

Aiming High for Young People – a Ten Year Strategy for Positive Activities

A summary

Aiming High for Young People was published on Thursday 26th July 2007 as part of the Government's policy review of children and young people and sets out a strategy to transform facilities and support services for young people in England. It considers how the Government can help all young people, particularly those in deprived areas, to take part in enjoyable and purposeful activities in their free time which can help them develop new skills and raise their aspirations.

This summary has been produced by the Regional Youth Work Unit - North East, a strategic development body supporting both statutory and voluntary youth services across the region.

Chapter 1: A vision for young people (pages 3 – 16)

This Strategy is part of the Government's policy review of Children and Young People and has informed the outcomes of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review. It outlines what services should achieve over the next 10 years, and defines the commitment expected of Local Authorities and partners, including the third sector, communities, parents and young people.

Adolescence is now recognised as a distinct developmental stage during which young people take increasing responsibility for themselves and their future prospects. Over the last 30 years or so, changes in the labour market, wider society, family structures, and the use of leisure time have made this transitional phase increasingly challenging, with greater risks but also a broader range of choices and opportunities. It is therefore important that young people develop the social and emotional skills which will enable them to take advantage of these opportunities, and to develop the resilience to manage the risks that may emerge. Evidence shows that young people from poorer backgrounds, without stable family backgrounds, who are struggling at school, or who are not regularly involved in some kind of constructive activity, are least likely to develop these skills, and are therefore most at risk of experiencing poorer outcomes.

The Government's vision is that all young people should have access to the support and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. Much progress has been made towards this, with wide ranging changes being implemented within the education and training system, whilst the development of integrated youth support services will improve young people's access to support outside of schools and colleges. However, there are still some challenges to be dealt with, with a significant number of young people having particular issues and disadvantages to overcome.

The reforms outlined in this Strategy are based on the following 3 themes, which provide the headings for Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the report

- **Empowerment** – young people having the opportunity to influence services
- **Access** – young people being supported to overcome barriers to access
- **Quality** – only high quality services have a real impact on young people's outcomes

In addition, the Strategy is informed by the Government's 3 core principles for public service reform

- **Progressive universalism** – all young people benefit, but with additional support for those who need it most
- **Prevention** – support for young people before they get into difficulties, and additional help to cope if they do
- **Rights and responsibilities** – in return for the right to excellent youth support services, young people, parents and communities have a responsibility to help in addressing issues for young people and providing solutions

Chapter 2: Positive activities: Improving outcomes (pages 17 – 27)

Young people’s experiences in adolescence, particularly exposure to risk factors such as poor housing, ill health and lack of parental interest, can impact on their chances of making a successful transition to adulthood. All young people are exposed to some element of risk as they grow up, but those with access to protective influences are more likely to develop the resilience and skills to deal with these risks. 3 key protective factors are academic attainment, positive parenting, and social and emotional skills. Other earlier reports have addressed attainment and parenting, and therefore this Strategy focuses on the role of positive leisure time activities in building social and emotional skills.

Evidence has shown that good quality youth activities can help develop the characteristics which enable young people to take advantage of opportunities and to deal with risk. They help build self esteem and self confidence which can impact on young people’s attitude to school, their peers, and whether or not they become involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour. Positive activities can also help build bridges between different groups of young people, and access for young people to something to do and somewhere to go can help reduce tensions within the community by reducing opportunities for anti-social behaviour and emphasising young people’s positive contribution to society. Through activity based programmes, young people can also often access further specialist help and support.

