

Introduction

Until 1999, the Youth Service¹ in Wales was linked to the Youth Service in England (Ministry of Education 1960, Welsh Office 1984 NAW 2000a). The main exceptions to this were the development of a specific Curriculum Statement for Youth Work in Wales (WYA 1992,) and the setting up of an independent Education and Training Standards Committee for Wales in 1994. As a result of the link to England, a number of opportunities were missed to examine variances cultivated by distinctive social, political, and economic differences between the two countries and the effects these have had on the Youth Service in Wales (Jones and Rose 2001). This is not to claim that each of these differences had an equitable effect on the development of the Youth Service in Wales, but to recognise that each has had an influence that has, to some degree, shaped practice in a way that can be described as specifically Welsh (ibid). These differences were recognised by the National Assembly for Wales following its formation in 1999, which claimed that the “*building blocks*” were in place across Wales for the introduction of a strategic approach leading to the development of “*a specific Welsh system for the support of young people*” (Michael 2000:1). It can be claimed that it was from this point in time that the Youth Service in Wales became part of a wider process concerned to develop an approach independent from what was happening elsewhere.

There was significant support for self-determining action and from its very beginning; the National Assembly was keen to promote a new way of operating, described as ‘*Team Wales*’. This was an approach designed to maximise the relationship between the private, public, and voluntary sectors as a means of delivering its three major themes of sustainable development, social inclusion, and equal opportunities (NAW 2000b). These themes would be linked to new education and training initiatives with their ability to liberate talent, extend opportunity, empower communities, and help create wealth (Davidson 2001a:1). This ‘*Team Wales*’ concept was further reinforced by the claim “*we aim to do things differently in Wales – through our ‘Made in Wales’ approach...as a means to create unique Welsh solutions to Welsh problems*” (Davidson 2001b:1). The theme was continued

¹ In Wales, the term ‘Youth Service’ refers to the collective of the local authority Youth Service, national voluntary youth work organisations and local voluntary youth work organisations.

throughout the strategic plan of the Assembly (NAW 2001a) with the claim that the *'Team Wales'* approach would be used to tackle the particular economic and social conditions through greater investment in knowledge generation and exploitation.

Within this environment the First Minister of the new National Assembly brought together a group identified as experts (including Youth Service specialists) to produce a document that took a strategic view of how the particular needs of young people in Wales would be both identified and responded to. The initial document – of what became a trilogy of publications – *'Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales'* (NAW 2000a), attempted to define the principles underpinning future policies and to determine the interface and level of effectiveness between existing policies. It also identified its purpose which was to ensure that young people are able to:

- Participate effectively in education and training;
- Take advantage of opportunities for employment;
- Participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.

These would be achieved through a multi-disciplinary approach, involving a wide range of organisations working with young people, co-ordinated through Chief Executives of Local Authorities for the purpose of *"reviewing and developing services for the entire cohort of young people in their area"* (ibid:75). This approach was driven by the statutory base included within the Youth Support Services Directions and Guidance (Wales) 2002 under Section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (HMSO 2000) which directed local authorities to set up Young People's Partnerships (YPP's) as the primary vehicle for co-ordinating multi-agency activity to deliver 10 entitlements (WAG 2002). These new partnerships would not have a significant budget to carry out their co-ordinating role but were expected by the National Assembly for Wales to influence and co-ordinate the spending of individual partners and to commission activities so that services would become more focused on the priorities of the Extending Entitlement initiative (NAW 2000a, NAW 2001b, WAG 2002). As well as developing the entitlement concept for young people, the Welsh Assembly Government also adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a basis of all of its work with children and young people (NAW 2000a). These rights were translated into seven core aims which were used as the basis for the Strategy

for Children and Young People (WAG 2004) and also for the establishment of an independent Children's Commissioner for Wales in 2001, who became the first holder of such a post in the UK.

Despite this positive approach, the process of turning policy related to young people (in the context of Extending Entitlement) into practice was often perceived by those working in the Youth Service as being too concerned with developing and centralising the importance of the Young People's Partnership as an organisation in its own right. It was a perception fuelled to some extent by the Connexions Service adopted in England, with its drive towards centralising services for young people (DfEE 2000). This was a process with some contradiction to that promoted by the Extending Entitlement experts group who stated that "*new structures are not needed – rather a local network of quality services guided by a clear vision of how young people's needs will be met*" (NAW 2000a). However, for the Youth Service to become a quality service and an effective member of the Partnership, after years of chronic under funding (Michael 2000) it was estimated it would require £100 million of new money in addition to the £20 million it was estimated as receiving at that time (NAW 2000c). This new budget would, it was proposed, be spent on employing 300 additional qualified workers, and refurbishing the buildings used by the Youth Service (ibid). Following some discussion and debate within the National Assembly, the Youth Service in Wales was allocated an additional £2million in 2001-02, £3.7million in 2002-03 and £4.75 million in 2003-04 (NAW 2000c).

