NORTH WEST REGIONAL YOUTH WORK UNIT AND LIVERPOOL YOUTH SERVICE
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TEAM

Youth Participation in the North West

Improving Youth Participation

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Introduction

Funding

This research was commissioned by the Together We Can Partnership, with additional funding in the form of staff time provided by Liverpool Youth Service.

Research Team

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The views and findings expressed in this report represent the views of the author (s) and are not necessarily those of NWRYWU, Liverpool Youth Service, UKYP, or any of the other organisations who contributed to this report.

About NWRYWU

NWRYWU is a voluntary organisation which aims to

- Reflect and represent youth work across the region
- To provide opportunities for youth services to respond to and impact on national government agendas
- To improve the quality and consistency of youth work across the region by promoting good practice and ensuring appropriate access to training
- To co-ordinate developments in both the maintained and voluntary sectors
- To provide a voice for young people and young people's issues and support the participation agenda
- To create regional development opportunities for young people, staff and managers that will add value to the work at local level

About Liverpool Youth Service Youth Engagement Team

The Youth Engagement Team is a group of five young people who are employed by Liverpool Youth Service. The Youth Engagement Team aims to safeguard all children and young people from discrimination in all its forms. This takes into account their race, gender, sexuality, mental and physical ability. The Y.E.T researches and develops ways of involving children and young people in the decision making process of the Liverpool City Council, Liverpool Youth Service, and other agencies. The Y.E.T finds ways to get young people involved and participating in the

planning and organising of large events for children and young people. The Youth Engagement Team aims to service the needs of the young people of Liverpool. Within this project the Y.E.T. worked regionally as an opportunity to develop the skills of its team and bring learning which is of benefit to young people within Liverpool.

About UK Youth Parliament

The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) enables young people to use their energy and passion to change the world for the better. Run by young people for young people, UKYP provides opportunities for 11-18-year-olds to use their voice in creative ways to bring about social change.

Abstract

This research was split into three sections. Section one involved the administrative task of mapping provision across the region whilst section two (the Enquiring Minds project) used participatory research methods to identify examples of best practice and barriers to provision. In addition to this a pre-existing youth worker consultation conducted in February 2008 was used which forms a third section to the research. Conclusions and recommendations on methods for improving youth engagement/participation across the North West are drawn from all three sections of this research.

Aims of Research

Section One: Mapping of Provision

To list and database the organisations in the North West Region who:

- Engage young people in local decision making. This will cover decisions within local authority political processes e.g. UKYP or youth councils
- Involve young people in planning and improving services,
- Involve young people in commissioning services for young people

Section Two: Enquiring Minds Project

To work with a group of young people in a participatory manner to research examples of practice from across the region, evaluate the success of this practice, identify common barriers to participation and make recommendations for change.

Section Three: Youth Workers Consultation

To consult with youth workers and other staff from a variety of organisations across the North West on the Aiming Higher Agenda. The consultation question was:-

"The Government's stated ambition is to see a real change in the level of involvement and control young people have over the design and delivery of services. How do we ensure that we can reach out to engage those who are marginalised and least likely to participate? "

Methodology
Section 1: Mapping of Provision

A pro-forma was designed (appendix I) which asked organisations for

- Contact details
- A self definition of organisation type
- To indicate which of the following areas of work they were involved in:-
    - engaging young people in local decision making authority, covering local authority political processes e.g. UKYP or youth councils
    - involving young people in planning and improving services,
    - involving young people in commissioning services for young people

This pro-forma was distributed through the following networks

- Principal Youth Officers within the NW
- Members of the Participation Workers Network North West
- Library Services within the North West
- Voluntary Youth Sector Umbrella/Support Organisations
- Key Health Service contacts
- Care Services Improvement Partnership North West mailing list
- Staff supporting the delivery of UK Youth Parliament at a local level

Recipients of the pro-forma were also asked to pass on the document to any other organisations they were aware of involved in youth participation

Returned pro-formas were then collated onto a database and organisations were categorised using the Adelphi method by adult members of the research team

Methodology
Section 2: The Enquiring Minds Project

Process

This section of the research was conducted by NWRYWU's Regional Participation Worker in partnership with young people from Liverpool Youth Engagement Team.

