The National Youth Agency

Research Programme Series

Making a Positive Contribution: The implications for youth work of Every Child Matters

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The National Youth Agency
Information and Research

Making a positive contribution

Key issues

- A policy focus on developing a more co-ordinated approach to helping young people make a positive contribution is an important and significant development in youth policy and one that is to be welcomed.
- Across a wide range of youth policies 'making a positive contribution' has been focused on tackling negative contributions such as reducing youth crime, disaffection in education, social exclusion and anti-social behaviour but the Youth Matters policy agenda offers opportunities to concentrate on more positive activities of the young.
- Making a positive contribution is closely linked to central government's desire to encourage 'active citizenship' amongst the young and can be seen in a wide range of policy initiatives in areas such as education, and sport development, that are aiming to prepare the young for future citizenship.
- It is assumed that a common agreement exists over what 'positive contribution' means. Much of this debate focuses on the need to teach the young their responsibilities. There is a danger that limited attention is being given to young people's rights including the right to participate or not.
- A core challenge to policy and practice in this area remains how to find ways and mechanisms of encouraging the contributions of some of the most excluded groups of young people. This is especially relevant for those from different ethnic groups, disabled young people and those whose are seen as a 'problem' such as young offenders and those excluded from school.
- Notions of 'contribution' need to be underpinned by an understanding of how it will bring about change. If practice is about maintaining the status quo then the most disaffected are likely to remain marginalised and less willing to participate.
- It is important that professional practice and policy makers do not 'problematise' those who do not volunteer, those who decide not to be 'active' in traditional ways, or those that do not participate in sport and consultation processes as expected. Participation in this context has to be about choice.
- Since early 2000 central government has been developing a wide range of initiatives that have aimed to increase ways that young people can be encouraged to make a positive contribution. Youth work is well positioned to help deliver these programmes. It has have a long history of helping the young to develop the skills, confidence and abilities to be active in these processes, and experience in developing processes and programmes of participation in decision making, sport and volunteering.

Note
Any views expressed in this document are the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The National Youth Agency.

1. Introduction

In 2003 the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (ECM) set out a holistic framework for the future development of children and young people's services. The ECM legislation was followed in 2005 by the Green Paper Youth Matters (YM). This aims to help teenagers (13 to 19-year-olds) achieve the five core outcomes of ECM.

ECM wellbeing outcomes

- Being Healthy;
- Staying Safe;
- Enjoying and Achieving;
- **Making a Positive Contribution**
- Achieving Economic Wellbeing.

Government has also set down Core Outcomes, Targets and Indicators and an Inspection Framework (ECM, 2003). These aim to provide a detailed working framework for local authorities and service providers. Youth Matters takes these as core aspects to be addressed.

This National Youth Agency (The NYA) Briefing paper concentrates on the contribution of youth work to the Making a Positive Contribution outcome for young people aged 13-19. It is the fifth in a series of six papers commissioned by The NYA to explore this relationship across the five 'wellbeing' outcomes set out in ECM. The holistic approach of ECM proposes that the five themes are linked. Therefore, while only one theme is discussed here this briefing has connections and implications with the other four. Youth policy is also more diverse with major policy developments taking place in education, health, culture, leisure and crime. This briefing will also draw on these to try and capture the complexity of policy in this area and to help show how and where youth work could have a greater impact.

2. The policy context of making a positive contribution

Since 1997 youth policy has been a major area of policy activity. Four key areas of concern have dominated policy.

- Tackling social exclusion;
- The problems of youth crime and anti-social behaviour;
- The problems of the 'risk-taking' generation;
- How to encourage citizenship, social participation and civic responsibility.

Much of the discussion over 'making a positive contribution' has focused on tackling negative aspects of behaviour, such as anti-social behaviour, and risk taking. Making a positive contribution is seen as the reverse of this and about young people not being a problem (France, 2007). When it comes to 'positive' contributions, policies have been devised that concentrate on encouraging young people to participate as 'active' citizens. While there is much debate over what active citizenship is and how best to encourage it (France, 2007), government has used it as a way of encouraging greater responsibility, involvement in voluntary programmes, and the linking of rights to responsibilities and duties (France, 1998). Part of this agenda has been shaped by claims that suggest that:

- Some young people are unwilling to take up their responsibility of work.
- The levels of young people being 'active' citizens is patchy – with certain groups not being active at all.
- Involvement of young people in mainstream democracy has been a major problem, raising concerns about young people as future political citizens.
- Young people from other countries or cultures not understanding the responsibilities of being a UK citizen.

