Extending Entitlement Revisited: The Maintained Youth Service 2002-2007
Paper Number 5 – How Knowledgeable were those Working in the Maintained Youth Service of its Discrete Identity During the Time of the Extending Entitlement Launch?

It is the intention of this paper to provide an answer about the level of collective knowledge and understanding of the purposes and associated principles and values of the maintained Youth Service held by those who work within it. This will be done to enable a decision to be made about whether the maintained Youth Service, as a clearly bounded group (or groups) of people interacting together to achieve a particular goal (or goals), is meeting the needs of young people and the requirements of government policy in a formally structured and co-ordinated way.

Collective understanding of Youth Service purposes, principles and values

The purposes of the Youth Service in Wales are included within the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales. As a result, the statement has become well embedded in a wide range of policy documents relating to the Youth Service, including Extending Entitlement, Youth Work in Wales Excellence Awards, and Estyn Standards and Inspection Reports. The outcome of this action has been the inclusion of many of its key concepts within relevant local authority documents, such as Strategic and Operational Plans for the Youth Service. It is, as a result, the principal document for determining the purposes, principles and values of the Youth Service in Wales.

From the evidence obtained from the interviews it is possible to conclude that there is a high level of **recognition** of Youth Service purposes as described in the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales. However, evidence obtained from the same sources would indicate that a collective **understanding** of the purposes does not exist to the same extent. Typical comments supporting this conclusion included:

> *"I have heard about it but I don't know what is says or means. When I start my training I am sure it will be explained"*
>
> Part-Time Youth Worker

> *"Of course I know what the Curriculum Statement is and I know what it contains. I don't understand it though; the individual words are OK but they are joined up in an overcomplicated way. As it stands it doesn't give me any help at all.*
>
> Full-Time Worker

Two broad reasons for this gap between recognition and understanding of Youth Service purposes were identified by the results of both the questionnaire survey and the interviews. First, it can be claimed that little effective support, such as qualifying training, induction training, or effective supervision, has been given to a high proportion of staff working in the maintained Youth Service. As a result, the interpretation of the concepts contained within the statements of purpose has been left, in many instances, to individual workers. This applies in particular to those who are employed part-time and who spend most of their time in direct contact with young people. Second, there is evidence that indicates that the agreed purposes of the Youth Service have increasingly been influenced and often changed in practice as a consequence of the pressures exerted on it by the requirements arising from the contemporary political agenda. Consequently, those employed within the maintained Youth Service did not identify the purpose of their work with any consistency, nor did they provide any significant evidence of an in-depth analysis by respondents of the purposes and principles of the maintained Youth Service. Rather there was, in general, a functional approach concerned to provide what could be described as simplistic concepts which identified the work of the maintained Youth service as being contained within four broad domains – education, leisure/play, social welfare, and employment.

The Youth Service as educator

'Education' was identified, from the data collected and analysed during the investigation, as one of the central purposes of the maintained Youth Service. However, despite the near consensus in the use of the term, significant differences of understanding were revealed between and within the discrete occupational strands about the term's meaning as a

philosophical concept that could be translated into a form of practice compatible with the purpose, principles, and values of the Youth Service. At one end of the spectrum, comments were made by a number of Principal Youth Officers and full and part-time youth workers that education delivered through the Youth Service had become increasingly driven by *'formal'* methods using formative assessment procedures - including those contained within, for example, the Open College Network (OCN) and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). A number of respondents claimed that this position had not been arrived at as a result of some thoughtful process involving those within the Youth Service. Rather, it had come about because:

> *"pressure was being placed on all sections of the Youth Service to develop a more formal approach to education which would include introducing methods of accreditation more suitable to that carried out at school"*
>
> Principal Youth Officer

This pressure, it was further claimed, was as a result of the comments contained within Estyn Inspection Reports, many of which identified *"high quality work"* in the Youth Service as being linked to the:

> *"substantial numbers of young people gaining formal accreditation for their achievements….. through a menu of routes that include:*
> - *A good range of Open College Network (OCN) units and courses*
> - *The Youth Achievement Award*
> - *The local authority's Record of Participation Award; and*
> - *Duke of Edinburgh Award"*
>
> (Estyn 2002b:7)

A number of those interviewed said that they believed local authorities who failed to provide these sorts of accredited educational opportunities within the maintained Youth Service were at risk of being criticised for *"missing opportunities to formally accredit the work of young people"* (Estyn 2001c:3). This position is further supported and its importance emphasised by comments contained within a range of other Inspection Reports, including Estyn (2001a), Estyn (2001b), Estyn (2002a), and Estyn (2002b), which all make positive reference to the attainment of *'formal'* qualifications by young people through their involvement in the Youth Service. It was recognised by many of the Principal Youth Officer respondents that these comments – made by a powerful and

influential body – sent out a very strong message to the Youth Service and in doing so, encouraged it to move away from a non-formal and informal approach towards a formal style of education and assessment.

At the other end of the spectrum, the view that this formal education approach should become dominant for the Youth Service was challenged by the comments of a substantial number of full-time and part-time workers. Many claimed that the Youth Service was and should remain a *'non-formal and informal education'* provision, within which specific learning gains were difficult to measure and only of importance when they were recognised and valued by the individual to whom they related. A significant number of full and part–time workers claimed that their role was important in creating what was described as:

> *"an environment within which young people would be encouraged to take part in a range of new experiences with the outcomes being the attainment of skills that would be of use in their wider lives and not just in their life at work"*
>
> Regional/Specialist Manager

However, for many respondents, the terms non-formal and informal were used to identify an approach to their work with young people that could be described as unstructured, unthinking, unplanned, and devoid of any pre-determined or measurable outcomes. It was terminology that appeared to liberate many workers from any systematic approach to their work because the terms non-formal and informal had become interpreted to mean a way of work that was improvised and makeshift. The general outcome, as identified by the evidence, was an approach within which the worker was most often passive, in that they waited to be motivated into action by *"what the young people want"*, or functional, in that their role was to open the building, keep order on the pool table, impose discipline, and organise activities. The justification for these approaches was described as trying to avoid being seen by young people as being too much like school because what young people needed, in the opinion of those interviewed, was a 'non-formal' or 'informal' environment within which they could escape the growing pressures to succeed at school by being with their friends and by taking part in activities they enjoyed. For many respondents, the Youth Service not being like school was of critical importance because

there was a broad consensus about the academic ability of those young people they were in contact with, who were described in a variety of different ways as academic underachievers. The response to this perceived reality was contained within two general strategies. The first, identified across all the occupational strands, suggested that the Youth Service should disassociate itself from any form of formal education approach in order to concentrate on what were described as the traditional ideas of relationship building, giving young people new and challenging experiences and providing somewhere for them to meet safely. The second strategy was to use the positive relationship between young people and youth workers to encourage them to develop a different attitude to learning. This, it was claimed, could be created by the use of traditional Youth Service curriculum activities, such as sport, craft, drama, dance, and wider community experiences, within which learning could be discovered or re-discovered in a way appropriate to the identified needs of the individuals involved. Concerns were expressed, however, about the general lack of acceptance, value, and resources given to this Youth Service approach by central government, local authorities, and other funding bodies, which continued to devalue the importance of a non-formal community-based learning approach when measured against formal education and work-based training.

