

LSDA responds



Transforming youth work

Published by the
Learning and Skills Development Agency

www.LSDA.org.uk

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Registered with the Charity Commissioners

Editor: Julie Pickard
Designer: Dave Shaw
Printed in the UK

ISBN 1 85338 714 2

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R1200/11/01/4000

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Note

The Learning and Skills Development Agency
was formerly known as FEDA.

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This report sets out the Learning and Skills Development Agency's response to the Transforming youth work consultation published by Connexions and the DfEE in March 2001. The original consultation document is available on the Connexions website at www.connexions.gov.uk

Introduction

1. The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) is a strategic national resource for the development of policy and practice in post-16 education and training. Our activities include research, with partners, to inform the development of policy and practice for post-16 education and training. We have a clear brief to work across the learning and skills sector, providing support for colleges, work-based training, adult and community learning, and schools post-16, with a particular focus on quality.
2. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We particularly welcome the recognition of the vital role youth work has to play in reaching and engaging young people and its particular focus on targeting those young people who are disengaged, most disadvantaged and at risk. We strongly support the aim to put youth work 'at the heart of' the Connexions service.

What can the DfEE, Connexions partnerships and youth services do to embed youth work in Connexions?

3. The consultation paper sets out the range of government policies aimed at supporting young people. We believe that these will have a positive impact over time in enabling young people to participate effectively in society, learning and the economy.
4. A clear understanding of the role of the Youth Service in achieving the aims of the Connexions service is vital to ensure that its role is embedded in Connexions. This will help both to raise the confidence and status of the Youth Service and awareness in Connexions partnerships of their potential impact.
5. The consultation paper itself and in particular, the Minister's statement in the foreword, is therefore very welcome. His statement articulates the broad role of the Youth Service in enabling the voice of young people to be heard, offering diverse opportunities for personal and social development and in promoting intervention and prevention to address disaffection and exclusion.
6. The work of the Youth Service on equality of opportunity and anti-racism and their capacity to target the most hard to reach young people where they are, both in terms of their personal development and in terms of geography, is vital to achieving the objectives of the Connexions service.

Has this analysis identified all the key issues for statutory and voluntary youth work today?

7. The analysis identifies all the key issues for statutory and voluntary youth work. We make further comments on elements of the analysis below.

The role of the Learning and Skills Council

8. We believe that the analysis pays insufficient attention to the potential role of the new Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and its local arms. Local LSCs operate within the same geographic boundaries as Connexions and will focus explicitly on planning and funding provision to meet local need, with a particular focus on quality. They offer the potential for a more coherent analysis of the range of provision and its adequacy to meet the needs of young people in their area. LSC targets place a heavy emphasis on the engagement and achievement of young people. These LSC targets include the following:
 - raise the percentage of 16–18 year olds in education and training from 75% to 80% by 2004
 - raise the percentage of 19 year olds attaining a Level 2 qualification from 75% to 85% by 2004
 - raise the percentage of 19-year-olds attaining a Level 3 qualification from 51% to 55% by 2004.
9. Achievement of these targets will be demanding and will require the engagement of best practice of all relevant agencies. We therefore believe that the vision for the Youth Service should identify the importance of the LSC role in securing appropriate provision for young people.
10. Local LSCs also have a key role in quality monitoring and driving up the quality of provision. For example, in determining where to fund provision, LSCs will take account of the quality of the provision. Therefore, dialogue between youth services, Connexions partnerships and LSCs will be essential to ensure that both the range and quality of the provision is appropriate for young people in the area.

Multi-agency working

11. We recognise that the aim of Connexions is to ensure that all those agencies working with young people operate in a coherent manner which delivers the optimum service for young people. The ambition is that greater collaboration by the different agencies will increase the level of effort in achieving the goals of the service. While we support this aim, we also note a danger that accountability could be blurred in new arrangements between the different partners. Where no agency has sole responsibility, it may become more difficult to identify where there are service failures. We therefore believe that significant investment will be needed in the development of the partnerships and careful monitoring to ensure that they operate effectively.