These concerns over how young people participate in their responsibilities and duties have influenced a wide range of policy developments where government is:

- Developing workfare programmes such as New Deal where benefits are linked to responsibilities.
- Introducing citizenship education in schools and new volunteering programmes as a way of trying to increase 'active' participation.
- Setting up and funding programmes such as the UK Youth Parliament as a way of increasing political participation.
- Encouraging the young to be involved in making local decisions in their communities.
- Creating new citizenship tests for all those applying for UK citizenship.

Central to all of these initiatives is the objective of teaching or encouraging the young to take the responsibilities of citizenship more seriously and to make contributions through being active. More recently government has introduced the new 'respect' agenda (Home Office, 2006). Government sees the 'lack of respect' amongst the young as a fundamental problem and a cause of the levels of anti-social behaviour, drug use and worklessness. This is evidenced in the growing levels of youth problems we have in British society. As Tony Blair argues:

'What lies at the heart of this behaviour is a lack of respect for values that almost everyone in this country shares – consideration for others, a recognition that we all have responsibilities as well as rights, civility and good manners.'

Blair, 2006 pp1

This approach to citizenship constructs the 'new' young citizen not only as irresponsible but also as disrespectful (France, 2007). From this we are now seeing the roll-out of programmes of intervention that are focused on encouraging respect and forcing individuals to be 'respectful' by using sanctions for those who are unwilling to show the respect necessary for being a 'good citizen' (Home Office, 2006). How successful this approach will be remains to be seen as it is still very much in its early stages of development.

3. Citizenship education

A core component of government policy towards encouraging the young to make a positive contribution was instigated in 2002 through the introduction of citizenship studies in schools. This subject was added as a foundation subject to the national curriculum for all secondary schools. Pupils aged between 11 and 16 are expected to have some form of citizenship education as a part of the PSHE programme. This programme was greatly influenced by the Crick report (DfEE, 1998) that argued all young people should develop and experience:

- social and moral responsibility;

- community involvement, and;
- political literacy.

Pupils are expected to gain greater knowledge of what it means to be a citizen alongside the development of skills that help them make more positive contributions and undertake their full responsibilities as citizens. The roll-out of this aspect of the national curriculum has been patchy. Problems remain in terms of implementation, teacher confidences and skills in teaching citizenship, and the development of a curriculum that encourage 'active' participation (Ireland et al., 2006). Furthermore, uncertainty remains about what 'active citizenship' means and how to put it into practice (Nelson and Kerr, 2006).

One solution is to broaden the responsibilities for teaching citizenship and youth work clearly has an important role to play in this. It is recognised that schools may not always be the best place for citizenship education to take place (Patrick and Schuller, 1999) and that partnership with other community based workers, such as youth workers, may enhance the learning process for young people (Davies et al., 2006). Good democratic principles and practice are sometimes learnt through social interaction within community life. Therefore using this context as a mechanism of citizenship education could be highly effective in helping young people become more active citizens. Jeffs (2003) suggests that youth work is ideally set to take up this role. It can provide locations and sites such as youth centres and clubs for dialogue to take place with young people over what citizenship means to them in their everyday lives and how they can take more control. Youth work also:

- is underpinned by voluntary association;
- encourages community participation;
- and helps build self confidence and interpersonal skills for active involvement (Hall et al., 2000).

Democratic Action for B&NES Youth (DAFBY)

DAFBY is based on the three dimensional model of citizenship education:

- social and moral behaviour;
- action in the community; and
- political literacy.

It meets on a weekly basis and identifies a number of lead issues which it prioritises for development. Different members attend each meeting, depending on its focus, and everyone comes together about once a month – the youth and community service funds minibus taxis to bring young people to the centre from across the large rural area.

The main approaches used are group work and peer education. The young people regularly work in focus groups as part of the consultation process, and organise conferences and events on specific themes. Members develop their skills on citizenship issues through structured workshops and training on management, presentation and communication skills.

The group has taken action on a wide range of issues including transport; city centre youth provision, stereotyping of young people, reducing youth crime and working for equality. Specific examples of work undertaken include:

- consultations on Youth Matters Green Paper, regeneration, and the authority's housing participation strategy;
- peer support for the development and training of school councils and local youth forums;
- an international youth exchange to Germany on the European Year of Citizenship;
- assisting the council on its adoption of Hear by Right participation standards and Act by Right participation skills training, Change for Children (the national framework for children and young people's services) and its participation strategy; and
- involvement in the recruitment of the Children's Commissioner.

