



## **An Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – response from Regional Youth Work Unit at Learning South West**

We are pleased to see that the Minister has commissioned a paper on the role of youth work in order to enable commissioners to take decisions about local service provision.

We are pleased that the paper locates youth work firmly as an educational intervention the outcomes of which are enhanced ‘capabilities’ to ensure young people are successful in their transition to adulthood.

The paper provides a starting point to assist the achievement of the Minister’s ambition to provide commissioners with a clear indication of the outcomes they can expect from youth work, clarifying the range of ‘capabilities’ that young people develop through engagement with youth work processes. However, as commissioners frequently lack hands on experience and understanding of youth work and wider work with young people, commissioning practice is likely to be enhanced by clearer guidance as to what constitutes ‘good’ youth work. These guidelines link to [RYWU commissioning guidance](#) were prepared three years ago in conjunction with providers and commissioners in the South West and may provide a template for a new articulation

The Minister’s second aim, to enable providers to develop a common language to describe their work is less likely to be achieved through this paper. The ‘Oginsky’ model is not widely used or understood in the field, and would require a substantial investment in workforce development to install as the common language. Youth workers already have a substantially common form of language to describe their work, expressed through training programmes and qualifications from Level 2 through to post-graduate. The more urgent need is probably for some investment in marketing and promoting this to those outside the direct delivery and management of youth work. It is a great pity that we were unable to use any of the resources made available by the last Government for the Young People’s Workforce Strategy for this purpose.

The suggestion that the youth work workforce would benefit from learning to articulate the educational purpose and outcomes of their work is welcome. This could best be achieved by embedding educational concepts firmly in the recognised qualifications for youth work at all levels. The current review of youth work’s National Occupational Standards provides a timely opportunity to achieve this.

All of the above must be seen in a context in which any intervention to support youth work may have come too late in some parts of the country to enable a current generation of young people to gain the benefits outlined in the paper. Local authorities have been the most significant funders of youth work since at least the 1970s, and in some parts of the country, notably in County Council areas, this funding has been reduced by up to 80%. The Institute for Fiscal Studies recent estimate of a reduction of 20% for youth services is not reflected in the South West, where the average reduction across the local authorities is more like 45%. In some areas we have lost all open access youth projects and all the 'architecture' and infrastructure support in terms of workforce development resources, curriculum support and any sense of strategic leadership. If the Government is serious about wishing to ensure youth work plays an effective role in the education of young people, it needs to act now with clear guidance to local authorities give higher priority to commissioning good youth work.