Despite the use of the term ‘education’ by most of the respondents to describe one aspect of their work, it would be inaccurate to claim that there were clearly defined ideological positions within or between the occupational strands of the maintained Youth Service about what sort of educational approach underpinned their work. From the information obtained during the investigation, it is possible to claim that an education approach – however described – was not an internalised part of a youth worker’s functions despite the use of the term during the interviews. There was only limited evidence available to suggest that the maintained Youth Service promoted an approach to learning that was structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time, or learning support, the outcome of which was intentional learning from the learner’s perspective. When an education approach was described by the respondents, it could be concluded that those in the maintained Youth Service had, in the majority of instances, adopted the form of education that could be seen to be most familiar to them: that is, an approach underpinned by an

externally accredited outcome that was understood and accepted by government with its managerialist stance and its value for money requirement. It is possible to conclude from the evidence provided during the investigation that government requirements, described in policy documents supported by the comments of Estyn, had, in the perception of significant numbers of those interviewed, created an environment within which it was in their best interests to co-operate. Consequently, education, particularly of the sort leading to formal qualifications, was seen by many working in the maintained Youth Service as an added, externally directed role that had to be dealt with before their core role could be carried out. Comments were also made by a number of respondents about what they saw as the short-term nature of the current political fixation with involving young people in formal approaches to learning during their leisure time. This approach, in the opinion of many respondents, was no more than a short–term distraction which would soon lose its impetus as it was superseded by a new political imperative, when funding became tighter, or when a new political party became elected.

Practical limitations were also identified as the central issue for respondents working part-time when attempting to provide opportunities for young people to obtain accredited qualifications. These limitations were seen to be as a direct result of both the small amount of time they spent with young people and the often erratic attendance of young people at a Youth Club or Youth Project. This finding was substantiated by the results of the questionnaire survey, which indicated that more than 53% of this occupational strand worked less than 14 hours a week and 42% worked less than 10 hours a week. The comments of several focus groups clearly articulated the part-time workers' perspective when they claimed that their contact with young people was sporadic and unpredictable because of the limited time they, as workers, were at the Centre or Project, a situation exacerbated by the often random pattern of attendance by most of the young people they met. Within this environment, the planning of courses or programmes of activities leading to accreditation was difficult, particularly if they were dependent on the regular attendance of young people. This issue was also raised by full-time workers, who recognised the limited time they too spent in direct contact with young people. The outcome of this situation was again an often restricted contact, which placed similar sorts of time pressures as experienced by the part-time workforce. From the significant amount

of evidence obtained during the interviews, it is possible to identify the use of the term 'education' as a constant definition of the role of the maintained Youth Service. There was, however, little correlation between the use of the term and a form of practice that could be recognised as a non-formal educational approach as described in the Curriculum Statement for Wales. The most cogent descriptions of education by those involved in the investigation related to 'formal education', which appears to have become the dominant approach used within the maintained Youth Service. This is not to suggest that this approach is widespread; it might be that it is easier, because of its familiarity to respondents, to describe it rather than to struggle with what appear to be the unfamiliar concepts of non-formal education.

The Youth Service as leisure/playtime provider

The management and organisation of the leisure/playtime activities of young people was described by significant numbers of those interviewed as a core purpose of the maintained Youth Service. The outcome of this activity was described during the investigation as being to involve young people in positive *'worthwhile'* activities, designed to keep young people *"off the streets"* and *"out of trouble"*. The benefits to young people through involvement in these managed and organised activities were described by many of those involved in the interviews as *"learning to be part of a team"*, *"the development and improvement of new skills"*, and *"an opportunity to succeed at things they might be good at"*. Comments were also made by respondents about why they involved young people in a broad range of leisure-type activities as a part of their Youth Service programme the outcomes of which they stated, was to meet the needs of young people, either as individuals, or as members of a team. As a result, involvement by young people in such activities was not specifically geared to winning or making a profit or concerned with a specific issue such as crime prevention or health promotion, although it was further recognised that all of these outcomes did happen or were likely to happen as a result of the involvement of young people in positive leisure-type activities. Once again, there was little evidence to suggest that those interviewed were involved in a thoughtful process within which there could be discovered the link between the purpose of a particular activity, the process by which that activity was being carried out, and the effective

achievement of the outcome measured against the purpose of the activity. Leisure-type activities which spanned a wide range of interesting, stimulating, challenging, and exciting activities were being offered to young people who were accepting the opportunity to participate. There is little evidence available to suggest how these activities are managed to reflect the criteria necessary for them to be described as non-formal education. It can be suggested from the evidence obtained that a significant amount of learning was probably taking place but in a way that reflected a classic informal education approach.

The use of the word 'play' as an activity of the maintained Youth Service was not clearly articulated during the interviews, although many of the sorts of activities described by those who responded to the interviews clearly could have been described as play. In many ways, the notion that young people use the Youth Service just to 'play' has increasingly become foreign to an organisation often influenced by a developing culture of quasi-professionalism underpinned by a little understood non-formal education philosophy. It can be argued that this position has been built on the foundation of the Curriculum Statement for Youth Work and other contemporary documents with their common view of promoting a service largely directed by funding-led, problem-based work with young people. However, a number of comments were made by respondents about a range of activities undertaken by young people through their involvement with the maintained Youth Service that can be seen to be motivated by the concept and values base of play as described by the Welsh Assembly Government. This policy document (WAG 2002c) describes play activities as being freely chosen and personally directed, intrinsically motivated without thought of external goal or reward. It is from this set of principles that much youth work practice is also delivered, which might provide a dilemma for those working in the Youth Service who believe they are under pressure to increasingly measure many of the outcomes of its practice.

> *"Youth work in the recent past was about young people dipping in and out of a range of activities they were interested in. As a youth worker this challenged me to involve them in all sorts of things. Trips, sports, things in the community and lots of other things. We had a good time, they were happy to get on with it and enjoy the chance to try something new or*

> *different. If they didn't get on with it or if they had enough we did something else. I think they learned a lot from that sort of approach. They were much more together, like kids in a playground although some of them were 15 or 16 year olds.*
>
> Part-Time Worker

The findings of the questionnaire survey identify another reason why the issue of providing leisure/play-type activities to young people could be seen by some to be a relevant activity. For many workers, much of their work with young people is focused on those under the age of 11, with a significant minority of those working with young people as young as eight years old. Only limited comment was made by those involved in the interviews about the potential for measurable learning as a result of the leisure/playtime activities organised for young people as part of their Youth Service contact. This provides additional evidence to suggest that the maintained Youth Service is concerned with providing activities for young people within an informal education framework in that it takes place outside of a structure in terms of learning objectives, learning time, or learning support; as a result, it becomes a process within which learning is sometimes intentional, but in most cases it is not.