DAFBY also feeds in the views of young people and sits on a number of boards and panels such as the local strategic partnership and the Connexions development board.

4. Young people and political particiation

Since the middle of the 1990s central government has been concerned about the political participation of young people. It has been recognised that young people's political contribution is at an all time low (Electoral Commission, 2003) and that government needs to take action to increase youth participation in democracy. Since 2001, this has resulted in a number of policy initiatives that have aimed to tackle this problem, for example, the Ynot/Yvote project (CYPU, 2001) and the Youth Voting Network (Electoral Commission, 2003). The issue of political contribution has also been taken forward by the UK Youth Parliament (DfES, 2004b). This was formed in 1998 and has been supported by DfES with an annual grant. Its central objectives are to give young people a voice in the political process, to increase young people's participation in

democracy and to empower young people to take more positive activities in their communities (www.ukyouthpartliament.org.uk). It has over 300 elected members from 95 per cent of all Local Authorities representing regional diversity. There are also devolved groups with contributions being made to the Welsh Assembly (Funky Dragon) and the Scottish Assembly and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum.

Its success to date remains limited (DfES, 2004b) but government has provided both resources and practical support to try and increase the effectiveness of the Youth Parliament. Questions remain about constructing participation processes that replicate existing adult structures, which may not be the most effective way of encouraging greater participation. For example, the youth parliament bears a strong resemblance to the adult system and evidence already suggests that the representation of excluded groups still remains a fundamental problem. Across the youth population it remains relatively unknown as a system of representation for youth issues (DfES, 2004b). Those most excluded are not being included in this process.

Youth workers have been seen as having a major role in UKYP (DfES, 2004b) and have been active in the setting up and supporting the expansion of the Youth Parliament initiative. They have core roles in supporting young people's participation and helping them develop representative systems across the UK. They have also been involved in implementing the initiative and making sure that as many young people as possible are involved (DfES, 2004b). Youth workers are active at the more local level, helping to find ways of giving young people a voice in more local political structures and encouraging them to have a' voice' in local decision making. This has always been a core activity of youth work (Davies, 1999) and something that youth work has good experience of.

Barnsley Voice and Influence

Barnsley Youth Service's Voice and Influence Team was set up in 2001 to focus on capacity building to ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place to allow young people to engage face to face with key decision makers. Speakout meetings provide the mainstay of the infrastructure. The team also supports a democratically elected youth council, youth summits, website, conferences, programmes of personal and social development and links with Connexions South Yorkshire's work on Engaging Young People. Membership of UK Youth Parliament and links with European Youth Parliament through youth council provide a voice at national and international level. The involvement of young people in decision making-processes has led to an impact on local service provision and facilities including outdoor skate parks, youth shelters across the borough, indoor skate park for the town centre, obtaining funding to run specific projects and support the youth council, environmental improvements, and a review of policing methods as a result of a Speakout consultation.

Full youth council meetings are held once a month, to which key decision-makers may be invited. A range of methods is used to gain the views of other young people, focusing on capacity building rather than formal structures in the nine area forum areas. The mainstay of the infrastructure is Speakout meetings. Speakout meetings take place monthly, organised with and for young people by the participation workers. Young people set the agenda, and adults with responsibilities for those services relating to topical issues/concerns are regularly invited to attend. At the close of discussion, action points are agreed and recorded and young people discuss when and how feedback is to take place. Youth participation workers support projects emerging from these sessions. The youth council has developed a range of approaches to involving other young people, including arts-based consultations, website forums and youth summits. Youth summits take place in each area forum with themes including health, education, aspirations, re-making <Barnsley> – a series of summits based on the government's Every Child Matters five outcomes is planned for 2005.

Young people are involved in all aspects of the youth council's development, initially through the democratic process of elections and subsequently through assisting with planning and preparation of speakout meetings, consulting/liaising with other young people and decision-makers. Members of the youth council have organised an anti-racist event, held council surgeries, developed a website, undertaken presentations and made a video for Barnsley Children's Trust. Following youth summits young people help ensure that key actions are taken forward through incorporation into the Community Plan.

5. The youth matters agenda: building a culture of participation

Youth Matters (DfES, 2005) is constructed on a policy programme that aims to increase young

people's participation in the decision making processes that impact upon their lives. The background to this development can be found in government initiatives that started in early 2000. In line with Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, the government set out plans for the development of policies and services that are to be built around young people having a voice in the types of services and policies that impact on their lives (UK Second Report to UN on the Rights of the Child, 2004). Government committed itself to four core principles of practice (CYPU, 2001):

- A visible commitment is made to involving children and young people, underpinned by appropriate resources to build a capacity to implement policies of participation.
- Children and Young People's involvement is valued.
- Children and Young People have equal opportunity to get involved.
- Policies and standards for the participation of children and young people are provided, evaluated and continually improved.