As a result of this disappointing level of funding, the Youth Service continued to be significantly under resourced and in many instances easily persuaded by relatively small amounts of additional money – not always related to a form of work linked to its core purpose, principles and values – to become involved in new, primarily government-inspired developments related to young people. The extent of this reliance on external funding was identified by the 2003-04 audit of the maintained Youth Service which identified the total budget of the Youth Service as £29.6 million with £9.6 million (34%) coming from external sources (WYA 2005). By the 2006-07 audit the percentage of budget provided by external sources was 39.2% (WAG 2008). As a result, the Youth Service continues to be too often directed, through financial control, to become involved in forms of practice underpinned by a number of

different priorities, many of which are driven by enhanced levels of accountability. This approach was interpreted by many managers and practitioners to be overly linked to the measurement of outcomes for young people as these were determined by formal accreditation methods. Little corporate attention appears to be given by the Youth Service to either delivering programmes underpinned by a non-formal education approach or providing evidence – linked to its particular style of education – of the importance of the outcomes for young people through their involvement in such programmes.

Overarching Policy in Wales

As the Youth Service in Wales attempted to re-energise itself following the publication of Extending Entitlement, a broad policy direction was emerging described in a range of documents related to the strategic direction of the new Assembly and more specific policies related to economic development, education and lifelong learning (www.wales.gov.uk). These were all policies with the potential to affect in some way the strategic importance of the Youth Service within the emerging social and economic agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government. However, despite the promotion of the 'Made in Wales' concept many of these documents were influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the 'Third Way' philosophy of New Labour (Blair 1996). This was an approach that committed New Labour to a style of politics underpinned by three core concepts: *'equal opportunity, civic responsibility and community'* (White 2001:4). Adherence to these concepts would result, it was claimed, in the development of a society with all individuals having an equal opportunity to access strategic goods such as education, jobs, income and wealth (ibid:8). Pivotal to the New Labour approach was a political commitment to radical reform aimed at ending welfare dependency and encouraging self-reliance and the work habit, resulting in welfare-to-work initiatives for groups like single mothers and the young unemployed. It was also an approach concerned to reduce public expenditure on state-supported programmes to ensure competitive ability in the context of an economy increasingly affected by industrialised globalisation. Central to the achievement of the New Labour vision were the ideas of social interdependence, mutual obligation and social responsibility promoted as the

stakeholder society, within which autonomous citizens would possess rights, assets and opportunities. In return, they would be expected to fulfil certain responsibilities and obligations driven by government policies on welfare, work and education.

The policy direction of the National Assembly was also reflective of New Labour's position on young people including Bridging the Gap (SEU 1999) and PAT 12 (SEU 2000) publications which promoted the New Labour concept of social integration with its emphasis on paid work and the education/training qualifications necessary to gain access to the labour market. Those working class young people outside of this framework were stigmatised and the emphasis for those working with them became a social inclusion agenda to bring all young people into the education, employment or training framework. This agenda influenced key National Assembly policies which were concerned to eradicate the negative economic and social conditions specific to Wales that existed at the time of its formation. These, it was recognised, were responsible for: *"the persistent and substantial gap between the levels of prosperity in Wales compared with the UK and the rest of Europe, Welsh per capita GDP is now only 82% of the EU average"* (European Task Force 1999:5)

The reasons for this prosperity deficit included low employment activity rates, low economic output, low investment in innovation and entrepreneurship and low levels of education, training and investment (Higgins and Morgan 1999). The European Task Force (1999) claimed that the problems associated with poor economic activity in Wales included the lowest household income in the UK as well as disproportionately high levels of dependency on social security benefit. Those affected by these circumstances were also often identified with poverty, crime and family instability and by their isolation from mainstream society (Blair 1996).