Step 1: Planning Day

The Regional Participation Worker facilitated a planning session with the young people using youth work techniques.

During this the young people

- Discussed and developed criteria for evaluating participation with other groups of young people
- Designed an activity they could run with other groups of young people to assess the quality of participation the groups were engaged in.
- Gave guidance to the regional participation worker on selecting groups from across the region to take part in the research. (It was initially hoped that the young people make this decision but the practicalities and timescales of the project meant this was not possible)

Step 2: Visiting Provision

Young people from the research team then visited a variety of services for young people from across the region. During these visits they met with young people accessing these services, and when appropriate staff. The group visited services where young people were actively involved in youth participation work but also services where young people were not engaged in youth participation.

During each visit the young people from the research team ran their research activity. This required the groups they visited to discuss and agree or disagree with a series of statements, written by the research team. This activity was filmed, and after each visit the members of the research team filmed their conclusions about what they had learnt from meeting the group, their judgment on the quality of the research they were involved in and possible opportunities for improvement.

The following provision/groups were visited:

- Oldham Youth Council (Local Authority Youth Service Provision
- Salford Disability Forum (voluntary sector organisation)
- Shavington Youth Club, Cheshire (Integrated Youth Support Service Provision)
- Bury Youth Cabinet (Youth Service and Connexions Provision)
- Wirral Youth Parliament (Youth Service Provision)
- Crewe Congress (Integrated Youth Support Service and ASB partnership provision)
- The McGuiness Unit, Prestwich Hospital (Tier 4 mental health provision)

These were selected to give a sample of a range of provision in terms of young people accessing the provision, geography and type of organisation. More youth service provision was visited than originally intended as a group of visits were conducted at a single event (UKYP regional meeting) with many youth service provisions present.

Step 3 Evaluation Day

Once all the visits were conducted the regional participation worker facilitated an evaluation session with the young people from the research team using youth work techniques

During this session the young people

- Identified common issues with participation in the groups they had visited
- Developed recommendations for improving participation across the region
- Identified their own personal learning
- Storyboarded and filmed a video diary as a medium for presenting their results and recommendations.

Ethical Issues

Every participant was made aware of the purpose of the research and how the findings will be used. The organizations visited were made aware that a video camera would be used and parental consent should be sought if necessary.

Levels of Participation

Research Team

Aims of research and initiation of research	Young people did not participate in this decision
Developing Research methods	Decisions made by young people, with support of adults
Selection of participants	Decisions made by adults in consultation with young people
Analysis of Results	Decisions made by young people, with support of adults
Recommendations for Change	Decisions made by young people , with support of adults
Presentation of results	Medium decided by adults Content decided by young people in partnership with adults

Participants

All participants were informed of the purpose of the research and how it will be used. Each group taking part received a copy of the video diary and research report.

Issues relating to Inclusion

To ensure all aspects of the research is as inclusive as possible, within the timeframe and budget, the following steps were taken

Research Team

Training was provided to all members of the research team during the planning day, and as part of their ongoing role within Liverpool Youth Engagement Team so that they developed the skills and ability to fully take part in the process. NWRYWU and Liverpool Youth Service operate an equality and diversity policy in relation to recruitment and selection

Methods

Video consultation was used to provide a methodology which is accessible and non confrontational to most young people. A group who were not engaged in participation provided a control group.

Participants

With a relatively small number of groups (originally intended to be four) it was not possible to provide a full demographic representation of the region. Two groups were identified to participate on the basis that they could be considered excluded.

Findings

The Section 2 report was produced in video format, which will provide an accessible and easily understandable medium to most young people.

