

Generalist Youth Information Services in United Kingdom in 1997

The attached pages constitute the chapter concerning the **United Kingdom** which is part of a 17-country study completed in 1997.

Each chapter provides a summary of the situation in the country at the end of 1997 concerning generalist youth information and counselling, and the methods and structures involved in its organisation and distribution.

This study was conducted by the **European Youth Information and Counselling Agency** (ERYICA), to which all the author organisations belong as “Member Organisations” or as “Co-operating Organisations”. Accordingly, the study is limited to those countries where in 1996-97 there existed functioning networks of generalist youth information centres and services which were co-operating with ERYICA.

The 17 chapters of this study, in separate English and French versions, can be consulted on the ERYICA Internet site (“www.eryica.org” - see the section “Documents”, then “1997 Study”). Each file, which is in Word 2.0 for Windows / PC (varying between 4 and 20 pages in length), can also be downloaded from the site.

More recent information about each ERYICA national partner, its activities and its network can also be found on the ERYICA Internet site:

- a) **current addresses of national partners**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”
- b) **links to Internet sites of national partners**: under “Discover SERVICES”, then “Web-sites of ERYICA Partners”
- c) (when the organisation co-ordinates a network) **links to a list of addresses of regional or local centres**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”.

Acknowledgement

ERYICA wishes to acknowledge the financial assistance which was provided for the study by the European Commission, in the framework of its “Information for Young People” programme.

© ERYICA, 1999

Published by **ERYICA** (non-profit association)
101 quai Branly, F-75740 Paris Cedex 15, France
E-mail: SGeryica@aol.com

GB

UNITED KINGDOM

of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

INTRODUCTION

The four nations of the United Kingdom (England; Scotland; Wales and Northern Ireland) are in some ways diverse in their methods of delivery of information for young people. This diversity arises from their years of experience in delivering the service in a wide range of locations and situations.

When it comes to the philosophical basis for their approach to the provision of youth information, advice and counselling, however, there is a great deal of commonality across the four countries. There is a shared sense of belief in young people themselves and in the importance of information, advice and counselling in helping them to reach their true potential. There is also much commonality in the restraints, usually financial, which are placed upon providers of these services throughout the United Kingdom.

The history of development can be traced from the late 1960s when, in common with some other European countries, there was an increased awareness of the need for young people to have access to information, advice and counselling. Young people have always needed this kind support, and older adults such as teachers and youth workers have done their best to help but often they lacked the resources and structures to provide for the specific needs of young people. The increased awareness of needs motivated

many local youth services and voluntary groups to research, plan and seek funding for the establishment of youth information, advice and counselling centres. In general, local youth services sought to plan youth information services, whereas centres for information, advice and counselling tended to be planned and managed by local management committees drawn from interested parties in the wider community, including the local youth service. (There are notable exceptions, of course: Berkshire, for example, where there was commitment to authority-wide provision of counselling and advisory services.)

The information for this text has been provided by five organisations active in the youth information field in the United Kingdom, each of which supports or co-ordinates a network of local agencies:

England: - National Youth Agency
 - Youth Access
N. Ireland: - Youth Council for
 Northern Ireland
Scotland: - Scottish Community
 Education Council
Wales: - Wales Youth Agency

Text updated: *December 1997*

The range of services on offer varied from centre to centre depending upon particular emphases and interests of local planning groups, as well as budgetary constraints and the availability of other services.

Young people made good use of the services on offer and they often presented with a complex range of needs. Practitioners began to gain a great deal of expertise and experience and the quality of the services improved. Workers were careful to continue to research the changing needs of young people in an increasingly complex society.

The centres were gaining in strength but still tended to be vulnerable in two respects: firstly, they remained isolated from each other and they had no mechanism for sharing their experience and, secondly, their financial security was often uncertain and this made it difficult for them to make long-term plans. There was no shared national policy statement which could be used in support of arguments for the importance of local provision.

Another factor which inhibited funding was the widespread belief in many places that young people's information needs, in particular, were already provided for by a range of existing statutory services such as the Careers Service, Job Centres and Libraries. People who were close to young people knew that the reality of the situation was that young people were faced with a confusing plethora of information which existed in many different places. Young people did not know where to go for the particular service they required. Even when they located the appropriate agency, they did not always receive the help they needed; often they were given facts and documents but not the support which would help them translate the facts into information upon which they could act.

In spite of all their difficulties the local centres managed to keep their doors open and young people continued to ask for help and information about all aspects of their lives. Practitioners, especially those involved in counselling services, became increasingly aware of their own needs for support networks.