This has resulted in a wide range of initiatives that have aimed to increase young people's participation. Willow (2002) for example identified 21 major government initiatives which provide opportunities for young people to influence decisions at the local level. These include Agenda 21 programmes, Single Regeneration Budgets, New Deal for Communities; the Children's Fund and the Local Government Act (Kirby et al., 2003).

This commitment to making cultural change has led to a whole range of NGOs being active in helping design and implement participation programmes for young people. For example, the Carnegie Young People's Initiative (www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/cypi) and the 'Hear by Right' initiative lead by The NYA (www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright). DfES has also produced guidelines on how to implement youth participation programmes in policy and practice areas (DfES, 2003).

Challenges around this work remain and there are dangers that professionals need to be aware of in developing these types of programmes. Building 'a culture of participation' tends to be constructed around young people making a contribution to public discussions and public services. This moves the construction of 'rights' more into the realm of 'responsibilities' (a young person's responsibility to be involved in exercising this right). This approach may also struggle to engage with young people's everyday lives. The types of decisions most young people have to deal with on a day-to-day basis take place in their schools, their families and with their peers (Crimmens and West, 2004). It is here where active citizenship will have most meaning (Percy-Smith, 2006). While the focus of this approach is on helping bring about change in an organisation, there needs to be an understanding of how these processes operate to bring about significant change and improvements for young people in their everyday lives.

The risk may be that many of the programmes that encourage the use of 'voice' fail to deal with their *purpose*. This helps to maintain the status quo rather than challenging it by failing to construct models that have clarity about what they are trying to achieve. Much research has been done on young people's perspectives of their communities and what needs to be changed, yet little seems to happen that suggests these types of activities might bring about change (Kirby et al., 2003). In fact, the failure to do this tends to create greater cynicism and disaffection amongst the young. For example, change is a social process that involves not only young people 'voicing' their views and perspectives but also adults listening (Percy-Smith, 2006). Yet evidence suggests this is not normally recognised and little discussion happens between adults and young people over how their views will be taken into consideration in the final decision-making process (Percy-Smith, 2006). As a result young people complain that they are not taken seriously.

Other issues to avoid have also been identified:

- Who to listen to, what issues to involve young people in, and for what purpose such methods are deployed can be determined by a wide range of adults (Crimmens and West, 2004).
- This work can mask a concern over managerial effectiveness.
- It can help create a 'consumer testing' perspective on how young people are to be involved (Cockburn, 2005).
- It can create an illusion of 'voice' and power when, in fact, it is controlled by organisations as a way to be seen to be listening while achieving managerial targets (Middleton, 2006).
- the issue of power between adults and young people, or policy professional practice and young people, is rarely considered in discussions over participation and tends to go almost uncontested and left alone (Crimmens and West, 2004).

This being said The NYA has been collecting a wide range of examples where change has been taking place as a result of young people's active participation in local based decision making processes (http://www.nya.org.uk/Templates/internal.asp?NodeID=92150). While much of this is not underpinned by research evidence it indicates that real potential exists for such programmes, with the right kind of support, to make a difference.

6. The Youth Matters Programme

In Youth Matters it was identified that one of the core problems for young people was having a place to go and things to do (Park et al., 2004). This has now been made a statutory requirement for all Local Authorities, with national standards being applied (see Education and Inspection Act, 2006: DfES Bulletin on Positive Activities 10/06). It will require Local Authorities to secure sufficient youth work activities to consult young people on activities available, publicise activities; and to use a wide range of providers. Youth Matters legislation also provides three new funding infrastructures for encouraging young people's involvement in these processes:

Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF). Central Government is providing a £62 million fund over two years to be distributed to Local Authorities to involve young people in identifying positive things to do in their communities and to support them in making decisions or giving local grants for increasing local provision.

Youth Capital Fund (YCF) This aims to work alongside the YOP, and is a capital budget providing £53 million over two years. It is not a replacement for mainstream capital funding but aims to involve young people in identifying capital projects in their local areas. It can be used alongside wider developments. The core objectives of both these funds are to 'give voice and influence to young people' (DfES, 2006 p3) and to change the way that local authorities provide services and facilities.

