

LAYC RESPONSE

Youth Work Opportunities for All Consultation to Inform a National Youth Work Strategy

Role of Youth Work

1. Should it Always be Voluntary?

Yes. If you remove the voluntary nature you fundamentally change the nature and purpose of youth work. We also need to be able to distinguish between compulsion and targeted as well as understanding that the application of youth work methods does not in itself constitute youth work. What defines youth work is its clear, intentional purpose and young people's voluntary engagement.

2. Examples of Good Practice

There are numerous examples of good practice, but there needs to be more. However, the sector also needs to create more opportunities to write up good practice and disseminate it in ways that youth workers find both accessible and has the ability to effect practice.

3. Universal and Targeted Provision?

There is a need for more open youth club provision as the balance has increasingly shifted towards targeted youth work. In addition, these two need discrete types of provision to be better articulated because without the bedrock of universal provision, where meaningful relationships are fostered, much of the targeted work will not be effective. Young people should have a right to a minimum level of open provision around which other more targeted or specialised work can be provided.

4. Different Support

It is currently very difficult for local communities to set up and sustain open youth club provision and more targeted/directed support needs to be dedicated to enabling local groups to achieve this. A heavy degree of regulation provides further barriers extenuated by lack of available funding and any real value given to those who provide these services either voluntarily or part-time paid.

We have currently a hard core of dedicated volunteers who contribute significantly to local youth club/work provision but unless we change the prevailing culture, where are the new volunteers coming from?

It is indicated that the Scottish Executive is responsible for a spend of some £7 million per annum on youth work, but how much of that actually reaches those working directly with young people

Those local organisations that are providing essential core supports for local groups need to be funded in ways that give them funding stability, ability to plan and execute their programmes effectively.

5. Volunteering

Volunteers play a critical and vital role in supporting and sustaining youth work across Scotland.

They need to be better supported, particularly around core skills and be recognised for the value they bring. This need not be around awards or certificates, but rather tangible investments into their youth work provision that enhances their roles and ability to do the professional job we ask of them.

6. Links with Schools

Schools are a resource that needs to be used more effectively by youth workers but not in respect of some kind of remedial teaching service. We need to offer more open youth work provision in schools using school facilities at break times and after school. There is also a need for schools to take on a proactive role in linking with local youth workers to encourage the uptake of local provision.

7. Youth Worker Skills re Schools

Young people's disengagement from school is not the responsibility of youth work to redress. However, a youth work approach can actively support those young people who struggle with the authoritarian style of schools.

We need to ensure that youth work does not get drawn into inappropriate areas of work particularly as we must be more able to clearly define and articulate what our practice is.

National Structures:

8. Support from National to Local

We need a 'youth work champion' who is able to provide real leadership and challenge the anti young people bias so prevalent in the media, politicians and public at large. It is also clear that much of the Scottish Executive's funding does not reach its intended destination. A transparent and effective funding strategy needs to be put in place that redresses the current balance whereby funding gets stuck in local authority cul-de-sacs. In doing so the voluntary sector needs to be given/take a far more significant role in the dispersal, delivery and accountability of youth work funds.

9. YouthLink Scotland

It is not clear what YouthLink Scotland's role actually is and that in its present form it is not effectively representing nor articulating on behalf of youth work in Scotland. It appears to reflect one of the poorer aspects of the sector, which is its ability to take on a chameleon type role, able to accept any work on the basis of funding being made available.

YouthLink needs to have a clear leadership/champion role whose primary focus is the sustaining and development of quality youth work irrespective of the funding winds that may prevail. In leading from the front it needs to adopt a more leaner and meaner approach.

10. National Organisations Links

Providing security of resourcing would greatly assist and enable national bodies plan work, both singly and jointly far more effectively. In providing the majority of funding the Scottish Executive should also be more directive in ensuring programmes fit the youth work agenda and that funding is not historically based, but is directly related to their ability to deliver effectively.

Better Information:

11. Improve Info for Young People

Glossy youth work information is no substitute for quality youth work. Young Scot for example dominates the national youth information landscape, but the same degree of funding/ support is not provided locally. This imbalance needs redressing otherwise we will continue to confuse youth information with being youth work and fail to promote/improve the public image of youth work where it matters most, in local communities. Youth workers have a key role in supporting young people find, interpret and act on appropriate information.

12. Involving Young People

There is an inherent danger in seeing young people's involvement as the only way information can be developed. Of course we should use existing infrastructures to help develop and test information out to ensure it's as effective as it can be but we should not become obsessed by only this approach.

Access to Opportunities:

13. Priorities for Youth Work

Youth work has been a significant loser through its assimilation into a generic community education service. One of its priorities must be to establish a dedicated youth work source preferably with a legislative backbone.

Thereafter youth work needs to re-establish its mantra of being intervention with young people that is planned, purposeful and on the basis of developing meaningful relationships.

In addition, priorities such as funding, staffing, regulations, access to premises, training, good practice, building maintenance and support services remain to the fore.

14. Youth Work Accessible

This is addressed by ensuring that there is a wide range of provision that is reflective of the various needs of young people enabling a more extensive choice that reflects and respects differences

15. Contribution to Community Relations

It is not helpful to suggest that young people are the sole contributors to poor community relations, which is implied by the question. There is unquestionably a greater divide between young people and adults leading to an increasing level of mutual intolerance. Locally based youth work involving local adults and engaging parents and community can and must play a key role in promoting community life. Youth workers in offering young people the chance to build meaningful relationship based on mutual respect can both support and challenge prevailing attitudes.

16. Barriers to Minorities

The barriers faced by young people from minority groups will be reflective of those faced throughout society. Youth work is better placed than many institutions to tackle these and to operate provision around an equalities agenda.

