

An education for the 21st century: A narrative for youth work today

Why now?

There are two reasons why the timing is ideal for a new understanding of the role youth work, alongside formal education, parents, families and wider communities, plays in the personal and social development of young people and equips them with the resources they need to 'succeed'. Such success we might define as finding a place within the community offering security, fulfilment and strong interpersonal relationships.

The first is to inform the collaborative discussions of the Department for Education's **Positive for Youth**¹ process (a task for which the authors of this paper have been commissioned), complementing the work being undertaken by the Centre for Analysis of Youth Transitions.

The second is more complex and relates to the **shared understanding of the aspirations we have for young people**, for them to accept, embrace and excel in fulfilling those responsibilities that emerge with age, and how these can be realised within the current social and economic context.

This paper is intended for two audiences. The first is **policy makers and commissioners** operating at national and local levels. Though our primary intention here is to prompt debate, a future action would be to develop specific guidance to support policy and commissioning processes in understanding how youth work contributes to effective interventions and improves the lives of young people.

The second audience is **youth work practitioners and those with an interest in supporting them** – in particular educators (see appendix 2), the youth workforce, youth sector not-for-profits and other stakeholders - for whom we hope this paper sparks discussion around the contemporary value of youth work and how that is appropriately articulated.

Youth work: approaches & outcomes

In this paper we promote the view that youth work is a highly effective approach for

supporting personal and social development (the process by which we learn from our experiences and develop the skills and competences to enable us to become more effective in our decisions and relationships) and **developing the social and functional capital**² necessary to empower young people. We contend that **through this process the outcomes and success we all want to see for young people can be realised.**

Youth work is a distinctive practice sitting alongside formal education, parenting, family and the wider community, in providing the **teaching, learning and development** young people need to make successful transitions to adulthood. In supporting such successful and safe transitions youth work confronts some **key challenges**:

The key focus of youth work is to 'enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential,'

(National Occupational Standard 2008 – italic emphasis added)

¹ <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/Positive%20for%20Youth> (DfE, 2011)

² Identity formation, agency and culture: A social psychological synthesis (Coté and Levine, 2002)

- **Learning** - the need to develop a **wider and more inclusive learning and development offer** that addresses the breadth of experience and opportunities young people need to flourish, providing structures to recognise that and to encourage lifelong learning;
- **The changing nature of employment** - illustrated by calls for 'employability' skills such as customer awareness, self-management and problem-solving³. Although overall attainment gaps are narrowing and grades improving, a persistent group of those still not in employment, education or training⁴ (NEET) indicates some young people are being left behind. Even allowing for churn within NEETs⁵ the UK is still behind other countries in tackling this.⁶
- **Family and community** – to help young people find an active and responsible role and place within the community - offering security, fulfilment and strong interpersonal relationships with family, local communities and other citizens in order to support a connective and associative society.

Human approaches to these issues are not naturally given, but require understanding and abilities learned with peers and supportive adults concerned with them and their development. Some of this learning is the remit of the school (especially in regard to specific skills for employment), but we believe there is a **more inclusive learning and development offer - youth work**, that address the breadth of experience young people need to flourish into accomplished and confident adults.

To take employment as just one example: good youth work can help young people deal with career choices realistically, balancing their expectations (from basic security through to fame and wealth) against new financial realities (the costs of further/higher education and a more volatile labour market). Good youth work is essential to ensuring young people today can cope with a set of transitions very different to those faced by their parents.

What is youth work?

The youth work approach is **person-centered, empowers young people** and transfers easily into different contexts. Its practice is informed by a set of **values**⁷ that include young people opting in voluntarily, creativity and reflection, respect, equity, diversity, independence and many others. Crucially this in turn helps young people to develop their own values. Though not unique to youth work the power of relationships with peers and supportive adults is an important element. Group work is also a common approach.

