
Policy briefing



'Youth Matters' Green Paper on young people

Introduction

1. On 18 July 2005, the government published 'Youth matters', its long awaited Green Paper on youth. This aims to bring together cross-departmental thinking on policy for young people and to outline proposals to reform services for them.
2. The Green Paper sets out proposals for young people (focusing on those aged 13 to 19) in four areas:
 - empowering young people to engage in positive activities;
 - fostering youth volunteering and community involvement;
 - improving information, advice and guidance for young people; and
 - supporting young people at risk.
3. The Green Paper is an extremely important document for voluntary and community organisations working with young people. It is likely to have widespread impact on their relationships with local and national government, and with young people themselves. This briefing paper summarises the proposals that are likely to have most impact on voluntary and community organisations.

Background

4. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) announced it would develop a Green Paper on youth in the Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners¹ in June 2004.
5. As a cross-departmental initiative, this Paper attempts to bring together government thinking and address gaps in some current initiatives which impact on young people. In particular, it was felt the Every Child Matters: change for children programme of reform neglected to address the specific needs of the older age group. So the proposals in the Green Paper link in with the five outcomes for young people (being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and economic well-being) and the local authority-based children's trust structure as the focus for delivering youth policy.

Proposals

¹ See: www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/5yearstrategy

Empowering young people: things to do and places to go

6. The proposals in this area are based on three premises: That young people, their parents and communities want more places to go and positive things to do; that young people are not interested in the current choice of activities; and this would lead to young people being less likely to get into trouble.

Young people as consumers

7. In delivering things to do and places to go, the government wants to put the purchasing power directly in the hands of young people. Two ideas on how to achieve this are given:
 - Opportunity cards: these will give discounts and access to a range of things to do and places to go. Young people, parents, and (in the case of disadvantaged young people) central government will be able to top up the cards. However, government subsidies will be withheld from young people engaging in unacceptable behaviour and the card suspended or withdrawn. Young people may also be able to top up their cards through volunteering, achieving excellence at school or college, or reaching milestones in their progress. Local authorities will develop the card with support from government. It is expected that local authorities will eventually fund positive activities for young people by topping up their opportunity cards. The card will also serve as an identity card, replacing the myriad of identification for young people. The opportunity cards are to be piloted by eight local authorities from 2006 to 2008.
 - Opportunity fund: each local authority will be given a fund that young people can decide to spend on projects they want. This is expected to be in addition to existing resources for youth services, and may be in the region of £10 to 11 million per year, about £30,000 for each local authority area.

Guidance and legislation

8. The quality of things to do and places to go for young people is to be driven up by legislation and statutory guidance. Legislation will clarify local authorities' duty to secure positive activities for young people. Statutory guidance will set out new national standards for activities for young people, which will include:
 - access to two hours per week of sporting activity;
 - access to two hours per week of other constructive activities in clubs, youth groups or classes;
 - opportunities to contribute to their communities through volunteering;
 - a wide range of other recreational, cultural, sporting and enriching experiences; and
 - a range of safe and enjoyable places in which to spend time.
9. Supporting guidance will set out the role for young people in making decisions on activities and facilities, and ensure the needs of young people from groups facing specific barriers are addressed by children's trusts.
10. Working through children's trusts, local authorities will set out an annual offer to young people. This will outline the national standards (given above); the local range of activities they are to provide; and a statement about sanctions and rewards.

Young people as citizens: making a contribution

11. A further strand of proposals relates to getting every young person volunteering and contributing to their communities. This builds on the Russell Commission recommendations²; and focuses on a few recommendations as being of particular interest. These are:
- peer-mentoring;
 - volunteering through schools, colleges and universities;
 - volunteering in public services;
 - financial support, celebrations and other rewards for volunteers; and
 - flexible and sustained volunteering;

Supporting choices: information, advice and guidance

12. Minimum expectations are to be set out for the information, advice and guidance (IAG) that every young person and their parents should receive at several key transitional stages.
13. Responsibility for commissioning IAG and the funding that goes with it will be devolved from the Connexions service to local authorities, working through schools, colleges and children’s trusts.
14. Children’s trusts will be expected to consult with schools, colleges and young people on existing IAG provision. They could then agree on the children’s trust commissioning provision on their behalf. However, if provision is considered to be poor, schools and colleges would be entitled to withdraw from these arrangements and commission services directly. If inspectors then find this provision is not adequate, devolved funding may be withdrawn by the children’s trust.
15. Under either arrangement, schools, colleges or children’s trusts may decide to buy in services from Connexions or other voluntary, community or private sector providers.
16. These changes are to be phased in from 2006, and should be in place by 2008.
17. For young people not necessarily in education, employment or training two schemes for IAG are to be piloted. From 2006, £60 million will support ‘activity agreements and allowances’, which will set out steps young people should take to enter learning or work in return for financial support. A further £80 million will support young people and their employers to engage employed young people in learning. Any rollout of these programmes will be determined by evaluation of the pilots.

