

Response to Consultation on Information, Advice and Guidance Services for Young People: Directions and Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities.

June 2010

1. Introduction

1.1 Youth Access is the national membership organisation for young people's information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS). Our membership comprises individual practitioners, local and national voluntary organisations, as well as some local authority managed provision. YIACS offer a holistic, multi-skilled and flexible approach to the wide range of young people's needs.

1.2 Youth Access believes all young people have a right to locally accessible, free, confidential and impartial information, advice, counselling and support. We work in partnership with our members, The National Youth Agency and other organisations to promote the development of high quality, young people-centred services.

1.3 Youth Access has over two hundred member agencies working with thousands of young people across the country every day, dealing with over a million enquires a year on issues as diverse as sexual health, emotional and mental health, relationships, homelessness and benefits.

1.4 Some Youth Access members additionally provide advice on skills, learning and careers and some have Connexions PA's embedded within them.

1.5 Youth Access welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

2. Endorsement from National Council for Voluntary Youth Services

2.1 Youth Access is a member of the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS). NCVYS is an independent body representing 170 national organisations and regional and local networks that work with young people. NCVYS works with its members to ensure voluntary and community youth organisations are at the core of public policymaking. NCVY supports this consultation response.

3. Summary of key issues

- The Guidance fails adequately to make clear the scope of the services and interventions to which it refers. A definition of IAG would immeasurably strengthen the document.
- IAG must be defined more broadly than careers advice and must include personal, practical, legal, emotional and health issues.
- IAG is delivered by a wide range of providers, not just Connexions. The guidance around branding fails to recognise this diversity and raises issues of independence for provision based in the voluntary sector.
- Young people themselves should be directly involved in shaping the ways in which IAG is provided to ensure all benefit from the delivery of relevant, inclusive and high quality support focussed around individual needs and aspirations.
- Insufficient attention is devoted to transition planning for those aged 18 and over. Many of these young people will continue to need targeted interventions to enable them to engage or keep them engaged, rather than the generic services of Jobcentre Plus.
- We welcome the recognition of the value of 'under one roof' services, the very type of service typified by YIACS, and the role of the non-statutory sector. It would be helpful if the Guidance set out more clearly how it sees voluntary and community organisations being partners in delivery.
- YIACS can make an enormous contribution to delivering integrated and non-careers IAG to young people and helping local authorities deliver key agendas such as personal wellbeing and NEET reduction.

4. What the Guidance needs to achieve

4.1 The IAG strategy, *Quality, Choice and Aspiration*, is predominantly focussed on careers and learning. Other personal and social needs, which act as barriers to engagement, receive only a brief mention. The clear risk is that in local Integrated Youth Support Services the term IAG will simply become shorthand for careers and learning IAG at the expense of young people's wider IAG needs.

4.2 There remains a need to ensure that the kinds of personal and social IAG services delivered by Youth Access members and other voluntary and community organisations working with young people, which deal with issues

which are barriers to participation, do not get squeezed out in local implementation of this strategy.

4.3 There are significant areas for development required in the strategy if it is to be successful in meeting its aims, some of which are set out below.

5. What is IAG?

5.1 In order that local authorities do not simply focus their IAG activity on careers advice it is necessary for Guidance to explicitly set out a definition of what is meant by IAG.

5.2 In order to meet young people's needs, we have argued that it is essential that rights based social welfare advice, and interventions dealing with personal, practical, emotional and health issues be included in that definition.

5.3 Extensive research has shown the relationship between NEET status, social welfare problems and mental health issues and that rights-based social welfare advice (e.g. on housing, benefits and debt) is a key intervention in resolving these problems.¹ NEETS indeed suffer a considerably higher proportion of social welfare problems than those in education, training or employment².

6. Branding and Quality

6.1 In our joint response to *Quality, Choice and Aspiration*, Youth Access along with the Confederation of Heads of Young People's Services and National Connexions Network strongly endorsed the need for all young people, in whichever setting they choose, to be aware of and have easy access to their entitlement to IAG; to receive services which are of consistently high quality provided by suitably qualified and experienced staff.

