Youth Matters; a response from the Development Education Association

The following response to the Youth Matters Green Paper has been written based on the discussions at a consultative seminar organised by the Development Education Association for its members with a particular interest in work with young people in non-formal settings.

Background

The Development Education Association (DEA) was formed in 1993 to support and promote the work of all those engaged in raising awareness and understanding of global and development issues in the UK.

The DEA is a national umbrella body working with over 240 member and partner organisations in the UK and overseas. The Association works closely with development education networks in Scotland - IDEAS, Wales - Cyfanfyd and Northern Ireland – CADA and various Government Departments, including DfES and the Department for International Development.

Key aims of the DEA

The Development Education Association's work focuses on the following three inter-related aims which have been discussed and agreed by the Association's membership.

• **Securing ownership of development education**
  To secure active ownership of the principles of development education and sustainable development amongst educators and education policy makers at national, regional and local levels.

• **Engaging wider society in development education**
  To engage with organisations and institutions in wider society to identify connections between their work and the principles of development education and to work out creative plans for joint action. The UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development will give this work added momentum.

• **Promoting quality and learning in development education**
  To cultivate quality practices in development education and promote learning from experiences in England and elsewhere in the world within identified sectors of education, the membership and their wider networks.

The DEA works with members and partners at a local, national and international level to promote the principles of development education and sustainable development as central to all sectors of education. The Development Education Association has taken a lead responsibility for the development of 'global youth work'. This involves producing publications, responding to Government policy initiatives and providing training and support for youth and community organisations on how to integrate a global dimension into their work. We also collaborate with international NGOs on how to develop informal education programmes with young people.
General

1. What do you think are the most important issues facing young people now? How are these issues different for younger (13-16) compared to older (17-19) teenagers?

The DEA members consulted think that the Green Paper does not recognise the global context in which young people live their lives, e.g. terrorism, technology, trade, media; and it is clear from experience that young people need to be supported to develop a global perspective to their lives beyond their local context. They should also be enabled to express their views of the world and be provided with opportunities to work for change on the issues that matter to them.

The issue of identity, for example, is relevant to all young people, those aged 13 to 16 and 17 to 19, and it is important that they are able to find points of reference that reflect a wider understanding of the world.

2. Are there issues faced by particular groups of teenagers that are not addressed in this document? If so, what are they?

The particular needs of young people from asylum seeker and refugee families are not recognised explicitly. These range from the need for specialist advice and support to access to the general services that all young people are entitled to i.e. youth provision that offers personal and social development opportunities. There is a need for this policy to involve representatives from these communities and the DEA has a number of Black and Minority Ethnic led member organisations who could make a valuable contribution to this process.

We would particularly like to raise the impact of globalisation on young people’s lives. The Green paper states that ‘changes in the economy, society and technology mean that young people today have more opportunities than previous generations and most take full advantage of them’, p.3 Ex. Summary. However, the document presents a very domestic perspective and fails to recognise that in an interconnected world a majority of young people cannot take advantage of these ‘benefits’. The levels of consumption and advantage in the West are built on poverty in the developing world and are not sustainable. People’s lifestyles will have to change in developed countries such as the UK.

• The paper does acknowledge that young people care ‘passionately about the issues of the day such as climate change and making poverty history’, but it’s not clear how the proposals would support and not hinder this kind of independent critical awareness and campaigning by young people.
• It is also recognises that when we are ‘teenagers we are most alive to exploring new ideas. New experiences, travel’, p.3, but does not mention, endorse or explicitly support the value of intercultural learning and youth exchanges. This is particularly important in this time of terrorism and heightened community tensions.
• It identifies the 2012 Olympics as an opportunity for ‘positive sporting, volunteering and cultural activities’, p.5, but again does not explain the reasons why this is such a valuable opportunity, e.g. intercultural learning, coming together of the global community.
• Finally and importantly, there are no connections made to DfES’s own initiatives ‘Putting the World into World Class Education’ or the ‘Sustainable Development Action Plan, which do recognise a number of the issues raised above. This is an
ideal opportunity to ensure the key messages from these initiatives are integrated into youth policy.

