



## *Taking Forward the Youth Matters Agenda*

### **Report of an Open Agenda Event at St. George's House, Windsor Castle, 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> March 2006**

This event was held to take forward the Youth Matters: Next Steps Consultation Response, launched by the Chancellor of the Exchequer the week before the event. The purpose of our discussions was to explore what we need to do over the coming 24 months to meet the expectations that have been generated through the Consultation – especially amongst young people.

To us, 24 months seems no time at all to bring about a significant cultural shift and put the 'hidden wiring' in place to meet the challenge of delivering integrated services for young people. But we recognised that for many young people 2 years is long time for change to happen.

That is why we felt it will be important to bring about some visible and significant changes as quickly as possible: to ensure that young people trust that we say what we mean, and that the proposals outlined in Youth Matters will happen.

This report begins with a brief outline of what we felt were the priority changes that should be visible to young people as early signs of taking forward the Youth Matters agenda (pages 2 – 3).

It continues by summarising what we felt will be the key areas in which we work – both locally and nationally – that will need refreshing, and new strategic and operational networks established to bring about these visible changes. We described this as 'the hidden wiring' in the way organisations work internally and together. Our action points for these changes in working culture and operation are drawn together under the following headings:

- Leadership; (pages 3 – 4)
- Bringing the workforce with us; (pages 4 – 5)
- Quick wins and sustainable change: getting the balance right; (pages 5 – 7)
- Young people's involvement (pages 7 – 8) and
- Communication, communication, communication! (pages 8 – 9)

As with all Open Agenda reports, we aim to reflect the ideas and action points put forward in the event, with the understanding that not everybody involved the discussions endorsed all of the ideas included. Nor should they be viewed as a policy statement on behalf of the Department for Education & Skills or any other organisation.

Phrases that are italicised are direct quotes from the event, and a list of participants is included at the end of the report.

**Krysia & Jo Hudek**  
**Open Agenda, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2006**

## Priority changes

While there was support for all the changes and developments proposed as part of the Youth Matters agenda, it was felt that the following should be in the vanguard "*as visible signals of our commitment*" to "*making the agenda a reality.*"

The ideas below reflect that there was also a strong view that it is equally important about **how** changes are introduced and the **characteristics** of these changes, as the changes or proposals themselves.

Under the umbrella of:

### *Information, Advice and Guidance, what we felt important is:*

- Widely shared awareness amongst young people of where they can access "*unbiased, good quality*" information, advice and guidance – and of the equity of the services available.
- Services and support for "*emotional health*" are included alongside other information, advice and guidance services. "*Welfare and learning are knitted together.*"
- Organisations delivering provision as well as information, advice and guidance services "*put the needs of young people before their organisational interests.*"

### *Increasing opportunities for young people and their power in deciding how money is spent on their behalf, what we believed essential is:*

- A "*shared and agreed understanding of the outcomes*" we wish to achieve between all involved including, of course, young people. Similarly, we have a shared understanding and common approach to setting baselines – so that we agree where our starting points are, and are able to measure progress.
- "*We unpick what young people say they want*" (and need) with them "*to make sure we get it right.*" We must also "*be willing to unpick our process and systems*" to deliver what young people want.
- Our early wins are those felt to be 'wins' by young people. And these wins should be attributed. "*We will say publicly to young people: your idea did that.*"
- As far as possible, "*we staff provision with young people*" and involve them fully in evaluating provision and services.
- The focus is on "*mainstreaming young people's imprint*" on all aspects of local and national strategy and operation. We were particularly keen that we ensure that any new initiatives and approaches that are introduced can be replicated and sustained within mainstream budgets.

Furthermore, we need to avoid any risk of Youth Matters being viewed as separate to the mainstream business of local, regional and national bodies. "*Respecting and recognising what young people have to say is relevant across all of the work*" of Local Authorities, regional and national Government.

- When we consider, plan for or talk about young people we are inclusive. This means "*we consider all young people including those who do not immediately spring to mind,*" for example, those in the armed forces on duty abroad, young carers, young married couples – indeed all those who can easily be overlooked.