The Youth Service as carer

Many of the full-time and part-time workers interviewed described in some detail the caring role of those who worked within the maintained Youth Service. Providing a *'shoulder to cry on'* or to *'offer help when it was needed'* were seen as key roles for those working within the Youth Service, as was *'befriending'* young people. This apparent caring approach was described as one of the main purposes for youth workers, particularly those employed part-time, who were keen to be seen as sympathetic adults in the lives of young people. A number of youth workers described this aspect of their work as part of their neighbourhood or local community responsibility, with many describing their role as *'looking out'* for young people for two particular reasons. The first was a belief that they were demonized by a range of influential bodies, including the government and the press, and needed, as a result, a champion to redress the balance of opinion when given the opportunity. The second was a strongly articulated view about the significant numbers of young people who came into contact with the Youth Service who

were economically disadvantaged, negatively labelled as a result of criminal or anti-social behaviour, academic underachievers, or stigmatised as a result of living in a particular geographical location or because they came from a particular family. Young people in any or all of these circumstances were seen by those working in the Youth Service as in need of caring support as individuals. An example of this was given by a part-time worker working in the community within which she lives:

> *"I sometimes feed young people who I know are hungry and sometime I take young people to see the doctor because they are sick. Twice this year I have gone with young people to funerals of their friends who have died on the streets through car accidents or because of drug overdoses. Without the support of the Youth Service lots of young people would think that no one cared"*

The caring role of those working within the maintained Youth Service can be identified by the results of the investigation as a central responsibility across all the occupational strands. Its importance was described by a significant number of respondents who claimed that when young people were in need of care and support, either individually or as a group, it became the first priority. From the examples given, it is reasonable to suggest that those working in the Youth Service would go to remarkable lengths to provide a 'caring' response to a wide range of issues and actions involving young people, many of which would be condemned by other adults. There is a breadth of information to suggest that by adopting this stance, the ability of the maintained Youth Service to become a more 'formal' service was seriously disadvantaged because the well–being of young people appeared to be paramount to a significant number of workers, even if it meant a perceived quota for accreditation was not met.

The Youth Service as a link to employment

Youth workers, particularly those working full-time, identified what they described as a new prescribed role for the maintained Youth Service which was aimed at improving the employment opportunities of young people, "*particularly those who did not do well in school"*. This would be achieved, in the opinion of the respondents, through delivering activities designed to improve the *"key skills"* of young people, the attainment of which

would encourage them to return to learning. There was some confusion about what this term meant to those working in the maintained Youth Service and little evidence was made available to suggest that there was any ability to identify these key skills or to describe appropriate processes for their attainment. However, workers in all the occupational strands could identify the reason for having key skills, which was, they said, to encourage young people to return to the formal education environment of school or college, to become more successful in obtaining formal education qualifications, which was clearly identified as the route into employment and a more positive lifestyle. Despite the strength of this position, a number of respondents suggested that young people could be offered a Youth Service 'qualification' delivered in a different way to school that would motivate them to obtain more 'qualifications' of use to them in the world of work or to continue their education within a further or higher education context. There were significant levels of scepticism about the value of some of the qualifications currently being offered by the Youth Service during the period of this investigation. A group of full-time workers summed up what was a widely held position when they said:

> *"OCN's for erecting tents, for attending the Youth Club or for working behind the coffee bar are just Mickey Mouse qualifications. Can you imagine a young person taking that sort of certificate for a job interview or to get on a proper training programme? We can't, neither can young people. Collecting these sorts qualifications has become more important for us as Youth Workers than they are for young people because they meet the targets we are being set. It's a bit bizarre.*
>
> Full–Time Worker

Some concerns were expressed about the changes that would need to take place within the Youth Service if it was to have a more effective role in preparing young people for the world of employment. Many claimed it would have to move away from its current position where it had a *"loose contact"* with young people who spent much of their Youth Service time in self-directed activities with minimal or non-existent methods for recognising achievement. There would have to be a reconfiguration of its approach so that it provided opportunities for young people to obtain *'real'* qualifications with exchangeable currency value with employers, school or further and higher education. This was an approach opposed by the significant majority of respondents for three specific reasons. First, it was stated that the organisation would lose its identity as a discrete

organisation, and young people, particularly those who came in contact with it, would lose a valued informal community meeting place. Second, the maintained Youth Service did not have the structure because of its over-dependence on part-time workers, nor the theoretical underpinning as a consequence of its structure, to carry out this new role. Third, it did not have sufficient resources to make the necessary adjustments to its structure or to its weak theoretical underpinning or to provide appropriate community-based teaching and learning opportunities for young people. Despite these concerns, there was significant recognition by those interviewed of both the importance young people placed on finding employment and the potential role they as workers could provide in supporting young people to attain this status. There was clear acknowledgement that being employed was a key stage in the lives of young people as they moved from dependence to interdependence and, as such, it was a legitimate responsibility of the Youth Service to provide appropriate support. For many respondents, this support was not related to providing opportunities for young people to be involved in what was described in a variety of ways as 'evening classes in the Youth Club'. There were from a small minority of respondent's clear suggestions that the maintained Youth Service could provide a broad base of activities within which participants would be provided with opportunities to improve, for example, their communication skills, their team-working skills, and their problem-solving skills. It would be about providing 'appropriate education' for young people, the outcomes of which would be a range of personal qualities such as improved self-confidence, appropriate ambition, and the ability to reflect and to take appropriate action related to the issues of importance to them. There was little evidence to link these outcomes to the social and economic agenda of the government – with the potential for increased funds or enhanced status – and there was even less evidence to suggest that the attainment of these outcomes was either planned or measurable. What was generally being described was an unplanned process, which for some young people resulted in new or enhanced skills of significant importance both to themselves and to society.

Domain dominance

The analysis of the interviews revealed that significant numbers of full and part-time workers who come into contact with young people sometimes see these four domains – education, leisure/play, social welfare, and employment - as discreet, but more often they see them as overlapping, requiring them often to make informed, conscious decisions about their importance or priority. From the findings of the investigation, however, a link was identified to suggest that the domain choice was influenced by what was described by many workers across all the occupational strands as institutionalised financial insecurity, the response to which was the development of an embedded entrepreneurial approach to both fundraising and practice. Youth workers, primarily those employed full-time, were keen to describe the sources from which they had obtained resources in addition to those provided by the local authority. Little regard appeared to have been given to the potential implications of obtaining additional funding, even when the sources were clearly outside of the Youth Service remit. Examples given included truancy projects involving youth workers collecting young people from home and delivering them to school or to other *"places of learning"* and youth workers acting as classroom assistants tasked with "*cooling out disruptive pupils"* by using what were described as "*youth work methods"*. This lack of understanding of the purpose of the Youth Service position was supported by the comments of many respondents, which appeared to reveal what could be interpreted as a shallow, uninformed approach to youth work with significant numbers of those questioned demonstrating major deficiencies in their knowledge and understanding of the agreed purpose of the maintained Youth Service. Many of the responses openly asked for information about what the 'true' purpose of the Youth Service was. Questions were raised about whether it is driven by an education role and if so, what sort of education was it? Is it a leisure service with its link to entertainment? Is it about developing winning athletes or winning teams? Is it about providing discos, computer games, or youth worker-led excursions?

