

youth ACCESS

to information, advice and counselling



Youth Access advice skills training at Streetwise, Newcastle

The youth advice workforce

now and in the future

This briefing is for:

- **policy makers and planners with an interest in: the young people's workforce; Integrated Youth Support Services (particularly Information, Advice & Guidance); Community Legal Services**
- **front-line services wanting to develop their rights-based advice services to young people**

1 Key issues

- The level of rights-based advice provided by the youth advice workforce needs to be raised so that young people receive an effective response from services.
- The technical quality of advice provided by practitioners in the youth sector needs to be improved to ensure young people receive advice that is accurate.
- The lack of a qualification in youth advice work needs to be urgently addressed in order to develop the competence of the workforce.
- Investment is required to improve access to affordable, accredited training for practitioners.
- Clearer career progression routes for youth advice workers are needed to aid recruitment and retention.
- Practitioners in the mainstream adult advice sector need to develop their skills in engaging young people in order to make their services more accessible.

2 Why is this an important issue?

Developing the quality of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) on offer to young people is a Government priority. A new IAG Strategy for young people is expected in Autumn 2009 with the development of the IAG workforce likely to be a key theme.

Currently, 16–24-year-olds experience over 2 million rights-related problems requiring advice each year. However, at least 1 million young people are left to cope with their problems unassisted, reflecting the alarming gap between young people's needs for advice and the capacity of services to respond to those needs.

The current recession is set to exacerbate this situation further with a sharp rise in demand for advice from disadvantaged young people on rights-based issues such as debt, welfare benefits, homelessness and employment.¹

Despite their general effectiveness in reaching out to young people in need, too few services in the youth sector possess the expertise to provide competent advice on social welfare rights-based issues. Meanwhile existing mainstream rights-based advice services (such as Citizens Advice Bureaux), which tend to have the technical competence, typically lack the knowledge and skills required to adequately engage with young people.

Policy makers, planners and providers wanting to meet young people's social welfare information and advice needs require a better understanding of the current state of the youth advice workforce and what needs to be done to address identified gaps.

3 Introduction

The **purpose of this briefing** is to set out the current state of the youth advice workforce, identify key issues that need addressing and propose a series of recommendations to enable the development of a youth advice workforce fit for the 21st. century and the challenges ahead.

This briefing focuses on the element of the youth workforce providing social welfare rights-based advice to young people (aged 13-25) as one of the primary functions of their job. 'Rights-based advice' is defined as advice and information provided to members of the public about their civil rights, entitlements and responsibilities under the law. This typically includes advice on housing, homelessness, welfare benefits, money and debt, education rights, employment rights, immigration, discrimination and domestic violence.

Context

The development of Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS) is changing the way services work together at local level. A variety of structures are emerging as local authorities develop strategies to deliver key aspects of policy, including Information Advice and Guidance (IAG), Targeted Youth Support, Positive Activities and the 14-19 agenda. The ambition is both to increase the quality of services and improve outcomes for young people.

Alongside local structural change, the youth workforce is also faced with the need to adapt to new integrated working patterns and systems, such as Common Assessment and information sharing. This new context requires a workforce that is 'fit for purpose'; providing a unique opportunity to 'ensure that qualifications, training and progression routes are accessible to all sections of the workforce'.ⁱⁱ

Reform of the youth workforce is being led by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and offers the potential for new roles and functions to take their place in the emerging training, qualification and workforce map. This is to be particularly welcomed in the case of job roles which have fallen outside traditional and formally recognised areas of the youth workforce. These are roles which have often emerged within the voluntary sector in direct response to young people's needs; rights-based advice work with young people is one example. A better understanding of how youth advice workers fit in the overall context of youth workforce reform will help ensure future practitioners are better trained to meet young people's needs.

There is a wealth of evidence regarding young people's needs for rights-based advice and their difficulties in finding services and practitioners properly equipped to meet their needs.ⁱⁱⁱ Not only is the context now right to

improve workforce planning and training in this area, but many of the tools are also now in place to take this forward, including relevant National Occupational Standards.

Data sources

Except where otherwise stated, this briefing cites data drawn from a robust piece of quantitative research conducted by the Legal Services Research Centre for the National Occupational Standards for Legal Advice Standards Steering Group in 2006. A total of 2,355 respondents working in the legal advice sector were interviewed for the study. The main survey findings relating to the wider legal advice sector are to be found in *Legal Advice Sector Workforce: Analysis of Survey Findings*, by Smith, M., and Tam, T., Legal Services Research Centre, September 2006. A total of 130 youth advice agencies participated in the study. Findings relating to the youth advice sector are the result of secondary analysis of survey data for Youth Access. Further data and details of the study are contained in an appendix to this report entitled *Key Data on the Youth Advice Workforce*, available at www.youthaccess.org.uk/publications.