When the **National Association of Young People's Counselling and Advisory Services** (NAYPCAS) was formed in 1975, it provided local centres with access to support, training and conferencing opportunities. Members of this organisation were enabled to share their skills and experience so that it became possible to identify and build upon existing good practice in the delivery of youth counselling and advisory work. New providers could seek guidance and existing workers could update their skills. The centres now also had a collective voice.

In 1981 youth information workers in Northern Ireland began to collaborate with their colleagues in Scotland, who in that year had produced the first "*Young Scot*" youth information publication (followed in 1985 by the first Young Scot discount card). 1981 also saw the opening of the first **Youth Enquiry Service (YES)** in Scotland. This came about as the result of recommendations made by young people employed on a year-long study to look at the information needs of young people leaving school.

In 1985 (International Youth Year) a Youth Information Study Group in **Northern Ireland** produced a report entitled "*Yiplinks*" (youth information points links) which proposed a way forward for that country. In the same year, **Wales** produced its first "*On-line*" youth information booklet which had been written for young people by young people.

In 1987 an inspection of existing youth information and counselling provision in the United Kingdom was conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (Youth Work) supported by NAYPCAS; the majority but not all of the projects inspected were members of NAYPCAS. The results gave details of the exact nature of work which was going on and made recommendations for the future. One of the main conclusions from the research was that information, advice and counselling services were valuable to young people's development and that coherent strategies were needed to ensure the success of future work. The report also discussed the various ways in which youth information, advice and counselling practitioners engaged with young people and gave definitions of the various methods of intervention, from information provision to counselling. Many workers would want to debate the detail of this study but this was perhaps the very strength of the work: it raised the profile of youth advice and counselling (and information). The report fuelled debate and paved the way for future changes. There appeared to be a growing commitment, on the part of Central Government, to a recognition of the work which was going on in the field of information, advice and counselling for young people.

1989 brought important milestones in development. In May of that year, Lancashire County Council held a major conference for youth information, advice and counselling providers; in July, the Home Office convened a fact-finding conference, and in the same month NAYPCAS and Her Majesty's Inspectorate invited key personnel to a two-day conference in Westhill College, Birmingham. The conference was attended by practitioners and service-planners from all over the United Kingdom. Many of them were members of NAYPCAS and all of them had experience of working with young people who often had complex needs. Once again, there was evidence of

Central Government's growing awareness of this area of work and of the need for realistic funding. At this time NAYPCAS was located in Leicester in the same building as the National Youth Bureau, the National Council of Voluntary Youth Services and the Council for Education and Training of Youth and Community Workers. These four organisations, along with the British Youth Council, were funded by the same Government sources.

It was to be the **National Youth Bureau (NYB)** which was funded to research and develop models for good practice in the provision for youth information, advice and counselling. The Information Shops for young people initiative provided NYB with substantial Government funding to research young people's information, advice and counselling needs. An extensive consultation process was conducted throughout the United Kingdom to obtain the suggestions and opinions of young people and of those who work with them. The Information Shop "specification" called for the provision of a comprehensive quality information service for young people. It did not require planners to provide a counselling service; often a sensitive referral to another local agency would be more appropriate. However, most Information Shops found that they had to develop counselling skills because there were no local agencies which provided an adequate counselling service.

Prospective developers of Information Shops for young people entered into a bidding process for the start-up funding which was promised for the development of the early pilot Information Shops. The chosen projects tended to come from the sector which was supported by local youth services: it was easier for these projects to demonstrate that they had secure premises and salaries. The selection process may have disadvantaged independent projects, many of which provided excellent services, but every effort was made to help these projects to fund-raise if they wanted to

work towards the fulfilment of the Information Shops specification. The Central Government funding which was made available to re-furbish the first pilot Information Shops for young people was useful but the main source of revenue continued to be some youth service monies, supplemented by Charitable Trusts and Foundations. There was some investment from the private sector because some employers saw the advantages of a well-informed workforce. The lack of Central Government funding for on-going development was disappointing because it failed to give clear recognition of the centrality of young people's information, advice and counselling needs. The future funding of the service was still insecure. However, significant advances had been made and the profile of the work had been raised; there was now statistical evidence that young people had many information, advice and counselling needs. Information Shops for young people, and other centres continued to be established even though it was very difficult for them to secure funding. Some new centres, and some existing ones, took on some of the aspects of Information Shop provision, even when they decided not to take on the full identity.

In April 1991, the **National Youth Agency (NYA)** was created in an attempt to streamline the delivery of Central Government support for youth work. This new organisation took on the roles of the former National Youth Bureau, the National Council of Voluntary Youth Services and the Council for Education and Training in Youth and Community Work. As the Information Shops for young people and all related developments became the responsibility of the National Youth Agency, there was continuity in the development work which was already under way.