A consequence of this uncertainty was the purpose of the Youth Service being seen by many of those working within it as a flexible commodity to be altered and re-prioritised depending on particular circumstances. In a number of responses, it was claimed that

decisions regarding practice were made intuitively or arrived at as a result of worker reaction to what was described as *"meeting funding criteria"*, *"responding to what young people want to do"*, or "*to meet the needs of young people"*. As a result, the willingness of workers across all occupational strands to give a clear definition of the purposes of their work was guarded. A common thread extrapolated from the interviews was an apparent lack of interest in defining a "*fixed"* purpose, which might restrict what was described by several Principal Youth Officers as the "*diverse nature of youth work practice"*. There was significant commonality of comment by Youth Service managers, regional/specialist managers and full-time workers about a need for the Youth Service to "*be a lot of things to a lot of young people"*. Comment was also made by a number of Principal Youth Officers that they were "*a broad church which could be affected by a too prescriptively defined purpose"*. A significant number of the Principal Youth Officers gave support to this position and made comment about the need to be responsive to developing political agendas which might require the Youth Service to take on new responsibilities or change direction. Views were expressed that the Youth Service could be diminished both financially and in terms of influence if it adhered too rigidly to prescriptively defined purposes that restricted its ability to take part in new initiatives with the possibility of new and additional financial resources:

> *"we have to learn to become prepared to respond to the changes that are taking place around us on what seems to be a daily basis. Much of my time is now taken up in partnership working meetings where decisions are being taken about how the cake is going to be cut. I'm much more interested in making sure the Youth Service is making a case than I am in protecting a way of working with young people that more often than not is in the imagination of academics and some workers who are always fighting for obsolete causes. We need to get real and realise how tough the world really is"*
>
> Principal Youth Officer

Youth work in schools and involvement in 'alternative curriculum' activities, citizen initiatives, health promotion, improved school attendance projects, and community safety projects were given as examples of the types of work promoted by the Welsh Assembly Government that would be enhanced by what was described as *"a youth work approach"*. A consequence of the involvement of the Youth Service was the potential increase in both project funding and the expansion of staffing numbers. There was a great deal of

pragmatism in the comments of the Principal Youth Officers and regional/specialist managers about such developments, with a Principal Youth Officer from a rural local authority making a typical comment claiming:

> *"More than 50% of my so called youth workers are funded from non-traditional sources. What they do does not easily fit into the requirements of the Curriculum Statement but there is a need to move forward with the new agenda"*

Only limited comments were made about the dangers inherent in this approach, which could result in the maintained Youth Service losing its specific identity to become a generalist organisation able to change its purposes, principles and values at the whim of government diktat or the requirements of other sources of funding.

Evidence from the investigation identified that practice was often influenced by conflicting priorities and the agreed purposes of the Youth Service (as described within the Curriculum Statement for Youth Work in Wales sometimes became secondary in determining the type of activity, process, and outcome delivered by the Youth Service. Comments by respondents would also suggest that the development of a collective knowledge of the concepts contained within the Curriculum Statement was not, in general, a priority for many of those working either full-time or part-time. The role of the youth worker as a provider of appropriate education to young people as they move from adolescence to adulthood appears to be unfamiliar to the significant majority of those interviewed who work directly with young people. What the interviews did reveal, however, was a more simplistic interpretation of the purpose of the Youth Service, which was described by a substantial number of both full-time and part-time workers as being to deliver a range of activities to help young people to gain positive experiences within their communities and beyond. Many of these opportunities could be identified as offering educational, participative, empowering, and expressive opportunities to young people. However, the findings of this investigation also identified the lack of a thoughtful link between the activities offered and the stated purposes of the Youth Service.

The consequence of this position appears to be a multi-layered Youth Service with managers generally being aware of the formal purposes of the Youth Service and its

potential link to contemporary political agendas, but with little or no access to young people, and part-time youth workers with only a limited awareness of either the purpose of youth work or the requirements of government but being the main contact point for young people. Separating the two is a relatively thin line of full-time workers – almost half of whom are unqualified – who do not always provide an effective bridge between the aspirations of policy and the realities of practice, because of both a lack of effective understanding of organisational purpose and a diverse set of occupational demands. This negative perception of the existence of a collectively held understanding of purpose between the occupational strands was supported by the comments made by the Principal Youth Officers involved in the interview process. One, from a rural Youth Service, gave a view based on his experience within his employing authority by stating:

> *"No - we do not have a collective understanding of what the Youth Service is about. If you asked me what is youth work and then you asked one of my area workers, then you asked the youth worker in the field, you would get three different answers."*

This view was supported by another Principal Youth Officer working in a local authority in north Wales, who also claimed to have a professional understanding of the purpose of youth work which might or might not be shared by full-time qualified staff, and which was unlikely to be shared by part-time trained staff. The reason given for this was because part-time staff often brought into their practice a belief that their responsibilities were:

> *"to fill up the time young people spent in contact with the Youth Service and play sport, to take part in other recreational activities and give them a good time and not to consider any serious sort of education or development role which is what I think youth work is about."*

A further Principal Youth Officer was more optimistic and spoke positively about the changes that had taken place in her predominantly urban Youth Service over the past two years. The catalyst for this was described as the new Youth Service agenda arising from the publication of Extending Entitlement. This had led to the appointment of a team of full-time youth workers – it was not determined if these were appropriately qualified – who had been given opportunities to collectively agree the purpose of their work, the

process by which it would be delivered, and the intended benefits of that work to those young people with whom it came into contact. However, this approach had only involved the full-time workers, while the part-time workers in the service were described as "*particularly badly neglected"* when it came to being included in developing an understanding "*of the ethos of what we are trying to achieve"*. Within this context, these workers were described as *"struggling on in their own way"*.

Full-time workers supported the view of the Principal Youth Officers group. A typical comment that reflected the views of a number of workers from the full-time worker's occupational strand suggested that:

> *As full-time workers yes we know where we are going. But in relation to part-time staff I don't think so - we speak a different language to the part-time staff. Mainly because it is part-time work for them, they've often got two or three different jobs. So their priorities are different to ours. From the authority's point of view, we are inflicting the mission statement on the part-time workers but their actual delivery is totally different from what our expectations are.*

This was a commonly expressed view of the full-time workers who described a significant divide between themselves, their managers, and their part-time colleagues. There was also consistent comment from this group about the reasons why this divide with the part-time workers existed. First, it was claimed that the statement of purpose was too broad, too complex, and too far removed from the reality of those in most regular contact with young people. Simply, it was an inadequate tool for part-time workers to use, who often described it as being written for a different audience. Second, there were conflicting priorities between the occupational strands, with part-time workers claiming to hold the moral high ground because of their closeness to young people. Third, it was recognised that part-time workers were inappropriately prepared for their frontline responsibilities. A Principal Youth Officer claimed

> *"We need part-time workers more than we need trained part-time workers. That doesn't mean that we don't try to involve them in training, but we can't put too much pressure on them because they might leave. The best we can do at the moment is to encourage them to train within a year of*

> *them starting to work for us. The trouble with this of course is that they get into bad habits and start believing in a way of working that doesn't always reflect what we want as a local authority"*

The outcome of this approach, in the view of many of the regional/specialist managers and full-time workers involved in the investigation, was a significant number of part-time workers who did not have the necessary skills, knowledge, or attitude to "*plan and deliver a session"* or to understand how "*to put relevant articles into practice"* in a way that met the purpose of the Youth Service. As a consequence, the service offered to young people by part-time workers was seen to be improvised and was described as being too dependent on the skills, interests, and abilities of individual workers rather than a strategic intervention built on the defined purpose of the Youth Service.