Voluntary youth organisations

12. We are aware that in the current negotiations to establish Connexions services and contracts, the voluntary youth sector is concerned that they will be given a lower profile than local authority services. Voluntary services, particularly the smaller ones, do not always have the capacity to engage in negotiations and planning discussions and see a danger that they will be marginalised. This would impoverish the range of support available to young people and should be avoided.
13. In many areas, local authority services support smaller voluntary services. It would be helpful if this support role could be promoted.

Funding of youth services

14. The significant disparity in spending by local education authorities (LEAs) on youth work (detailed in Appendix 1 of the consultation paper) is clearly of concern, and demonstrates no correlation between levels of deprivation and levels of spend.
15. There are a number of new initiatives, as yet not embedded, which may help to raise the level of resource targeted on youth services. For example, the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (targeted at the most deprived areas) and Community Planning procedures will both provide an impetus for addressing disadvantage, which should have a positive impact on youth services.
16. As discussed above, the establishment of the LSC with its local arms will increase the attention paid to securing an appropriate range of provision to meet the needs of young people. In addition, existing mechanisms such as inspections are an important means of encouraging local authorities to develop their youth service provision.
17. The consultation paper notes that funding for provision of youth work is not ringfenced in the grant allocated to local authorities, and that some authorities do not invest sufficiently in the Youth Service. Local authorities defend their need to be able to assess and address local need in the way they consider most appropriate, and reject ringfencing on the grounds that it restricts their capacity to respond to local priorities. We accept the dangers of excessive ringfencing undermining local accountability. However, given the importance of the Youth Service to government priorities, it may be appropriate for consideration to be given to ringfencing a percentage of grant allocation that must be spent on the services.
18. We therefore support an approach in which progress is reviewed once the range of new and existing approaches (including increased frequency of inspections) has had time to impact on services.
19. The analysis in the paper points to the need to consider the ratio of staff to young people. Even the lowest, 1:289, is only equivalent to the anticipated average caseload of a Connexions Personal Adviser delivering the basic entitlement of general advice and guidance. We suggest that consideration be given to establishing a benchmark for staffing. This could be considered in relation to equivalent roles in other sectors, such as social work or community nursing. The benchmark should give staff the capacity to be innovative and creative in their service provision to meet the demands of young people.

What other measures do you think should be introduced to strengthen our approach to quality?

20. Quality can be addressed through securing consistent and adequate funding for services (discussed above), through development of staff skills and through quality development and monitoring. We strongly recommend that coherent and consistent approaches are adopted across both local authority and voluntary youth services.

Staff skills

21. We share the concerns about the lack of a 'clear set of nationally applied standards' for the initial training of unqualified workers and the absence of consistent induction arrangements. Youth work needs a strong professional profile which recognises the challenging and intensive nature of work with young people and the extensive range of skills and abilities required to interact effectively with other professionals and services.
22. Our project, *Back on track*, identified a substantial need for professional training and development to improve services for disadvantaged young people. Although this was not exclusively about youth work, the findings are relevant to the service. We identified a number of areas in which skills need to improve:
 - group work with young people who need a lot of support and have very challenging behaviour
 - designing alternative curricula
 - how to collaborate effectively with other professions (schools, careers, work-based training, social services, probation).
23. We believe that the development of professional standards and training for those engaged as learning intermediaries with young people needs coordination. The range of roles includes, for example, Connexions staff, youth workers, Education Welfare Officers, school and college careers staff, tutors, and mentors. It will be important to maintain the distinctive nature of different services while common elements are acknowledged. Effective collaboration between the agencies involved in developing and delivering standards and training could explore a unitised or modular structure to enable common elements of the roles to be assessed and developed to common standards. This could also facilitate progression between different services.
24. Based on research on successful working with disaffected young people (Taylor 2001), one of the best ways of achieving successful working between different organisations and professions would be through joint staff development. This can be effective in promoting understanding across professions and developing skills in joint working. We recommend that this be built into the development stage for the Connexions service.