NAYPCAS opted-out of the new organisation and reconstituted itself as a membership organisation which was

launched as Youth Access in 1992. (The British Youth Council also remained separate from and independent of the National Youth Agency.) **Youth Access** (*1A Taylor's Yard, 67 Alderbrook Road, London SW12 8AD*) continues to work for the development of best practice in youth information, advice and counselling. In June 1996, Youth Access adopted a Statement of Principles for its members throughout the United Kingdom, which will constitute one of the building blocks in the task of developing common standards for good practice.

The Statement of Principles from Youth Access is the latest in a series of developmental steps which have brought youth information, advice and counselling provision to the point that it has reached today. Young people continue to need the service, and practitioners go on gaining in expertise and experience. Information technology innovations, in particular, have encouraged planners to collaborate in the development of a range of information products. More transnational work and an increasing emphasis on national standards and training have brought workers to the point where they can begin to benefit from the combined strengths of:

- national co-operation and coherence
- international collaboration
- appropriate diversity.

AIMS AND PHILOSOPHY

The enduring philosophy underpinning the development of youth information in the United Kingdom is the concept of **empowering young people** to take control of their own lives to good effect. It is not easy to provide a transnational definition of the word "empowerment", although it is clear that some of the ideas behind the term have been expressed by writers outside the United Kingdom (eg. Calmat in France

1985). Essentially, the approach is young people-centred and can be contrasted with

situations where information providers dispense facts without making sure that the young person can go forward with confidence to use the information.

In practice, the empowering approach means that young people are helped on their own terms and in locations where they feel comfortable: this may be in youth clubs; shopping malls; schools or any place where they happen to congregate. A key aim, therefore, must be that the information be accessible both in its location and its style of operation. The ethnicity and other characteristics of the youth population need to be discovered as a basis for the planning of a centre which will reflect the true needs of the local community and will attract all categories of young people. Special attention is paid to the particular needs of disabled young people. Various factors are considered whenever a decision is taken about whether to establish a “centre” or a “point”. If the population is large enough and there is an obvious central location which is accessible to young people, then a centre will probably be opened. In rural areas, however, or in clusters of small towns, a series of inter-connecting information points or electronic media might provide a better option. Wherever the provision is sited and whatever the chosen format, the important thing is that young people receive the same quality of information and personal support. The range of services is likely to be greater in a large well-funded centre but the essence of the service should be the same in any centre or point. So long as the young people being helped are actively involved in the information process in partnership with a trained and sympathetic worker, then their needs will be served.

There is, however, a difficulty in all of this. Young people have a right to choose to “self-serve” in the selection and use of information. They might not be ready to discuss their needs with anyone else or they might be accessing the information

through a computer terminal at some isolated location. How does the information process take place under these circumstances? How does the young person remain actively engaged in an information process with sympathetic others? One solution (at least in part) is to “build-in” the participative process. If young people are actively engaged in the preparation of information products and are frequently asked for their views as to their continuing suitability, their contribution can be seen as a vital quality assurance mechanism which protects the integrity of the approach. Any piece of information on display or on screen will include a suggestion that the young person might want to seek help from a trained worker who will support their use of the information.

Young people themselves are involved in the planning of centres and points. The participation of young people through consultation, research, piloting and feedback remains one of the most valuable components of the developmental process. Additionally, young people often act as volunteers in the centres so they gain practical experience in all aspects of the service.

All of the above is helpful in describing the empowering approach but something else, a more elusive quality, needs to be defined: it is the conviction of the importance of engaging with young people. Engaging with them not just in their well articulated needs, but in their uncertainty about the future and indeed in their dreams about the future. Empowerment is a very resilient concept and those who espouse it retain a belief in young people which has helped them overcome many operational difficulties.

The information itself needs to be accessible and written in a language which young people understand. This is more likely to mean that it needs to be user-friendly and non-bureaucratic rather than written in the language used by a specific ethnic group, although it can also mean that. Young people have a right to information which is usable and attractive, and they have a right to have their confidences respected. The information provided is free, impartial and it is complete. Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the facts, and workers try to ensure that the young person has really understood. The process of transferring the condition of being informed from one person to another is complex and demanding and it is the essence of the work.

Although many organisations and centres may have their own Charters for quality youth information provision, most of them endorse the European Youth Information Charter and would agree that it embodies the key aspects of good practice in youth information provision.

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON YOUTH INFORMATION

There is no clear statement of Government policy to support the development of youth information in the United Kingdom.