Exacerbating this position, in the opinion of many of both the managers and full-time workers involved in the interview process, was what was described as the changing profile of part-time workers, who were now seen to be drawn from a different background to that with which many experienced full-time workers were familiar. The abilities of current part-time workers were generally described in a negative way. Many were identified as local residents who had been drawn into the Youth Service for a variety of reasons. Respondents were highly critical of selection criteria, which were described in a variety of ways as cursory, with the consequence being the recruitment of workers with "*limited education"* and "*little ability to assume the responsibilities of working with young people in the community"*. In the not-too-distant past, a number of respondents claimed it was teachers who filled most of the part-time Youth Service posts and gave the main support to the full-time workers. This, in the opinion of many of those interviewed, gave the Youth Service some status and authority as well as providing informed support. It also brought into the practice of youth work a view of education that could, in the opinion of a number of Principal Youth Officers and full-time workers, be used as an informed basis for the development of non-formal education approaches of the sort used by the Youth Service.

The part-time workers involved in the interviews were aware of many of the deficiencies in their individual knowledge and understanding of "*what the Youth Service is really*

about". Many of them claimed that the reason for this was their ineffective induction and in-service training, which affected their performance as maintained Youth Service employees. However, their concerns did not appear to come from a search for either a deeper understanding of the philosophy underpinning youth work or greater clarification of the concepts contained within the Curriculum Statement. What was of greater importance to them was a range of more practical and – from their perspective – more relevant issues.

> *'I work by myself and I need to know how to deal with disruptive boys who've been drinking and are causing trouble'*
>
> *'What sort of activities should I be offering as a one night a week club with no facilities and a membership between kids in prams and 20 year olds?'*
>
> *'I want to do more than keep kids off the streets but I'm not sure about what else there is'*

Comments were also made by a number of part-time workers who suggested that they were:

> *"being thrown in at the deep end" - 'being left to my own devices' and "being told when I started to get on with it"*

This final point was recognised as a significant failing by a number of full-time and part-time respondents who recognised the need to be part of an appropriate induction programme concerned with introducing new employees to both the working practices and organisational culture of their new employment. As one group of full-time workers agreed, part-time workers came from such diverse backgrounds that it was unfair to expect them to understand the purpose of the maintained Youth Service, the process by which that purpose would be achieved, and the expected outcome. There was also recognition by many of those managers and full-time workers interviewed that without a robust induction, many workers, particularly those employed part-time, were liable to bring with them a weak understanding of some of the core priorities of the maintained Youth Service, including equal opportunities. This was recognised by Estyn (2001a:11), who claimed:

> *"All staff are committed to the young people served by their particular centre or project, but some staff are not clear about the overall aims and objectives of the service. Not all staff have been through a formal Induction process".*

It was also agreed across the occupational strands that, as a consequence of the inadequate preparation of part-time workers, there was little opportunity to ensure a collective understanding of the purposes, principles and values of the maintained Youth Service. Finding solutions to the development of a collective understanding of the purposes, principles and values of the maintained Youth Service through training was, however, seen to bring its own challenges because of what was described as the fragile balance between training part-time workers and retention. The transient employment trends of many of the workforce were identified by the managers and full-time workers as a significant reason why the maintained Youth Service struggled to have a collective understanding of its purpose. In an era of expansion, the recruitment, retention, and training of youth workers at both full and part-time levels was described as placing new and additional pressure to maintain sufficient levels of appropriately trained and experienced employees. A Principal Youth Officer reflected the views of colleagues involved in the interviews by saying:

> *"We calculate that we lose 25% of our part-time staff every year. It's very difficult to recruit new workers and when we do it is not always possible to train them before they start work. It's our intention to train them in the first year as a priority but depending on what time of year they start they might have to wait for training until their second year of employment. When they start the priority is to introduce them into the administration systems of the service, little time or energy is spent on introducing them into the philosophy of youth work. We hope that they will pick that up as soon as possible.*

A number of managers and full-time workers expressed concern about the problems of developing an experienced cohort of part-time workers, most of whom were described as having a variety of alternative options for part-time employment. Care is needed and given at management levels to ensure that part-time workers are encouraged to stay

within the Youth Service and the pressure of training is kept, where possible, to a minimum.

> *"There is a real need to be careful about how part-time workers are treated. They are becoming difficult to recruit so we need to be careful of the pressure we put them under through things like training. Part-time workers are in the main interested in working directly with young people in a way that perhaps reflects their own particular interests or their own experience of the Youth Service. We don't want to frighten them away by getting them involved in a form of training that has become increasingly academic in the sense that they have to write assignments. Given the choice of making them train and perhaps losing them or hanging on to them with no training is no choice. We would prefer to hang onto them.*
>
> Full-Time Worker

It is not necessary to assume that as a consequence of this position, young people are inevitably subjected to a low-quality service through their involvement in the Youth Service. Rather, it suggests that the focus of provision is on the young person with limited thought or action being given to the balance between the requirements of government policy and the needs of young people. This is not to suggest either that the requirements of government are not being met. It is not unreasonable to suggest that as a result of the wide range of opportunities provided for young people, delivered in a way that reflects consciously or unconsciously the underlying principles and values of youth work, many of the requirements of government are being achieved. What do not appear to be happening are any conscious attempts either to pre-determine the outcomes of particular aspects of Youth Service practice or to carry out post-outcome measurements. The Youth Service as a result places itself in a vulnerable position in an environment of accountability, made worse by the introduction of Young People's Partnerships with their joined-up solutions approach. In this vulnerable position, even greater articulation is required of the purpose and outcomes of their particular organisational approach and how this fits in – or not – with the wider political agenda.

Whose agenda?

There was a growing belief, articulated by many of the Principal Youth Officers and full-time workers involved in the interviews, that the focus of their work was increasingly

being directed towards the delivery of the government's social and economic agenda, which was forcing them to re-prioritise their work into areas that were more focused. These areas included increasing the numbers of young people staying in or returning to education, preparing young people for the world of work, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, contributing to improving health, and raising levels of political involvement. Failure to achieve appropriate outcomes within these areas of work on time and to a specified standard brought with it, it was believed, the threat of funding being withdrawn, with the work being directed elsewhere to more receptive organisations. It was claimed that driven by this approach, the maintained Youth Service was increasingly becoming involved in a number of different government-directed priorities, each having the potential to develop its own discrete purposes, principles, values, and outcomes. An example of this, given by a number of respondents, was the Youth Work and Schools Partnership Project. Funded at a cost of £900,000 over three years by the Welsh Assembly Government (WYA 2001), its purpose was to encourage young people, through the use of '*youth work'* methods delivered within the school environment, to raise their *"levels of achievement, attendance and motivation by improving their attitude towards learning"* (WYA 2001:1).

