

# Youth Services – Our Future

## The Liberal Party policy on informal education and young people.

### **Background**

The Liberal Party has consistently supported the need for good, well-resourced leisure time provision for young people believing in the informal education and character-building role that such services provide.

As part of this we recognise the importance of such services being rooted in community provision and involvement believing that the qualities and input provided by significant adults contributing on both a paid and voluntary basis make to the development of young people during the crucial 'youth' period of growth.

This we believe significantly takes place in the years 10 to 16 with a wider remit for 14–19 year olds and with linking outside these age ranges for special needs.

The Public Sector funding of these services has been variable and patchy not the least because of well-intentioned planning interventions such as concentrating on targeted youth work with harder to reach young people or those at risk of trouble with the law. The creation and then disbanding of 'The Connexions Service' in the 2000's played havoc with expectations of youth services and particularly voluntary youth services who came to rely on support from the associated budgets only to have their own hopes dashed at the end of that decade.

Subsequently we saw the demise of The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services and a subsequent impact on County and Unitary local Councils for Voluntary Youth Services only the strongest of which have survived.

Many local authority youth services have also suffered dramatic cuts with the real deliverers of the service part-time local youth clubs and community centres being the hardest hit.

Whilst supporting a concept of localism in the delivery of services we believe these should be supported by adequate resources. Post War legislation laid upon local authorities the duty to provide for the leisure time needs of young via educational budgets and this needs to be re-implement and budgeted for in a proper settlement upon local authorities.

### **Training Staffing and Support**

Adequate and supported training for full and part-time professional youth service workers and officers as educational professionals needs to continue to be in place in community organisations and local authorities and enhanced based upon the special needs of youth services and not tied to the needs of university degree places.

The Probationary Year for professionally trained staff placing them alongside other educational professions such as teachers which was allowed to slide in the 1990s onward needs to be immediately replaced and linked to a continued and updated Education Department (Ministry) register as previously, not a commercially driven vehicle through an outside body.

There also needs to be a seamless opportunity for volunteers and part-time paid staff to move on and train for this qualified status currently known as JNC qualified with the youth service taking a lead in equality for all staff in the service. For this reason, we do not support any move to restrict job title or the designation of youth worker rather preferring the teaching/educational model. However, the designation of Youth Support Worker currently used is questionable and we cannot condone a system that does not respect all Youth Workers as equals.

### **Adventure, Development and Safety**

The Liberal Party supports a service based on good health and safety measures and adequate safeguarding but also recognises the valuable role played by youth and community workers as challengers of young people and of services and recognises that safeguarding systems are often too rigid and being child protection and social services engineered often work against real and pragmatic safeguarding and resultantly impinge on proper and initiative based safeguarding.

We believe that local qualified youth and community workers should have a respected role in being able to challenge and monitor bureaucratic and system led local safeguarding roles and that inspection bodies should be obliged to take note of observations and opinions from community youth services.

We believe that the more informal and less system/outcome-based approaches have much to offer in terms of approach, challenge, processes and thinking for safeguarding practices yet are too often seen as 'amateur outsiders' in the process despite being well trained and qualified. This we feel needs to change.

### **Structures**

The Liberal Party believes that there have to be structures which build upon the unique traditions of youth service whilst being able to move forward to meet the challenge of coming generations.

Many of the National Voluntary Youth Organisations are exemplars of good service to young people as are a wider range of local voluntary organisations and community led youth services and youth clubs. We believe that the quality of service of the voluntary sector is well exemplified by the mission statements of uniformed youth organisations and others such as The National Association of Boys and Girls Clubs and UK Youth amongst many others.

The Liberal Party believes that working together between The Voluntary and Independent Sector and Local Authority provision is the best workable model for the continuation of good local youth services.

The Liberal Party believes that existing strong Councils for Voluntary Youth Services provide a model for a way forward and calls upon the government to support the CVYS Network in England in working to ensure county networks are rebuilt across England. The Liberal Party respects the work of The Welsh Council for Voluntary Youth Services and respects the mirrored services across the border in Scotland. The work of and linkages to Youth Work in 'The Commonwealth' should be developed and strengthened throughout the Local Authority Youth Services as well as the voluntary sector.

Whilst there are many measures and work to be done in ensuring adequate informal education provision for young people The Liberal Party believes that attention to the above is THE WAY FORWARD in ensuring the country ensures to prioritise its youth in giving support to their future as MATURE CITIZENS OF A FREE SOCIETY.

The Liberal Party

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