The **model below** is just one way of demonstrating its flexibility and responsiveness, illustrating degrees of youth work interventions using the nature of stimuli (events) and levels of self and guided reflection. In addition youth work can take place in a wide range of settings including youth clubs, sports/arts clubs, faith or uniformed groups and many others. Different young people require different approaches, settings and institutional contexts from highly targeted, specialist support to a more universal offer. Youth work approaches offer such flexibility.

In the borough of Knowsley for example different services for young people are provided /commissioned according to the needs of specific geographical areas, issues affecting particular groups of young people or a more universal demand. Some activities target anti -social behaviour "hotspots", where detached youth workers gather intelligence before engaging young people in programmes focusing on risky behaviour. Others such as Teenage Health in Knowsley (THinK) run a programme for young women at risk of teenage pregnancy and sexual health problems. At the other end of the spectrum 'Youth Zones' provide universal activities delivered in secondary Centres for Learning across the borough on Friday evenings, aiming to provide a wide range of positive activities for those aged 13-19 years.

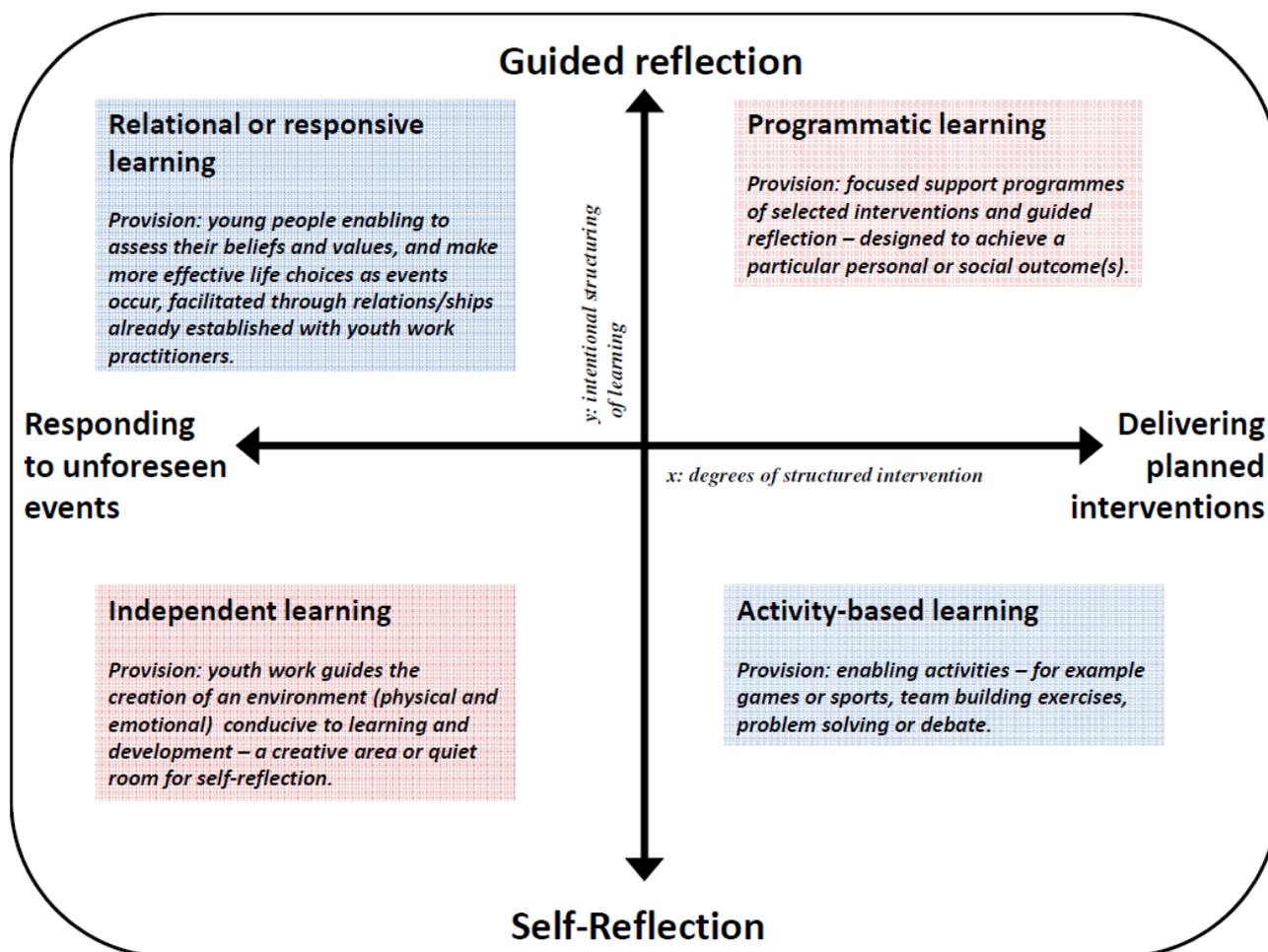
³ http://educationandskills.cbi.org.uk/media/press_release/00357/ (CBI, 2011)

