



Children England response to the Education Select Committee inquiry into services for young people

Introduction to Children England

1. Children England is the leading membership organisation for the children, young people and families' voluntary sector. With member organisations working in all parts of the country ranging from small local groups to the largest household names in children's charities, Children England is in a unique position to use the collective voice of the voluntary sector to achieve positive change for children. Children England provides capacity building, support and information to its members and the wide range of voluntary sector organisations working with children, young people and families. It does this by building active networks, promoting good practice, stimulating policy debate and ensuring that the issues that matter most to its members are taken up with decision makers.
2. Children England partners with the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) in acting as a strategic partner to the Office for Civil Society. We refer to NCVYS, and endorse their submission to the Select Committee, as the leading authority on the voluntary and community sector perspective on the realities, challenges and practice of the dedicated youth work sector and services. We are submitting our response on the basis of our members' broad range of interests and concerns for young people, based on their expertise in delivering innovative and critical frontline services for young people such as young people in and leaving care, young people at risk of abuse and exploitation, asylum-seeking young people, runaways, young people in trouble with the law, disabled young people making transitions to adulthood and young homeless people. We believe that the full spectrum of situations and services needs for young people in, and moving on from adolescence, face significant challenges in the immediate future, with considerable concern about the impact on the young people who need and use them. We therefore welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important and timely Inquiry.

The relationship between universal and targeted services for young people

3. The funding pressures right across the public sector have already led to an increased political and public debate on the value and affordability of universal versus targeted provision. We are concerned that this is creating a false dichotomy between the two when the most effective provision will include a combination of both. Young people's circumstances can change quickly and dramatically and it is essential that public service provision is flexible enough to respond to this.
4. On the one hand, one of the principal aims of targeted services must be to re-engage users with universal services; acting as a portal from specialised support back to mainstream provision. On the other hand, it must be made easier for those who currently survive and thrive on the minimum, universal entitlement to access targeted support before any potential problems become critical. As such, we must be careful not to overly target interventions through the use of personal or familial 'risk factors' and/or geographical deprivation indices. These risk factors are only indicative, not predictive; some young people come to develop high levels of need quite suddenly. Effective early intervention means providing support to those who may not present with the requisite risk factors but know themselves to need increased help. Strict targeting will miss them, or exclude them until they're more obviously troubled and more expensive to support.
5. As such it is important that we retain universal routes of access to targeted services. An excellent example of this is the counselling and psychotherapy service run by Young Devon which provides a very effective early intervention and prevention service to young people affected by a range of emotional issues. Very few of the referrals come from targeted providers (including only 1% from social services) with the vast majority from schools, families or the individuals themselves. This means the project is accessible to those with low level emotional needs that can be met before they escalate as well as those with more serious mental health problems.
6. One of the greatest advantages of allowing young people to easily move up and down a continuum of support, rather than reserving particular support for particular individuals, is that it can also combat the potential stigma associated with targeted services. Rationing universal services will effectively label those who use them as needy, dysfunctional or disadvantaged, with the result that even those who require support will be deterred from accessing it. Promoting a culture in which people feel positive about seeking help and support, rather than feeling that it signifies real or potential failure, must be central to a coherent prevention agenda. The key to ensuring the earliest intervention at the point of least presenting problem must therefore be to empower the individual to seek and secure the help, support or advice they seek

at the earliest point they feel they would benefit from it. Overly specifying eligibility criteria for targeted services and therefore stigmatising the support will put this goal at risk.

How services for young people can meet the Government's priorities for volunteering, including the role of National Citizen Service

7. We welcome the Government's commitment to nurturing people's sense of community, citizenship and civic duty through increased volunteering. Millions of young people already volunteer on a regular basis and many more would also get involved given the right support. The National Citizen Service has a vital role to play in this regard and has the potential to instil in young people a volunteering spirit that will last well into adulthood. Indeed, polling during the summer of 2010 for Children and Young People Now magazine¹ suggests that a majority of young people welcome the NCS and hope to be able to take part in the programme. However, with only 11,000 places nationally in the first year for an age group numbering around 750,000, there are serious questions about the affordability of any major upscaling in a context of continued spending cuts thereafter. With a limited number of places, we are concerned that the scheme could become the preserve of the self-selecting group of already engaged and confident citizens, therefore failing to reach the disadvantaged and disengaged young people who have the most to gain from the programme.