This interconnection of negative factors affecting the lives of people in Wales was further highlighted by the claim that social exclusion becomes an outcome and describes a way of life where opportunities are few, services are difficult to access and people lose hope (NAW 1999). Young people were it was claimed also disproportionately affected by social exclusion, with 37%² living in poverty in that

² In 2001 the total population of Wales was 2,903,085, the total population of young people between the age of 11-25 was 551,600

they lived in households with less than 50% of the average income of households with dependent children, 18% did not have anyone earning money, and in some areas the figure approached 60%. 3,400 children were looked after by local authorities and 2,500 children were on the Child Protection Register. Over 5% of young people left school with no qualifications and one in seven 16 to 17 year olds were not in education, training or work. Unemployment and low pay was also seen as a contributor to the economic and social position of Wales with the Assembly claiming that in 1996-1997, 25% of households and nearly half a million people in Wales received income support or family credit (ibid). A more recent report (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2005) concerned with monitoring poverty and social exclusion in Wales identified little improvement resulting in child poverty rate in Wales stalling at around 28%. The report also identified the unemployment rate among young adults at around 10%, more than twice that for those aged over 25. It also claimed that a quarter of 19-year-olds lack NVQ2 or equivalent qualifications, a proportion unchanged this decade that around 10% of 16- to 18-year-olds are not in employment, education or training and up to 1% of children are in situations where they are almost certain to be very seriously disadvantaged (for example, in care or becoming homeless). The report further claimed that more than 15% of children live in workless households and more than 20% live with a disabled parent.

Within this framework the Youth Service in Wales often remains outside any direct front line education involvement in its own right designed to eradicate these social and economic conditions. The role of the Youth Service is in many instances relegated to an involvement concerned with the “re-entry” of young people into education, training and employment as part of its social inclusion agenda (Welsh Office 1998, SEU 1999). This position reflected the findings of the Education and Employment Committee of the House of Commons, who claimed that to combat disaffection, *“all interventions should have the aim of reintegrating young people into mainstream education”* (HMSO 1998: iv). Within the new policy framework, educational and social programmes of the sort delivered within the Youth Service, negotiated by young people without the influence of either government-led employment agendas or appropriate and quantifiable outcomes remained as marginalised as it has ever been.

For many Youth Workers what was missing from the economic and social policy agenda of the Assembly was recognition and support for a particular kind of learning delivered outside of school with the voluntary participation of young people. It is a style of learning driven by the belief that *“knowledge is assumed to be actively constructed by the learner, not passively received from the environment; and second, learning is an interactive process of interpretation, integration and transformation of one’s experiential world”* (Pratt 1993: 17) Underpinning an effective Youth Service approach to learning are those who challenge the effectiveness of formal education by offering a broader perspective about the values of non-formal learning which occur, they argue, ‘in’ and ‘out’ of community. They also argue that formal learning systems offer a certain type of arrangement for learning which may not suit the needs of many in society, implying that the formal context for learning offers some an opportunity for learning but not all. In the opinion of non-formal educators what is required to overcome this is a complementary system designed to *‘provide the learner with new links to the world instead of continuing to funnel all educational programmes through the teacher’* (Illich 1971:73). It can be argued that by adopting this position the Youth Service is enabling young people to successfully navigate their routes to adult life, to take more control over their lives, and to achieve their aspirations. However, instead of using its potential strengths to achieve this the Youth Service was directed to maintain what could be described as a secondary role within both the government’s employability agenda linked to the achievement of hard outcomes and a social care role linked into children and young people’s rights.

Within this environment, in 2006 an opportunity presented itself for the Youth Service that allowed arguments to be made to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee of the Welsh Assembly Government. Rob Edwards, Chair of the Principal Youth Officer’s Group and Veronica Wilson, Chair of the Council for Voluntary Youth Services in Wales, made powerful presentations to elected members on the potential of the Youth Service and identified capacity reasons and political neglect as the reasons why its potential was not being fulfilled (WAG 2006). During the subsequent debate the Minister, Jane Davidson, announced that there would be a strategy developed for the Youth Service in Wales which would provide a vision for the Youth Service and an action plan to ensure it made an effective contribution to the Welsh Assembly Government’s policy agendas.

The Youth Service Strategy for Wales (WAG 2007a) developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including young people, was launched by the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in March 2007. The strategy clearly identified the Youth Service in Wales as being underpinned by the following characteristics:

- the voluntary involvement by young people who have chosen to engage in the process
- being age specific. Focused on 11-25 year olds
- a non-formal education approach
- being driven by a young people first approach
- a universal approach

The document also described a range of outcomes for young people as a result of their involvement with the Youth Service within three themes of active participation, wider skills development and enhanced emotional competence. Central to the ongoing delivery of the strategy was an audit of existing provision with the outcomes of the audit providing the basis for additional resources during the 2008-09 financial year (WAG 2008a).