⁴ <http://www.3s4.org.uk/drivers/youth-unemployment> (Third Sector Foresight, 2011)

⁵ Increasing Participation Understanding Young People who do not Participate in Education or Training at 16 and 17 (NFER, 2009)

⁶ Education at a glance (OECD, 2010)

⁷ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110414152025/http://www.lluk.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/National-Occupational-Standards-for-Youth-Work.pdf> (National Occupational Standards p194)



Above: Degree of intervention and reflection in youth work, based on the Oginsky model (original version available via the link below).⁸

But youth work in its entirety is much more than a range of services, activities and interventions. Though youth work methodologies and approaches can be taken into other (non-youth work) contexts, there are elements of youth work itself that mean it is **more than simply one way of working** with young people.

Some of these elements are to do with professional skills and levels of training, but others touch on what Howard Sercombe refers to as the ‘covenantal relationship of trust’⁹ that youth workers build with young people, that society *accepts* the need for appropriate adults to develop such relationships in order to support young people’s development - and indeed *authorises* them to do so.

What does youth work practice look like?

To put simply youth work practice engages young people in meaningful personal and social development processes which are challenging, rewarding and enjoyable. Youth workers facilitate the abilities of young people to think, act, change, create and grow, making a difference to their own lives, those of their peers and communities. Whilst youth work practice can be difficult to briefly summarise its various forms have a ‘family resemblance’, characteristics including:

1. **Young people choose to be involved** in the activity or program. They help to plan and design it and are involved in its evaluation and implementation. Activity design starts where young people are.

⁸ Cumulative diagram based on Oginsky model available in original version at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oginsky_Model.png (Oginsky, 2011)

⁹ <http://www.uk.sagepub.com/books/Book233132> (Sercombe, Youth Work Ethics, 2010)

2. **The process involves collective activity (e.g. team work)** and the facilitation of learning that enables young people to develop social skills and competences facilitating progression to independent adulthood - young people working together, learning and reflecting as a group, using a variety of different mediums (art, debate, media, curriculum resources etc).
3. **The programmes are in and of themselves enjoyable, challenging and rewarding** to young people, who are encouraged and supported to influence the delivery of the programme, take on leadership roles and responsibilities for tasks.
4. The programme **affords young people the opportunity to think about themselves** as individuals and groups in relation to wider issues and encourages reflection.
5. The programme/process provides **further development opportunities for young people**, through the creation of resources/curriculum tools that can be used by others, the opportunity for peer education, or inclusion in local and national forums or debates.
6. There is sometimes **recognition for involvement** in the process and **celebration** of achievement, accreditation or acknowledgment by a wider group, community.
7. There is an **increase in the confidence, self esteem and voice** of young people as a result of the programme/process.

These seven characteristics are also often expressed as steps (e.g. Hart's Ladder of Participation¹⁰) or as spiral journeys where the young person's role evolves each time they go round (from participant through to higher forms of engagement).

Realising our shared outcomes

In seeking to transform character and abilities in order to help young people lead flourishing lives, youth work faces a complex task that cannot be reduced to imparting a simple list of capabilities. Indeed one of its key features is the ability to *unite* such capabilities, helping young people to *act* capably.