*Other issues highlighted include:*
- Any youth policy should encourage peer mentoring and youth led volunteering, with young people trained as peer mentors.
- Citizenship and positive activities are being underplayed; there is an opportunity for promoting active global citizenship (see DfES ‘*Putting the World into World Class Education*’).

3. Do you know of any projects or initiatives which have been outstandingly successful in tackling the challenges covered in this document?

GLADE, a development education centre that supports global citizenship, worked together with Taunton detached youth work team to run the 'What Matters to Me' project. The organisations aimed to produce a flexible and easily replicated exercise that would encourage young people to explore their own values base and attitudes and then be able to contrast this with other's. The resulting arts project was successful in engaging young people who experienced exclusion and deprivation and challenged their attitudes and behaviours in a creative and meaningful way.

A range of youth services and DEA member organisations have many years of experience in meeting the challenges outlined in this document, however the document does not make explicit the key contribution that youth work can make to personal and social development. This has been supported and documented by DfES policies of ’*Transforming Youth Work’* and ’*Resourcing Excellent Youth Services*’ and the DfES NVYO Grant Scheme which have been widely well received by the youth work sector. In addition, the Social Exclusion Unit some time ago identified the key role of youth work (Policy Action Team Report, 2002). The DEA would be willing to identify further examples of work specific to the challenges covered in the document from amongst its membership if this would prove useful to the DfES.

4. How can we encourage young people to take their responsibilities seriously – what should the incentives be for good behaviour and what sanctions should be applied for poor and disruptive behaviour? Do you know of any examples of schemes which have applied these kinds of incentives and sanctions effectively?

Firstly, it should be acknowledged that a vast majority of young people do take their responsibilities seriously, whether they be Young Carers, members of youth organisations, youth clubs or community projects, or as students. Furthermore, involving young people in decision-making and enabling them to participate in the planning and delivery of educational and leisure activities can make a significant impact on poor and disruptive behaviours. (See Hear by Rights, UK Youth Parliament).

If young people commit criminal acts then they should be subject to the appropriate tariff. But sanctions imposed via an opportunity card in a non-formal education, i.e. youth work, setting will be unworkable and counter productive. The groups involved in ‘anti social’ behaviours who the DfES would most like to reach will simply be further excluded if they are sanctioned through this type of scheme. Young people personally at risk and at risk of offending often have chaotic lifestyles that may not conform to set standards and sanctions would have little impact on their behaviours.
The youth work and global youth work agencies are well positioned to promote positive behaviours without an emphasis on systems of incentives and sanctions. Detailed advice should be sought from agencies such as Fairbridge and Centre Point who have extensive experience in this field.

5. What more could be done to divert young people from risk-taking behaviour, like smoking, binge drinking and volatile substance and illicit drugs misuse?

Many youth services are currently engaged with young people at risk and an important first step would be to provide them with further Government support begun with the Transforming Youth Work agenda. Significant investment in local authority youth services alongside extra support for the voluntary youth sector is needed to resource the necessary services.

Again, it is worth noting that youth work hardly features in the Green Paper in comparison to sports and leisure provision. It can be argued that non-formal education has more of a proven track record in this field than sport in deterring difficult to reach young people from risk taking behaviours. For example, *Teenage Pregnancy Unit Report* (2001) valued youth work’s ability to address a range of health concerns including young people’s sexual health. The Home Office research conducted between 1996 and 1998 (Ward and Rhodes, undated) established youth work’s potential for preventing drugs misuse. The DEE “youth action scheme” highlighted Youth Service’s ability to reduce young people’s offending (France and Wiles, 1996).

7. How can the Connexions brand be used to best effect within the reformed system?

There seems to be confusion about how planned new provision and structures will work alongside Connexions, particularly the Connexions Card and Personal Advisors.

