

Youth Access, the national membership association of young people's information, advice and counselling services welcomes the opportunity to respond to the DWP's proposals outlined in 'In work, better off'.

Over the past few years, Youth Access has produced a number of reports offering evidence of how services can be better structured to meet the needs of 16-25 year olds. It is our view that any attempts to tackle unemployment in this age group must consider how services can be built around their specific needs. Key areas we wish to highlight are those concerned with creating improvements in this group's access to social welfare advice and also their access to psychological therapies. It is our view that the barriers to employment for a core group of young adults cannot be tackled without an holistic view of their needs and a response that is able to address this.

We can provide detailed evidence to support our views. Some of our evidence is the result of our partnership with the Legal Services Research Council (LSRC), which has enabled us to draw upon their findings from the Civil and Social Justice Survey.

Our evidence suggests that young adults aged 18-24 and at risk of long-term unemployment are also particularly vulnerable to a range of social welfare and mental and emotional health problems. These problems are likely to operate as a continuing barrier to employment and will frequently persist and escalate if left unresolved.

We have attached some of the available published evidence, but would wish to draw your attention here to the following points:

- The level of need for social welfare advice i.e. advice to tackle problems with for example housing, homelessness, debt and benefits among young people is relatively high compared to that among other age groups.
- Young people's advice needs are unique in their range and pattern – social welfare problems are often inextricably linked to emotional, personal, health & practical problems.
- Young people's problems tend to be relatively complex and severe and they are particularly prone to multiple problems compared to groups over 25 years.
- Housing and homelessness problems are the most common reason that disadvantaged young adults first contact services and the most common presenting problem at youth information, advice and counselling services.
- The cost to individuals, health and public services of civil justice problems is very significant – estimated to amount to at least £13 billion over a 3½ year period.
- A large proportion of individual young people suffer from physical and/or stress-related ill health as a result of social welfare problems and they spend more time worrying about their problems than other age group, with many suffering a severe loss of confidence.

- Social welfare problems frequently
 - lead to young people losing income, housing or employment;
 - create significant barriers to studying, working, enjoying and achieving;
 - Make it difficult for many young people to feel involved and respected in their communities.
- There is growing evidence of a link between social welfare problems such as homelessness and crime, leading these young adults at continuing and further risk of long-term unemployment

When young people are able to access good quality legal advice the evidence demonstrates that they are able to resolve their problems, often leading to dramatic improvements in their lives, including their access to education and employment. For the past 2½ years Youth Access has been piloting new models of access to social welfare advice for 13-25 year olds. The early findings from this work demonstrate the significant gains for young people in having access to better quality social welfare advice.¹

However, nationally it remains the case that young people are less likely to obtain good professional rights-based advice than other age groups, particularly relating to problems in the main areas of social welfare law. The research tells us that young people aged 16-25

- Tend to have relatively low awareness of their rights and responsibilities, or of how to resolve their problems.
- Are reluctant to go to mainstream advice services, such as CABx and solicitors.
- State a marked preference for face to face advice. They are less likely than other age groups to access advice and information by telephone or via the internet.
- Prefer to access social welfare advice in existing youth provision, e.g. a youth information, advice and counselling service. This enables them to receive advice alongside a range of other services that they may need, e.g. counselling or sexual health services.
- State a preference for getting social welfare advice from either youth workers with good legal knowledge or advisers specialising in working with young people.

The YIACS response to needs

Youth Access has long-championed the models and responses made by youth information, advice and counselling services (YIACS). In recent years these services have also received support and endorsement in other reports. This includes the Social Exclusion Unit's report 'Transitions: young adults with complex needs', and more recently the Mental Health Foundation's report 'Listen Up'

¹ *Rights to Access Project: Interim evaluation report*, Michael Bell Associates (MBA) for Youth Access, February 2007.

which focused on improving access and responses to the mental and emotional health needs of 16 -25 year olds.

It is important to also note that in addition to the issues related to young people's social welfare advice needs set out above; the age group 16-25 years is often a time when mental health problems first arise. For most young people in this age range there continue to be gaps and difficulties in accessing age-appropriate psychological therapies for common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, as well as some difficulties for more severe problems. As the SEU noted in its report *"At present the provision of psychological therapy and counselling services is patchy and is funded through a wide range of 'stitched together' routes"*.

Youth Access' membership of youth information, advice and counselling services (YIACS) understand these difficulties very well. YIACS provide a range of services in an 'under one roof' model of service delivery. This enables them to provide a package of helping interventions capable of addressing a wide spectrum of needs: from housing, homelessness, debt and benefit problems through to therapeutic help with relationship issues, self-harm, depression and identity problems. The majority of YIACS also work across the age range 13-25 years thus cutting through some of the difficulties young people face in accessing many statutory and other services. Too many older adolescents and young adults find themselves squeezed between services designed more around the needs of children and those which are primarily concerned with the needs of adults.

Ironically despite the wider acceptance of the strengths of the YIACS model, these services' ability to continue to provide for the 19-25 year age group is now being put under further strain in a number of local areas by the development of current youth policy. Policy has now determined that most young people will only continue to benefit from access to some of the most intensive support until they reach 19 years.

We believe 19 is an arbitrary cut off point that pays little attention to the needs of young people at the greatest risk. Our knowledge of brain development and the wider impact of social and economic change on 19-25 year olds is increasing and policy needs to be more sensitive to this age and stage of development. We therefore urge the DWP to ensure it paves the way to a smoother transition between services at 19+; ensuring young adults up to 25 years can benefit from more age-appropriate provision shaped around an holistic view of their needs.