In commissioning terms such capabilities can be referred to in several ways – as *intermediate* or perhaps *proxy* indicators for the kind of wider *societal* outcomes commissioners, policy makers and all those supporting young people would recognise. Understanding and focusing on the **capabilities developed through youth work** is vital to unleashing its potential through a commissioning process, where such capabilities can be measured, and in turn lead to a variety of desirable outcomes.

Some of these outcomes will be **intrinsic** – that is they have value in and of themselves for the individual. Some will have predominantly **extrinsic** value, where there are wider social implications such as preparing young people for employment. Some outcomes will include elements of both.

Youth work is concerned with a holistic approach to development, which is fundamental to the emotional well-being of young people and promoting greater 'resilience'¹¹ and 'mental toughness',¹² the quality which determines in large part how individuals respond to stress, pressure and challenge such as change, irrespective of prevailing circumstances.

Outcomes such as increased resilience or mental toughness are **products of the capabilities in the logic model below**. Increasingly evidence highlights the link between the development of these capabilities and the achievement of 'harder' outcomes around employment, education and health.^{13 14}

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¹⁰ <http://docs.youthworkonline.org.uk/big society/files/2010/11/ladder2.gif> (Hart, 1992)

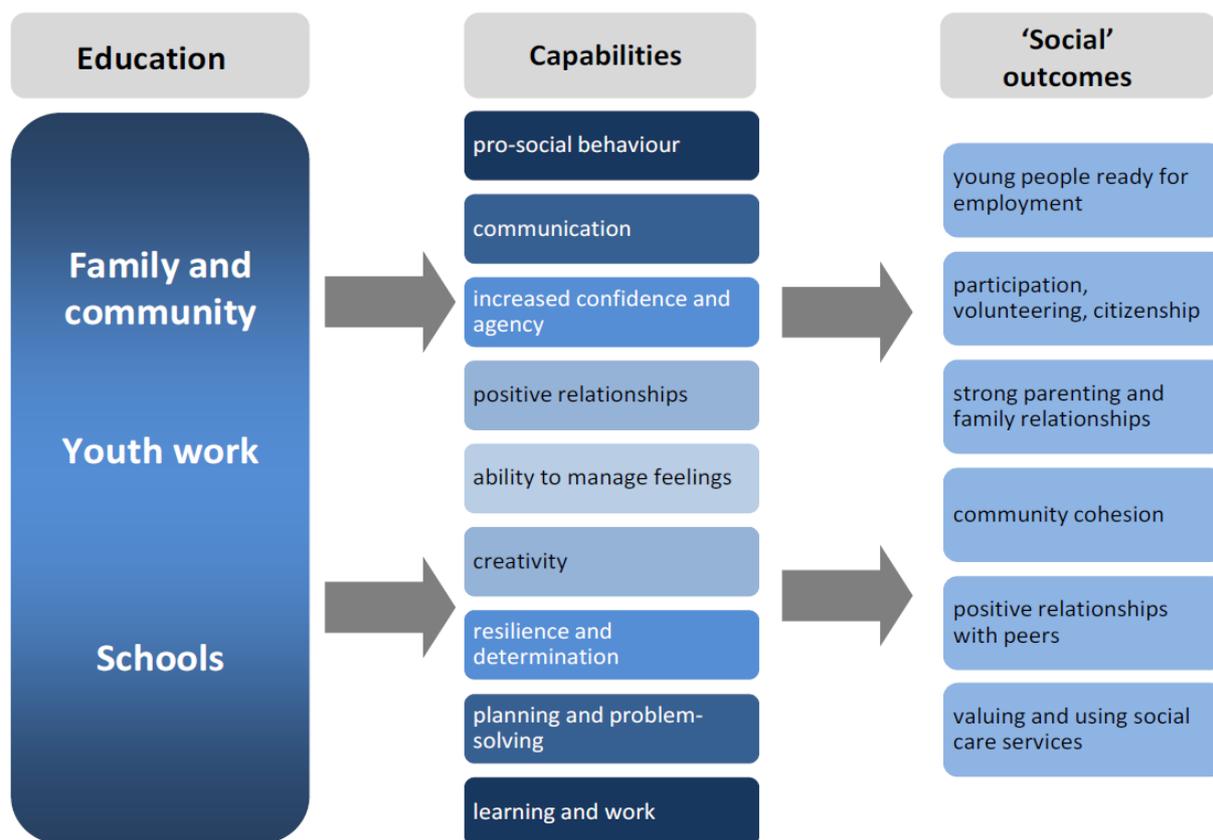
¹¹ <http://www.openforum.com.au/node/1293> (Leach, 2009)