Quality development and monitoring

25. LSDA has a major role in quality improvement in the learning and skills sector, through systematic programmes of support for providers and for curriculum. We would be pleased to share our experience of such programmes with the DfES and the National Youth Agency with a view to identifying what elements might be transferable.
26. As stated earlier, we support the proposal to increase the frequency of inspections – these provide an important external assessment which can assist in developing consistent notions of quality across the services. The requirement for local authority action planning will also help to ensure that weaknesses are addressed. The effectiveness of action planning could be promoted through a fund targeted specifically to support post-inspection action planning, in addition to the current standards fund.
27. We would recommend self-assessment as an approach to continuous quality improvement which embeds reflective practice and processes in the culture of the organisation. There is a wealth of experience now of self-assessment by colleges and other post-16 providers of education and training which could inform its introduction into the Youth Service. The involvement of young people in evaluating the effectiveness of the service from their point of view would be a vital element of a self-assessment process.
28. Other approaches that have been effective in the colleges and which are an important element of LSDA's Raising Quality and Achievement Programme with colleges, are the use of benchmarking techniques; networking between providers to share best practice; and support for action planning. As stated above, we would be pleased to discuss this in detail to support similar initiatives in the Youth Service.

In what ways can we best capture and value the voices of young people?

29. The recognition that effective services for young people need to be shaped and influenced by them is a most welcome feature of the government's policy on youth. In the past, young people have not been systematically consulted on issues which would directly affect them.
30. Young people's engagement needs careful building, managing and sustaining if it is to be effective. The Youth Service has a key role in engaging young people through systematic approaches to both developing their capacity to contribute and to creating an infrastructure through which they can be consulted.
31. Capacity building among young people is a vital role for the Youth Service. While the development of a Youth Parliament is important, on its own it will tend to involve and represent the views of only the most confident and articulate young people. The Youth Service can work systematically with the most disengaged young people to develop their confidence and their skills to enable effective involvement. This is a resource-intensive and ongoing role.
32. The success of the Youth Service in engaging young people will depend on the opportunities available for young people to have influence. This must be seen to be a serious exercise that leads to young people being involved in the design, delivery, inspection and evaluation of the service. Therefore, opportunities need to be available for young people to be involved, for example at youth forums, on planning bodies, on advisory boards, on Connexions' boards, and in the Youth Parliament.

How can youth work target its resources to help young people 'keep in good shape'?

33. We welcome the aim of keeping young people in 'good shape' – enabling 'each young person to be somebody who not only enjoys life but is in good health, studying to the best of their ability, is challenged and stretched mentally and physically, is an active member of their local community and capable of understanding the consequences of their actions'.
34. In particular we support:
 - the focus on ensuring access for all young people to a rich variety of personal growth experiences and enrichment activities. We agree that provision is patchy and LSDA's current work on enrichment strategies for 16–19 full-time learners has demonstrated how pressures of funding have reduced opportunities. However, we believe that there is potential for this decline to be redressed under the new arrangements of the LSC
 - the recognition that young people need personal support as well as access to enrichment activities, and that some young people have difficulty accessing such support. It will be important to be clear about the interface between the various support roles and services working with young people. Young people need to have a perception of seamless support from a range of agencies involved in their personal development and learning.
35. The Youth Service approach places a strong emphasis on empowerment as an aspect of a young person's well-being. The role of youth workers and personal advisers in advocacy and challenging barriers recognises that changes in behaviour are often required not by the young people, but by the practices of other individuals, agencies or professionals. Effective execution of this role is best delivered through sustained work in local communities where workers are an established presence, able to work effectively with local agencies and professionals.

How can youth work be built in to the core of the Connexions partnership activity?

36. We support an approach that focuses on the contribution that the Youth Service can make to the Connexions enterprise rather than integration that could imply subsuming the Youth Service role. This supports our experience that partnerships work most effectively where the individual partners have distinctive contributions to the joint objectives. We have rehearsed earlier (paragraph 11) the dangers we see with confused lines of accountability. We believe this is increased where organisational roles and responsibilities are blurred.
37. Our research on the development of best practice in partnerships, referred to earlier, also indicates the need for early involvement of all partners in the process of developing protocols and ways of working and most importantly aligning planning arrangements. Clarity about how service planning will be undertaken to engage the key partners effectively will be a particular challenge. This will require that the cycles of reviewing and consulting enable the full engagement of the key partners.
38. Representatives of youth work should have key roles at both strategic and operational levels within the Connexions partnerships. This will help these partnerships formulate their policy and strategic direction. It will also ensure that the wider aspects of youth work are included in their plans, and that the provision of youth services in the area reflect and complement the services provided by the Connexions service. A reciprocal membership at strategic and operational levels of a Connexions representative in youth service would provide a vital planning link to support coherence of ethos and approach.