In addition to these developments, young people and the Youth Service were also receiving some attention during the early part of 2007 from all the major political parties in Wales in preparation for the Welsh Assembly Government election planned for early May 2007. Liberal Democrat policy was to improve the provision of all Youth Services by putting them on a statutory basis as a means of ensuring local authorities met the demand amongst young people for leisure and education-based facilities that could get them off the streets and into constructive engagement with each other and with their communities. They also promised to encourage greater use of specially trained youth workers to help pupils identified as needing extra targeted behavioural support. The Conservative Party generally ignored the Youth Service as a discrete organisation with the potential to contribute to its agenda, Plaid Cymru promised professional support to young people aged 16 to 19 not in employment, education and training, to encourage them re-engage in education, training or in some form of volunteering. They also promised to invest in the appointment of specially trained outreach youth workers to work with young people

not in education or training. The Labour Party, in comparison to the other major parties, made more positive comments about both young people and the Youth Service underpinned by what they described as a commitment to provide education and training opportunities as good as any in the world. In order to achieve this they promised to increase investment in every area of education, lifelong learning and skills and improve standards. Teachers, lecturers, youth workers and other practitioners were all identified as having crucial roles in providing ever better education and training. Labour promised to invest £20 million in the Youth Service to support the delivery of the Youth Service Strategy. In addition they promised to invest in the appointment of specially trained outreach youth workers to work with young people not in education or training. The May 2007 election resulted in a coalition government between Labour and Plaid Cymru. With two manifestos to prioritise and cost, the £20 million promised to the Youth Service by Labour became £10 over three years from 2008-2011 for capital projects, with an additional £380,000 allocated for revenue in 2009-09 (WAG 2008b).

Despite the production of the strategy and the additional resources the Youth Service in Wales continues to be affected by a small number of interconnected challenges which maintain its inability to maximise its potential. Firstly, it has been unable to provide cogent arguments for the importance of its non-formal community based educational role that convince politicians, both within the Welsh Assembly Government and within local authorities, to give it sufficient levels of funding. It can also be argued that on some occasions it has also failed to convince itself of the importance of its particular education role. Secondly, specific Youth Service policy continues to be subordinate to other policies related to children and young people, particularly around formal education and social care. This will assume greater importance if the financial position of government becomes less positive. Thirdly, the Youth Service continues being squeezed between competing government priorities related to, for example, the social inclusion agenda, the crime reduction agenda and the social care agenda. Fourthly, the promotion – or perhaps Youth Service interpretation – of an approach to take those working with young people out of what has been described as their ‘professional silo’ into more integrated children and young people approaches. This last challenge is as a result of a developing policy framework which includes the Children Act 2004 (HMSO 2004) which places a legal

requirement on local authorities to have Children and Young People's Partnerships in place by 2008. This partnership will be driven by an overarching children and young people's plan covering all services for those aged 0-25; this includes an integrated workforce development plan which causes some unease in the Youth Service about a reduction in the distinctiveness of the Youth Service. The status of the Young People's Partnerships – the driver of Extending Entitlement within which the Youth Service is located - will be determined within individual local authorities who will be allowed flexibility as to how the statutory requirement is achieved. Within this arrangement local authorities and their partners including the Young People's Partnership can decide whether they wish to retain separate age-based partnerships or not

Conclusion

The Youth Service at all levels should be aware that it is the intent of the current Welsh Assembly Government to make Wales a learning country, where high quality, lifelong learning liberates talent, extends opportunities, empowers communities, provides the better jobs and skills that people need to prosper in the new economy and creates a sustainable future (WAG 2007b). If the Youth Service in Wales wants to become an integral part of this ambition it will need to convince the Welsh Assembly of the potential of its non-formal education approach undertaken with the voluntary involvement of young people. To achieve this it will need to consider a number of issues. First, it needs to collectively adopt the purpose, principles and values of the Youth Service as these are identified within the National Youth Service strategy. There should be a resistance to redefining its roles to meet particular funding streams as there should be a resistance by those training staff for the Youth Service to creating generic 'workers with young people'. The strategic purpose of the Youth Service in Wales is to create a discrete organisation capable of meeting the outcomes for young people in the way identified within the National Youth Service strategy (WAG 2007a). Second, the Youth Service needs to recognise and understand the aspirations of government and have knowledge of how these aspirations are translated into government policy. Third the Youth Service needs to effectively match its purpose, principles and values to strategic government policy

initiatives. Fourth, it needs to collect evidence on a regular basis which links the outcomes for young people of their involvement in Youth Service programmes to appropriate elements of Welsh Assembly Government policy. Fifth, it needs to be more active in contributing to the development of Welsh Assembly Government policy rather than reacting or avoiding it after it has been written. Only by doing this can those working within the Youth Service help create an environment within which it can deliver a range of programmes appropriate to its purpose, principles and values and meet some of the requirements of government policy.

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