Both funds aim to target the most deprived areas of England. Access to the most 'hard to reach' groups and those most excluded are to be prioritised ie children leaving care, disabled youth, young carers, young offenders and different ethnic and minority groups. These initiatives are linked to wider policy developments on neighbourhood renewal (ODPM, 2005). Being actively involved is seen as bringing about increased levels of self confidence, new skills and recognition through accreditation.

How successful these initiatives will be remains to be seen. There are concerns about how effective they can be by using this model of delivery. The Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund are to be delivered by 'market forces' in local areas. Young people are to choose how this money is best spent. This assumes that young people are in the best position to know what is needed in their local area and that they will act in fair and equitable ways. But the use of 'market forces' is not always the best way to deliver services and risks exist especially in relation to how money is allocated locally. The results of this process could lead to: greater exclusion for the less able, the most marginalised and those defined as the 'undeserving' (ie troublesome youth) although recent research suggests that in the authorities that have actively engaged with this agenda young people have, with the right support, allocated resources to some of the most deprived groups (Davis, 2007).

Financial allocations to the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund are also limited. The amounts allocated, when spread across the UK, are time limited and questions remain about how much impact they are likely to have on changing the culture and practice in a sustained way. Making such changes requires substantial resources over a longer period of time.

This being said opportunities for changing practice and increasing participation in decision making do exist, and youth work has a long history in this area. It also has much to contribute in helping these types of programmes work. Increasing young people's positive participation has a long history within youth work (Davies, 1999). As early as 1949 over 240 participation projects were formed in local authorities across England. These projects ranged from youth councils and youth parliaments and acted as a medium where young people could express their views (Davies, 1999). In the 1960s the Albemarle Report built on this principle advocating that young people become the 'fourth partners' with youth services. Giving young people opportunities to participate in youth club management and decision making was perceived as a good way of enabling young people to learn about the civic responsibilities of citizenship, and increase their involvement in democracy (Albemarle Report, 1960), and by the 1990s 'empowering young people' through participation programmes was seen as a core function for youth work (Thompson Report, 1982). In the 1990s opportunities in wider policy developments were created that allowed youth workers to develop this work further. For example, the Single Regeneration Budget and Agenda 21 helped fund the expansion of participation in community and environmental regeneration. By the late 1990s youth work is seen to be involved in a wide range of such activities:

- 98 per cent of youth services were involving young people in managing youth services resources;
- 57 per cent of youth services had Youth Charters;
- 43 per cent of youth services supported Youth Forums and Youth Councils;
- 28 per cent had undertaken youth consultations

or/and run conferences specifically for young people; and
- 18 per cent of youth services had run peer education projects.

(The NYA, 1998)

More recently, youth work has expanded its role as a result of resources being made available through the Transforming Youth Work Development Fund set up by the DfES in 2002 and through the application in policy of Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. This has once again increased the role for youth workers in participatory work and created more diverse ways of working:

- ***Increasing active involvement in youth services and other related service developments.*** As well as expanding existing programmes, new initiatives such as Youth Bank projects, and Peer Inspection projects have been introduced.
- ***Creating representative structures.*** This has seen the expansion of youth councils, and forums, UK Youth Parliament and active involvement of young people in decision making in youth clubs.
- ***Involving young people as leaders, mentors and mediators.*** This has seen an expansion of junior leaders in youth clubs, peer mentors in schools and peer mediators on anti bullying programmes. Some of this is receiving accreditation and helping young people into future careers.
- ***Influencing policy in other services.*** Youth work is supporting young people to have an influence in policy making in agencies such as schools, social services, health services, with the police and with the Connexions Service.

(Merton et al., 2004)

7. Youth volunteering

As a part of the 'making a positive contribution' section of ECM, volunteering has also been identified as a critical area for participation. This builds on longer-term developments in government around encouraging greater civic participation. For example, in 1999 the Voluntary Community Unit of the Home Office was re-launched as the Active Community Unit (ACU). This was accompanied by the launch of the Millennium Volunteers programme directed at 16 to 24-years-old in 2000. Other initiatives have also been expanding. Community Service Volunteers (CSV) for example offers full-time volunteering opportunities away from home for those aged 16 to 35 in exchange for a small allowance, travel expenses, food and lodging. In 2004, the Russell Commission on volunteering was set up to review and recommend a national framework for volunteering. This is to include:

- The establishment of a dedicated Implementation Body – responsible for overseeing the process (v).
- Setting of national standards of volunteering and an emphasis on accreditation and linkages to vocational qualifications.
- Expansion of opportunities – more diverse placements (including short-term, and part-time) and a plan to create a national programme of full-time volunteers.
- Provision of a weekly allowance so that young people can pursue long-term commitments.

