

For God's sake, tie your
ropes together:
The history of youth work
in Wales

Political betrayal, professional
in-fighting and practice inertia

Pre-history

- For many years 'England and Wales'
 - Small departures: Methodist youth work, the Urdd
- 1960 Albemarle Report
- 1969 Youth and Community Work in the 70s
- 1982 The Thompson Report – England
- 1983 HMI Survey 13 - Wales

Points of departure

- 1985 International Youth Year
- The Wales Youth Forum/Canllaw Online
- The Wales Youth Work Partnership
 - WYF, CWVYS, WJEC, WAFTYCW and more!
- 1989-92 Three Ministerial Conferences on the Youth Service – where was Wales?
- The Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales
- 1991 The National [England] Youth Agency
- 1992 The Wales Youth Agency

The Wales Youth (Work) Agency

■ Five functions:

- Youth participation and empowerment
- Information for youth workers
- Youth information
- Training and staff development [ETS]
- Voluntary youth organisation support

■ Plus One:

- International work (Youth for Europe)

■ Plus One More:

- Management of grants to voluntary organisations

Some key (?) moments in the 90s

- Lisbon Protocol 1992
- Youth work excellence awards
- Building the Future
- Youth work and schools partnership programme
- Youth work and crime prevention
- Youth work and health promotion
- Budget from one-third of a million pounds to two million pounds

Devolved Wales 1999

- Extending Entitlement (not Connexions)
 - Unanimous political support
 - No new structures and no new profession(s)
 - Commitment to young people aged 13-25 (not 13-19)
 - £3m extra for WYA over three years for:
 - Strengthening partnerships between vol and stat sectors
 - Youth information
 - Training of youth workers
- Llais Ifanc/Young Voice— developed within WYA
 - Funky Dragon

Fragmentation & division

- A new Youth Policy Unit within the Welsh Assembly Government
- The ascendancy of the children's agenda (from 2000)
- Separation of youth information from WYA
- Talk of 'youth support services', not youth work or the Youth Service
- Separation of voluntary youth organisation activity
- Promotion of the idea of 'learning coaches'
- Establishment of Children and Young People's Partnerships

Fragmentation & division

- WAG support for a Participation Unit within Save the Children Wales
- Reallocation of youth information resources to (1) Careers Service, and (2) new private sector organisation
- Targeted programmes (cf youth work and custody)
- No engagement with youth worker training

2005-09 a rudderless four years

- Nov 2004 Minister's intention to withdraw financial support from Wales Youth Agency – unanimous opposition from the field to this decision
- Dec 2005 end of WYA: transfer of 14 staff to Welsh Assembly Government (youth work strategy unit now fewer than five people)
- What happened to 'ETS' and 'Connect Cymru'?
- 2007 Youth Service Strategy but thin resources
- 2008 Reduced funding for voluntary youth organisations
- 2009 (May 22) end of 'Extending Entitlement'

Where now?

- Precarious future despite February 2009 conference ‘Thinking Seriously about Youth Work’
- Some youth workers are from Venus, most (now) are from Mars
- Political hostility, structural decline, limited professional influence, practice uncertainty
- John Rose last week: “We have to put the lights on all over the house, not just the front room”
- Even those who have ‘joined the real world’ of targets, indicators and outcomes “have still found themselves in the wilderness”
- But a new ‘real world’ will emerge again (maybe!)