How can youth workers be supported to undertake the Personal Adviser role?

39. While the role of Personal Adviser is a key one, it represents only part of the youth worker role. We feel strongly that the implied view that the roles of youth workers and Personal Advisers are interchangeable represents an impoverished view of youth work. For example, it ignores their role in issues-based work, the equality agenda and critically their work in social education with groups of young people.
40. The same is true of other professionals who may have a personal adviser role within a particular context. For example, careers staff in schools and colleges and Education Welfare Officers will have a personal adviser role plus other specialist expertise. It is important not to give the impression that the personal adviser role is the full extent of these roles.
41. There is a danger that recruitment of youth workers into the Personal Adviser role could attract staff away from the Youth Service which is already having difficulty recruiting. Consideration needs to be given to addressing any disparity in pay, conditions and progression with Connexions Personal Advisers, and recognising common areas of skills through qualifications, status and pay.
42. There is also a danger that issues of demarcation, contract, targets and remuneration could undermine the development of seamless, cross-service provision. Standards which cover the range of services and seek evidence of effectiveness, efficiency and value for money, with the young person at the centre, should help.

Will the action above deliver the youth work described in this document?

43. We support the proposals to:
 - strengthen the inspection and action planning arrangements
 - secure more coherent local services through community planning and mechanisms such as local strategic partnerships. We believe that it will be very important for the Youth Service to have a clear and strong role in these arrangements.
44. We further support the view that improvements in the quality of youth work need to be made in tandem with the development of the Connexions service and that each partner has a role to play in strategy and delivery.
45. It is important to recognise learning providers as key partners in the development of a transformed youth service. The involvement of youth services within schools and colleges in particular will be essential if the service is to fulfil the requirements to reach out to young people and develop preventative strategies. Our research shows that while good practice exists, it is patchy.
46. The developing policy focus on a coherent 14–19 curriculum, the value of enrichment and the development of the graduation award, will require partners to work together to support and help young people to manage their learning experience and transition to adulthood effectively.
47. LSDA's work with disengaged young people, *Engaging with the learning gateway* (2000) and *Back on track* (2001), and on tutoring and student guidance (carried out through the Raising Quality and Achievement Effective Practice Networks) indicates that there are many current arrangements whereby youth workers are either engaged by the college itself or are frequent visitors to the school or college by negotiated agreement. Such good practice needs to be extended.

What other action can each partner take to deliver this agenda?

48. We have made comments under earlier questions that relate to this issue. We make a few additional points below.
49. We believe that a key to securing adequate resource will be ensuring that youth services are well positioned in relation to the community and strategic planning roles of other agencies – most significantly those of the local authority, the Connexions partnership and the LSC.

What resources can youth services draw on to deliver a pledge for local people?

Local authorities

50. It is stated that local authorities are expected to 'ensure the active involvement of young people'. In order to illustrate how they are to do this, we suggest that the intended involvement of young people in the community strategy-making process be made explicit.
51. We strongly welcome the stated expectation that local authorities should not use the Connexions service and its additional funding as an excuse to cut youth work budgets and resources.

Voluntary youth organisations

52. We strongly welcome the recognition of the role that voluntary youth organisations currently play and the identification of their future role.
53. Our main concern is ensuring that the culture and ethos of voluntary sector organisations are maintained while embracing them as vital partners in the provision of 'mainstream' services. Their capacity to reach young people for whom statutory organisations may be off-putting must not be lost.

Connexions partnerships

54. We support the lead role that Connexions partnerships are expected to play in the locality by ensuring that youth services, both publicly funded and voluntary, are included in the business plans.
55. We would, however, expect to see a requirement for a correlation of the strategic vision and priorities of the Connexions partnership with the business plan. These strategic priorities would reflect the implementation of the whole youth support service for the locality. Greater awareness would also be served by the involvement of Connexions partnership strategic staff on the boards, committees and governing bodies of its partners.
56. We particularly welcome the allocation of development funding to Phase 2 and 3 Connexions partnerships so that they can, inter alia, work on the establishment of new partnerships.

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