

Placing youth work in Europe as evidence-based practice

TAKING THE MESSAGES FROM ROTTERDAM TO GHEENT

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Youth work is a cross-sectoral 'tool' to reach the aims of European youth strategies. The European Union and the Council of Europe consider this as highly important. But how can youth work be empowered and strengthened to live up to these expectations? Participants at the European expert meeting on youth work in Rotterdam in March 2010 have sent key messages for the Ghent Youth Work Convention in July 2010 in Belgium.

Youth work on the European agenda

In the adopted renewed framework (Council of the European Union Decision, November 2009) the Council of Ministers of the EU agreed to create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and the labour market, to promote active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people. A strong role for youth work is foreseen to reach these ambitions. Also the Council of Europe recently adopted its youth agenda 2020 on future youth policy, which includes challenges for stronger participation of young people in society. The development of quality youth work and its recognition are considered to be key methods and instruments in this strategy.

Youth workers play an active role – more than just pedagogical – within the context of a varied set of youth provisions and the decision-making process. In the European context, the common ground is

that youth workers work with young people in a non-formal (education) setting. The diversity of youth work and youth workers within Europe is also a fact. Taking this diversity into consideration, what are the shared questions and answers? What are the defined roles, competences and backgrounds? What are the lessons learnt and how is this knowledge spread? How do youth workers influence policymakers? Is youth work recognised as a broad (pedagogical) youth provision? How can youth workers strongly position themselves within European countries?

Expert meeting for youth workers in the Netherlands

Some 60 youth workers, youth researchers and youth policymakers (the triangle) gathered for two days in the Netherlands to start to answer these questions and formulate a number of key messages. These messages will be taken to the Ghent Youth Work Convention, in July 2010, during the Belgian EU Presidency. An international preparatory team including the 'Ghent organisers' prepared the focus for Rotterdam. Its follow-up is therefore guaranteed. An active contribution to the meeting was also made by the European Commission and the partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth.



MESSAGES FROM
ROTTERDAM



KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

- improved co-operation with research and policy;
 - more applied research of effects of methods & approaches to increase quality;
- developing evidence-based methods & practice;
- using the power of facts & figures to anticipate future needs of young people and society;
- room for piloting, experimenting and innovation;
- strengthening networking and knowledge exchange;
 - more resources and better use of what is already available (EKCYF)

PROFESSIONALISATION

- development of ethical/professional codes;
 - development and implementation of competence profiles;
- acknowledgement and registration of youth work as a profession;
- formal qualifications and continuous education;
 - development of common language and common definitions;
- recognition of youth work is the final result, not a goal in itself

Conditions for Empowerment of Youth Work in Europe

POSITIVE PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

- young people's talent's development at the centre of youth work and policy;
- young people have the right to quality guidance;
 - Youth-led methods in a community setting (including participation of the neighborhood);
- anticipating future needs, goals and approaches;
 - stimulate political awareness of youth;
 - better use of social media (to reach target groups)

BETTER POSITIONING AND INFLUENCING

- youth work should be an equal partner in cross-sectoral co-operation to guide young people;
 - using the power of facts and figures to improve visibility and influence policymakers;
- strengthening position through knowledge building, networking and further professionalisation;
 - improving visibility by publication of effects in various ways (including social media and virtual networks)

Moving forward for young people's guidance

Some of the experts in Rotterdam will continue their debate at the Ghent Youth Work Convention in July 2010 and beyond. This should contribute to the debate on developing a better recognition of youth work in Europe with the end goal of helping young people in the development of their talents and skills to integrate into European society. Young people have the right to quality guidance to this end.