Learning outcomes for research team and participants

Research Team

The team learnt through participating in and leading groupwork sessions; learning outcomes are identified in the video diary by members of the team.

Participants

Anticipated learning outcomes for participants were

- Development of group and communication skills through participation in research activity.
- Greater awareness of successful youth participation and barriers to participation with participants by giving them access to the final report.

Methodology
Section 3: Youth Workers Consultation

This was a pre-existing piece of work which has been incorporated into this research. In February 2008 NWRYWU and UKYP ran an event called Circles of Influence 2008. This was an event organised by young people from UKYP to enable young people from across the region to meet and debate with regional decision makers within seven debate circles. Over 150 young people from across the region attended. During the young people's debates staff that had supported and brought young people to attend the event were invited to take part in a group discussion around the governments Aiming Higher White paper.

This debate was facilitated and recorded by Andy Hamflett UKYP Chief Executive, and the following question was used to open discussion

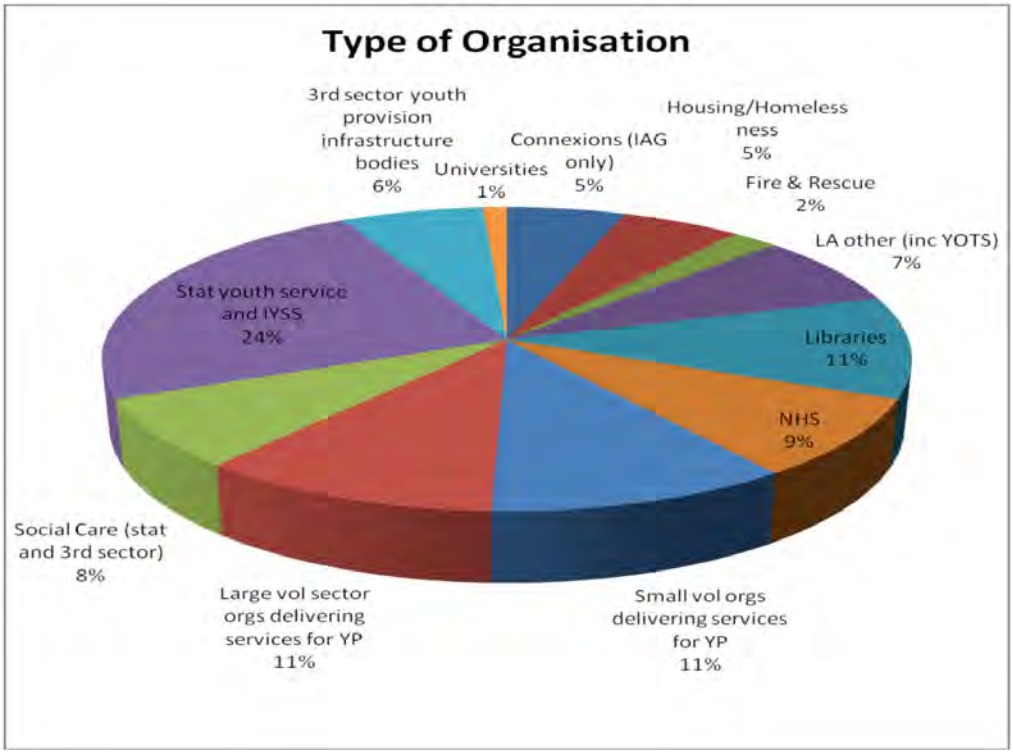
"The Government's stated ambition is to see a real change in the level of involvement and control young people have over the design and delivery of services. How do we ensure that we can reach out to engage those who are marginalised and least likely to participate?"