Much of this type of work, it was claimed by significant numbers of respondents, was described as promoting a style of intervention which abused the fundamental nature of youth work both because it *"moved practice away from the traditional voluntary nature of the relationship between the Youth Service and young people and because it embraced prescriptive outcomes demanded by funding bodies".* The approach was also described as being about maintaining the individual deficit model promoted with such enthusiasm by the previous political administration, an approach that shifts the blame from structural deficiencies within society onto individuals, or groups of young people, who continue too often to be identified as lacking in some particular attribute, particularly the attainment of the 'right qualification'.

Young people labelled in this way are often referred to the Youth Service by their school, a position that caused significant concern to many workers involved in the study because of its conflict with the core principles and values of the Youth Service because it removes

the right of young people to have ownership of the relationship with the youth worker by being able to decide whether or not to take part. A study of the Monmouthshire Youth Service (Jones 2000) raised this issue when it was claimed:

> *"the process of referral in the Youth Work and Schools Partnership programme were particularly disturbing. The form filling and observations of behaviour raising questions around the rights of the individual, participation and confidentiality. How the procedure sits comfortably in the framework of values that inform youth work is one to explore"*
>
> Jones (2000:14)

For many of those with a strategic responsibility for the maintained Youth Service, issues such as this – and others, including the crime reduction and health agendas – were viewed as opportunities both to increase their budgets and to become more central to policy construction and delivery. Many other Principal Youth Officers and full-time workers expressed grave concerns about how the Youth Service was changing, with little resistance, through being manoeuvred into government-prioritised areas of work by the promise of a more secure future for those organisations able to meet its precise requirements. In the context of the Youth Work and Schools Partnership initiative, the cost to the maintained Youth Service would be its commitment to the specific agenda of school inclusion and the resultant increase in formal accredited certification. Opportunities, it was claimed, to debate the *"often inappropriate involvement of the Youth Service in a process concerned with a formal school based education approach both in and out of school have been limited or non-existent"* (full-time workers focus group). It could be concluded from the information obtained during the investigation that the Youth Service had been pressurised into making changes to its purpose, principles, and values through its insecurity at being left behind by contemporary debates resulting in it being isolated from prioritised funding streams. The consequence of this for many involved in the investigation was summed up by a full-time worker who said:

> *"I have never felt so uncertain of my role than I do now. I have become fearful of what I do and how I do it because I don't want to be seen to be off message. The result of that could be open criticism from those who control the purse strings in the Assembly.*

Respondents also claimed that they were under pressure to agree a new understanding of Youth Service purpose that moved them away from 'traditional' youth work based in local Youth Centres. Many of those interviewed claimed that the Welsh Assembly Government was exerting pressure on the Youth Service to suspend what were described as its *'purist notions'* of the purpose of the Youth Service and adopt new positions which ensured greater alignment to the government's agenda. What was being suggested during the interviews by those managers with a strategic responsibility for the delivery of the Youth Service was the development of a setting within which the Youth Service would be aligned more formally with what was described as the *'traditional approach to education'*. Alternative Youth Service solutions driven by non-formal community-based learning, with a young-people-first approach rather than a system-first approach, were described as being "*lost, misunderstood or ignored"*.

Two additional issues with the potential to distort a clear identity for the maintained Youth Service were also identified. The first was described as the mixed, confused, and contradictory messages emanating from representatives of the Welsh Assembly Government about the political vision and priorities for work with young people during their leisure time. A commonly held position was described by a regional/specialist manager focus group which agreed:

> *"If you look through the Entitlement document there are mixed messages there. For example, it has all the usual what you might call prescriptive ideology, competences, work-based skills, the ability to work and all this. But if you actually look through the document you can pick out 'empowering young people' 'self reliance' 'developing the ability of young people to make their own decisions'. Now you could argue that some of these words are a contradiction to the prescriptive side and my view is that the Welsh Assembly is giving mixed messages"*

This position was made more difficult by what was described as the lack of 'direction' and the lack of 'leadership' from those within the Welsh Assembly Government with the responsibility for supporting the translation of government policy for young people into effective practice in a way that reflected the partnership commitment of Extending Entitlement. A consistent theme identified by those interviewed was related to the lack of

empathy shown by government officials for the history and culture of the maintained Youth Service and its current neglected condition which required a planned strategic development rather than what was described as *"obedience to an enforced agenda by individuals who had little understanding and knowledge of its current status"*. There was a belief that a new agenda for young people was being created which would not include the traditional approach of the maintained Youth Service but would be contained within a more formalised Young Peoples Partnership (YPP) which would reflect the Connexions approach in England (DfEE 2000). The second issue was described in a number of ways as the one-dimensional aspects being identified in a range of diverse government documents which were concerned to identify particular issues or youth-related problems, which could be solved through additional government funding by a focused Youth Service approach. As a result, the Youth Service agenda was increasingly being asked, in the opinion of those involved in the investigation, to develop programmes that would result in, for example, "*young people returning to learning"*, *"improving citizenship"*, *"reducing crime and anti-social behaviour"*, "*improving health"*, and "*reducing their involvement in risky sexual practices"*. Increasing pressure, it was claimed, was being exerted on those working within the Youth Service to demonstrate its effectiveness in dealing with these issues and problems through the identification of quantifiable outcomes. A key theme identified from the data obtained during the investigation indicated that significant numbers of workers felt unable to resist these developments because of their feeling of isolation within what was described as a disparate organisation. As a result, the Youth Service was seen by those working within it to be "*in a position where it was unable to fight the wishes of the National Assembly"*. This resulted, it was claimed, in an organisation that was easily manoeuvred away from its core responsibilities into alternative methods of working designed to achieve outcomes of use to the agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government, even when these contradicted the agreed purposes, principles and values of the Youth Service.

There was, however, recognition by the Principal Youth Officer and many of the regional/specialist managers of the new political requirements of the Welsh Assembly Government and the impact these would have on the work of the maintained Youth Service. It was recognised that enhanced levels of external accountability requiring

clearly stated purposes and outcomes against which the Youth Service could measure its performance would be required. Failing to do this was seen, by many of those involved in the investigation, to have negative repercussions in a number of fundamental ways. First, the Youth Service would continue to have limited access to government money. Second, the Youth Service would become isolated or diminished within the new Young People's Partnerships, resulting in its return to its voluntary roots or its re-designation by government as a new organisation with a specific purpose. What was required, in the opinion of several of the Youth Service managers involved in the investigation, was a collective agreement with their colleagues which would result in the maintained Youth Service being viewed as *"clear, as an organisation, about what it is and what it is able to do to help young people achieve, and equally as important what does it do for the government"*. It was further agreed that this needed to be done *'with one voice'*. This was a key theme by respondents from all the occupational strands, who agreed that the important priority at the time of the investigation was to:

> *"keep a direction on what the Youth Service is about and not to be drawn into some of the other agendas driving those who work with young people"*
> Principal Youth Officer