Government responded to the main recommendations of the Russell Commission by setting up a ministerial committee chaired by the Chancellor to support the introduction of the Implementation Body. A new chair has been appointed (Rod Aldridge – Capita) and the Body has raised £3.5 million of the £50 million required (DfES, 2006) to start this process.

Peer mentoring is also being seen as an important aspect of the volunteering programme. Government has recently announced that it intends to establish peer mentoring schemes in 180 secondary schools and for 600 looked-after children (HM Treasury (2005). Peer mentoring is something that youth work has much experience of, and is an area of work where it could make a significant contribution.

St Basil's Participation and Peer Education Project

St Basil's supports the Schools Training and Mentoring Project (STaMP), through which young people are involved in peer education and mentoring on housing and homelessness issues, in order to prevent homelessness among other young people.

Schools Training and Mentoring Project (STaMP) – residents from St Basil's (and other local housing projects) work with staff to deliver peer education workshops and presentations to raise awareness of homelessness with year 10-11 students and young people in youth centres. They undertake a 12-week 'Professional Futures' training programme, including three supervision sessions encouraging them to reflect on their development and achievements. The group has produced a DVD on homelessness to use with young people, and has worked with the Children's Society to produce a film to accompany its good practice guide for work with young runaways. Members have also delivered training sessions to youth workers and Connexions advisers.

The peer mentors' group involves 16 to 19-year-olds who undertake a seven-week training course delivered in partnership with two local FE colleges. One peer mentor is currently working with six young women at risk of exclusion as part of a local school's Behavioural Improvement Programme.

The focus on social participation through volunteering while offering a positive way forward has to recognise its limitations and potential dangers. For example, there remain a number of unknowns about how these processes will benefit young people's participation:

- Much of this agenda while constructed around wider notions of 'active' citizenship is in fact about concerns over the employability of the young. Volunteering for example is seen as a good way for young people to gain job skills, confidence to move into the labour market and improve their employability to employees – it is a particular way of participating which is linked to employment.
- Volunteering may not be the best way of tackling social exclusion and increasing inclusion. Evidence shows us that participation in this area of social life has always been shaped by inequalities between different classes, genders and ethnicities. Therefore we should be cautious about seeing this as the solution to more embedded problems.
- Volunteering opportunities can have embedded in them disparities between social groups (Ruiz, 2004), as well as potentially causing the social exclusion of young people.

Youth work was born out of the voluntary sector. Its roots emerged from social movements that wanted to help to improve the lives of the young (Davies, 1986). It was only after the second world war that youth services, funded by local authorities, became a formal part of the welfare system. The tradition of youth work within the voluntary sector still remains as a core component of how youth work is delivered to young people (Merton et al., 2004). Youth work is also built upon the notion of 'voluntary association' in which young people make choices to be involved or not. This core value is at the heart of youth work and one that is seen as critical to it having a positive relationship with young people and helping them make decisions in their lives (Merton et al., 2004).

Volunteering as an activity has also historically been a major activity within youth work. For example, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and more recently the Prince's Trust have always been supported and used by youth workers. Voluntary work within youth work has traditionally been a mechanism to use with young people as a means of helping them become more reflective and active citizens (Ofsted, 2005b). Involving young people in the running of youth clubs or in environmental projects or community activities as local volunteers, has traditionally been used by youth workers as a part of 'informal education' and as a way to help personal development (Merton et al., 2004).

The Ivy Project; Exeter

The Ivy Project is a dedicated youth volunteering project with trained specialist workers. It provides opportunities for young people aged 12 to 25 to access a range of volunteering opportunities in their community, encourages their personal development and enables them to celebrate their achievements. It has four main objectives:

- making volunteering flexible, fun and accessible;
- ensuring that young people are encouraged and recognised as valuable members of their communities;
- working with and supporting young people from a range of backgrounds, especially those who are at risk of social exclusion; and
- giving young people a say in the running of the project.

Ivy provides a broad range of opportunities tailored to young people's needs. It uses a three-model approach:

- Taskforce: one-off volunteering opportunities helping the community but requiring low commitment.
- Matching: traditional volunteering placements, such as volunteering at the RSPCA and in charity shops, conservation work, helping out in day centres and youth work placements.
- Youth action: Young people design and manage their own community projects with support from trained facilitators.

This model has proved very successful. Young people receive whatever support and training they need from youth workers. The project seeks to ensure that young people are recognised as valuable members of their community by celebrating the achievements of young people, challenging any negative perceptions experienced in the wider community about young people and vice versa, providing positive images of young people and actively promoting their achievements.

