

Executive summary

Introduction

The Blueprint Inquiry team set out to identify the elements of a great youth club and what needs to be done to develop and sustain such clubs. Bringing together key information and evidence about youth clubs from a variety of sources the intention was to create a practical blueprint for youth clubs in the 21st century, offering the best to young people.

The Inquiry heard evidence from over 400 youth leaders, workers and volunteers, from our club network and local authority staff, through the commissioned workforce survey, and through local consultation events. The views of over 100 young people were listened to through filming at local youth clubs, and MTV BOOM! project events, as well as through Clubs for Young People's survey of our Big Exchange group.

This executive summary and the recommendations that follow reflect this process.

Why youth clubs?

Though there is no doubt that young people today are presented with an ever-broadening spectrum of opportunity, many of them also face a number of contemporary challenges, including more recently the increased possibility of unemployment as a result of the economic downturn. Whether driven by a recognition that young people deserve proper investment, or simply as a result of concerns about young people 'hanging around', communities want more and better facilities for teenagers – local communities most often list activities for teenagers at the top of their 'wish list' for neighbourhood improvements, above health services, public transport and crime.

In recent decades, club-based youth work has moved in and out of vogue. Fortunately for clubs, current policy, research and government funding are once again supportive of the club-based approach. However, there is concern in much of the youth sector as to where and how this support is being offered so as to ensure that all young people are given the best opportunities possible.

Policy development and youth clubs

Key policy and legislative developments of the last five years have focused on better outcomes and opportunities for young people, thorough promotion of multi-agency partnerships, an emphasis on young people's participation and outcomes, investment in improved facilities and development of the children's workforce. The level of commitment from government in their approach to better outcomes for young people is certainly welcome; however, there is still some way to go before the value of clubs is fully understood, celebrated and further translated into policy and investment that reflects this value.

Clubs today – the reality and the potential

Numbers and what clubs do

As there is no national database of youth clubs in existence, it is impossible to know where clubs are or what services they are providing. There is also no consistent expectation about what a youth club is or guidance around purpose. If we want to ensure that there are new and improved places for all young people by 2018, we need to better understand the baseline, identify what is needed and plan how we get there, mirroring the process undertaken in the development of local Children's Centres. So, just as you can easily find your nearest school or Children's Centre is, you should be able to find your nearest youth club and know what it is they do.

National framework

Clubs have developed in a piecemeal way over the last forty years due to being non-statutory and poorly funded by successive governments. Larger 'beacon' youth clubs supporting and developing emerging clubs happen informally across the UK. This type of support needs a more robust framework to enable it to grow and strengthen, particularly with the investment in the *myplace* programme which is helping build new clubs in a number of local communities. These 'beacon' youth clubs could provide the base from which to address some of the key ongoing issues that youth clubs are experiencing working alongside the Clubs for Young People city and county organisations.

Funding general open provision in youth clubs

Currently, in commissioning services, public sector bodies are still not fully engaged with or confident about the capabilities of the third sector, and often are also too narrowly focused on some specific 'problem' groups such as young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs), and issues such as teenage pregnancy. Much funding is focused on targeted work, to the extent that it is now increasingly difficult to access funding for universal provision within clubs. Clearly, this is not just a funding issue but an ongoing policy debate about the changes in approach within youth work, influenced by government directives. Many of Clubs for Young People's youth clubs work successfully with hard to reach or disengaged young people, and it is largely an open access approach which recognises the underlying causes of social exclusion that brings such success.

Access to funding

Furthermore, Clubs for Young People member clubs report that the myriad of different funding streams makes navigation of the system difficult and time-consuming. One London youth worker reported managing 26 different funding streams, all of which required different information during the application process, and different sets of information as part of the monitoring process. Such examples, along with the 'targeted vs. universal provision' issue, mean that for club staff it has become increasingly difficult to access funding. That said, representatives from the sector acknowledge that club managers themselves need to develop a more entrepreneurial approach to managing clubs, and look creatively for ways of ensuring sustainability.

Funding smaller clubs

Around 20% of the member clubs in the Clubs for Young People network are large, well-established community organisations, with full-time paid staff and the capacity to manage substantial revenue projects if commissioned. However, a much larger proportion, (44%), would describe themselves as a "small, essentially voluntary club, delivering club/project activities in the local community". There are existing clubs struggling to survive and provide a quality service on very limited funding, and in buildings that need investment; *myplace* will not be able to help many of these clubs. Clubs of all shapes and sizes need investment, and the aspirations of Aiming High could be more readily and quickly achieved if investment was more focused on the current stock of clubs.

