

Consultation on the 2010 Sector Skills Assessment Lifelong Learning UK

A response from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)

September 2010

Introduction

1. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) is the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in England. A diverse network of over 170 national voluntary youth organisations and regional and local youth networks, NCVYS has been working since 1936 to raise the profile of youth work, share good practice and influence policy that has an impact on young people and the organisations that support them.¹
2. The NCVYS network reflects the diverse range of voluntary organisations working with young people at community, local, regional and national level. Most of our members offer opportunities to engage in challenging activities or develop creative talents. They also support young people to become active in their communities and offer opportunities for their voice to be heard. Some offer interventions to prevent or tackle specific issues such as homelessness or offending behaviour. Others offer counselling, advice, guidance and information. All contribute to young people's personal and social development; some also engage with spiritual development.
3. For more information on any element of this paper, please contact NCVYS's Policy Officer, Dominic Weinberg on 020 7278 1041.

¹ A list of NCVYS members can be found here:
http://ncvys.org.uk/Our_Members.html

Context

4. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) welcomes the opportunity to comment on Lifelong Learning UK's (LLUK) annual Sector Skills Assessment (SSA) to understand current and future national skills needs and the drivers of skills demand in the lifelong learning sector.
5. NCVYS would like to submit this response outlining what it believes are the skills shortages and gaps of the voluntary and community youth sector (VCYS) in England, along with recommendations for addressing these issues. As many of our members are also involved in training delivery, we will also make comment with regards to skills shortages and needs of work-based learning providers.
6. NCVYS has reviewed its response to the Sector Qualifications Strategy of the Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) in 2008. NCVYS would like LLUK to refer back to this response and view the comments alongside this submission.²
7. The voluntary and community workforce is a diverse and mixed workforce, comprising qualified and unqualified staff, part-time and full-time staff, and voluntary and paid staff. The report from CWDC, *A picture worth millions: State of the young people's workforce report*³, shows that there are a large number of people volunteering in the youth and community workforce across England. The report estimated that 523,000 volunteers deliver youth work and that there are 77,000 paid youth work staff. Therefore there are varied skills needs across the workforce e.g. the skills shortages for volunteers will be different to that of a professionally qualified youth worker.

Key comments and recommendations

8. As the CWDC report has confirmed, volunteers make up the majority of the workforce in the youth work sector and it should therefore be a priority of LLUK to meet their skills needs. The members of this diverse workforce have varying levels of academic ability, from graduates to volunteers with literacy and numeracy problems. Furthermore, the interest in achieving accreditation varies e.g. young volunteers may find accreditation more attractive than a parent volunteer.
9. NCVYS members find that funding and a lack of time continue to be the biggest barrier in accessing training and other development opportunities. Volunteers need flexible and accessible learning options that do not discriminate against those with little time to spare, and should receive induction, supervision and, if possible, mentoring. During induction, the basic skills and knowledge for working with young people should be covered, including first aid, health and safety and safeguarding. Those interested in training should have access to a course based on the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge.
10. For volunteers interested in accreditation and qualifications the current ABC Level 1 Certificate in Youth Work may not be appropriate due to its requirement to undertake 180 guided learning hours (GLH). An Entry Level qualification in youth work, with a lower GLH requirement, but with the necessary basic skills and knowledge requirements (including safeguarding, which is currently missing from the Level 1 Certificate) would meet the needs of volunteers, as well as those new to youth work or considering working in the sector. The Level 1 qualification is a key component of programmes offered by NCVYS

² NCVYS response to Lifelong Learning UK Sector Qualifications Strategy Action Plan Consultation, NCVYS (June 2008)

<http://ncvys.org.uk/UserFiles/NCVYS%20Sector%20Qualifications%20Strategy%20response%20June%2008.pdf>

³ Children's Workforce Development Council (2010) A picture worth millions: State of the young people's workforce report http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/assets/0000/7827/Executive_summary_SYPW_report.pdf

members, including the Youth Steps programme from the Prince's Trust. NCVYS would be keen to involve such members in any review of the level 1 qualification.

Recommendation: LLUK should create a specific plan to meet the skills needs of volunteers. LLUK should assess the demand for an entry level youth work qualification and review the Level 1 qualification.