8. Youth participation in sport

Since early 2000 encouraging youth participation in sport has been seen as an important area where young people can both improve personally, learn the values of good citizenship and how to participate (DCMS, 2000; 2002). Sport is seen as a vehicle for tackling social exclusion and helping increase confidence and self-esteem to improve the contributions young people can make (DCMS, 2000). Sport programmes are also thought to make a significant contribution to citizenship education by encouraging moral and social responsibility, community involvement and political literacy and greater respect (Eley and Kirk, 2002). Sport England has had a major role in expanding provision and developing programmes that increase active participation, and government has been providing much of the funding (ie Positive Futures Programme; Sport Action Zones). While much of this has been focused on schools, there has been an attempt to target those who are 'hard to reach', and those who are excluded or involved in criminal activity (DCMS, 2002). Expanding sport participation has been strongly associated with volunteering. For example, Millennium Volunteers are rewarded for their volunteering in the area of sport leadership (Eley and Kirk, 2002). 'Step into Sport' is a similar programme. Launched in 2002 it has invested £7 million in leadership and volunteering in sport aimed at 14 to 19-year-olds. Similarly, it is a core recommendation of the Russell Commission that more young people be involved in volunteering around sporting activities (Russell, 2004).

Again, similar to debates in the area of volunteering there are questions to be asked about this approach to increasing participation and 'making a positive contribution'. Social participation in sport may have many benefits ie improvement in health, and improvements in self identity, making a contribution to citizenship education through encouraging moral and social responsibility, community involvement and political literacy and greater respect (Eley and Kirk, 2002). Yet the evidence of the effectiveness of sport in having wide ranging impacts is limited, and it has to be recognised that there is a need for more research evidence in this area (Ruiz, 2004). National Evaluations are indicating that participation is increasing, especially in the most deprived communities (Sport England, 2006), yet how sustainable this is and how inclusive it is of diverse and 'hard to reach groups' remains unclear. Figures continue to show that not only are those living in deprived communities less likely to participate, but also ethnic minorities and disabled youth are low users of sporting facilities. Similarly, evidence of the link between sport and crime reduction is unclear (Waddington, 2000). For example, while there are some indications that being involved in the Positive Futures sporting programmes may have reduced offending, figures remain unsubstantiated (Sport England, 2004). A recent review by the Scottish Executive also showed that a small body of evidence existed that indicated that sport could reduce crime yet causal relationships remain unproved (Ruiz, 2004).

While there are uncertainties about this approach to increasing participation youth work is well positioned and has significant experience in helping to increase participation in sport. Traditionally youth work arose out of concerns about the negative use of leisure by the young (Davies, 1986). But in more recent times the focus has been on the use of sport and leisure as an education tool (Albemarle Report, 1960). Sport and leisure were considered constructive activities that would help in the processes of education in good responsible citizenship (Davies, 1999). More recently, youth work has seen these types of activities being used to help tackle broader social and political issues such as community cohesion and social exclusion, while also helping young people become better citizens (Ofsted, 2005b). Sport, leisure and more recently, popular culture are therefore seen as vehicles within youth work to help young people in their personal and social development and to make a positive contribution (Merton et al., 2004).

The Fitzrovia Youth Action Project

This is a community based youth action project using sports and youth work to engage young people and support them in developing projects which benefit the community and improve relationships between people from different ethnic and age groups throughout the London Borough of Camden. The projects include a community football programme, the Unity Cup anti-racist football tournament, and a range of inter-generational and environmental activities. By bringing different groups together around sports FYA has restored pride and ownership of the local environment and helped generate a sense of community among residents.

FYA supports a range of community based activities with a sports theme:

- Weekly football training sessions providing opportunities for young people aged 8 to 16 from different ethnic communities to play together.
- Inter-generational project bringing together local residents and young people who spend

time in the recreation areas outside their homes.
- Young women's project and girls' football tournament in summer 2005.

Young people receive training relevant to their projects. For instance, those involved in organising the Unity Cup, undertake training in conflict resolution, stewarding and project management.

9. The challenge of 'making a positive contribution'

Youth Matters and other policy initiatives discussed here are making a significant impact on developing new ways of helping young people make 'positive contributions'. It has created a framework that will potentially increase young people's ability to make a positive contribution in a wide range of areas of social life. This being said there are a number of challenges for policy makers and practitioners in this area.