Working with local authorities

Despite the issue of asset and capital management being highlighted in Aiming High as part of improving local youth facilities, many of our member organisations report that they have not been consulted by local authorities. The consensus is that voluntary sector provision (including capital and assets) is often disregarded, with local authorities focusing on their own stock. Indeed, clubs report that there are several barriers to working in partnership with local authorities generally, including a lack of faith in the third sector to deliver services, excessive bureaucracy and local authority 'target chasing.'

Training of staff and volunteers

Building-based provision has gained popularity, and alongside this comes a challenge for club staff – managing significant budgets, income-generation and leading large multidisciplinary teams. With increasing focus on the delivery of youth work in youth facilities, it seems timely to review how paid staff and volunteers can meet these challenges. All paid youth work staff should have, or be in the process of acquiring, a recognised youth work qualification relevant to the role.

Quality standards

With the introduction of Aiming High, the ten year strategy for our children and young people, “raising the quality of provision is crucial if all services are to reach out and support all young people... to access the opportunities and services available.” If we are serious about driving up standards articulated in Aiming High then we need a more coordinated approach to quality standards for youth clubs and centres. This is even more important with the advent of 60+ new ‘world class facilities’ being developed through the *myplace* initiative.

Measuring success

Clubs must also be able to monitor, reflect on and improve their services, and show their value to young people. Youth work is primarily about engaging with young people by helping them develop and learn things they feel are worthwhile. Monitoring of youth projects has tended to focus on quantitative measures of inputs and outputs, which it is widely acknowledged have failed to capture the true impact of club-based provision. As funders and commissioners inevitably move towards outcome and results-based funding, what is more important now is for youth club staff to provide evidence of changing patterns of behaviour and of the ‘distance travelled’ by young people.

Work in youth clubs in a recession

During the course of this Inquiry there have been dramatic changes to the economy, affecting all aspects of life. From the local consultation events it was evident that clubs were already starting to see the impact of this on young people and their families within local communities. Finding ways of sustaining the hope and energy of young people during the ‘credit crunch’ is arguably one of the greatest challenges for youth work in general and for the youth club sector in particular. All young people would prefer a real job with a decent wage but, when this is not achievable, other viable options must be presented. With careful planning, a work development programme based on apprenticeship principles could be a credible offer to young people at youth clubs.

Quality youth clubs

The Inquiry team identified five primary elements that are essential to consider when designing or improving a youth club – location, design, staff and volunteers, activities, and young people’s involvement.

Location – the club should be centrally positioned within a community, and chosen with due consideration given to: access issues (affordability and safety); territory and young people’s identity; and proximity to outdoor recreational areas if necessary. For some areas, alternatives to a dedicated youth facility may need to be considered due to the location. For example, in remote rural settings, mobile youth projects, portable youth buildings or ‘Pods’ are all possibilities.

Design - should be guided by two overarching principles: (i) to facilitate social interaction, and; (ii) to deliver personal development opportunities in a safe, supervised environment. The design must reflect young people’s views and the project’s aspirations, so, rather than providing what can be afforded, managers should be finding creative solutions to raising the finance for what is actually required. In general terms, buildings should be attractive, well-lit and easy to see into, with some external ‘transitional’ space outside, for any young people initially uncomfortable about going in. Health and safety is paramount, as well as the provision of space for staff to work and for storage.

Workforce – those working in youth clubs need to care about young people and have the ability to empathise with, listen to and respect them. They should be positive role models and inspirational leaders, working with enthusiasm and a sense of humour, which is particularly important to young people. Along with these qualities, staff must be prepared to be there when young people need them, including evenings and weekends, and to give young people continuity and stability. Youth workers should be encouraged and supported to gain recognised qualifications that equate with their role. Volunteers are an essential part of the workforce and need the same support and consideration as paid staff.

Activities – should be flexible and responsive to the needs of young people so they remain interested and engaged. Overall, activities must have the right balance of learning and fun, and be challenging, stimulating and inclusive. Long experiences, such as weekend or week-long stays, offer the chance for more intensive work with young people. They may be based around exploring particular issues or spending time together as a group to engage in a range of activities not normally available in the club setting.