### *Reaching the most disadvantaged, what we felt important is:*

- We recognise that "*no young person is 'hard to reach'. Organisations and provision that finds them so are just not looking in the right places.*"
- We need multi-agency teams that "*are a salad not soup.*" By this we meant those providing different types of support need to keep their professional identity. "*Young people do not all need the same services at the same time.*" That said, these services do need to be offered on 'the same plate' for young people to select those they want or need.
- The impact of the Youth Matters agenda "*must benefit first those most in need of services and support.*" While there needs to be a universal approach to taking forward the agenda, young people at greatest disadvantage need to be at the forefront.
- We don't re-invent wheels, but "*draw on known best practice and spread it widely.*"

## Putting in place the hidden wiring to bring about these priority changes

1. **LEADERSHIP** As a priority, we need strong leadership of "*different types, in different locations and at all levels*" to move the Youth Matters agenda forward.

Our starting point should be a widely shared expectation that being the "*head of an integrated youth service is a different job*" to anything that has come before and, from this premise, it follows that the leadership skills that are needed to take forward the Youth Matters agenda are also different.

Heads of integrated youth services will need to foster and champion leaders "*of different types and in different places.*" We need leaders amongst young people, within communities, amongst employers and in different departments across local, regional and national Government. We need "*strategic and operational leaders.*" All need to "*believe in, mainstream and work towards achieving the five outcomes*" that Youth Matters is designed to bring about: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic well-being.

The skills we want our young people, community and organisational leaders to demonstrate are not those that we always immediately associate with leadership. The leadership skills that are needed are "*networking, championing and influencing*" rather than commanding and controlling.

As one person put it: "*we're looking for a different style of leadership.*" We need people who "*don't feel threatened by working outside of their experience and expertise.*" They need to feel confident about

drawing on *"linked specialists"* who can advise them on policy areas outside of their own that should be influenced by the Youth Matters agenda. They also need to influence others to ensure that *"the Youth Matters agenda is part of the mainstream and not kept in a silo."*

So, where do we turn for help with leadership? There was a strong view that effective arrangements need to be made to support upcoming leaders within organisations, communities and amongst young people. Some suggested that this support could be modelled along the lines of some sort of virtual national academy. Where we all agreed is on the need for urgency in providing this support over the next months as appointments are made and for effective succession planning.

### ***ACTION POINTS***

The following action points were put forward as priorities to meet the challenge of creating effective leadership.

- ✓ Draw up a presentation pack *"to tell the story"* and bring to life the vision of Youth Matters.
- ✓ Share information about emerging delivery models.
- ✓ Identify champions amongst all the stakeholder groups including young people.
- ✓ Test the impact of services for young people on partners' agendas. For example, how much impact has, say, the work of Connexions services had on the delivery of mainstream learning provision?
- ✓ Ensure we continue to push out strong positive messages about the Youth Matters agenda through Government, nationally, regionally and locally.

2. **BRINGING THE WORKFORCE WITH US** We agreed that our first task must be to define clearly who we mean by the workforce. This task needs to be very closely followed by firm and warm reassurance that the changes being proposed are in no way a response to poor service delivery.

The importance of this reassurance and recognition of the value of the work that has been undertaken cannot be over-stressed if we are going to motivate the workforce to embrace the vision of integrated services for young people. Some staff *"are feeling undervalued and bruised"* by the changes proposed.

They need to feel that the Youth Matters agenda is about building on what young people feel is working well, and rather than viewed as a threat, it should be seen as a long overdue opportunity for career development and recognition of skills and experience.

Of course, those working with young people will only be convinced that this is an opportunity when they can see how they can develop their skills and accredit their skills so that they become part of a new professional workforce. At the moment there are concerns that

advocating the need for "*a new professionalism*" or even "*a licence to practise*" implies a lack of professionalism at the moment. These concerns need to be allayed and staff reassured that a new professionalism will recognise, accredit and build on the best services for young people that are offered now.

### ***ACTION POINTS***

The following action points were put forward as priorities to motivate and gain the trust of the workforce.