6.2 We also argued that:

"Raising the aspirations of all young people, especially those with multiple needs and supporting them to overcome barriers preventing them from realising their skills and talents, requires intensive and individualised responses. Evidence suggests this is best delivered in a range of settings, including more informal community settings e.g. youth information, advice and counselling agencies often found in the third sector."

Integrated Youth Support Services have a key role to play in securing a diversity of provision through the effective, transparent and robust

¹ Sefton M, (2010) *With Rights In Mind*, Youth Access 2010

² Kenrick J (2009) *The Advice Needs of Young People – the Evidence*. Youth Access 2009.

commissioning of providers across the private, public and third sectors. An effective mix of provision able to respond to young people's needs at times, in places, and styles of their choosing contributes to more positive outcomes for all. IYSS also have a role in easing the transition process between services for young people at 19+. We urge the greater use of joint commissioning between youth and adult services to enable providers, particularly in the Third Sector with its more flexible age boundaries, to play an important continuing support role, especially for the most vulnerable."

6.3 Youth Access feel that the draft Guidance, with its focus on Connexions Quality Standards and branding, fails to include and reflect this diversity of provision and that young people are likely to be worse served as a consequence.

6.4 Branding also raises questions about independence of services, something key to the provision of high quality IAG, particularly in relation to social welfare issues such as benefits and housing advice.

7. What can YIACS offer?

7.1 YIACS could and should be central to broader IAG delivery, providing as they do uniquely accessible targeted but holistic services 'under one roof'. The House of Commons Select Committee on Children Schools and Families recognised the value of the model in work to reduce NEET numbers³ (even if it failed to appreciate the work is going on in the UK at present) as did Ofsted⁴.

7.2 The evidence is clear that only a small minority of Connexions Personal Advisers have the sort of in depth knowledge and expertise needed to give the sort of specialist interventions that many NEET young people need. The same is true of those youth workers who work closely with the most vulnerable groups of young people, such as care leavers or those at risk of reoffending.⁵ Evidence is also mounting that the service provided by Jobcentre Plus for unemployed young people simply does not meet their needs and they certainly do not begin to deal with issues like social welfare problems, drugs and alcohol problems, emotional wellbeing or mental health.

7.3 YIACS however do have a successful track record of delivering these and other vital services to 13–25 year olds in accessible, young person friendly surroundings and with proven positive outcomes... Soon to be published evidence from pilots of the Youth Access Youth Advice Outcomes Toolkit show for example that 62% of young people felt better able to deal with their

³ *Young people not in education, employment or training*, House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee 2010

⁴ *Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why*. Ofsted, March 2010

⁵ *The Youth Advice Workforce: Now and in the Future*. Youth Access 2009

problems as a consequence of receiving advice; 57% had improved confidence and control over their lives; and 35% had higher involvement with education, training or employment.

7.4 At the same time they are struggling to meet the demand for their services, often without adequate funding and resources⁶.

7.5 Young people are struggling to deal with the problems of economic recession and the stresses and strains these bring. Those in debt, struggling with the benefit system, with housing problems or with emotional and mental health problems become further removed from education, employment and training. The longer this persists the greater that estrangement becomes and gets passed through generations.

7.6 Youth Access is currently working with three YIACS to develop better evidence of how these services can make a significant contribution to this combination of young people's social, mental and physical health needs. The pilots are trialling the use of a Department of Health nationally validated outcome tool to enable us to collect robust data about the outcomes for young people participating in this project and uniquely the project is also securing some effective partnerships with GPs. Given GPs increasing role in service commissioning, the evidence from this project will hopefully enable us to demonstrate to the GP community the benefits of supporting the YIACS model of provision. The findings from this project will be available in late Spring 2011

7.7 Investment in targeted young people's services, such as YIACS, is not only a highly effective response to the immediate demands of economic recession, but also a way of building in resilience to its longer term consequences and to future economic downturns.

Youth Access 2010

⁶ *'Under Strain' the effects of the recession on young people and the organisations that provide advice and counselling to them.* Youth Access April 2010