



A Response to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Youth Work Inquiry

This submission is made by Unite, the UK's largest trade union with over 1.4 million members across all sectors of the economy including manufacturing, financial services, transport, food and agriculture, construction, energy and utilities, information technology, service industries, health, local government and the not for profit sector. Unite also organises in the community, enabling those who are not in employment to be part of our union. Unite is a leading trade union for community, youth and play workers, with thousands of members across the United Kingdom. The Union has our own section for Community, Youth and Play workers entitled the CYPW section. We work tirelessly to campaign for an end to the destruction of youth and play services, for a high quality universal youth and play service for all, for a statutory supported youth service and JNC Pink book pay and terms and condition for all our members underpinned by continuous professional development and training.

1. What is the role of youth work in addressing the needs and opportunities for young people?

Youth work has a major role to play in addressing the needs and opportunities for young people by creating a safe, supportive and flexible environment for young people that supports personal development, offers non-formal and informal learning opportunities, personal advice and guidance and supports young people in developing their own identity.

On a societal level it is crucial that young people have access to quality education, training, guidance, and employment and likewise, it is as equally important that society enables young people to both express their opinions and to participate fully in their community.

Youth work as a professional educational practice uniquely inspires, educates, empowers, takes the side of and amplifies the voice of young people and, unlike other interventions, it combines these elements in a relationship that young people freely choose to engage with.

2. Are the key issues and challenges faced by young people being addressed by current youth service provisions?

Where youth service provision remains, it seeks to support young people to address the barriers and challenges they face. But it seeks to do more than just that. Raised self-esteem, a greater understanding of the value of collective decision making and democratic engagement, together with the development of communication skills and wider experience and knowledge of the world and social issues; the creative and constructive use of leisure time and discovery of talents are all well documented results of young people's active involvement in youth work. So too are the benefits of youth work in raising academic standards in school and college.

Effective youth work improves the life chances of individuals. It offers young people new experiences in the arts or outdoor adventure; it encourages volunteering; it helps develop the skills and attitudes needed for employment and for adult life; it gives young people the chance to learn how to relate better with each other and to different adults in safe and challenging environments. Youth work helps young people explore boundaries between reasonable and risky behaviours and contributes significantly to early intervention and preventative services, reducing the incidence of young people in need of highly targeted intensive and expensive services later on.

Youth work seeks to create comfortable and enjoyable settings which are more effective in reaching young people and enabling creativity and self-expression, and in this way works to address the many challenges that young people face in a holistic and integrated way, focusing on the different areas of life and the young person as a whole and not just one aspect.

One of the main strengths of the youth work approach is the emphasis on partnership and its role as a link and broker between young people and different fields, sectors and services, such as the local community, school, social services, media and the police.

Youth work supports young people to become active citizens and engage in decisions and actions which affect them and their community. As a result youth work enables young people to better understand the views and concerns of others and those of wider society which in turn contributes to greater harmony and social inclusion.

3. Are there sufficient youth workers to support youth services and other delivery models for good quality youth work?

As recent research has shown, our youth service, once seen as an icon of good practice, a jewel in the crown, has been brought to its knees as a result of disproportionate cuts to youth service budgets over the past eight years and the failure by governments past and present to put it on a statutory footing.

At a time when hundreds of youth centres have been shut down, thousands of youth workers made redundant and hundreds of thousands of youth service places lost to young people, the National Citizen Service (NCS) accounts for 95 per cent of central government's direct spending on youth services with a pledge of £1.2bn of funding for it by 2020.

Unite believes this investment has been at the cost of an adequately funded and resourced 365 day a year universal youth service. Serious concerns about the reach, impact and value for money achieved by the NCS have been raised by the National Audit Office (2017) and the Public Accounts Committee (2017).

Unite believes that youth services should be universally available to all young people, with the opportunity to participate open to all those who wish to take it up. Participation in youth services should be voluntary on the part of young people, and youth services must be underpinned by trained and qualified youth workers, working to professional standards.

Unite believes that there is the need for a Youth Service Strategy which outlines how a well-funded universal youth service sets young people on the path to success and how this will represent real value for money.

A well-funded youth service promotes social inclusion, encourages partnership working, assists young people at risk, gives young people hope and aspiration and is cost effective. Having youth services embedded in local communities, increases the ability to respond sooner, before difficulties and challenges become significant problems for individuals and wider society. Being based at the heart of communities, rather than parachuting in, enables local knowledge on trends, patterns of behaviour, new issues, to be used to inform appropriate local responses. It also allows for sustained trust and respect to develop between those in need and those who may be able to respond to those needs.

Universal services have disappeared in many parts of the country, and youth work provision is often being used to 'firefight' and provide targeted responses rather than an open access universal service for all young people.

Youth workers are no longer able build trusted relationships with young people, but instead need to meet tick box targets and fast responses at the point of crisis.

Professionally developed youth workers are superb at engaging in complex arenas and contributing to responses to knife crime, gangs, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), peer on peer violence, mediation and more. But they are able to do so because they are rooted in a methodology that creatively enables relationships to develop in open access settings.

This is key to developing young people as part of their wider communities, bridging generational assumptions and perceptions, as well as giving opportunities for 'good press' rather than the negative connotations they are usually associated with.

4. What are the training and workforce development needs to secure and sustain youth work?

Ensuring all young people have access to youth work services is crucial to enable them to reach their full potential. For many young people, involvement in a certain project, or a relationship with a particular youth worker, has been the catalyst to help them develop skills and confidence and make better choices in their lives. We believe that legislation is needed to clearly establish young people's legal right to receive youth work services, and who is responsible for ensuring those services are provided.