¹² http://www.aqr.co.uk/html/top_menu/Our-Measures/Assessments/Mental-Toughness--Young-Persons-Application/ (AQR, 2011)

¹³ Grit: The skills for success and how they are grown (Y Roberts, 2009)

¹⁴ Social and emotional education: An international analysis – Self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting academic performance of adolescents (Clouder et al, Duckworth and Seligman, from Psychological Science vol 16 no 12, 2005)

¹⁵ Ricky behaviour and social activities (Cebulla & Tomaszewski, National Centre for Social Research, 2009)



It is important to note these clusters do not represent generic characteristics – they are always context-specific. Nevertheless youth work commonly seeks to impact on a **range of such capabilities**¹⁶ and this breadth is part of its effectiveness. Youth work supports young people to develop values and capabilities in a range of different contexts, and to navigate their journey through life.

In complementing the emerging evidence-base we also recognise the need to continually strengthen **evaluation practices** for youth work approaches. In this endeavor we note that the Centre for Analysis of Youth Transitions is currently working on providing an authoritative assessment of the quality evaluations¹⁷, which should inform evaluation best practice in due course.

Who does youth work?

The youth workforce is very broad and challenging to encapsulate. Like other areas of public service it consists of volunteers, part-time and full-time workers. These individuals have a range of qualifications and experiences, including many with the professional qualification in youth work.

Professionally qualified youth workers can be found in both statutory and voluntary sector settings. According to NYA figures¹⁸ numbers of students recruited to recognised university courses ranged between 1100 and 1400 per annum between 2006 and 2010 – the majority being typically female and under 30. By sector the majority of graduates in the same period took up roles in statutory agencies, with a significant but lesser number working in the voluntary sector.

The whole workforce however also includes a large number of practitioners without degree qualifications but still providing youth work and/or youth work related support to young people. In

¹⁶ Clusters based on work in progress by the Young Foundation on behalf of the Catalyst consortium to develop a framework of outcomes for young people

¹⁷ <http://www.ifs.org.uk/projects/325> (Institute for Fiscal Studies)

¹⁸ Annual Monitoring of Youth and Community work programmes 2009-10 (National Youth Agency)

2009¹⁹ the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) estimated these individuals to number over ¾ million paid staff and over 5 million volunteers, working with young people in both statutory and voluntary settings.

Who uses youth work approaches?

Many in the wider workforce would describe their roles as ‘youth work’ because they are working with young people and widely employ youth work approaches in their roles. The table below heavily generalises these and is included only as a guide. In practice there is much overlap between sub-sectors of this tranche of the workforce:

Sub-sector	Typical job role	Typical activities
Creative and cultural activities	Youth art worker	Arts and craft activities
Education and schools	‘youth worker’	Using arts/sports etc with challenging young people within formal education settings
Health	Youth health advisor	Health promotion (sexual health, substance misuse, advice and guidance etc)
Housing	Youth participation worker	Activities in specific geographic areas (estate-based initiatives, inter-generational work)
Outdoors	Young or Youth Leader	Camping, bush craft, orienteering, walking etc.
Playwork	Play worker (or youth worker – play is 0-16)	Activities that support emotional and educational development through play
Social care	Youth support worker/assistant	Advocacy / general support on behalf of young people
Sport and recreation	Sports Leader / Coach	Sports activities
Substance misuse	Youth worker / advisor	Reducing harm through creative activities, information advice and guidance
Youth justice	Youth worker / youth panel member	Advocacy, advice and guidance, diversionary activities

Conclusions

This paper has reasoned that youth work and youth work approaches not only support positive outcomes for young people but are an essential feature of the wider educational offer they need in order to succeed.