From time to time specific Government Departments have shown interest in youth information. For example, the Home Office in 1989 invested in the Information Shops for young people initiative because it saw the potential benefit of effective youth information in the fight against crime: if young people were helped when making decisions which would affect the rest of their lives, then they might make better decisions and become better citizens. Similarly, young people who are homeless and/or unemployed seem more likely to commit crimes - if this correlation is accepted, then it might be possible to

reduce crime by tackling some of the causes. Furthermore, if information centres were friendly and of a high quality, then young people would be likely to seek help quickly rather than wait until they had a multiplicity of problems.

The Home Office also recognised the particular information needs of specific groups of young people and funded many creative responses to their information needs.

The Department for Education and Employment has a more obvious responsibility for young people. Clearly, young people's education is of paramount importance and there is the on-going need to allocate sufficient money to fund schools, colleges and training programmes. Although effective youth information could be a very efficient way of enabling young people to make the most of education and training opportunities, it remains low on the list of priorities. (Again, there is the persistent belief that young people are provided with plenty of information, and a lack of understanding that many young people remain uninformed.) However, there has been some support from this Department, as demonstrated by the part-funding of pilot Shops in the Information Shops for young people initiative and by the continuing part-funding of Youth Access.

An important problem is that funding remains "piecemeal" and this does not facilitate the robust development of the quality services which young people need and deserve to have. An additional difficulty in the United Kingdom is that there is no Ministry or Department with a particular responsibility for youth information or youth policy in general.

The lack of policy affects youth information development across the United Kingdom but the Government in Westminster (as has been shown) and the

various Offices (the Scottish Office; the Welsh Office and the Northern Ireland Office) do offer whatever level of support they can. Furthermore, each of the countries has a youth service made up of a wide range of provision including the activities of a strong voluntary sector. (In Scotland there is a Community Education Service encompassing adult education, youth work and community work.) Each youth service develops a curriculum for youth work and, increasingly, youth information is being identified up as a clear curricular priority.

LEGAL STATUS AND FINANCING OF CENTRES

It is clear from the above that none of the youth information, advice and counselling centres are run by the Government (central or local).

The local youth service often provides the impetus for the development of youth information provision. Youth service personnel take responsibility for convening groups of people representing various sectors of the community. Many agencies, both statutory and voluntary, have information which they want to make accessible to young people and they have a range of services they wish to make available; for example, health information, careers advice, education and training opportunities. They know that young people are more likely to use youth information centres than some of the more official services. Committees of interested people may work in an advisory capacity to the local youth service or they may, with the continued backing of the youth service, form themselves into associations with their own legal entity and as such register as charitable bodies for funding purposes. Sometimes information, advice and counselling centres have little or nothing to do with the youth service; they see themselves as doing youth work but not as part of the youth service and they obtain

their funding entirely from independent sources.

Sometimes a large voluntary organisation such as Barnardo's will identify the value of youth information work and will take the initiative in providing the service, or at least will raise awareness and convene groups of potential funders. When this happens there is usually some level of partnership with the local youth service which would be seen as the skills base for work with young people.

The idea of local funding consortia representing the statutory, voluntary and private sectors is sound enough; all of them have an interest in the young people of the future. The reality is that it takes a great deal of time and persuasion to secure an adequate level of funding from any source, and in each locality the case has to be made afresh. However, things are changing and as the profile and visibility of youth information grows so there is a movement towards the point where everyone takes it for granted that young people need well-resourced information provision.

Salary costs are usually high and this funding is often very difficult to secure. If youth information centres are to be really useful to young people, they must be open whenever young people need them and they must be staffed by trained people. With obvious variations according to local needs and means, a staffing structure might look something like this:

- Centre Co-ordinator, who has overall responsibility for the delivery and the on-going development of the service;
- Information and advice workers, either paid or voluntary, who will have received training in interpersonal skills and information work skills;
- Administrative Assistant;
- Information Technology support person;

- Outreach Workers, who run information sessions in schools, colleges and a wide range of other locations; most of these workers would be young volunteers who have received training;
- Staff on secondment from other services, such as the Careers Service.

Some centres offer counselling and, if so, the counsellors often hold a recognised qualification (or they may be part-qualified); they may be paid staff or volunteers.

Volunteers and paid staff are treated equally in terms of their rights to influence the day to day running of the service as well as the formulation of long-term plans. The support and development of volunteers is taken very seriously, and often the volunteers (both young and older adults) will stay with the centre for a long time. Youth information centres provide interesting and enriching volunteering opportunities, and they will soon be able to offer placements for students of vocational qualifications in youth information.

Many centres would say that it is difficult to maintain staffing levels like the above but all would agree that a minimum of two trained people must be available any time a centre is open.

NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION

Systems for co-ordination will be initially described under separate country headings.

England

Since the pilot Information Shops for young people have been in operation, most new developers of youth information seek the help of the National Youth Agency when planning their service. Staff in the pilot-shops have now gained five years' experience of this particular model so they can give guidance and practical help. Shop staff teams have adapted the provision to suit a number of different needs whilst

retaining the corporate identity, so there is a wealth of experience which is available, through the National Youth Agency, to new developers.

The **National Youth Agency** (NYA, 17-23 Albion Street, Leicester LE1 6GD) now supports 25 Information Shops for young people. Each Shop is supported by a web of information points and information buses. Additionally, the Agency gives some help to over 300 projects which are in various stages of development towards the establishment of a local centre.

New projects are advised about :

- the principles of youth information
- the preparation of youth community profiles to guide planning
- the location of centres
- staffing levels and training of workers
- sources of possible funding
- the collection, classification and presentation of information
- formats for the collection of statistics.

For some time the National Youth Agency has been working towards the provision of a national database of youth information and, in November 1995, a demonstration version was launched on the Internet. Now, thanks to partnership with the Wales Youth Agency and funding from the National Lottery Charities Board, a comprehensive database will soon be available. The regional and local information will still have to be added but the software development will facilitate that process. It is likely that this database will be made available to colleagues in other European countries.

Many centres continue to operate outside the National Youth Agency's Information Shops network. They have their own identity and they value their independence and prefer to plan their own provision.

However, they espouse similar good practice and their operations are close to the principles of both the Shops and the European Youth Information Charter. Many of them are affiliated to Youth Access. They often report that products which have been developed for the Information Shops are useful for them so they are likely to link into the Agency's database.

The National Youth Agency has been particularly successful in forming partnerships with the Library Service through the Association of Youth Librarians. This association has promoted the development of Information Points within libraries designed and organised on the basis of the Information Shops for young people model.

Northern Ireland

The five Education and Library Boards (which cover defined geographical areas) are the main providers of youth information centres in Northern Ireland. The **Youth Council for Northern Ireland** (*YCNI, Forestview, Purdy's Lane, Belfast BT8 7AR*) works with the Boards in developing youth information provision and, in particular, in forging European links. The Council also supports the work of voluntary youth organisations, some of which have developed a wide range of quality youth information, advice and counselling services.

Each Education and Library Board provides, in the statutory sector, at least one youth information centre which gives support to smaller youth information points based in youth clubs. Information is uniform throughout each Board area although it may not be the same across Northern Ireland. Three of the voluntary organisations provide youth information centres (one of them provides a full counselling service).

In general the work is well developed and practitioners are clear about what level of service they are providing. Most of them do not provide counselling but they have mechanisms which ensure that young people receive careful referral to this and other services. Effective referral work requires the centres to develop links with other agencies; for example, the youth information service is registered with the Law Centre for Northern Ireland which provides regular guidance and information on legal matters.

All of the centres in Northern Ireland have computers which young people use for project work and the production of CV's. In earlier years some interesting work was done on the development of computerised information and practitioners are familiar with all the problems of collecting and updating information. These skills will be useful when new information technology developments get under way.

The Department for Education in Northern Ireland has identified the need to provide a Young People's Opportunities system using information supplied by the YCNI and the Education and Library Boards. The Department has clearly recognised the need for young people to have information on all aspects of their lives and it will make available appropriate resources to develop a comprehensive computerised system. Representatives of practitioners and decision-makers will meet to guide the project and make recommendations about the information content and style of presentation. They will give consideration to any matter which would affect a young person's access to the information.

Youth information development in Northern Ireland is based upon extensive research, which is recorded in the following reports and documents:

- “*Yiplinks: Proposal for a Youth Information Development Project in Northern Ireland*” (SCOYO, 1985)
- “*Youth Information - Towards a Strategy*” (SCOYO, 1987)
- “*Youth Information in Northern Ireland - a Review for LIP Action*” (Library and Information Services Council / N.I., 1994)
- “*A Strategy for Youth Information for Education and Library Boards*” (Inter-board Youth Information Panel, 1995).

The Youth Council for Northern Ireland is a member of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) and the European Youth Cards Association (EYCA). The activities of both these organisations enable Northern Ireland practitioners to keep in touch with developments in Europe. In September 1995, nine project workers took part in an ERYICA International Summer University in Spain, and another group has made a study visit to youth information providers in the Republic of Ireland.