The dangers of failing to do this were described as a loss of identity with the principles, values, skills, and community links of the Youth Service being drawn into a range of inappropriate locations where they faced the possibility of being subsumed by more powerful organisations. The link between schools and the Youth Service was given as an example, as was the use of youth workers within crime-reduction strategies. What was being expressed was not reluctance by those involved in the Youth Service to work with other organisations; rather, it was a concern to do so from a position of equality, not subservience or dependence. For the full-time workers interviewed, this clarity of identity would be clearly underpinned by an approach of a particular sort delivered in a way complementary but different to the style of education experienced in school. It was felt that the promotion of this Youth Service approach would, if promoted in the 'right' way, enhance the image of the Youth Service to others working with young people. As a full-time worker said:

> *"I think the priorities are to gain credibility with everybody, actually putting across what we are doing, why we are doing it and what the young people are getting out of it. It is as simple as that at the end of the day".*

A need to embed a collective understanding of the 'essence' of the Youth Service by defining more appropriately what it 'does', how it 'does it', and what 'results' are planned and achieved was being suggested. From this position, it was claimed that the maintained Youth Service would be able to defend the integrity of its approach, as this was identified by its purposes, principles and values. There was a need to do this, in the opinion of those being interviewed, because the identity of the maintained Youth Service in Wales was being altered by a range of external pressures for political reasons. It was also recognised that while this process was taking place, the organisation was in a vulnerable position because it was apparently unable to find sufficient common ground on which to state its case. This was exacerbated, in the opinion of a number of workers across the occupational strands, because the Youth Service had, through rapid and uncoordinated growth, arrived at a position where too many of its workers were unqualified and unable to defend its traditional approach and identity because *"they don't understand what made the Youth Service special in the first place"* (Principal Youth Officer).

Youth Service principles and values

For both those employed in the maintained Youth Service and those taking part in its activities, making the link in practice between its purposes (what it intends to do) and associated principles and values (the way it intends to do it) is critical in developing an organisation with a discrete way of working with young people. The articulated principles and values of the Youth Service describe a way of working with young people that is underpinned by a social education approach that recognises:

- the ability and inability of people to resolve problems and change themselves;
- the tension and distinction between empowering and controlling people;
- the worth, ability, and rights of people;
- the right to self-determination; and
- the importance of collective action and collaborative working relationships and the value of co-operation and conflict.

Arising from this approach are the assumptions that the worker has respect for the individual and values the pluralistic culture of society, resulting in the need to confront inequality and discrimination. The principles and values of the Youth Service also assume that the worker recognises both the influence of personal values on practice and the reality that they are, like those they work with, changing beings.

These is little evidence from either the analysis of the interviews or the questionnaire survey to suggest that there was a collective recognition and understanding between and across all the occupational strands of the maintained Youth Service of its organisational principles and values. Those involved in the interviews who were employed as Principal Youth Officers were almost exclusively qualified and experienced as teachers in formal education settings. [This is a phenomenon that would benefit from further investigation to determine its possible influence on the Youth Service.] From the information obtained, it is possible to suggest that the significant majority had not been given, during their change of employment from teacher to youth worker, any significant induction training or other in-service training that would have helped to fully embed the purposes and associated principles and values of the Youth Service into their practice or their management of other Youth Service staff. A commonly held view was summed up by a Principal Youth Officer who said:

> *"I first made the transfer from school to the Youth Service as a part-time worker. I found the work interesting and rewarding and I quickly transferred into it full-time. I don't recall there being any specific decision being taken for me to be re-trained or even for me to be made aware of the differences, if there were seen to be any, between my role in school and my role in the Youth Club. The same can be said about my promotion into a management role. There was some assumption that I was a natural manager in the same way as I was assumed to be a natural Youth worker.*

The majority of the Principal Youth Officers interviewed described in a variety of different ways a wish to move forward with the new agenda and the new way of working, even if this meant abandoning what was described as traditional ways of operating. Comment was made about the too often inadequate outcomes of traditional evening 'Youth Club' provision, which was described as being unable to change to meet the

requirements of new policy and associated funding streams with its new requirements for the Youth Service.

> *"To be truthful I'm not that interested in what went on in the past. What I'm interested in and what my employer is interested in is what we are expected to do today. I don't think that it's useful to have our past thrown at us by the likes of those in the Agency. We have a great opportunity to go forward. There's more money, more staff and the Youth Service is mentioned more by the government than any other time I can remember. We need to get on with what's expected of us and not fight old battles and work to old agendas. I don't really care about Albemarle or Thompson on any other old reports. They've been, had their day and gone and we must move on with the times."*

What appeared to be important to the managers and strategic thinkers of the maintained Youth Service in Wales was maximising the perceived opportunities being presented by the new political environment. Driven by this priority, there was, it appeared, little intention to do so from a practice position that recognised the accepted purposes, principles and values of their organisation. Rather, there was a sense that complying with the contemporary political agenda would develop and protect their work with young people in the community. To maximise the perceived opportunities, there was within this occupational strand a general acceptance that the maintained Youth Service was facing a period of fundamental change which would see it become more closely involved with schools and more closely involved in the delivery of more formal styles of learning underpinned by quantifiable measures of success. As a consequence, the Youth Service was described as increasingly becoming involved in providing low-level reproductions of formal education, in the sense that the outcome of some activities were planned to lead to an externally measured 'qualification'. This point was summed up during a /specialist managers focus group debate about the education role of the Youth Service with a generally agreed comment:

> *"the young people who we are in contact with don't normally have any qualifications from school or college. The only success they have in their lives comes from getting a certificate for the work they do with us. We give these for regular attendance for good behaviour or for taking more responsibility in the youth club. Most are linked to OCN, NVQ's, or Sports*

Award, particularly those that involve young people in First Aid or Food Hygiene."

Little evidence was identified during the investigation to suggest that this developing process was being implemented by full-time and part-time workers in a collective or cogent way to implement the non-formal education approach promoted within the Curriculum Statement. This finding is perhaps not unexpected given the evidence obtained during the questionnaire survey, which indicated that almost half of the respondents were unqualified and, as a consequence, had not been given an opportunity to consider the philosophical position of their work. New methods of work were being passed on to a workforce, many of whom were unprepared either to provide arguments to safeguard the purposes, principles and values of the maintained Youth Service or to suggest how these could be used to make a contribution to the government's agenda and the needs of young people.