And though there is much evidence to suggest good youth work leads to a range of positive outcomes, we have tried not to over-claim and recognise the roles others play in young people’s personal and social development. Schools for example obviously fulfill a crucial function in child and adolescent development,²⁰ and young people grow up in a political, economic and social landscape far beyond the influence of a local youth club or an inspirational youth worker.

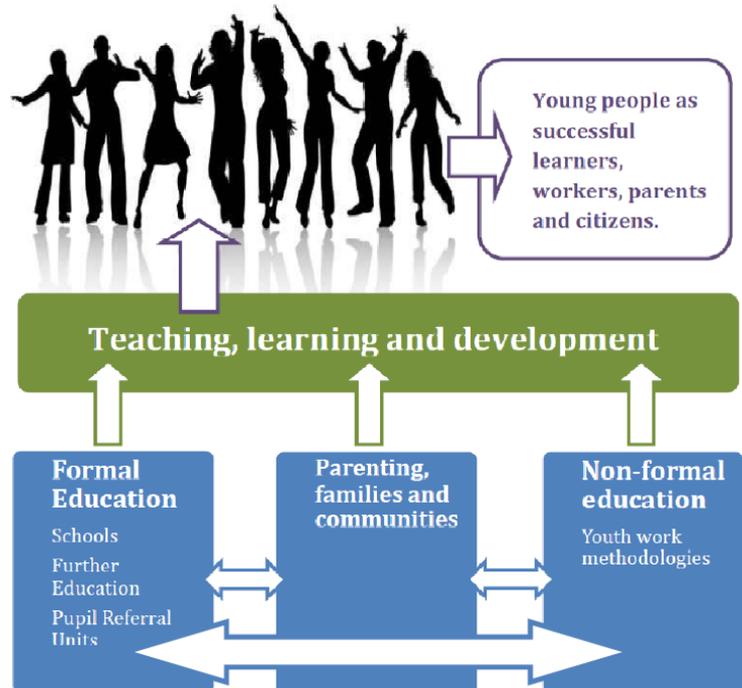
There are also limitations to the evidence base. But there is a clear sense of direction – through cumulative evaluation of individual programmes, the experiences and anecdotal evidence of young people and practitioners, survey data etc – that youth work has real value.

¹⁹ http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/assets/0000/7827/Executive_summary_SYPW_report.pdf (A Picture Worth Millions, CWDC, 2009)
²⁰ Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (2011); Flannery (1997); Furlong and Morrison (2000); Reynolds et al (1996); Thomas and Mortimore (1996).

To capitalise on this requires a greater understanding of the capabilities youth work can generate for young people, and the links between such capabilities and a range of outcomes we can all appreciate – policy makers, those working with young people and most crucially young people themselves.

In summary:

- **Youth work is a distinctive educational approach that can be used to facilitate the process of personal and social development**, leading to a range of positive capabilities and broader ‘social’ outcomes. Research is increasingly indicating positive correlations between intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes – so what is good for the individual is good for wider society;
- **Youth work sits alongside formal education and wider institutions** (family, community etc) in providing the holistic personal, social and educational development opportunities necessary to help successful transitions to adulthood;
- **Youth work approaches are employed by many engaged in working with young people.** Wider use of such practices, outside of youth work contexts, would greatly enhance the wider learning and development offer we believe is necessary for young people to make successful transitions to adulthood.