Workforce Data shows that: 46.4% of youth advice workers say they either always or very often work beyond their agreed hours.

4 The current shape of the youth advice sector

Who provides rights-based advice to young people?

A range of professions and job roles are involved, including:

- **Youth advice workers** – this group is explicitly employed to provide advice to young people and includes both generic youth advice workers, providing a combination of rights-based and non-rights-based advice, and specialist rights-based youth advice workers, typically focusing on housing, welfare benefits, employment rights, debt and/or education rights.
- **Youth workers** – this includes generic youth workers who often provide some advice to young people in the course of their work. While this group makes up the majority of the youth workforce providing information and advice on personal and health issues, few are competent to provide in-depth advice on social welfare issues.

- **Personal Advisors (PAs)** – drawn from the Connexions workforce, PAs may give careers and generic advice, while a small minority give more in-depth advice on rights-based issues. Most PAs are likely to need some rights-based knowledge, e.g. on financial and housing matters as a minimum.
- **Vulnerable young people workers** – this includes a variety of youth support workers working with particular groups of young people, e.g. care leavers; young people at risk of offending; refugees and asylum seekers; and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or with mental and wider physical and sexual health issues. As with youth workers and some PAs, many of this group need some knowledge of social welfare rights-based issues, but few are competent to provide in-depth help.
- **Solicitors** – there is a small number of solicitors working in law centres, Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) and legal practices who specialise in advising young people.
- **Youth information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS)** are mainly located in the voluntary and community sector and offer a combination of services to support young people typically aged 13-25 years with a range of often complex problems and needs. Youth Access estimates that there are around 350 YIACS in England and Wales; the majority are Youth Access' members.
- **Mainstream advice agencies**, such as CABx, provide generic advice to the general population. Most neither target young people nor have particular skills and expertise in working with them.
- **Connexions and youth centres** within the local authority and in the Third Sector are also places to which young people may turn for advice. However, it is difficult to quantify the level of rights-based advice available.

Workforce Data shows that: 14.7% of workers in youth advice agencies report having a long-term illness or disability.

Workforce Data shows that: Youth advice workers have very high 'pride' ratings regarding the work they are doing and the organisations they work for. They are also very likely to say that they think their organisations are well managed.

How big is the sector?

Based on the data available,^{iv} Youth Access estimates there are around 600 paid workers and 1,500 volunteers in England and Wales providing rights-based advice to young people as one of the primary functions of their job. This includes those providing a combination of rights-based and non-rights-based advice, but excludes those providing advice solely on non-rights-based issues, such as relationships, bullying, health and careers. The figures also include advisers based in the mainstream legal advice sector, e.g. working in CABx and Law Centres, who are focused on meeting the needs of young people, but excludes advisers in these settings who may only advise young people from time to time.

In addition, there is a very large number of other workers who will play some lesser role in providing rights-based advice and/or information to young people, including many of the estimated 7,500 Connexions PAs,^v 4,000 professional youth workers, 17,000 youth support workers and 500,000 volunteers working with young people.^{vi}

Which agencies provide advice to young people?

The youth advice workforce is located in agencies as varied as their job roles, but the following are the most common:

Definitions of 'Information' and 'Advice'

The following definitions have been agreed by Youth Access' network of 200 members and are included in the Quality Standards for Youth Information, Advice, Counselling and Support Services:

Information is the provision of systems and processes which make comprehensive, up-to-date and accessible information available to young people. There is no assessment or recommendation about the information's appropriateness, and decisions, choices and action are left with the young person. Information work can include signposting to other services or providing young people with resources to discover their own answers to their questions and needs.

Advice is concerned with helping a young person to change or cope with practical issues and problems. It seeks to widen the young person's choices by providing accurate and relevant information about their rights, options and potential courses of action. The advice worker may identify and recommend ways forward, but decisions and choices are left to the young person. Any action agreed by the young person may be undertaken by, with, or on behalf of the young person.