There was, however, a considerable amount of evidence to suggest that both full-time and part-time workers continued to be actively involved in delivering to young people what they described in a variety of ways as *'skills development'* or *'skills improvement'*. These goals were described as being achieved through the involvement of young people in a wide range of *'practical activities'* that young people *'liked to do'*, and included sporting activities, such as football, and creative activities, such as painting, drawing, pottery, and performing arts, including dance and drama. Most of these activities did not appear to be consciously linked to a learning process, although a number of both full-time and part-time youth workers described in some detail what were seen by them as *'the benefits to young people'* obtained as a result of their specific involvement in such activities. Many of these, if planned as outcomes for young people and if legitimised by some agreed and reputable verification programme, would be highly valued within the current political agenda. Detailed claims were made of young people's enhanced abilities to socialise as a result of improved communication skills, to operate more effectively as a member of a team event or activity, and to take greater ownership of personal and group decision making. A typical example given by a part-time worker claimed:

> *"you can see the changes to young people as they become part of what's happening with us. Young people who can't look you in the eye when you say hello quickly respond to a positive approach, some patience and the setting of fair grounds rules that they know are realistic. I've been a worker in this area for 9 years so I've seen young people grow up and become OK adults. Maybe not world beaters at anything but OK people who have the right sorts of useful experiences, challenges and enjoyment from what the Youth Service is able to encourage them to do"*

From the evidence, it can be claimed that at all levels of the occupational strands there is a significant gap between strategic development, delivery, and any sort of understanding and knowledge of underpinning purposes, principles and values. The result is that work with young people is tenuous, with curriculum activities most often appearing to be being divorced from a robust strategic position because of what was identified as a reactive approach dependent on the particular interests, abilities, or inclinations of individual workers. This conclusion is supported by the review of a local authority Youth Service, where it was claimed:

> *"A lack of agreed purpose … … has caused confusion about the changing role of the Youth Service. This has resulted in an organisational failure to clearly articulate the educational role of the Youth Service and to inculcate this approach with a part-time workforce. Evidence was available to suggest that at unit level traditional practice dominated resulting in the continuation of historical practice that had in most instances become a habit"*
>
> WYA (1999e:11)

The continuation of this approach to working with young people could be seen to be as a result of part-time workers being tasked to work with young people, often without the benefit of training or the close management support of colleagues more able to offer appropriate guidance.

Despite these negative conclusions about the inability of the maintained Youth Service to formally recognise the links between organisational purpose, principles and values, there were significant levels of evidence to identify an organisational culture with a number of dominant characteristics that reflect both its stated purposes, principles and values developed through what could be described as its intuitive or observed and copied

practice. Throughout the transcripts of the interviews were descriptions of ways of working with young people concerned both with education in its broadest sense and by a commitment to the well-being of young people. Examples were given of how these young people were being encouraged, supported, and enabled by the efforts of all occupational strands to take part in a wide range of activities within which they were able to develop social skills and build relationships through their involvement in what were described as traditional Youth Service activities. Central to these activities were opportunities for young people to come together to take part in a wide range of group activities including, for example, residential experiences, being part of a team activity, visiting other youth organisations, or socialising within a Youth Club environment. The most often stated reason for young people's involvement in these and an extensive list of other activities was the positive relationship between the adult worker and young people. The building and maintenance of this relationship was seen to be the key element in encouraging participation in new and untried activities including Morris Dancing, ice-skating, acting, public speaking, financial management, and peer-assessment programmes. Within these comments there was continual reference to enjoyment, free choice, the positive feelings workers had for the well-being of young people, and how important their role and responsibilities were within the communities they worked and often lived in.

There was evidence of contradiction and confusion from all occupational strands about what those who worked in the maintained Youth Service were supposed to be doing. During the interview process, the most common initial answer to the question 'what are the purposes of the Youth Service?' was 'it is educative, participative and empowering', which are the process elements of the Curriculum Statement. The initial analysis of this answer suggested that this is what the respondent believed or understood. Further analysis revealed that in many instances, it was a prepared reply given in the hope that it would satisfy the questioner and, in doing so, it would divert attention from what appeared to be the reality of practice. That is, it was being driven by a widely agreed, but generally unspoken purpose, which was, in a general sense, to help young people make good use of their free time. The conclusions reached by a focus group of full-time workers confirmed this when they claimed:

"there are in our experience at least two Youth Services. The one we try to be for those outside of our work and the real one which we understand. For other people we try to use the jargon and talk about our work as being about education that can measure what young people do through their contact with us. For us we know that what we do is more important than that. We live in the communities that young people live in. We very often become their first adult friend; this gives us a big responsibility when they turn to us for help, support or guidance. Survival is often the main priority and with the help of the Youth Service many of them do learn how to survive and move on. We can't measure it so we have to pretend that we do something else. It's a load of bollocks really and a complete waste of time.

Summary

It was important for the researcher to note that during the interview process there was evidence to suggest that many of those involved could be described as *"procedural compliant"* (Bryman et al 1994:178). The researcher believed that some of the answers to the questions raised during the interview process were concerned to satisfy the interviewer rather than providing an honest answer as this was understood by the interviewee. This necessitated at times a more prolonged interview process concerned to develop a level of trust and co-operation as a means of identifying more effectively the collective understanding of the purposes, principles and values that make the maintained youth Service a discrete organisation.

The evidence examined in this paper did, however, lead to the conclusion that there is neither a collective understanding of the purposes of the maintained Youth Service nor of its interrelated principles and values. What could be identified was some limited agreement of a number of broad domains within which those employed by the maintained Youth Service operated in an ad hoc way. A prime cause of this approach was identified as institutionalised financial insecurity which made the prospect of additional resources appealing, even though their acquisition often required the maintained Youth Service to move away from its stated philosophical position. Exacerbating this position was the significant numbers of unqualified workers involved in the interview process who were both unable to identify the purposes, principles and values of the organisation and

prepared to obtain additional resources in the belief that it was in the best interest of young people. This led to the purposes of the maintained Youth Service being identified as a flexible commodity that could be altered or changed to meet the particular requirements of those providing financial support.

The evidence also identified the differences in understanding between the occupational strands of the maintained Youth Service which led to significant differences of interpretation of the purposes, principles and values of the organisation. This difference of understanding became magnified in practice as direct work with young people was delegated to part-time workers who were often inappropriately recruited, trained and managed to carry out their work in accordance with clear guidance and appropriate support. Claims were also made during the interviews by workers across the occupational strands that the Youth Service agenda was being increasingly directed by government policy, which was moving traditional ways of working with young people into more specific areas such as employment, crime reduction and improving health. This development had the potential to divert the work of the maintained Youth Service towards more politically orientated priorities.

Within this framework several separate groups could be identified. There are those workers who understand the purposes, principles and values of the maintained Youth Service but who are nevertheless drawn to politically driven work and as such can be described as making a response to:

> *"an organisational innovation in which the technical requirements of the innovation… are broadly adhered to, but where there are substantial reservations about its efficacy and only partial commitment to it, so that there is a tendency for the procedures associated with the innovation to be adhered to with less than a total commitment to its aims"*
>
> Bryman et al (1994:178).

There are also those who appear to be content to embrace politically driven or resource driven work with young people even if doing so brings them into conflict with the purposes, principles and values of the maintained Youth Service. It can be concluded that the reason for this is because of a lack of knowledge and understanding of the

organisations discrete characteristics. There is a third group, of often marginalised workers, who are attempting to maintain a level of integrity by working with young people in a way that maintains core principles and values. It can be further concluded that the tensions between these groups has the potential to effect the quality of work being delivered to young people and the capacity to diminish the ability of the maintained Youth Service to meet the requirements of appropriate government policy.

John Rose 2017, taken from PhD research

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