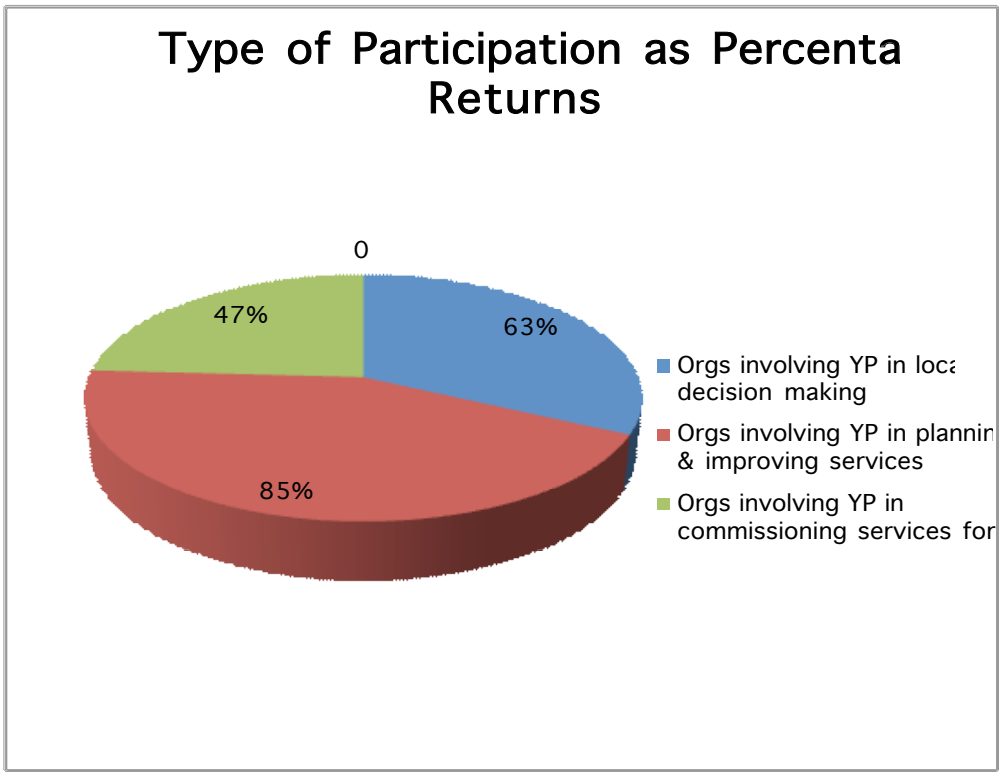
Staff from the organisations below took part in this consultation; the majority were youth workers, though some were employed in other roles such as Personal Advisors and Teachers.