Underpinning the policy of 'positive contribution' are uncontested values that assume a common agreement about what this means. The notion of 'positive contribution' is not defined, but when it is referred to, it tends to be constructed more around negatives. For example, it is seen as about not being anti-social, not being criminal and not being out of work. While these are important, there are dangers that the policy framework does not address young people's concerns and should therefore give greater guidance on what 'contributions' are important.

When 'contribution' is defined more positively it is usually about acting paternally to others, taking on responsibilities, being self motivated, being respectful and acting in 'good' ways. It has little to say about how this contribution can improve young people's lives or how they can challenge the status quo or the negative things that impact on their lives. Attention to these issues may help increase social participation.

Much of the agenda about 'contribution' is concerned with responsibilities and duties (and more recently respect) – little is said about young people's rights and how they may contribute to this process of 'positive contribution'. A policy agenda for participation must also help define young people's social, political, economic and political rights – ensuring they have a legal framework for increasing their citizenship and for making a 'contribution'.

A fundamental challenge to policy and practitioners is to find new ways of ensuring the most excluded and marginalised groups are included in these processes. Evidence shows that across the areas of policy that are relevant to this debate, ie political engagement, volunteering and sport involvement, large sections of young people are still not actively engaged. Diversity amongst young people is also a challenge, in that practice needs to ensure that the needs of a wide range of different groups are taken into consideration when looking at and defining what a 'positive contribution' may be. This is critically important amongst minority ethnic groups and the disabled, in that their contribution needs to be better recognised and more influential in policy and practice. It also means finding ways for some of the most 'problematic' young people ie young offenders and young people excluded from school to also be involved, and to ensure that they are given the opportunity to make a contribution.

The risk for policy and practice is that by enforcing (and forcing) a definition of 'contribution' or citizenship upon the young, which gives limited attention to change, diversity and difference, will, in fact, increase the marginalisation of those who are seen as acting outside the dominant perspective of contribution. In this context young people who are different or who challenge the status quo may find themselves being construed as a 'problem'. This has significant consequences for those who are seen not to participate in the ways being defined in policy as it stands and do not share values that reflect its own view of a 'good society'. Not to volunteer or not to take on responsibilities as defined by the new legislation or not to be involved in sport and leisure potentially defines a young person as acting outside the norm, a potential problem and not a full citizen. Policy and practice must avoid this in making judgments about the types of contributions young people can and should make.

10. Challenges for youth work

Policy in the area of 'making a positive contribution' also creates a number of challenges for youth work.

- Policy that is focused on social control, sanctions and employability at the expense of other considerations goes against the core values and working practices of youth work. Constructing positive relationships with young people in this context remains difficult.
- The concentration on reducing negative

behaviour and changing this to pro-social behaviour ie stopping anti-social behaviour, pressurises youth work towards 'fire-fighting' problems rather than working with young people around more positive solutions.

- Policies that advocate conformity to dominant values that are not accepted by all, makes working with diverse and excluded groups more challenging. This will increase the tensions between excluded youth and professional youth workers.
- The strong emphasis on 'civic responsibility' and 'active citizenship' can fail to engage with the needs of the most vulnerable young people. Young people's rights are being eroded and the focus on responsibilities and duties makes it hard to work with some of the most excluded.
- The introduction of 'market forces' into how local services are to be provided, creates a competitive environment for youth work and one which young people may reject if it becomes focused on process in favour of more popular forms of sport and leisure activity.
- In the commissioning processes and with market-driven services, youth work may find itself marginalised around cost. Youth work will need to be able to show its added value and cost effectiveness.
- Participatory work is resource intensive and demanding on youth worker time. Expectations from policy are high and the limited resources available to support this work on the ground will make success a challenge for the future.
- How to evaluate participation programmes will be necessary. Traditional models of evaluation may not be appropriate, therefore new forms of evaluation need to be developed – given the limited skills of youth workers in this area this will create a significant challenge.

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The National Youth Agency
works in partnership with young people and with organisations and services to ensure better outcomes for young people. It is an independent, development organisation located between government and funding bodies on the one hand and service providers and their users on the other.

We strive to ensure that the work of services and organisations is:

- relevant to the lives of young people;
- responsive to policy;
- effective and of a high standard;
- efficient and provides good value; and
- successful in securing the best outcomes for young people.

Our five strategic aims are:

- Participation: promoting young people's influence, voice and place in society.
- Professional practice: improving youth work practice, programmes and other services for young people.
- Policy development: influencing and shaping the youth policy of central and local government and the policies of those who plan, commission and provide services for young people.
- Partnership: creating, supporting and developing partnerships between organisations to improve services and outcomes for young people.
- Performance: striving for excellence in The Agency's internal workings.

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