8. We are also worried that with significant cuts likely for the major national volunteering infrastructure bodies² and youth services more generally, the National Citizen Service appears to be 'the only game in town'. This not only limits volunteering opportunities available outside of the summer holidays but it also appears to infer that until the age of 16, and without overt tutelage, the young are not yet conceived of as active citizens within their communities in their own right. This is a perspective vigorously challenged by the voluntary and community sector, much of whose current work is focussed on empowering young people to undertake collaborative, imaginative and constructive action within their communities, just as the Government's policies advocate. The learning from such work would also strongly suggest the need for named and overt inclusion of young people within plans for building local community and citizenship, precisely because of how often they are excluded and viewed as either being too young to have positive views and contributions to make, or more negatively, as a threat to their communities' sense of peace and safety. One of the biggest volunteer drives launched in the UK since the Coalition came to power – for volunteers to help with the 2012 London Olympics – has already excluded anyone under 16 from applying, to the great disappointment of many young people keen to contribute. On this basis, and while welcoming the NCS and the

¹ *National Citizen Service proves a hit with teens in CYP Now Poll*. Lead story, cited in Children and Young People Now edition 5 -11 October 2010

² <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/Channels/Policy/Article/1045047/Volunteering-charities-lament-Office-Civil-Society-funding-cuts/>

overall aim of promoting active citizens, we are concerned by the partial and tightly-programmed referencing of young people's role within the Government's volunteering vision.

Which young people access services, what they want from those services and their role in shaping provision

9. Involving young people in designing services and creating opportunities for them to voice their opinions about issues that they care about is at the heart of the work of the young people's voluntary and community sector. The Government should seek to draw on this expertise and actively involve organisations with a strong participation record in empowering young people to influence services. In doing so, it is essential to recognise that involving young people in shaping provision requires skilled facilitation. Often this will require highly trained professional youth workers rather than just volunteers. Unfortunately, the deep cuts to youth services are likely to see many of these skilled youth workers losing their jobs. For example, the flagship Salmon Youth Centre has announced that it may have to cut staff by half due to loss of statutory funding.

The training and workforce development needs of the sector

10. The voluntary and community sector encompasses a wide range of roles and attracts staff from a variety of back grounds, including long term volunteers, new graduates and experienced individuals from other fields. As such, the workforce has extremely varied development needs.
11. However, in order to ensure that the sector is well prepared for the new political and financial environment, we would suggest that workforce development needs to incorporate the skills that are essential for the long term sustainability of the voluntary and community youth sector. In particular, improving overall governance through training on policy formulation, accountability and strategic thinking; developing leadership talent; increasing business skills such as marketing and understanding new types of finance; better management of volunteers; and more accurate impact assessment processes. Unfortunately, voluntary and community groups find it very difficult to secure funding for these aspects of training and skills development, due to the grant and commissioning focus on funding projects rather than organisational development. As a result, over time organisations lose the capacity to manage, adapt, maintain and grow high quality services.
12. Children England has been working to strengthen these skills through our VCS Engage programme. We have nine Regional Development Managers who not only provide training and support directly but also facilitate the coming together of professionals on a regional basis to learn from each other. Our experience, and the Programme's evaluation, shows that this exchange of knowledge at a regional level is still local enough to be relevant to those working at a sub-national level but is removed from the often competitive and 'too close' relationships at local level. Networks and training provided at this level are cost effective too, enabling particularly small groups and services to share in high quality training and support tailored to the nature and realities of their work and sector, that they could simply not afford if sought out

on their own basis. Funding for VCS Engage is, however, due to end at the end of March 2011, further restricting the capacity and support available to the voluntary and community sector delivering services for young people.