- ✓ Scope who we mean when we refer to the workforce responsible for delivering an integrated service for young people, identify any gaps that need to be plugged, and "*how roles and responsibilities might change.*"
- ✓ "*Co-locate services and staff to create multi-disciplinary teams*"
- ✓ Nationally and locally establish systems that are transparent so that workers (and indeed young people) *can see how resources are being deployed.*"
- ✓ "*Identify the core competencies for the pedagogy of working with young people*"
- ✓ Work closely with the Children's Workforce Development Council and Lifelong Learning UK to shape "*a programme of core training and continuous professional development.*" It was suggested that this should include "*a degree qualification in working with adolescents, rather than just youth work.*"

3. **QUICK WINS AND SUSTAINABLE CHANGE: GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT** By quick wins we did **not** mean easy wins. Perhaps the most important quick win "*will be building confidence and expectations that Youth Matters is a long-term strategy*" and not a 'here today, gone tomorrow' initiative.

We valued the introduction of the Youth Opportunity Card and Funds because of the public spotlight they will give to the importance of empowering young people. But we felt that these initiatives must be "*woven into a wider strategy*" of giving young people "*a much stronger voice in determining their future and public and community life.*" Standing alone they could be seen as gimmicks. As part of a long-term strategy – "*attracting all Party support*" – they can be included as important milestones.

So who do we need to convince that this ambitious long-term strategy is working? First and foremost, young people themselves, closely followed by communities, Government, staff working in the sector and, not least, the media. Buy-in from all is important to the success of the strategy. And we were conscious that one person's quick win is not always recognised as such by others.

It was suggested that quick wins for communities, Government and the media are all about "*visible changes and quantifiable outcomes.*" For example, a measure of success could be a

change for the better in the number of times a bus shelter gets smashed. A quick win for those planning and delivering services is "*how to*." By this we meant how we plan and deliver services that will bring about visible changes for the better. For young people a quick win is the two together and more: playing a key role in the 'how to' deliver the changes and outcomes that they want and need, and "*receiving recognition for their involvement*."

One person pointed out that recognition for young people's contributions to society is largely about "*rewarding heroic victims*." It was advocated that we should create a new set of awards that "*publicly attribute young people's contributions and achievements*". A quick win will be to give recognition to young people for their contribution to improving the quality of life for their peers, in their communities and society in general.

Some favoured the idea of achieving a quick win through "*turning round poor performance*" in say, a specific urban and local area: a "*rags to riches*" story that would capture media interest. Others were not so sure. They were concerned that if this transformation relied on significant additional resources then it could be difficult to replicate it elsewhere. Moreover, it was felt that it could be a two edged sword to focus on areas with poor service. How would this fit with the idea that Youth Matters "*will shine the spotlight on excellence?*"

### ***ACTION POINTS***

The following actions were proposed to prepare the ground for achieving quick wins as part of a long-term strategy to achieve the five key outcomes.

- ✓ Identify criteria for early wins to ensure that they are not just seen to be "*cherry picking easy wins*," but are viewed as key milestones within a long-term strategy.
- ✓ "*Agree local impact measures*" that will reflect how well the strategy is meeting communities' and young people's priorities and concerns. While these impact measures should be agreed locally, it will be of value if they can be developed in a way that the data can be "*read across regionally and nationally*."
- ✓ Identify at local, regional and national level "*funding streams that can be pulled together*" to support the strategy and achieve quick wins.
- ✓ On a local level develop and test out a "*no more money model*" of delivery of integrated services for young people based around schools. The purpose of this exercise will be "*to identify just how much we can achieve with the resources available at present*", and precisely where more resources are needed to plug gaps and drive up quality.
- ✓ Put together a bank of cutting edge case stories for media coverage and to provide an "*ideas resource for Children's Trusts*" across the country.
- ✓ Buy-in consultancy from those in the field whose practice and achievement is known to be first-class ("*shining the spotlight on excellence*")

4. **YOUNG PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT** As a starting point, it was advocated that Children's Trusts need to have "*a clear understanding of the profile of teenagers in their local areas and of services which both target them and affect their lives.*" Young people should be involved in agreeing the information that should be captured in this profile, and "*how the data should be interpreted.*"