5 Key issues and recommendations

1 Expanding the breadth and the levels of advice offered by the youth sector

The issues:

- Some agencies in the youth sector – including the Connexions service – lack clarity in how they define their advice services, potentially causing confusion in terms of expectations, both amongst staff and users. Generally, however, the level of advice available to young people on social welfare rights-based issues is not as high as that available to the general adult population.
- Currently, the majority of youth advice workers (68%) provide general advice across a range of subjects.^{vii} The most common social welfare rights-based issues dealt with by youth advice services are: housing and homelessness (on which 69% of Youth Access' members give advice); benefits/money/debt (61%); education rights (52%); and employment rights (50%).^{viii}
- Youth advice workers are more likely to offer general advice and less likely to specialise in a single area of advice compared to the 'not for profit' legal advice sector as a whole, i.e. providers such as CABx and other adult advice services in the public and voluntary sectors.
- There is a paucity of youth professionals performing an advocacy role, despite Youth Access' research indicating that young people want and need help that goes beyond basic advice if they are to successfully resolve their more complex problems.^{ix}
- There is anecdotal evidence of a widespread lack of confidence on the part of many advisers in the youth sector in their ability to effectively challenge authorities on behalf of their clients, for example in relation to decisions on benefit entitlement and homelessness applications. This is partly due to a lack of training and support in the provision of rights-based advice, as opposed to personal and health advice and information.
- There is also evidence that youth organisations are poor at identifying the limits of their competence and that they make insufficient numbers of referrals to more specialist advice services.^x

Youth Access recommends:

- The case for a competent youth advice workforce – one able to provide effective advice, assistance and representation from generalist through to specialist levels – is overwhelming and is backed by Youth Access' extensive research.
- The youth sector needs advice case workers who are not only able to deliver basic advice on matters involving rights, but can also advocate effectively for young people and help them challenge decisions where necessary. The workforce needs to have the confidence and professionalism to meet this challenge, if young people are to secure their rights and entitlements to goods and services.
- A properly defined and recognised youth advice workforce, respected as a discreet profession within the larger youth workforce, will enable other parts of the youth sector to define the limits of their advice-giving role, and improve their ability to identify and refer issues appropriately.
- The wider youth workforce, i.e. including youth professionals who do not view themselves as having an explicit advice-giving role, needs to develop its ability to identify rights-based issues, provide accurate initial advice or information and make timely referrals to more specialist services when they reach the limits of their competence. This could be achieved by embedding training on basic advice skills and rights-based knowledge within existing courses for youth workers and other youth professionals.

Workforce Data shows that: Only 6.8% of workers in the youth advice workforce provide representation for their clients, compared with 27.8% of all workers in the wider advice sector.

Workforce Data shows that: The most important factors cited by youth advice workers as providing job satisfaction are feeling that the work was worthwhile and that they were helping people, with salary coming far down the list.

2 Improving the technical quality of advice in the youth sector

The issues:

- While the youth sector rightly places an emphasis on the youth-friendly aspects of its services, this is frequently not matched by an equivalent emphasis on securing the technical quality and accuracy of advice.
- Systems such as detailed case recording and file reviews, common throughout the mainstream advice sector, are often absent in a youth advice sector that has its core roots in the more informal approaches of youth work, rather than the more technically-based legal advice sector.

- Furthermore, while there is an absence of hard data on the availability of technical/case supervision, as opposed to other forms of supervision in the youth sector, anecdotally there is some evidence to suggest there are significant gaps.

Youth Access recommends:

- Young people's services need to assess the quality of their rights-based advice provision against an appropriate standard. At present this is the Community Legal Service Quality Mark, although this may be replaced by a new standard currently under development as part of the Working Together for Advice Project.^{xi}
- The sector needs to drive up the technical knowledge of those providing advice by exploring the use of:
 - internal and external technical casework supervision;
 - mentoring or buddying schemes with specialist legal caseworkers;
 - peer review of case files.
- Many of these solutions require far closer partnership working between youth advice agencies and

mainstream legal advice agencies. Some of the most effective partnerships witnessed by Youth Access have been built on the delivery of existing legal advice outreach services by mainstream advice agencies in youth advice agency settings.

- There is a need for greater use of distinct casework and line management supervision systems, in common with the supervision arrangements for counsellors. The sector needs to build its capacity to provide effective casework supervision, undertake competency assessments and develop the advocacy role of staff.

Workforce Data shows that: 45.9% of youth advice workers receive line management supervision at least once a month, 27.1% quarterly and 14.6% less often than quarterly. However, a further 14% report not receiving supervision at all.

Workforce Data shows that: Only 30.7% of youth advice workers have received training in specific areas of the law, such as Welfare Benefits and Housing.