Recent research has suggested that it is the characteristics and nature of activities, rather than the particular activity itself, which has the most impact on developing social and emotional skills. In particular, young people who have participated in structured activities where there is an underlying purpose and goal and an element of organisation by adults are more likely to achieve positive outcomes in later life. In comparison, young people who have attended only unstructured activities are at most risk of poor outcomes. Other important characteristics of successful provision include:

- Activities that are attractive to young people, creative and inclusive
- Young people are not treated as problems
- Young people and parents are involved in design and delivery
- A safe environment and appropriate supervision are provided
- Ease of access
- A holistic approach is taken to young people’s needs
- Sustained participation by young people
- Adequate resources are available
- Good management structures are in place

The Government has already provided support to a range of contexts for the delivery of activities, including extended schools and targeted programmes such as Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF), Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP), and the Young People’s Development Programme (YPDP), which uses arts and sports to tackle risk-taking behaviour. In addition, there

is a wide range of other contexts where young people can access positive activities such as youth clubs, leisure centres, uniformed organisations and opportunities for volunteering and community engagement.

Chapter 3: Empowerment: Giving young people and communities real influence (pages 29 – 41)

The Government are committed to ensuring that more young people have access to and are able to participate in local services, and believe the most effective way of doing this is to give young people genuine influence over the design and delivery of services. Not only does this increase participation in services, it helps make the services better and more responsive to their needs, gives the young people involved new skills and helps bring together young people from different backgrounds. Over the past 18 months, the Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF) and Youth Capital Fund (YCF) has involved over 8,000 young people in making decisions about funds, over 73,000 in developing bids, and over 569,000 have benefited from activities or facilities funded by YOF/YCF. In addition, Local Authorities have been active in establishing a range of mechanisms to increase young people's representation, including Young Mayors, and Youth Councils or Forums. And through the New Deal for Communities programme, Young Advisors have been appointed in 20 areas to show community leaders and decision makers how to engage young people in community life and local democracy. However, it is clear there is more to do, as only 14% of 15 and 16 year olds feel they have enough say in decisions that affect them, and there can be difficulties in overcoming adult's negative perceptions about the involvement of young people.

In order to achieve this, the Government will

- **Support young people to take their place as valued members of society** - More effort is needed at local and national level to promote a more positive view of young people and their contribution to society. As part of this, the Government will explore how young people can organise events which celebrate their transition to adulthood. They will also look at the potential for a 'Youth Week' to celebrate young people's achievements and create more positive perceptions of them. In addition, £70 million will be invested through v, the youth volunteering charity, to develop a National Volunteering Programme which will establish a framework for the accreditation of youth volunteering opportunities so young people have their achievements and commitment acknowledged.
- **Put more resources and responsibility into young people's hands** - Following their successful implementation, the Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF) and Youth Capital Fund (YCF) will be extended until at least 2011, with additional resources being provided for the most deprived areas. In addition, Local Authorities will be expected to devolve up to 5% of their youth service budget to young people's influence in 2010 and 2011, with the long term aspiration being that by 2018, young people could actively shape decisions on 25% of the Local Authority budget for positive activities.

Building on the success of YOF/YCF, the Government are keen to provide further opportunities for young people to develop projects providing positive activities for other young people, and from 2008, they will invest in building the capacity of third sector organisations who can support such youth led initiatives. They will also fund the development of a Youth Leadership Fund and a National Institute for Youth Leadership to support the development of young people's leadership skills

- **Empower marginalised young people to have more influence** - The Government is keen to ensure that young people who are particularly disadvantaged by their circumstances

are not further marginalised by being unable to influence the design and delivery of services. They will therefore invest over the next 3 years in building the capacity of third sector organisations who can work with Local Authorities to support such groups of young people.

- **Empower communities to improve services** - Local communities have a role to play in holding Local Authorities to account, but often don't know what mechanisms are in place to enable them to do so. The Local Government White Paper includes new methods for influencing elected members, including the Community Call for Action, and the Government expects Local Authorities to ensure young people, parents and communities will be able to use their councillors to launch such action. There will be an increased expectation on councillors to act as a conduit for communities to feed in their priorities to Local Authorities, and a requirement for Local Authorities to bring together young people's and adults participation forums to develop common solutions to common problems.

Chapter 4: Access: Attracting and engaging every young person (pages 43 – 66)

Delivering on the Government's vision for young people means ensuring all young people have access to the opportunities and support they need, and that these opportunities and services are attractive, accessible and appropriate for their needs.