The impact of public sector spending cuts on funding and commissioning of services, including how available resources can best be maximised, and whether payment by results is desirable and achievable

13. Right across the voluntary and community sector, there are clear and substantial threats to the continued existence of a significant proportion of organisations. In 2009/10 over one third of the voluntary and community sector's income came from statutory funding. Across our membership alone, who have a combined annual turnover of around £750million, more than half of their total income currently comes from statutory sources.
14. Public spending cuts are already starting to be passed on to our sector in terms of immediate contract withdrawals, as well as the prospect deep cuts and de-commissioning at the end of most existing contracts in March 2011. A Freedom of Information request by *Charity Insight* has revealed that local authorities have already cut around £200m from voluntary sector funding. Equally worrying, in only 15% of those cases did the councils conduct an equality impact assessment of the cuts they were making. The result is that many organisations who are providing vital services may be lost over the next 18 months due to the suddenness and severity of statutory funding withdrawal, and the lack of viable alternative funding pathways to 'bridge' their survival and adaptation to the new evolving environment. We believe there is a significant risk that while placing a growing voluntary and community sector at the heart of Government's commissioning plans, the Coalition may more immediately preside over a period of the most substantial reduction of the sector for many decades.
15. The emergence of new funding methods, such as payment by results, provide a potentially great opportunity for the voluntary and community sector, but we must be careful not to treat them as a panacea. Though in theory they may lend themselves to youth services, the reality will be far more complex. Firstly, when supporting young people we are trying to effect long term 'intergenerational' change with positive outcomes often five or ten years down the road. Given that current contracts here are usually only for three years at most, the funding of 10-year outcomes through payment by results mechanisms, would require a commissioning revolution. Secondly, causality is virtually impossible to prove over such a large time period. The development of a young person is an incredibly complex process determined by a wide variety of inputs of which any individual service is only one. It is unclear how one would determine the return that investors should receive on their money, or even if the private sector would be willing to invest for this amount of time in the first place. It may be that payment by results mechanisms, such as social impact finance vehicles, would be better used for more defined and perhaps higher level interventions, freeing public resources to invest in early intervention over

the longer term.

16. We believe that a fundamental reassessment of the commissioning process is required if government is to maximise the impact it achieves with shrinking resources. There is a default assumption that competitive tendering will automatically secure better value for money and in most cases it is indeed likely that government will pay less for particular services using this method. However, this unit cost completely ignores all the associated costs that have been incurred both by government and suppliers as a result of the competitive tendering process. Many managers in the voluntary and community sector now spend 80% of their time managing various contracts rather than managing actual projects. In larger VCS organisations, new contract managing posts have been created, and whole teams have been set up in local authorities. In all cases, the effect has been to further distance funding processes and decisions from frontline delivery.
17. Without a comprehensive analysis of the costs of this competitive commissioning infrastructure it is impossible to say for certain whether it has helped to deliver youth services more efficiently. However, the evidence we have received from our members suggests that in many cases competitive tendering is not the best way to maximise resources. Instead, government at all levels should use a variety of funding tools, including retaining grant funding as part of the commissioning mix. Where competitive tendering is deemed necessary, costs would be significantly reduced if government bodies issued longer contracts. We believe that a move to at least five year contracts (with appropriate review and break clauses), and in some cases even longer, would not only reduce procurement bureaucracy and costs for authorities, and tendering costs for voluntary organisations, but would also better reflect the needs of many young people for stability and reliability of services, that can have a sustainable positive impact in their lives.