This information is likely to "*include data on ethnic mix, special educational needs, poverty and ASBOs,*" and "*mobility maps so that politicians and officers understand where young people's boundaries are in relation to provision.*"

It was strongly recommended that young people should have an input into commissioning and evaluating services. This should be a "*diverse and renewing mix*" of young people. It was advocated that plans should be made "*to develop a system that enables young people to give services and provision their quality approval*" – through, say, a kite mark. This kite mark would be awarded all provision and services that impact on their lives in one way or another. The idea put forward was for "*programmes to be developed nationally and tested locally for young people to be assured that a wide range of service providers from bus drivers to tenants associations know how to communicate with them.*"

Opportunities should be created to enable young people to become involved with a "*wide range of decision making fora.*" This could mean significant changes in approach and behaviour. Meetings may need to be rescheduled to enable young people to attend. Reports and agenda items will need to be written in plain English! Indeed, it was suggested that "*no new national or local policies should be passed without evidence of young people's input*" in their development and drafting. In other words, all new policies should be "*young people proofed.*"

Young people should also "*be recruited to deliver provision to their peers, supported by skilled adult workers.*" It is important that these "*adult workers are confident about being led by the expertise of young people.*" This is one area where we felt that "*a strong national signal*" is needed from the Department for Education & Skills and the Learning & Skills Council "*to support employment and training of young people in planning and delivering provision for their peers*" through, for example, Apprenticeships.

What this all means is that we need to create the space so that young people can become involved in shaping and delivering services. We need to share power and control by involving them in decision making processes, and we need to "*be open and clear about funding tensions and difficult decisions if we're going to earn their trust and buy-in.*"

#### **ACTION POINTS**

The following actions were proposed to maximise the involvement of young people in taking forward the Youth Matters agenda.

- ✓ Urgently review the allocation of Apprenticeships in 2006/07 to ensure that as far as possible the programme supports the Youth Matters agenda. In particular, we felt that Apprenticeships should be available to young people wishing to work in the public and community sectors.

- ✓ With the involvement of young people, begin to profile teenagers in local areas. Although this will be a local exercise, agree common systems and data in order that information can be pulled together country-wide.
- ✓ Identify how decision making systems and process can be reconfigured to allow greater involvement and input by young people.
- ✓ With the involvement of young people, develop a new kite mark or award for all services that impact on their lives.
- ✓ Design and set up local "*consultation, communication, evaluation loops*" with young people that include as part of their cycle 'deep dive' evaluations of provision. The loops should be designed in a way to allow for the "*succession planning and renewal*" of the young people involved.

5. **COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION!** It was strongly advocated that "*this should be our mantra*" locally and nationally in taking forward the Youth Matters agenda. We recognised that communication of different types to different audiences is needed – both external: young people, parents, carers, communities, media, and internal: Local Authorities, schools, youth services, Connexions, Children's Trusts and other stakeholders.

The external communication strategy should be centred on the positive. What young people can do and the difference they can make to the quality of their own lives and others. The internal communication strategy needs to focus on building trust and breaking down silos.

And by communication we didn't mean a "*one-way stream but two or even three-way dialogues.*"

We felt that first class communication will be essential if we are bring about the cultural shift that achieving the five aims of Youth Matters will require. The barriers between different services for young people must be removed if we are going to provide integrated services. Fear of young people in some communities needs to be tackled, as does the negative media coverage that is frequently given to young people. This won't all happen overnight, but we felt confident that a great deal can happen with an effective communication strategy in place.

We felt we could learn a lot from the communication strategy that was developed for Sure Start. What we especially liked about this strategy is that it has proved to be very effective both locally and nationally, and that it attracted strong political buy-in across Government.

### ***ACTION POINTS***

The following actions points were proposed to put in place national and local communication strategies.