11. NCVYS has previously given feedback to LLUK regarding the current youth work apprenticeship programme.⁴ We hope that a new framework can be introduced and improvements made. There is also a need to support those who might benefit from an Apprenticeship but who do not yet have the skills to begin one, so skills delivery which focuses only on outcomes such as qualifications is inadequate. Pre-apprenticeship programmes are valuable: they aim to remove the barriers that prevent individuals from learning, such as low confidence, and poor literacy and numeracy skills. Such programmes could include occupational related training and key skills, as well as careers advice to ensure that individuals are pursuing the apprenticeship most suited to their needs and abilities. The possibility of gaining certificates and awards at this stage should also be considered. Many voluntary and community sector providers already offer this holistic approach.

Recommendation: LLUK should make improvements to the current youth work apprenticeship programme and consider support for potential new apprentices.

12. The lifelong learning sector needs to use creative ways to develop the skills and knowledge of volunteers and staff, such as learning circles, mentoring and working more collaboratively with others. The uncertain economic outlook makes it all the more important to maximise the sector's workforce development resources.

Recommendation: LLUK should support activities, often undertaken by infrastructure bodies, which further the use of creative workforce development approaches.

13. In July 2009 NCVYS submitted a response to LLUK with regards to the youth work manifesto.⁵ Within this, NCVYS suggested a review of the higher education youth and community work courses ought to take place, including research in to graduate destinations, to ensure courses are appropriately equipping professional youth workers with the skills and knowledge for their role. NCVYS would be keen to learn if employers have raised any concern with regards to whether youth work graduates are equipped with the necessary skills.

Recommendation: LLUK should assess whether there is demand from employers to undertake a review of the higher education youth and community work courses.

14. Some NCVYS members continue to request for a fast track route to become a professionally qualified youth worker and for greater recognition of experience. LLUK's Sector Skills Agreement of 2008 proposed to explore a potential General Professional Recognition Learning and Skills Scheme and NCVYS would encourage LLUK to still explore this scheme. Suggestions from NCVYS members to date which could form part of the scheme design include: accrediting prior learning and experience; using the Youth Professional Status standards developed by CWDC; including a skills test which would need to be passed to award professional status as a youth worker.

⁴ Available from NCVYS, please email Nichola Brown, nichola@ncvys.org.uk

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Recommendation: LLUK should consider the introduction of a General Professional Recognition Learning and Skills Scheme

15. Youth practitioners who have completed degrees in other disciplines (e.g. youth arts workers) currently need to additionally study youth and community work in order to become a qualified youth worker. There is a need to look at easier routes for them to gain youth work skills and qualify as youth workers.

Recommendation: LLUK should work with NCVYS to explore solutions to make it easier for other youth practitioners to gain youth work skills.

16. Some NCVYS members would like a Level 4 QCF youth work qualification, with the only equivalent being an Open University Level 4 Certificate in Working with Young People.

Recommendation: LLUK should assess further the demand for a level 4 QCF youth work qualification.

17. There are a number of particular skills gaps that NCVYS is concerned about:
- Understanding commissioning.
 - Developing supervision practice and reflective practice.
 - Child protection and safeguarding – there are significant gaps in training provision and a lack of understanding of the requirements in levels of training needed.
 - Managing volunteers and fundraising e.g. sourcing funding for a youth project.
 - The spiritual development of young people – faith organisations employ a large number of workers and volunteers in the delivery of youth services.
 - General skills e.g. team work, managing a team, project management.
 - Assessor and verifier skills – with the sector becoming an increasingly important provider of training delivery, these skills will help increase capacity in the sector to deliver key programmes such as youth work apprenticeships. Training providers have indicated to NCVYS that the reason for the lack of take-up of assessor units and qualifications is that they believe that employers are unclear of the key role assessor skills play in capacity building within their workforce. Reliance on external organisations providing assessment is costly and can prevent employers from developing their workforce. NCVYS would like to work with LLUK to explore creating promotional opportunities.
 - Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector training – the current assessment criteria and guidance does not cater to experiences in the informal learning sector.
 - Optional units connected to global youth work for youth work qualifications.

Recommendation: LLUK to explore these skills gaps.

Further comments

18. NCVYS would like to LLUK to review the evaluation information of the Progress project when it becomes available. The project is managed by a NCVYS led consortium on behalf of CWDC's Young People's Workforce Programme Board (of which LLUK is a national partner). Progress seeks to deliver 25,000 accredited training opportunities to staff and volunteers working front-line with young people, between September 2010 and March 2011. It is therefore a key project improving the skills of youth work practitioners and one in which LLUK could learn from and possibly use in any subsequent plan for solutions to skills gaps.⁶

Recommendation: LLUK to review evaluation information from the Progress project to inform the SSA.

⁶ Further information about the project is available, please email Nichola Brown, nichola@ncvys.org.uk