8. What more can we do to ensure that reformed services are focused on achieving the improved outcomes we all want to see?

Reformed services need to include well resourced youth services that work in a participatory manner with young people to enable them to shape the services and to ensure they are inclusive. Again, the work of *Transforming Youth Work* and the NVYO grant scheme have highlighted cost effective models of meeting these goals.

**Empowering Young People: Things to do and Places to go**

9. What do you think of the emphasis in the proposals on empowering young people themselves to shape local services? What other options are there for achieving this?

We would broadly welcome the role of young people shaping the services aimed at them; in this way empowering young people and providing things to do and places to go are part of the same process. Many youth services and voluntary youth organisations have distinct experience of involving young people in the design and delivery of services. The Hear By Right model within local authority youth services
should be explored and extensive consultation carried out with the UK Youth Parliament, the British Youth Council, and specifically the Carnegie Foundation. Other options to consider may come from campaigning and lobbying groups or the voluntary sector, particularly from those organisations that promote youth-led community action.

10. What should be done centrally to support the development and delivery of local opportunity cards? How should opportunity cards be developed so that the maximum number of young people can benefit?

We do not support the introduction of opportunity cards, as portrayed in the Green Paper, as the central vehicle for the delivery of youth policy in England. A discount card for travel, educational and recreational activities for young people would be supported but one that includes a consumer incentive scheme for young people that can be withdrawn as a sanction.

As stated above, if young people commit criminal acts then they should be subject to the appropriate tariff. But sanctions imposed via an opportunity card in a non-formal education, i.e. a youth work setting, will be unworkable and counter productive. The groups involved in ‘anti social’ behaviours who the DfES would most like to reach will simply be further excluded if they are sanctioned through this type of scheme.

It is hard to reconcile the card and what it stands for with the actual aims of the Green Paper; there is a fear that the opportunity card will actually limit young people's choices and reduce their opportunities for free association. It is also unclear what role/use the card has in meeting young people’s needs through youth services and how it might contribute to their development.

However, if the plans do go ahead
- They should include an ethical dimension (perhaps with extra points attached?) as much concern has been raised that discounts will only come from large/monopoly companies. This would complement the Government's own CSR agenda and could be based on Ethical Purchasing Policies such as the one developed by Oxfam. There should also be a booklet with the card to explain about consumer choices and ethical consumption, and perhaps some sort of scheme that gives the opportunity to donate points.
- There should be accreditation for service providers and those who are part of the reward system e.g. orchestras, dance groups.
- They should be sensitive to vulnerable groups (refugees/homeless/travellers) and not cause further marginalisation; when would they pick up/use their cards for example?
- They should be considerate of young people living in rural areas.
- Young people’s right to privacy and confidentiality must be respected. The information gained from the card should be for the purpose of young people’s protection and development only.

We endorse the views of the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) in their response to the Green Paper. They state that their members are ‘very concerned over the proposal to withdraw the youth offer from young people who engage in unacceptable behaviour. This group of young people is unlikely to be deterred from their pattern of behaviour by such sanctions. In addition, it is these young people who particularly need positive interventions. If implemented, these proposals are likely to have a double impact on local groups: firstly, groups may lose funding for working with these targeted young people; secondly, if a young person is
unable to use their opportunity card, local groups may deliver provision without the card, and therefore without any prospect of funding.

11. Which activities do you think have the most benefits for young people? Do the proposed national standards on activities cover the right areas?

The Green Paper places an emphasis on sport and the DEA membership would like to see a much greater focus on arts, media and informal education work with young people. The Green Paper should more explicitly recognise the value of youth work in non-formal educational settings. Arts and media projects, for example, can often engage young people of mixed abilities in rewarding and positive activities.

Are they achievable and affordable within existing resources?

No. Substantial additional resources will be required if the vision outlined in the Green paper is to be realised and proposed national standards are to be met. DFES’s ‘Resourcing Excellent Youth Services’ made a commitment to reach enable youth services to reach 25% of young people in every locality and this aim should continue to be a key target.