3 Developing a qualification in youth advice work

The issues:

- The development and approval of National Occupational Standards for the Legal Advice Sector (NOS for legal advice) has been a major milestone for the rights-based advice sector. The NOS are hosted by Skills for Justice and, significantly, since July 2009, the approved units have included the specialist knowledge and skills required for providing rights-based advice to young people.
- Despite the fact that many workers in the youth sector currently provide help on social welfare issues such as housing, benefits and debt, there is little awareness within wider youth sector workforce and training policy of the existence of the NOS for legal advice.
- Skills for Justice have been commissioned by the legal advice sector to research the current labour market, develop a sector qualifications strategy and an occupational map leading to the development of Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) Units based on the NOS for legal advice.
- While Youth Access has developed a unique national programme of training in youth advice work, which has been mapped against the NVQ Frameworks for Legal Advice at levels 2, 3 and 4, this is currently not accredited.
- The Open University has recently developed a generic NVQ in advice work, however there is currently no

qualification that equips workers to be competent in delivering legal advice to young people.

Youth Access recommends:

- Funding needs to be made available to enable the sector to work with Skills for Justice to convert the NOS for legal advice into 'fit for purpose' NVQ / QCFs for youth advice.
- A competency framework for the role of youth advice worker needs to be developed and existing and future training provision mapped against the framework.
- The DCSF and the CWDC must ensure any new qualification in providing legal advice to young people is part of the Integrated Qualifications Framework and underpinned by the Common Core of Skills for those working across the Children's and Young People's workforce.
- Any new qualification for youth advice must be mapped against other youth workforce qualifications, including those for youth workers, Personal Advisers, and other professionals working with vulnerable young people and the youth justice sector.
- Skills for Justice must ensure the functions of youth advice work are included in any functional mapping of the children's and young people's workforce in the justice sector.

4 Improving access to training and qualification routes

The issues:

- Many youth advice workers are graduates and/or hold vocational qualifications in various subjects, with youth work qualifications the most prevalent. Youth advice workers are considerably more likely than other parts of the advice sector to be working towards or have completed NVQs; commonly NVQs 3 and 4 in youth work and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG). Yet none of these qualifications equip staff to provide competent social welfare rights-based advice.
- Youth advice workers are substantially less likely to gain vocational or professional qualifications related to giving advice than the rest of the legal advice sector. Workers in youth advice agencies receive less training in specific areas of law than workers in the not for profit sector as a whole, yet conversely, far more training in working with specific client groups. In the absence of a formal youth advice qualification, youth advice workers typically have been trained 'on the job'.
- While organisations in the youth sector are overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of training and qualifications – and in many instances there is an established pattern of accessing qualifications – cost and the geographical location of courses act as key barriers to accessing training and qualifications.

Youth Access recommends:

- In addition to skills-based training (e.g. on generic communication skills and skills in working with young people), wider policy on the development of the youth workforce needs to better reflect the requirement for staff to access specialist knowledge-based training. There needs to be a range of strategies to ensure access to different training and qualification routes.
- There needs to be more flexible funding to enable access to training. For example, funding under 'Train to Gain' is available to those with no previous qualifications or up to the equivalent of level 3, but is not generally suitable to the youth advice sector where there are a high number of graduates, or equivalent, who need support to access training to move sideways.
- Since youth advice workers are less numerous relative to the numbers of youth workers locally, funding is required to support training at a national level, but with the capacity to enable local delivery. This would create desirable economies of scale and support many providers in the voluntary sector where affordability and ease of access are of particular concern.

Workforce Data shows that: 41.5% of youth advice workers have a degree and 7.3% a Masters degree. 18.2% have completed and 4.0% are working towards vocational or professional qualifications.

5 Developing clearer career progression routes

The issues:

- Most people working in the youth advice sector initially chose to work generally with young people without identifying advice-giving as a specific role. Many begin by volunteering as youth workers or providing information in youth information, advice and counselling services. The majority of youth advice workers (53.6%) say they 'entered the legal advice sector almost by chance'.
- Job satisfaction levels are higher in the youth advice sector than in the rest of the legal advice sector, with 84.2% of workers either very or fairly satisfied with their current role in meeting their career aspirations. However, a majority (57.9%) report some barriers to meeting their career aspirations: lack of funding or insecure funding and insufficient career opportunities are the most commonly cited barriers.
- The legal advice sector as a whole has identified its rapidly ageing workforce as a serious problem. This phenomenon affects the youth advice sector, but to a far lesser extent: whilst less than 0.5% of paid staff in Citizens Advice Bureaux are aged under 25, 7.4% of

workers from Youth Access members fall into this age bracket. Nevertheless, there is a need to bring younger people into the sector in the longer term, as well as an immediate need to contribute to the provision of training, apprenticeships and jobs for young people affected by the recession.