Scotland

The **Scottish Community Education Council** (SCEC, 9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5EZ) supports the development of youth information in Scotland through three main mechanisms:

1. **Publications**: these are aimed at both practitioners and young people, and SCEC produces a range of information materials on specific issues (such as drugs), as well as general information. The publications include:

- the “*Young Scot Book*”: distributed annually to every school leaver in Scotland, it contains 180 pages of information and essential addresses;

- the “*Young Scot Magazine*”: published quarterly with The Herald newspaper, circulation 150,000; an additional 50,000 copies of the magazine are distributed by SCEC to Young Scot members (30,000), youth information points and schools across Scotland.

2. **Training Seminars**: SCEC runs a number of seminars to support practitioners who provide information for young people. These have included guidance on work with young people preparing to leave school and on young people, crime and community safety (in partnership with the Scottish Office Crime Prevention Unit).

3. **National Youth Information Group**: SCEC, in collaboration with the Principal Community Education Officers in Scotland Group, runs and supports the National Youth Information Group, which aims to provide a focal point and co-ordinated approach to the development of youth information in Scotland. In conjunction with local groups throughout Scotland, the national support group has agreed four key areas for the development of youth information in Scotland:

- criteria for youth information services (based on the principles contained in the European Youth Information Charter)
- corporate identity
- enquiry answering formats and trends
- national monitoring and promotion.

Each of the 35 youth information points in Scotland operates on the basis of the agreed criteria in the above areas. The national network of Principal Community Education Officers in Scotland have endorsed the strategy and have agreed that all future youth information points will meet the criteria. A National Directory of Youth Information Points (in Scotland) will be published in the near future.

There is an extensive European dimension to youth information work in Scotland. SCEC is a member of both ERYICA and

EYCA, and is the originator and operator of the Eurodesk information service about European programmes and opportunities for young people.

Wales

Youth information development in Wales has placed a particular emphasis on the value of peer-led projects: young people actively involved in defining and providing the service for other young people. This was a great strength in the original "*On-Line*" ("Canllaw" in Welsh) information booklet which was first produced in 1985. The methodology for production of the booklet emanated from Cartrefle College in Wales and has been replicated by many projects in the United Kingdom.

Attempts were made to link the On-Line booklet with a Youth Card (similar to the successful Young Scot Card) but development has been patchy to date. However, the preliminary work for a Youth Card in Wales provided a vehicle for highlighting young people's needs and has placed an emphasis on youth information work. Current Youth Card developments are being handled by the commercial sector and it may yet be very successful. Existing cardholders receive a magazine which is useful and attractive. The magazine gives general youth information but it may go on to develop a focus on information about mobility and travel.

Since 1992 the **Wales Youth Agency** (WYA, *Leslie Court, Lôn-y-Llyn, Caerphilly CF83 1BQ*) has been responsible for the co-ordination of developments in the field of youth information, and since 1994 has had close links with the National Youth Agency in England.

There are two distinctive aspects to the planning of youth information in Wales.

a) the need to provide information in two languages

b) the constraints on the work due to the largely rural nature of Wales.

The first point means that there are additional costs with any publication. However, whilst publishing bi-lingually does not guarantee that the material is read, it does mean that youth information is presented in a manner which is culturally appropriate.

The second point means that there are not many large centres of population which would support the development of a centre as comprehensive as an Information Shop for young people, although some Shops are being developed in collaboration with the National Youth Agency in England. Generally speaking, however, youth information points are more appropriate. These are supported by publications and information technology initiatives.

Publications aim to respond to the already identified needs of young people and continue to raise the awareness of needs. Some peer-led pilot projects have resulted in the publication of :

- a national magazine which the young people called "*Taabww*"
- a "*Biz-Kit*", a video and booklet package written by young people for young people giving advice on how to start a business
- "*Healthy Delinquents*", a health information project.

A vibrant on-going magazine is the free, bi-lingual Youth Workers' Magazine "*Ymlaen*", which is distributed two and a half thousand readers located in the statutory and voluntary organisations throughout Wales. This magazine acts as a very effective networking tool for youth workers and sometimes carries youth information.

The bi-monthly magazine "*Pigion*" focuses more directly on youth information. 1,000 copies are distributed free to providers and developers of youth information. The youth information content is indicated by the heading, "The word is..... (HEALTH, for example)".

The Wales Youth Agency responds to new projects by sending them an information package which tells them about sources of help and gives guidance on the key points in setting up a service. It also provides them with a copy of the European Youth Information Charter and (when appropriate) gives them a registration certificate to say that they are working within structures agreed by England and Wales. The Agency provides on-going support for developers of new projects by giving advice on:

- the principles of youth information
- the preparation of youth community profiles to guide planning
- the location of centres
- staffing levels and training of workers
- sources of possible funding
- the collection, classification and presentation of information
- formats for the collection of statistics.