Involving Young People – must be a top priority in any club. Leaders can delegate duties to young people, building up the levels of responsibility over time. It is now recognised as accepted practice to involve young people in the club's management activities – club leaders should also ensure young people receive the right training and support.

Other issues include ensuring the club knows about possible funding sources, developing networks and contacts, and marketing and promoting the club, which may often involve word of mouth amongst young people themselves.

Conclusion and recommendations

The network of youth clubs today reflects many aspects of life within communities, their values and aspirations, belief in their young people, the commitment of community leaders and the passion and energy of the staff and volunteers.

Essential to the sustaining and development of these clubs, and the clubs of the future, is a well structured support network to develop the all round quality and breadth of provision in every club, whatever their size or focus. Without recognition of the importance of this support, the chances of developing a world class network of clubs will become increasingly difficult. The following recommendations, which are designed to support this process, are focused on delivering what the Inquiry team set out to do in offering practical solutions and the provision of a blueprint for 21st Century youth clubs.

Recommendation 1

Clubs for Young People recommends that national club-based stakeholders and supportive organisations come together to develop a nationally agreed definition of youth clubs and clear guidance around purpose.

Clubs for Young People recommends that all youth clubs give details of address including postcode, opening times and categories of activities delivered to a national register based on the agreed definition and guidance for youth clubs, and that this register be linked to local authority data-collection for positive activities, and be accessible to the public.

Clubs for Young People will commit to a full audit of their youth club stock and make it available to the DCSF's Information and Signposting of Positive Activities project (Plings).

Recommendation 2

Clubs for Young People recommends the further development of a youth club infrastructure with corresponding network support, based on the successful principles of the School Sports Partnership model. This needs to be supported with appropriate funding for a national lead body and the full engagement of top tier local authorities and local voluntary sector partners. Ten pilot beacon club networks should be developed to create a pathfinder approach to their wider development.

Recommendation 3

Clubs for Young People recommends that the Government supports through the Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF) a Youth Investment Forum set up by Clubs for Young People. This Forum will explore and champion how best to sustain investment in young people through the provision of more and better youth facilities and innovative approaches to financing these youth facilities.

Recommendation 4

Clubs for Young People recommends that future policy direction supports open access provision in socially deprived neighbourhoods rather than targeting individual young people referred by statutory agencies. This should be supported by a broad partnership approach to enable effective and appropriate 'signposting' both to and from youth club based activities.

Recommendation 5

Clubs for Young People recommends that the Government commits to a new national medium grants capital investment programme. Clubs for Young People would work with the Government to secure private sector match-funding for such a programme. This should be specifically for the improvement of the current stock of local youth clubs based on where this is needed most. We would recommend that this be on the basis of a minimum application of £250,000 up to a maximum of £1 million.

Recommendation 6

Clubs for Young People recommends that the DCSF commissions independent research into how local authorities have managed their Youth Service budgets over the past two years, the proportion allocated to voluntary sector providers and the commissioning models used to inform these decisions. This would be to test the statutory guidance from the amended 1996 Education and Inspection Act that local authorities "should use the service provider that offers the best possible combination of skills and experience to deliver services of the highest possible quality and for the most economical cost."

Recommendation 7

Clubs for Young People recommends that national club-based stakeholders and supportive organisations come together to develop a set of National Occupational Standards based on quality assured qualifications for club-based youth work. These National Occupational Standards for youth club workers should be available at levels 2, 3 and 4 and should take account of the impending changes to the generic youth work degree qualification curriculum.

Recommendation 8

Clubs for Young People recommends that a national quality standards framework for youth clubs is developed as part of the recommended youth club infrastructure, with appropriate investment and support to build third sector capacity in this area.

Recommendation 9

Clubs for Young People recommends that national club-based stakeholders and supportive organisations come together to develop an outcomes-monitoring framework which enables voluntary sector youth clubs to demonstrate the impact that they are having on young people's lives, particularly those being commissioned by statutory, charitable and private sector agencies.

Recommendation 10

Clubs for Young People recommends that a scheme is developed to support young people in work development experiences within a youth club setting. Funding from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Future Jobs Fund scheme could be ring-fenced to enable this to happen.