Over two thirds of the young people who responded to the Youth Matters consultation said more facilities were the most important thing that would improve their lives, and that these facilities should be places where they felt safe, that they could call their own, and where they could access a range of activities and services such as information, advice and guidance. Parents and communities also want better youth facilities to encourage community cohesion and promote better relationships between young people and adults.

The Youth Capital Fund has provided £56 million to improve and develop facilities, and the Building Schools for the Future programme has enabled schools to upgrade facilities for extended school activities and other youth provision. Increased use of mobile provision brings facilities directly to the young people, and other initiatives are looking to increase the use of community facilities by young people. However, there is more work which needs to be done and the Government are planning to make available further resources to develop new and improved youth facilities in every constituency. Over the next 3 years, they will invest £60 million, and follow up this up with additional funding through the re-investment of unclaimed assets. This funding will be expected to stimulate the development of local strategies for youth facilities which will build brand new purpose built youth centres, refurbish existing provision, and enable the development of smaller scale facilities. These facilities will be expected to deliver services that are led by young people, inclusive, built on partnership working, respond to local needs, and that are sustainable in the long term.

The Government are also keen on improving young people's access to sport in the run-up to the 2012 Olympic Games. They plan to use this event to inspire young people by developing a 4 year Cultural Olympiad, recruiting Young Ambassadors from School Sport Partnerships, and staging an annual UK School Games.

Increasing the range of opportunities available to young people is only part of the solution, and ensuring young people can actually access such provision is essential. Amongst the issues the Government are keen to address through this strategy are:

- **Access to information** – funding will continue to be provided to Local Authorities to publicise information about local opportunities to young people. The Government will also seek to ensure parents receive information about available opportunities, and the benefits to young people of participating.
- **Cost** – continuation of the Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds will help young people access services by putting purchasing power directly into their hands. The Government have also announced in ‘Aiming High for Children: Support for Families’ an investment building up to £217 million in 2010/11 to fund access to services provided through extended schools for disadvantaged young people.
- **Transport** – Local Authorities will be encouraged to explore options for improving young people’s access to transport, including subsidising young people’s travel, negotiating partnerships with local transport providers, and developing community transport schemes. The recently published draft Local Transport Bill proposes giving Local Authorities more opportunities to influence transport companies to make transport more responsive to the needs of communities including young people.
- **Safety** – Local partners including Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards, Local Strategic Partnerships and Children’s Trusts will be expected to work together to address young people’s safety, and Children and Young People’s Plans should include the actions to be taken by each partner

For some young people, additional support will be required and it will be crucial to reach out and support these young people, as they stand to gain most from the activities and services on offer. This will be achieved through the use of targeted support bringing together the work of multiple agencies, the development of a more personalised approach to learning in schools, additional help for parents and families, and greater support for third sector organisations who reach out to the most marginalised young people. Significant investment will be made to expand the availability of year round personalised provision for the most disengaged young people, and this is likely to include professionals holding a small activities budget for young people to increase the range of opportunities available to them. There will also be increased investment in outreach services and in residential activities.

Chapter 5: Quality: Effective services delivered by a skilled workforce (pages 67 – 82)

Evidence shows that high quality services delivered by a skilled workforce are the key to improving young people’s outcomes. Such services are characterised by:

- a focus on building resilience and protecting young people from risk
- availability of a diverse range of activities
- offer of extra support through signposting or integration with other services

Also key is the practice of the people who work directly with young people, particularly their understanding of adolescent development.

Over recent years, the Transforming Youth Work Development Fund has provided significant investment in youth work, and the development of the Quality Mark for Services to Young People by the NYA has gone some way towards driving up quality standards. However, there are still some significant challenges which result in a lack of overall impact and quality, including poor co-

ordination of activities and support, a lack of local collaboration and partnership working, commissioners not utilising the best of available provision particularly from the third sector, Local Authorities not seeing services for young people as a priority, and issues around workforce quality, leadership and management.