Rural locations can be very well served by the variety of solutions which are possible through information technology. The recent partnership between the Wales Youth Agency and the NYA in England will expedite the development of software and hasten the availability of a much needed information tool.

PIAFE

All four countries belong to the PIAFE Partnership which exists to co-ordinate and promote the youth information activities in:

- Pays de Galles (Wales)
- Irlande (Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland)
- Angleterre (England)

- France (France)
- Ecosse (Scotland).

The Piafe Partnership has received part-funding from the European Commission for seminars involving practitioners from the member countries.

Youth Access also gives support to its member centres (and others) in all four countries. It organises an annual training conference which provides practitioners with training in specific areas as well as valuable networking opportunities.

All four countries have strong links with other statutory services particularly the Careers and Library services. The National Youth Agency has been particularly successful in forming partnerships with the Library Service through the Association of Youth Librarians.

RELATIONS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND YOUTH INFORMATION STRUCTURES

In the absence of any government policy, there is no governmental interference in the determining of priorities in youth information work. There are Government priorities in youth work, however, and youth information workers would take account of these when seeking funding for particular aspects of their work.

Changes in the organisation of local government in England and Wales have provided opportunities for new structures and, perhaps, for fresh thinking. The Wales Youth Agency has written to all the new Authorities in Wales giving them information about young people's needs and seeking their support.

All youth information centres keep records of the nature of young people's enquiries, so it is possible to provide decision-makers (local, regional and national) with extensive data about the problems facing young people. Some problems are worse

in particular localities and the available statistical evidence could inform the planning of local services. Youth information workers do make these data available to Local Authorities (and others) and they point to emerging trends. There is not a great deal of evidence that the statistics have much influence on policy, but the volume of statistical evidence is growing and it is becoming impossible to ignore.

TYPICAL SERVICES OFFERED BY CENTRES

It is not possible to describe a typical youth information or counselling centre in the United Kingdom but the following is typical of an Information Shop for young people or a related centre, and contains elements which will be found in many local centres.

Each Information Shop provides information on any topic about which a young person might enquire. Young people often do not know what information should be available for them and they may need time to be able to describe their needs. It is important, therefore, that they have the ability to browse without interference.

Information is well organised into key categories such as Education; Employment; Training; Health; Housing; Money; Relationships; Leisure, Sport and so on. If the young person cannot find the heading which would seem appropriate, a “key word” index is available for reference. This index would include modern terminology and slang as well as the more formal words.

The information is displayed in a number of formats:

- Leaflets
- Booklets
- Computers
- Videos and interactive computer programmes.

Posters and noticeboards can play an important part in drawing young people’s attention to important issues and clear sign-posting is used to guide them round the Shop.

Young people are always invited to approach an information worker for help. It is unusual for a centre to provide a counselling service (although some do) but all workers are trained to recognise the need for counselling and, when necessary, they will conduct a sensitive referral to the appropriate agency. Workers will help young people to write letters; make phone calls; compile curricula vitae, and they will sometimes accompany the young person when a referral is made to another agency.

A centre will almost always provide an outreach service: groups of workers, or young users of the service, go into schools, youth clubs, and other places where young people congregate to let young people know what help is available and to encourage them to use it.

Additional services, such as:

- Pregnancy Testing
- Substance Abuse Counselling
- Post-Exam Results Counselling
- Careers Advice,

may be available in the centre if they are planned in partnership with the local Health or Careers service.

Many centres now provide a telephone helpline which is open whenever the centre itself is closed. Ideally, the helplines would be open 24 hours of the day but this has not yet been possible in any centre.

Some young people prefer to make their first contact by telephone and workers receive additional training in the use of helping skills in telephone work.

ASSESSING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Broadly speaking, the information needs of young people have already been assessed: they need to know everything about everything. The experience of existing local centres bears this out. Young people ask about everything from how to find their birth certificate to questions about white-water sports.

New centres still need to conduct local surveys to determine the perceived needs of the local young people because there can be a shift in emphasis in various areas. Examples would be areas of high unemployment, and isolated areas.

Sometimes the existing local services are particularly strong in some respect and this would mean that the new youth information centre could expect a lot of help with a particular information topic and staff would have confidence in referring young people to use that particular service.

Each centre prepares a community profile of the local youth population (often this is quite a simple profile of age, ethnicity and types of disability). It is important to establish that all young people who might use the centre actually do so, and in some kind of representative numbers. So the centres record the gender, age and ethnicity of each young person who attends and they record details of any disability.