- ✓ Draw up both national and local multi-stranded communication strategies that identify "*to whom, for what purpose and how.*"

- ✓ Raise the profile of Youth Matters across all the major political parties and Government Departments. The idea will be to encourage politicians to champion the Youth Matters agenda in a similar way to the way in which they support Sure Start.
- ✓ At the same time, bring the Youth Matters agenda to the notice of other Government Departments and Local Authorities so that its relevance to meeting a number of Public Service Agreement and other targets is widely understood, "*and budgets aligned to support a coherent approach.*"

## Endnote

By the end of this session one person spoke for many when they said, "*I feel that we've really begun to sharpen up what the Youth matters agenda needs to include and our implementation plan for taking it forward.*"

Where we want to get to looks like the best that is happening now. We agreed that the challenge is to broaden and deepen what is valued by young people. On the one hand this means building on what young people feel is working well. On the other, it means "*questioning what we do now and leaving behind our baggage*" if we are going to succeed in meeting young people's expectations.

We recognised that we all need to go the extra distance to foster trust and shared ownership of the Youth Matters agenda amongst ourselves as strategic funders, planners and deliverers before we can expect young people to trust us! If we're not confident that the hidden wiring is in place to provide the integrated services young people say they want and need, why should they be confident?

We took this as the challenge we are committed to tackling over the coming months through the action points outlined in this report and others. It was suggested that in a year's time from now we should hold a follow-up session **with** young people to test out how far we'd succeeded in taking forward the Youth Matters agenda, and where there needs to be even greater energy and focus.

**The idea that we will be ready to involve young people in this way 12 months from now is a testament to our commitment to making things happen. This session was viewed very much as starting point to sharpen up our priorities for action and kick start momentum. The strong consensus when we left Windsor was that there is a lot to do but that it is all doable! Let's take a rain check on our progress in a year's time.**

## Participants

Tom Jeffery	Director General, Children, Young People & Families, Dept. for Education & Skills
Anne Weinstock	Director, Supporting Children & Young People Group, Dept. for Education & Skills
Gordon McKenzie	Head of Choice & Opportunity Division, Dept. for Education & Skills
Bozena Allen	Interim Associate Director, Office of the Children's Commissioner, Dept. for Education & Skills
Felicity Winter	Acting Divisional Manager, Children & Youth Division, Dept. for Education & Skills
Richard Painter	Children's Trusts & Emerging Practice Team, Dept. for Education & Skills
Melanie Johnson	Chair, Connexions South London Partnership
Katharine Horler	Chief Executive, Connexions Berkshire
Peter Cloke	Director for Children & Learners, Government Office for the South West
Chris Davies	Corporate Director for Children & Young People, Borough of Telford & Wrekin
Dillon Hughes	Principal Youth Officer, Devon County Council
Brendan Loughran	11 – 19 Strategy Lead, Directorate for Children & Young People, Suffolk County Council
Keith Sorrell	Headteacher, Windsor High School
Abbie Lloyd	Head of Youth Crime Prevention Team, Home Office
Kevin Byrne	Head of Strategy and Support Unit, Children Young People and Communities Group, Department of Culture Media and Sport
Hilary Spiers	Consultant, Young People and Health, Dept. of Health
Stuart Gardner	Senior Policy Manager, 14-19 Curriculum, Learning & Skills Council
David Harvey	Chief Superintendent, Youth Justice Board
Susanne Rauprich	Chief Executive, National Council for Voluntary Services
Barbara Hearn	Director Policy & Innovation, National Children's Bureau
Flo Hadley	Divisional Manager, Children's Services Inspection Division, Office for Standards in Education
Tom Wylie	Chief Executive, The National Youth Agency
David Walker	Senior Policy Adviser, Public Services, CBI
Andy Driver	National Youth Work Convenor, Community & Youth Workers Union
Paddy Hall	Director Youth Services & Improvement, Outcomes UK
Aidan Relf	Policy & Communications Adviser, Association of Learning Providers
John Brennan	Chief Executive, Association of Colleges
Suzanne Payne	Senior Project Officer, Local Government Association
Krysia Hudek	Director, Open Agenda & Fellow, St. George's House
Jo Hudek	Director, JH Consulting & Associate, Open Agenda