**Young People as Citizens: Making a Contribution**

12. Will our proposals, taken together with those of the Russell Commission, lead to increased mutual respect between young people and others in the community?

The standards include vague phrases such as ‘access to’ and ‘sporting activity’ that need to be defined further, alongside the specifics of how the youth offer would work in practice. The benefits of youth work and youth volunteering need to be emphasised as valuable in their own right, not as means to an end of social/community cohesion. The emphasis should be on the personal and social development of young people.

If mutual respect is to be fostered then young people should be enabled to define and develop communities based on their personal needs, interests and ambitions.

13. What more can we do to recognise and celebrate young people’s positive contributions to their communities?

Public recognition should be offered to all young people that take positive action in their communities. This is important for many reasons.

- It will contribute to community cohesion and inter-generational understanding.
- It will challenge the prevailing, negative image of young people.
- It will encourage more young people to involve themselves in the community.
- It will foster the long-term motivation of those being recognised.

Recognition and celebration includes mainstream media coverage and a lot of work needs to be done to create the spaces necessary for this to occur. It also includes formal accreditation and other concrete rewards that young people can build on. The Youth Achievement Awards, coordinated by UK Youth, are a good example of a
structured and quality assured programme that combines learning outcomes and recognition.

Whilst no young person should be out of pocket for their voluntary efforts, payments or other financial rewards can devalue the experience for some and distort the motivations for taking part in an activity. The positive, long-term impact of volunteering on young people's lives has been reinforced by the Russell Commission.

14. Would the opportunity to earn rewards motivate young people to get involved in their communities?

The DEA would share NCVYS’s concern that that, ‘by offering rewards to young people for volunteering, it ceases to be volunteering and young people may not continue to volunteer into adulthood if they are no longer ‘rewarded’. Also there is a tendency in the Green Paper to focus on promoting the individual young person as consumer, rather promoting community values, which should be the basis for voluntary action’ and campaigning. If young people set their own goals in relation to volunteering and or community action with the support of youth workers they are more likely to remain involved in activities and benefit from ‘positive peer pressure’.

15. How can we ensure that young people from the diverse range of communities that make up today’s society are effectively engaged by service providers?

Service providers need to develop effective partnerships with community organisations that can provide advice and actual opportunities for appropriate volunteering and community activism. Community activism needs to be based on the needs and aspirations of young people themselves. Adapting a Youth Action approach is an effective way of developing this work where young people set the agenda for their involvement. Accreditation schemes such as the Youth Achievement Awards (UK Youth) can provide the flexible peer recognition for these efforts that has a currency in education and the workplace.

Simultaneously the barriers to the involvement of diverse young people need to be addressed such as negative perceptions of volunteering/community involvement amongst young people and adults. Incentives can be offered but not in the form of payment but rather recognition and the option of accreditation. We should be careful of making assumptions about why certain groups do not volunteer in a traditional sense; many communities are active but not in the established voluntary and charity sector. Further work needs to be done to ensure that the voluntary sector is accommodating to members of Black and minority ethnic communities in particular, as these remain predominately white led organisations that have access to public resources and profile. Furthermore, it is not just a matter of the proliferation of BME organisations that will help engage more young people but an increase in the diversity and recognition of the work of existing organisations and the interaction between them. There are many examples of good practice in this area from organisations involved in global youth work.
Supporting Choices: Information, Advice and Guidance

16. What kind of help and support is most important for young people?

Young people need support in making sense of the world around them and making critical choices in their transition from childhood to adulthood; from independence to interdependence. The role of a significant adult (youth worker) who has a primary interest in the social development of the person rather than an agency agenda, e.g. crime diversion, can provide young people with the relationship where they can identify the specialist support they may need. This reflects the rationale for 'Every Child Matters'.

17. How can we ensure that information, advice and guidance provided to young people is comprehensive and impartial and challenges rather than perpetuates traditional stereotypes?