Youth Access recommends:

- National policy on Information, Advice and Guidance needs to drive better recognition of young people's social welfare rights-based advice needs. Improved recognition will lead to an increase in services and workers able to respond appropriately, which together with appropriate training and qualification routes will ensure a clearer and higher profile career pathway.
- Advice work generally – and youth advice work in particular – needs to be promoted as a specific career choice both for school leavers and for graduates.
- The Government's response to the recession should include a consideration of the potential role of advice agencies as providers of apprenticeships, training and jobs for young people.

6 Developing the skills of practitioners in the mainstream adult advice sector

The issues:

- Youth Access' research shows young people rarely access mainstream advice agencies for advice.^{xii} There are a number of reasons for this, including advisers' lack of skills in engaging young people. The situation can also be exacerbated by lack of legal knowledge specific to young people's unique set of problems and, occasionally, by negative attitudes displayed towards young people.
- There has been some progress in Law Centres and, to a lesser extent, in CABx, some of which have shown interest in developing their services for young people, for example by employing young volunteers or establishing targeted services.
- Where specific initiatives have taken place in the mainstream sector, then young people's perceptions of these agencies as being 'unfriendly' has partly changed and there have been improvements in the numbers accessing services.

Youth Access recommends:

- Advisers in mainstream advice agencies need to improve their skills in working with young people. Youth Access has developed a pilot course in conjunction

with the Law Centres Federation examining good practice in working with young people. Similar training needs to be rolled out across the legal advice sector.

- Agencies wishing to improve their accessibility and services to young people should consider adopting forthcoming good practice guidelines Youth Access plans to produce for mainstream advice providers.
- Where appropriate, mainstream advice agencies should seek opportunities to enable young people to help them improve their services to young people. This may involve establishing a consultative group of young people to advise on access issues.
- Mainstream advice agencies and youth advice agencies need to work more closely at local level to share expertise, develop joint services and improve referral relationships.

Workforce Data shows that: Only 0.4% of legal advisers and lawyers in the private sector, 4.3% in the not for profit advice sector and 2.4% of advisers in the statutory sector say that young people are one of the client groups they target.

Interested in the issues raised in this briefing?

Youth Access is keen to work with any agency wishing to develop its competence to provide good quality rights-based advice to young people and can provide training for practitioners. Please contact Helen Stollar, Advice Services Development Officer – Training, on 020 8772 9900 or email Helen@youthaccess.org.uk

Notes

- i See *The impact of the recession on young people – and on their needs for advice and counselling*, Youth Access, 2009.
- ii *2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy*, DCSF, December 2008.
- iii See, for example, *The Advice Needs of Young People – The Evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access, 2009.
- iv Youth Access has based its estimate on data from the 2006 Legal Advice Sector Workforce Survey, workforce data on the youth sector and Youth Access' data on its membership. Further research would be required to identify a more precise figure.
- v *Occupational Summary Sheet: Connexions Personal Advisers*, Children's Workforce Development Council, 2007/08.

- vi *NYA Guide to Youth Work*, The National Youth Agency, 2007.
- vii Data source: 2006 Legal Advice Sector Workforce Survey.
- viii Data source: Youth Access membership data.
- ix *Rights to Access: meeting young people's needs for advice*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access, 2002.
- x Ibid.
- xi Working Together for Advice is a multi-strand project managed by Advice Services Alliance and funded by the Big Lottery Fund. The project's partners are: AdviceUK, Age Concern, Citizens Advice, Law Centres Federation and Youth Access. Workforce Development & Training is one of eight workstreams in the project.
- xii See, e.g., Kenrick 2002 op. cit. and *Locked Out*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access, 2007.



About Youth Access

Youth Access is the national membership organisation for a network of 200 youth information, advice and counselling services.

Through its members, Youth Access is one of the largest providers of youth advice and counselling services in the UK, dealing with over 1 million enquiries a year on issues as diverse as sexual health, mental health, relationships, homelessness, benefits and debt.

Youth Access provides the training, resources, research, campaigning and other infrastructure support to ensure high quality services exist to meet young people's diverse needs.

Youth Access has published a number of reports on advice, covering: young people's needs; advice-seeking behaviour and access; effective models of delivery; the impact of advice. All our reports are available to download from our website.

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