All young people achieving: reforming targeted support

18. The government wants to bring together the multiplicity of programmes and agencies that work with young people who are facing problems or are in trouble. This is in keeping with the Every Child Matters agenda, and aims to reduce the need for young people to re-tell their story several times, and to move towards a more efficient use of resources.
19. To this end, local authorities, working through children’s trusts, are to be in charge of working with all the relevant agencies to deliver support for young people. The range of

² See www.russellcommission.org; NCVYS has produced a separate briefing paper on the final report of the Russell Commission, see www.ncvys.org.uk

existing government programmes which focus on specific issues will be merged to help with this process.

20. Services should be encouraged to co-locate in schools, voluntary drop-in and health centres, and universally available youth facilities and health shops.

A reformed system: delivering the outcomes

21. The Every Child Matters outcomes framework will be the single performance management system for evaluating progress against the Youth Matters reforms. Much of the detail on how reforms are to be implemented reflects changes already occurring as part of the change for children programme.

Impact on organisations working with young people

22. The Green Paper aims to encourage local authorities to work with a wide range of providers in delivering services for young people. However in order to take advantage of these opportunities, organisations must become ‘accredited providers’. While the detail of what this will mean needs to be developed, NCVYS would be concerned that it does not entail regulation that will be prohibitive for smaller community organisations.
23. A central concern is around the government’s ability to remove subsidies to young people engaging in antisocial behaviour. These subsidies are aimed at disadvantaged young people whose families will be less able to top up the cards. Hence, this measure will impact disproportionately on the most disadvantaged young people. Furthermore, for these young people being able to access positive things to do and places to go is likely to be particularly critical if they are to be supported to turn their situation around.
24. There is also concern that the only additional resources committed for these changes is £40 million capital funding over two years from 2006. This is for local authorities to improve places for young people to go and develop new approaches to strategic investment in youth services. The local offer is to be deliverable within existing resources. It is expected that vacant facilities, school facilities and funding from the Big Lottery Fund’s Young People’s Programme may be used to fill the gaps. There will be concern that in allocating Big Lottery Fund money to services that should be funded through the public coffers the government is once again flouting the principal of additionality. And that locating services in schools may mean they are less likely to be accessed by some young people.
25. There is a particular focus on the provision of sport throughout the Green Paper. The government will invest in a network of local youth sport development managers to work with young people in non-educational settings. Hence while several services may be co-located in or delivered through schools, special provision is only made for young people not in education in the case of sport. Young people’s participation in music and the arts, for example, does not receive similar focus. The government needs to broaden its view of positive activities to ensure the interests of the diverse range of young people are met.
26. Furthermore, some elements of youth work that are important to the development of values such as spirituality and interpersonal empathy are not addressed when considering things to do and places to go. Neither is the importance of accredited or structured activities that allow for the progression of young people.
27. The government expects that local authority funding of activities for young people will eventually be through opportunity cards. Many smaller community organisations will not

have the capacity to become an accredited provider; to resource the technology required for the opportunity card; or to advertise their activities to young people. They may end up losing out to private companies that can easily bare the additional costs. Networks and partnerships of organisations working at a local level may be an important means to support these organisations and foster a level playing field. This is critical as these are often the organisations that are best placed to work with the most marginalised young people in society.

28. Very marginalised young people may be put off accessing services if they are required to give out personal information in order to register for an opportunity card. Once again, these will be the young people most in need of help and support.
29. The idea of some type of ‘smartcard’ for young people is not a new one. There may be concern over how the government has reconciled this proposal with similar schemes, for example, the Connexions card (which had start-up costs of £140 million) and the national identity card scheme, which will shortly be put before Parliament.

What is missing from the Green Paper?

30. It is apparent that while commendable in essence, many of the ideas are under-developed and the detail of how they will be implemented will be very important. The government has emphasised the importance of the consultation period in helping to develop proposals, and for this reason a 16-week consultation period is given.

What next?

31. As detailed above, many proposals are to be piloted from 2006 and rolled out two years later. The government hopes to present the necessary legislation to Parliament by the end of the year.
32. NCVYS will be continuing its dialogue with the government regarding the proposals in the Green Paper. We plan to hold a consultation event to gather members’ views on the Green Paper and to inform the development of our formal response.
33. NCVYS would encourage members to respond individually and to encourage the young people they work with to respond, as well as contributing to a NCVYS response. Submissions are requested by 4 November 2005 to:

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Cheshire
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**‘Youth Matters’ may be downloaded from www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/youth
A summary and young people’s questionnaire are also available.**

If you would like more details about any aspect of this briefing, please contact NCVYS policy officer, Ellie Rose, on 020 7253 1010 or email ellie@ncvys.org.uk