It is clear that new solutions need to be developed to deal with these issues. Two strategies may be employed here to help ensure the right kind of information, advice and guidance for young people. Firstly, young people's networks can inform the planning of IAG services and be part of the monitoring and evaluation process. Secondly, the training of advisors needs to incorporate the development of the skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to a changing global society. An understanding of young people's interaction with the global forces that influence their lives will contribute to a more comprehensive and impartial service.

18. What do you think of our proposals to devolve responsibility for information, advice and guidance to children's trusts, schools and colleges?

We would support the devolution of information, advice and guidance to Children's Trusts, to identify the most appropriate provider of such services. However we would question the effectiveness and appropriateness of this being offered primarily through a school site. Often young people seeking advice wish to remain anonymous, this would be difficult on a school site. Young people who are excluded from school and who have negative feelings for the institution will, in all probability, not access these services. Confidentiality in the provision of these services must be maintained; this may present a cultural shift for schools and need to be carefully thought out. There is a broader question of accountability with the Government's policy of increasing schools autonomy, e.g. where will the responsibility for these services lie ultimately and how rigorous will contracts be between schools, colleges and Children's Trusts? We suggest they should remain with the local authority. Consistency and quality standards of service provision across the country is key but there are questions about how this will be effectively regulated and enforced.

20. Do you agree there is a case for quality standards for information, advice and guidance? If so what should they cover? How can they be made affordable without putting pressure on financial or workforce resources?

We support the comments made by NCVYS that existing standards should be built upon, that standards with different levels (similar to the model used in PQASSO) may assist VCS organisations, and that capacity building should be a priority so that organisations can progress through each level.
The DEA and its members think that the opportunity should be taken to introduce a global dimension to IAG training and that this should be part of any quality standards that are developed.

21. Would quality awards for information, advice and guidance help to ensure high quality and impartiality?

High quality and impartiality will be enhanced through the meaningful and sustained involvement of young people, accompanied by appropriate support. This would also ensure the relevance of IAG to young people and its use. We support the views of NCVYS that, “Such a system could provide a showcase for best practice, but it is unlikely to have much impact on driving up standards unless resources are provided to disseminate this practice across the country and to provide training in the implementation of new ways of working.”

22. Do you think a ‘personal health MoT’ for 12-13 year olds would be an effective way of helping young people make a successful transition to the teenage years and to secondary education?

We support the comments made by NCVYS that, “There may be difficulties for young people who are more likely to engage in risk taking behaviour to undertake such a process within the school environment. Therefore, thought should be given to how some aspects of this might be offered to young people through an organisation independent of the school or health professionals. Independent organisations might also be provided with greater capacity to explore emotional and mental health issues in greater depth.”

We recommend that local practice amongst VCS organisations on the issue of young people's times of transition be looked at.

All Young People Achieving: Reforming Targeted Support

23. Do you think there is a good case for bringing together within children's trusts responsibility for commissioning different services which provide support to young people with additional needs?

24. How can we ensure that young people facing particular barriers, for example those who are disabled are effectively engaged by service providers?

25. How can we ensure that the new lead professional role is successful in co-ordinating the delivery of targeted support to young people who need it?

26. What more could be done to help older teenagers make a smooth transition to support from adult services, where they need them?

The DEA supports the comments made by NCVYS in response to the questions related to ‘All Young People Achieving’ and would like to highlight the following key points.

• We support an increase in joined-up working but consideration must be given to maintaining local diversity of provision.
• The facilitation of inter-agency and inter-sector links would be welcomed and would complement the aims of 'Every Child Matters'.
• Local and small VCS organisations should not be overlooked in the commissioning process.
• VCS organisations have a good record of reaching vulnerable and marginalised young people and involving them in local decision-making.
• Young people facing multiple barriers need access to a continuum of support.
• There is a tension between the ECM agenda of sharing information and the need of young people for privacy and confidentiality.

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