The key steps we believe need to be taken to ensure the sustainability and development of youth services for this and future generations of young people, and the key elements required in a youth service strategy are:

- **A statutory Youth Service.** Unite believe that the Youth Service should be put on a stronger statutory footing. Since 2006, under the Education and Inspections Act, local authorities have a responsibility to provide 'sufficient activities'. But this duty is open to interpretation and has been largely ignored.

We believe it should be strengthened to reflect every young person's right to the opportunity to take part in high quality youth services. Recent figures show that local authorities have made £123m cuts to youth services over the two financial years 2014/15 and 2015/16. This has resulted in the loss of almost 98,000 youth service places for young people between 2014 and 2016, in addition to the 41,000 that had gone between 2012 and 2014 and the closure of 244 youth centres, on top of the 359 that were closed in the previous two years. Unite supports the call of Choose Youth for the introduction of a Young People and Youth Service Bill.

- **Ring-fenced funding and investment.** A statutory duty to provide youth services will not ensure provision without the necessary accompanying resources. Recent

estimates state that £387m has been cut from youth service spending across the UK since 2010. Unite believes that this figure is in fact far higher. The picture of where these cuts are being made is contrasting across the country with different local authorities making different decisions and setting different priorities, spending cuts inflicted on local government are universal, and they come from central government. To support the placing of Youth Services on a statutory footing and the establishment minimum standards we believe that Local Authorities should receive ring-fenced funding and investment for youth work. Funding should allow for a sufficient level of provision across the country with factors such as deprivation levels and rural accessibility, amongst others, used to 'weight' funding.

- **Youth service partnerships.** Every local authority area should set up a youth service partnership and should commit to working on a youth strategy. This strategy should be prepared in partnership with young people resident within the area of the local authority, including relevant youth councils and other representative groups, parents and guardians of those young people, voluntary and community organisations operating within the area of the local authority and providing youth services to young people, and other stakeholders providing youth services and facilities to young people.
- **Sufficient resourcing and workforce plan.** Increasing the staffing levels to meet the needs of young people with an effective strategy to recruit enough suitably skilled and qualified youth workers is essential. Unite believes that a sufficient level of appropriately qualified youth workers is one qualified full time youth worker for every 400 young people aged 13-19 in each local authority. Local authorities should ensure that whoever the provider is of youth services in their area, they employ a high-quality workforce that reflects and meets young people's needs. All providers should make provision for ongoing development of the workforce, including support for continuing professional development. Unite believes that the youth sector workforce should be suitably qualified, and that all youth workers should be employed on JNC (Pink Book) terms and conditions.
- **A register and revocable Licence to Practice, for qualified youth workers and the 'protection of title'.** Unite believes that professionally qualified youth workers should be registered, as other sections of the children and young people's workforce. Without this regulation, anybody can claim they are a 'youth worker' and this is putting children and young people at risk. It is an imperative that a legally protected title should be introduced and only available to those with approved qualifications and experience. Opportunity should also be made available for youth support workers and voluntary youth workers to become participants in the scheme at an appropriate level.

- **Continuous Professional Development for youth workers.** Research from Unite the Union from 2017 (Youth Work – Professionals Valued) shows that practitioners and academics believe that Youth work is being deprofessionalised. Deprofessionalisation will have an impact on the quality of services available to children and young people. The deprofessionalisation of youth work needs to be arrested. Unite believes that those who work with young people, in a paid and voluntary capacity, should have access to high quality workforce and volunteer development to enable them to lead and deliver quality youth work. There should be Continuous Professional Development opportunities for all workers, paid and voluntary. All employers should be required to provide and fund appropriate training to enable workers to develop new skills and keep up to date with youth work issues and practice. This should sit alongside the Register and Licence to Practice.
- **The return of the National Youth Audit.** Unite believes that to underpin the development of high quality Youth Services proper data is required to ensure that minimum standards are being met and exceeded. This requires the return of the National Youth Audit, previously carried out by the National Youth Agency.
- **Impact, outcomes and inspection.** Unite believes that funding should be provided for greater academic research into youth work. This would maintain an up to date evidence base for the effectiveness of youth work and help in spreading best practice. Youth work enables 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. But youth workers are under growing pressure to demonstrate and quantify its impact to make the case for future sustainable funding by demonstrating how youth work improves young people's wellbeing, life chances and outcomes. Unite believes that clear arrangements need to be re-established for internal quality assurance complemented by regular external inspection and reporting by Ofsted.

Unite will seek to promote this vision across the youth service sector and is willing to work with other stakeholders across society who share our broad vision for a sustainable youth service providing informal education to young people on their terms and enhancing their physical and psychological wellbeing.

Government has a vital role to play in ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to access good quality universal youth services and this can be best achieved by placing the youth service on a statutory footing. It must be the responsibility of the Secretary of State to promote, secure and provide, in partnership with local authorities and voluntary bodies, a sufficient Youth Service

whose primary purpose shall be the personal and social development of young people.

A well-funded youth service promotes social inclusion, encourages partnership working, assists young people at risk, gives young people hope and aspiration and is cost effective. The lobbying organisation Choose Youth estimates, along with all previous professional calculations of resource requirements, that for just £350 a year per young person, all young people could have access to youth work services in their immediate locality.

We believe the government needs to take this radical approach in order to deliver the youth work offer that young people in England deserve. A statutory youth service, with dedicated ring fenced funding, provided by a core of JNC qualified youth workers from the statutory and voluntary sector, working with trained and supported volunteers with one full time nationally qualified youth worker for every 400 young people.

**Unite the Union, CYPW section,
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