How local government structures and statutory frameworks impact on service provision

18. With young people aged anywhere between 10 and 25 (depending on which definition is used), the principle structural problem for young people is that roughly half way through this period they move from children's to adult services. This transition can have a profound impact on the vulnerable groups who rely on statutory services, yet currently it is often poorly planned and managed. For disabled young people and their carers the transition can be particularly traumatic. Familiar professionals who they may have known for over a decade are replaced by strangers, funding is reduced and new eligibility criteria and paperwork has to be navigated. Similarly, care leavers, those with mental health issues and young people involved in the criminal justice system all struggle as a result of changing statutory frameworks and reduced support.
19. Greater devolution of budgets to local authorities and the removal of the statutory basis for consultation with the voluntary and community sector through Children's Trusts mean that local

authorities will have far greater autonomy to design service provision. As such, providing a voice for the voluntary and community youth sector at a local level will become increasingly important. While in some cases this is a role that can be carried out by local generic voluntary sector infrastructure bodies, often they lack the expertise to effectively represent the interests of specialist providers. It can be an isolating experience to represent the VCS on statutory decision making structures. The regional networks of representatives on Children's Trusts and Local Safeguarding Children Boards, coordinated by Children England, have played an important role in sharing best practice and increasing the confidence and skills of representatives to speak out on behalf of the sector and their service users.

20. Similarly, regional and national infrastructure organisations are far better placed to influence multiple local authorities who chose to share back office and commissioning functions on a regional or sub regional level. We are currently supporting the development of consortia in the North East and South West to enable smaller local and specialist groups to bid for service contracts on both a regional and sub regional basis.

How the value and effectiveness of services should be assessed.

21. We wholeheartedly agree with the Government on the importance of accurately measuring the impact of services. With large cuts imminent across the public and voluntary sectors it is essential that every pound spent is achieving maximum benefit for young people. The voluntary and community sector has long recognised this and already made great strides towards measuring the outcomes of its work, creating a broader evidence base and sharing best practice.
22. While great progress has been made, we also know that there is a long way to go. For many voluntary and community groups there are major barriers to developing their impact assessment processes; principally money. Thorough evaluation requires significant resources yet additional funding is rarely provided for this purpose in statutory contracts. Even when it is, it is also often the first thing to be cut when budgets get tight. Similarly, combating the most entrenched social problems requires long term investment but with contracts often only a year in length, three at best, service providers are generally not given sufficient time to make a realistic impact, never mind evidence it.
23. The problem is particularly acute for small charities who also only work with limited client numbers and as such find it almost impossible to meet the highest research standards in evaluation. Indeed, the Government must recognise that there is an inherent tension between the two laudable policy aims of the Big Society and greater impact assessment. With even medium size charities often lacking the resources to properly evidence their impact, it is unfeasible to expect small community groups, that the Coalition hopes will increasingly deliver public and community services, to do the same.

24. It is also true to say that formal methodologies for impact assessment are most often applied to professionalised services and in part driven by the need for professional groups such as doctors, social workers or therapists to develop their practice and test emerging or new interventions. This is excellent, but not easily, or necessarily appropriate, to transfer to the activities of a small community youth club. In fact the overzealous applications of such evaluation methods can be destructive and serve to work against the development of cost effective community based prevention.
25. We also believe that there are worrying ethical implications to some of the most rigorous testing methods. For example, the use of randomised control trials would require denying services to those who have been identified as in need of support in order to provide a 'baseline' against which to measure the impact of interventions provided to others. Given the evolutionary rather than revolutionary pace of social change, a thorough experiment could take many years. This would not just be morally dubious, the majority of our members would actually be obliged by their founding charters and articles of association to step in and provide assistance.
26. Overall, it is essential that assessment methods are proportional and appropriate for the type of service being delivered. Youth services should not just be measured by the number of young people involved or the hours of provision but instead by the quality of the experience. To this end, government should make greater use of feedback from young people.
27. In some cases local authorities have started asking voluntary and community groups what they think would be a good way of monitoring progress. We welcome this collaborative approach and would like to see it adopted more widely. Ideally though a consensus needs to be developed about how we collect evidence so that we can aggregate data more effectively across areas and services to better understand patterns and the most effective ways of addressing complex needs. This would hopefully limit the extent to which successful projects lose funding, even where effectiveness has been shown, due to a new local or national administration changing the definition of success.

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