Next steps

Through the process of completing this short paper, the authors have been alerted to a number of obvious areas of future development and debate in addressing the questions raised within. These are summarised as follows:

- **Feedback on this narrative:** as stated at the outset this paper is intended to prompt debate within and beyond the stated audiences on the proper role and value of youth work as part of a broad educational offer to young people;
- **Guidance for commissioners:** one particular aspiration of the authors, but one that ultimately proved too complex to sufficiently address in the time available, was the production of guidance for commissioners seeking to employ youth work and youth work approaches in meeting the challenges with which they are tasked. This remains a key area to be addressed;
- **Implications for the youth workforce:** in taking a holistic approach to young people’s personal and social development the authors feel more could be done to help youth work practitioners and formal educators (teachers etc) learn from and recognise each others’ complementary approaches. From the youth work perspective, more attention could certainly be focused on helping practitioners recognise the educative qualities of the non-formal work they deliver. Developments in formal education such as the more holistic English baccalaureate accelerate the need for this. There is certainly scope to explore this with employers, Awarding Organisations and others.

Appendix 1 - Mandate

The remit for this work has been provided at Ministerial level in order to contribute to the discussions taken forward through the Positive for Youth processes.

This paper has been developed through a collaborative process involving the following individuals:

- Doug Strycharczyk (AQR)
- Sandra Richardson, Eve Byrne, Damien Allen (Knowsley MBC, Children and Family Services)
- Nick Wilkie (London Youth)
- Susanne Rauprich, Gethyn Williams (National Council for Voluntary Youth Services - NCVYS)
- Fiona Blacke (National Youth Agency - NYA)
- Bethia McNeil (The Young Foundation)
- John Bateman
- Dr Richard Davies, Leicester De Montford University



Tim Loughton MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 0012345 ministers@education.gsi.gov.uk

Susanne Rauprich
Chief Executive NCVYS
3rd Floor
Lancaster House
33 Islington High Street
London
N1 9LH

5 September 2011

Dear Susanne,

The Role of Modern Youth Work

As you know, the Government is resolutely positive for youth and committed to seeing all young people play a positive and active role in society. I am planning to publish a new statement of Government policy on young people and services for young people by the end of November this year, and I am grateful to you and many others for your ongoing contribution to shaping a new vision in this area.

As we have developed this process, a number of organisations and individuals have commented on the lack of an up-to-date description of the role of youth work in supporting the personal and social development of young people and helping them achieve positive outcomes in life.

The Government has given local areas the responsibility and flexibility to decide how to prioritise public funding for services for children, young people and families. It is crucial that local commissioners have a clear description of the role that youth work can play in tackling key local issues such as engaging young people in learning, community safety, and mitigating risky behaviour by young people. This role is likely to be particularly important for young people from disadvantaged or chaotic backgrounds who may not have as many opportunities or support through their family, school or community. This articulation needs to include the immediate impact of youth work on personal and social development, but also the important knock-on impact of this on their education, employability and other social outcomes.

In the context of the overall Positive for Youth policy process, I would be therefore grateful if you would work with others to set out a shared vision for the role of youth work in the delivery of modern services for young people in

order to help:

- policy makers and local commissioners to better understand the impact of youth work and how it can support and empower young people to achieve positive outcomes and avoid negative ones;
- providers of youth work services for young people to develop a common language to describe their role and impact

To achieve this, a vision and narrative for youth work will need to be based on a clear articulation of the outcomes that youth work seeks to impact directly and indirectly, and the evidence of its ability to do so. It will need to represent the interests of a wide range of stakeholders, including those who see youth work primarily as a professional discipline and those who see it primarily as a process for achieving or avoiding certain specific outcomes. Your role in the Catalyst Consortium as the DfE's strategic partner for youth will enable you to make close links between this work and Catalyst's work to develop an outcomes framework for youth services and support the youth workforce. Links should also be made to the work that my Department is commissioning from the Centre for Youth Transition on the evidence base for work with young people.

I would be delighted to discuss this work with you directly, and would invite you to use the Positive for Youth section of the DfE website to disseminate your draft so that as many individuals and organisations as possible can comment and contribute to your thinking.

I have sent a copy of this letter to Fiona Black, John Bateman, Damian Allen and Paul Oginsky.

I look forward to hearing from you.

TIM LOUGHTON MP