If the centre's records indicate that young people with particular characteristics do not use the centre, attempts are made to contact those young people to find out why they do not use it.

CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER SERVICES

It make sense to survey the locality for existing strengths and to begin a process of co-operation with the personnel who deliver the other services. The history of

such collaboration is that it usually works very well and a new youth information project often has the effect of increasing young people's use of a whole range of information services. Information professionals are quick to recognise the strengths of an integrated approach to the planning of local information services, so there is a readiness to share experience and resources.

Young people themselves still need to be surveyed when new provision is being planned (or existing provision refreshed). They often articulate some need which had previously not been identified. Certainly, they will suggest new ways of doing things and their ideas can be passed on to all centres.

Often communities know that certain problems exist in the area (substance abuse, for example) and the centre is asked to help by running special information events and sessions. It may not be possible to measure a decrease in substance abuse but it is possible to measure an increase in the number of self-referrals to substance abuse agencies which may be the result of increased information work. It can be difficult to evaluate the direct effects of youth information work but with common sense and imagination it is possible to define indicators of success. Young people themselves often provide qualitative data on the usefulness of the service and this can be very convincing. Of course, many young people would not want to say anything about their difficulties or activities and no-one should press them to do so.

HOW PLURALISM AND QUALITY ARE GUARANTEED

There is no censorship of the information which is made available to young people in youth information and counselling services; they have a right to access all the information they require.

However, there are information materials in circulation which are factually incorrect or contain a particular bias. So all information which a centre offers needs to be scrutinised for accuracy and impartiality. It is important to monitor the “extra messages” contained in information products by virtue of the way various groups are portrayed or omitted. In the United Kingdom there is so much information available on any subject that it is necessary to take some responsibility for sifting through the range of options and coming to a decision about the most useful materials. Young people help with the sifting and choosing and, if they have strong opinions about the choice or rejection of any materials they are usually allowed to decide.

Information, advice and counselling workers are trained to be aware of their own attitudes and prejudices. They aim to be non-judgmental about a young person’s lifestyle, sexuality, ethnic origin or anything else that would influence the integrity of the interaction between the young person and the practitioner. This is the part of the training which really takes time and resources. Trainee workers are often surprised by things which they discover about themselves but they report their pleasure in their own personal growth. Counsellors of young people need extensive training, and many now hold a Diploma awarded by the British Association of Counselling.

Information, advice and counselling workers receive continuing training both on the job and outside the work situation. This keeps them up to date with changes in information and methods of delivery of all their services. Youth Access stresses the value of on-going supervision as part of the training process for counsellors and as a method for protecting the young person and the worker.

The National Council for Vocational Qualifications has recently published Standards

for Advice, Guidance, Counselling and Psychotherapy. From these Standards a range of qualifications have been defined. Many of the qualifications match-up fairly well to the work of information and advice workers or information, advice and counselling workers so practitioners can look forward to gaining access to qualifications which will have a national recognition.

THE FUTURE

The rapid growth of information technology has without doubt increased young people’s access to information. Indeed, they would find it difficult to avoid electronic media. The pervasion of modern society by various applications of the new technology has made it possible to inform a wider range of young people. This can lead to their participating more in the shaping of their world, including the definition of services provided specifically for them.

But there are dangers in easy access to information from a range of providers not all of whom have young people’s interests at heart. This has been recognised by youth information practitioners and they have made every effort to become skilled in the use of information technology so that they can use it to the best effect. Young people need their help and they need their protection. Young people often discover potentially harmful material as they Surf, Dip or Dive on the Internet, for example. They need to find it just as easy to discover quality youth information and if they discover that the information is attractive and relevant to their needs they are more likely to give it their attention.

These technological options for the rapid dissemination of information in schools, clubs, libraries, train stations or any place where young people might seek it will facilitate access to relevant information. These solutions will not, however, provide everything which young people need.

They still need the possibility to seek personal contact or support from trained workers who will meet them on their own terms and help them use the information. These workers will also be able to identify, and sometimes meet, counselling needs and will press for the resources to support a youth counselling service of high quality.

It is neither possible, nor desirable, for every youth information practitioner in the United Kingdom to agree upon all the details of how youth information and counselling is best delivered but there is a wide agreement on the key principles. This concord has been consolidated by a convergence of interests over the last few years. The **Four Nations Youth Policy Group** which now meets regularly provides a forum for co-operation and collaboration on youth policy. This group will also discuss youth information issues and opportunities for future coherent development in this field.

*ERYICA and the organisations involved in preparing this Chapter wish to record their appreciation to the **Youth Council for Northern Ireland** for financing the operation and to **Eileen McDonald** who conducted the study for the YCNI.*