17. Gender Issues

Youth work does not operate in isolation and is subject to historical prejudices prevalent into society. Therefore youth work provision needs to be conscious of the range of needs and barriers that exist and to look at creative ways of addressing these.

18. Opportunities for Young People of School Age

The way to address some young people's disengagement from school is for schools to develop an alternative curriculum that meets their needs.

To try and distinguish youth work for young people at school and those who have left is to divide youth work artificially and reinforce concerns about the Scottish Executive's intention to create an inclusive school based youth work service.

19. Post School

See question 18.

20. Partnerships

Effective and sustainable funding that is based on funding work that has proven track record rather than seeking to follow the newest fad is the way to develop and support meaningful partnerships. Current partnership funding is not always effective and too often produces funding uncertainty resulting in high staff turnover and cuts to provision.

We also need to take a long-term perspective on youth works impact rather than be dependent on short-term evaluation linked to short term funding.

21. Engaging Local Networks

For the voluntary sector influencing local authorities is very difficult, particularly around budget decisions. The tension within the relationship re the funding v the funded often gets in the way of productive partnerships that need to be based on mutual understanding, agreement and challenge where appropriate.

If we are to achieve changes in this kind of relationship the balance of power in favour of local authorities needs to shift. Unless we can jointly take responsibility for the holding of budgets, the nirvana of partnership working will continue to allude us.

22. Expanding Numbers

We need to look at the development of 'super clubs', which would be centres of excellence, which in addition to providing significant 24/7 provision, act as a support hub to other local youth work provision. Having a dedicated youth work service with appropriate buildings providing a single focus, increased staff and building capacity will enable youth work to increase its reach.

23. Use of Facilities

In Edinburgh the building of PPP Community Schools has enabled modern facilities to be located in numerous areas. However, the commercial costs of lets after school hours greatly restricts and even prevents local youth groups accessing such.

We also need to be better able to unlock those local community centres that have drifted away from seeing youth work as a priority rather than maximising their let income via youth work groups.

24/25. Empowering Young People

There is a significant danger in mirroring adult decisions making structures and then wondering how we create professional young people who then occupy those positions. A key strength of youth work is to assist young people in developing the decision-making skills and knowledge to understand, test out and thereafter apply to the range of life decisions. This is critical if we are to avoid establishing a youth elite rather than a bedrock of confident and skilled young people from which they can emerge, able to determine how best they can access/create appropriate decision making structures.

26. Improving Quality

We are too obsessed with outcomes rather than outputs and process. Youth work is not about creating an alternative school curriculum. However, we also need to better articulate what the benefits of youth work are/should be and be smart enough to measure these in both the short and long term.

27. Working with Others

In order to do this effectively, youth workers need to clear as to what we are, how we operate and what we do. Failure to do so will ensure other professionals with an interest in young people will misunderstand, misinterpret and/or mislead us into areas of work that either compromise us or are inappropriate.

We need to challenge the notion that youth work operates exclusively around a deficit model of young people by being some kind of remedial service. In doing so we will be able to negotiate joint work more effectively with other agencies from a position of strength and common understanding.

28. Recognition of Learning

Firstly we need to establish if young people we work with want to have formal recognition of their involvement in youth work. If so then schemes like YAA should be funded adequately to allow those youth workers/young people to use this approach to meet those expectations. However we must not cajole young people into their use where it is either inappropriate or where participation in its self has an innate value rather does require to be formally acknowledged.

29. Employers

YAA and such schemes have a role but youth work is not an alternative careers or employment agency.

30. Promote Excellence

One of the keys in enhancing the role of youth work is within the arena of professional training. The establishment of a youth work service would require professional training to address this as currently you can undertake a degree course with little emphasis on youth work either academically or within placement requirements.

Equally current training does not adequately skill up staff to be youth workers and so when leaving university they are often ill equipped and therefore avoid youth work posts. Professional training needs to be fit for youth work practice and needs to equate with current practice needs.

Training:

31/32. Skills and Qualities

We should not distinguish between volunteers and paid staff. The qualities that relate to our practice base are: -

- Understanding young people and youth cultures
- Ability to relate to young people as a supporter and critical adult
- Ability to challenge and change behaviour
- Ability to work as a team player
- Understanding of group work processes
- Ability to plan, organise and deliver safe/risk protected programmes
- Ability to blend and adjust provision
- Ability to evaluate critically

33. Retaining Staff

Youth work is a career cul-de-sac with little opportunities for promotion that doesn't take staff out of the service.

We also need to raise the standard of youth work by promoting good youth work practice and good youth workers in order to effect a change in public perception. By improving quality it will in itself retain more staff by making the work and its results more meaningful.

Managers also need to lead by example by keeping their level of youth work practice to a credible level.

34. Training

Current training is often held at the wrong times, delivered in the wrong ways, around the wrong topics and often to the cost of the participants.

Training must be needs led, accessible and linked to a national training strategy that adequately resources the local delivery of such.

It also needs to be robust in providing the skills necessary to be a credible practitioner.

35. Information

This is too often left to chance. The HMIE service needs to be given a role to monitor the programme of training and its quality as part of their inspection process. Joint training budgets for local areas needs to be provided to underpin the requirement to provide the regular programme of needs based training.

36. Measuring Standards

We need a robust national scheme purposely funded, supported and staff trained in. If we look at the level of investment in disclosures we can surely afford funding to enhance the long-term quality of youth work in Scotland.

37. Any Other Competent Business

This has been an exceptionally difficult questionnaire to complete and has missed a real opportunity to engage the sector more productively.

In devising a national strategy its needs to be capable of being deliverable locally rooted into best practice and be costed in respect of full implementation.