitting this response on behalf of youth work providers in local authorities and voluntary organisations across the South West region. We have consulted with our networks and members, including all the local authorities, 300+ voluntary organisations and training providers at further and higher education level.

Rather than respond to individual papers we have drawn together key themes. If you would like to explore any of the points raised in more detail, please contact Gill Millar on 01823 335491 or gill_millar@learning-southwest.org.uk

Key Points

Vision

- The vision for a society that is positive about young people is very welcome, and provides a sound framework on which to build youth policy.
- A society that is 'positive for youth' is one in which young people feel able to enjoy their teenage years and are encouraged to make the most of their lives, confident in their identity as individuals and as members of their communities; where young people and adults work, play, live and learn alongside each other with mutual appreciation and respect.
- As they grow young people should expect to have access to a range of activities, advice and support to grow in confidence, develop new skills and prepare a range for their adult life. Many young people will need help at some point to make informed choices, to feel safe or to be healthy and for others to be there for them when failures occur – as well as to celebrate their achievements. For some this will come from family, school and friends for other young people it will come from youth workers and other trusted adults.
- We welcome the focus on early intervention which matters at all ages and should not be seen as only applying to younger children.

Resources

- The disproportionate cuts in services for young people (75% in some South West local authorities) mean it will not be possible to meet the needs of all young people, and in many areas it is unlikely that there is sufficient resource in place to provide effective early intervention and prevention approaches.

- There is good evidence to demonstrate that involvement in positive activities and good relationships with adults involved in those activities has an impact on keeping young people away from crime, drug and alcohol abuse. The current disproportionate cuts in open access youth work and positive activities mean that fewer young people will be able to benefit from these services.
- Capital investment in facilities for young people cannot be separated from revenue requirements to sustain buildings. Young people consistently say that they want warm safe places in which to meet friends and engage in activities. The new buildings provided through the myplace fund provide some fantastic resources – however, in general, the small amounts of capital funding distributed in conjunction with young people through the Youth Capital Fund have probably had more positive impact in their areas. A local capital plan for youth facilities identifying key priorities and accessing a range of funding sources would be an essential element of an overall local youth services strategy.

Leadership and Direction for young people's services

- In the context of localism, there is a very clear need for local authorities to take a leadership role in developing coherent service delivery strategies for young people. Many local authorities do not currently have an identified lead senior officer for young people's services, and this makes it difficult to develop a coherent local strategy.
- Young people require a mix of open access youth work and positive activities and targeted individual support for those who are most vulnerable. The role of open access services as 'de-escalation pathways' is potentially crucial.

Measuring Impact

- We welcome the return of measurable performance indicators for young people's services along with identification of main roles (para 57, Overarching statement).
- We need to develop a common approach to measuring the impact of open access work with young people, and would welcome investment from Government to facilitate this.

Commissioning

- Commissioning practice is underdeveloped in young people's services, as indicated in the recent OFSTED report.
- We are not convinced of the desirability of creating a competitive market in young people's services. Positive partnerships between youth work providers resulting in shared priorities for young people in localities and an agreed rationalisation of provision to meet the needs of young people who are most likely to benefit from engaging in youth work would be a preferable approach.

Voluntary youth sector

- Voluntary sector capacity building remains a priority for the youth sector, especially as so many sources of capacity building funding are ending. New local cross-voluntary sector infrastructure partnerships funded through Big Lottery Fund must take seriously the development and representational needs of the children and young people's voluntary sector.

- The rhetoric of finding new forms of funding from the private sector feels very hollow in a region where there are very few large scale private enterprises with capacity to support youth organisations to a significant degree. If private sector wealth is to benefit young people outside London and the Home Counties, any brokerage service must have links into more distant regions.

Young people's voice

- Young people should have an active voice in determining service delivery strategies in each local authority, building on the excellent work on young people's voice and influence over the past decade. The vision of an accessible and effective vehicle for youth participation in each local authority is most welcome, and will build on good work done to date in South West local authority areas, where UK Youth Parliament has been a particularly successful vehicle for engaging young people in decision making at local and regional level.

Helping young people succeed in education and employment

- Education Maintenance Allowance was a powerful tool in enabling young people to remain in education and training, by contributing to the substantial cost of travel to college in largely rural areas with poor and expensive public transport links. Its loss means many young people have withdrawn from courses and have lost an opportunity to gain qualifications and skills. Combined with a stagnant labour market this is putting young people in real danger of becoming and remaining unemployed.
- Community based careers guidance and information provided through Connexions has largely disappeared, leaving schools and colleges as the only source of advice and guidance. School based provision is patchy and we have real concerns that young people will not be able to access the guidance they need to make appropriate career choices. Careers guidance workers have specialist skills which are being lost to young people. The proposal for an 'all-age careers service' has much merit, but needs to be extended to young people as well as adults.

Young people's workforce

- We welcome the papers' acknowledgement of the role for professional youth workers and would wish that more investment had been made in this area within the 2008-2011 Youth Workforce Strategy. We currently have a robust qualifications framework for youth work, with sector-led and resourced professional validation of degree and post-graduate qualifications through the network of Education and Training Standards Committees in each devolved authority. In England that National Youth Agency facilitates this process. There is an argument for considering a graduate apprenticeship route to provide a pathway for young people who have been involved in youth work as volunteers and peer leaders to get a foothold in the profession.
- The youth workforce has a very high proportion of volunteers and the Progress project demonstrated a demand for accredited training amongst them. However, current funding arrangements for accredited qualification put them out of the reach of individuals and the voluntary organisations who rely on volunteers, and a fund to support accredited training for volunteers would be a real bonus.

- We are concerned that as we write, the final Sector Skills Council destination for the youth work workforce has not been determined, leaving the sector vulnerable at a time of great change. A consultation carried out over the summer showed that a large majority of respondents see the future of youth work in the context of community development and learning, with links to that sector as well as the wider children and young people's sector.
- As a result of budget reductions and changes to Skills Funding Agency requirements, local authorities are withdrawing from the delivery of pre-professional accredited qualifications for youth workers, leaving a concerning gap for both their own and the voluntary sector workforce.

Gill Millar

Regional Youth Work Adviser

Learning South West

September 2011