In order to address these challenges the Government will introduce further reform to:

- **improve partnership and collaboration** - Local Authorities need to play a strong leadership and co-ordinating role in the provision of services to young people, working with partners in the statutory, third and private sectors. They will be expected to work closely with Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP's) involve the full range of local partners in the development of Children and Young People's Plans. The Government are particularly keen to see better joint working around preventative services, as it is clear that programmes which seek to prevent young people experiencing problems in the first place are more likely to help them achieve the best outcomes, rather than those which intervene when problems have already become serious. As part of this more collaborative approach, from 2008 the Government will expect Youth Offending Teams to pool 10% of the Youth Justice Board funding with local youth support services to provide young people's prevention initiatives. Primary Care Trusts will be expected to pool their budgets for preventing poor adolescent outcomes with local authorities from 2008, and, emphasising the importance the education system plays in creating preventative services, all activities planned and offered by extended schools should be embedded within the local offer to young people.

With specific reference to the important role third sector organisations play in delivering preventative services to young people, the Government is committed to ensuring that three year funding becomes the norm rather than the exception. They have already announced plans to train 2000 commissioners as part of the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning, and will look at developing a stronger evidence base to demonstrate the third sector's impact in service delivery. In recognition of the fact that not all third sector organisations will wish to be commissioned to deliver services, they have committed £80 million to fund small grants to community groups, and will provide further investment to improve the level and quality of small grant funding to community groups. They will also reform the Capacitybuilders scheme to ensure funded projects provide programmes of direct benefit to frontline organisations.

- **clarify priorities and strengthen accountability** - the Government are keen to ensure that there is a clear strategic direction for improving young people's outcomes, and increased accountability for the delivery of services. The creation of the Department for Children, Schools and Families is part of this, and brings together children and young people's policy at the heart of Government. The 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review will outline a new set of Public Service Agreements which identify Government's highest priority outcomes, and will include measures to monitor the percentage of young people participating in positive activities. As part of the revised Local Area Agreement process, local authorities can negotiate up to 35 priority targets, which could include young people's participation in positive activities if this is seen as a local priority. Another way of demonstrating the importance of services to young people is the level of resources allocated, and the Government will encourage local authorities to publish details of their expenditure on youth activities so that they can be held to account locally by young people and communities. Finally, under the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) inspection regime, progress towards national and local priorities will be measured by inspecting both local authority services and those provided by partners, giving an added incentive to local authorities to manage the overall offer of youth activities effectively.

- **facilitate the use of effective practice** - the complex nature of the reforms outlined in this Strategy will require strong national leadership and collaboration. The Government are not convinced that current arrangements are sufficient, and believe there is a case for creating a single clear lead to support local delivery across public, private and third sectors. They will therefore be looking at the development of a Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services, and how this could support better practice in young people's services
- **support and develop the workforce** - young people have identified the importance of 'trusted adults', including parents, community members and volunteers as well as professional workers, in supporting them to engage in new activities and opportunities. However, there are a number of challenges which need to be overcome to ensure those working with young people have the right skills and knowledge. The Government are therefore looking to introduce a number of initiatives, including a national leadership and management initiative to support the development of shared skills and knowledge for leaders and managers who work with young people, a programme to encourage more people who teenagers can relate to into the workforce, and ways to support the training needs of staff working in the third sector and volunteers. The Government will also work with partners to explore how the most disengaged young people can have access to a mentor to support them in the transition to adulthood, and to develop a common platform of skills and training for those who work with young people, including the development of new qualifications as appropriate.

Chapter 6: Next steps (pages 83 – 84)

Delivery of this Strategy will be taken forward for the Department for Children, Schools and Families, working closely with all other relevant Government departments. As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007, £185 million has been committed over the 3 years 2008 – 11 to underpin the commitments set out in the Strategy. At local level, it will be the responsibility of local authorities to deliver the strategy in partnership with other agencies through Children's Trust arrangements.