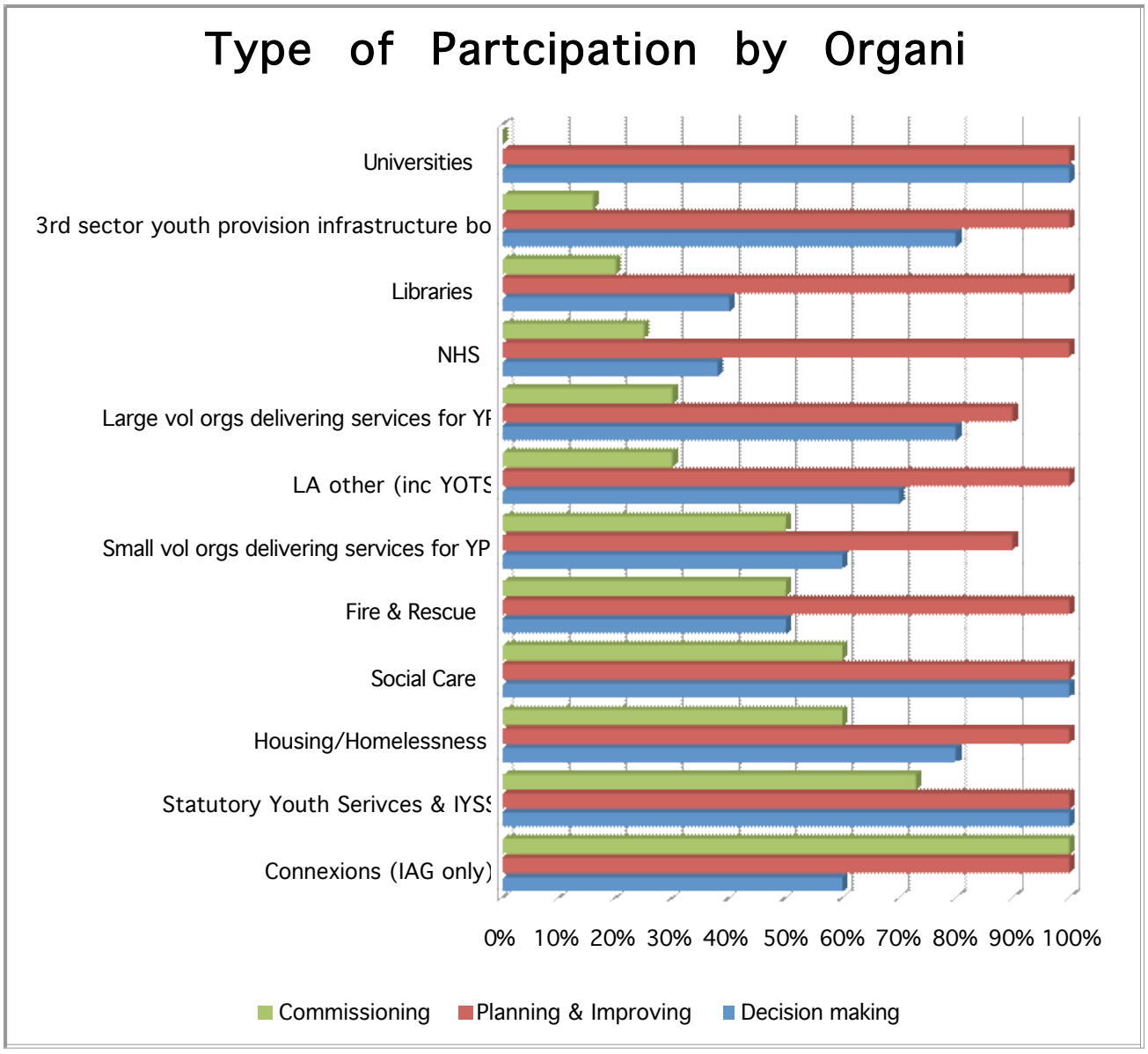
Anfield Detached Youth Work Project
Blackburn with Darwen Youth Service
Blackpool Youth Service
Bolton MBC Youth Service
Bridge Foyer Hostel, Chester
Buile Hill High School, Salford
Bury Youth Service
Canal Boat Project, Halton
Carlisle City Council
Connexions Cheshire & Warrington
E2E, Total People Macclesfield
Knowsley Youth Service
Lancashire Youth Service
Liverpool Community College
Liverpool Youth Service
Oldham Youth Service
Salford Disability Forum
Sefton Youth Service
St Helens Youth Service
Trafford Youth Service
Warrington Youth Service
Wigan Youth Service
Wirral Youth Service

Results
Section 1: Mapping of Provision

Total Number of Pro-forma Returns: 93, full Database in Appendix II







Trends within the Database

- *The largest number of returns came from statutory youth services or integrated youth support services.* This reflects that Youth Services and youth work have a strong tradition of youth participation and engagement, with the professional qualification for youth work focusing heavily on participation.

- *The majority of returns came from public sector organisations and local authority owned companies (e.g. connexions).* This could be a reflection recent government drives to promote youth engagement and participation, but could also be connected to the following point in that public sector organisations are by their very nature large organisations.

- *An even larger majority of returns came from large organisations.* This is likely a reflection of the costs in supporting youth participation with small organisations finding it difficult to resource (this is also reflected in section 2)

- *There was an absence of schools councils returning pro-formas*. Whilst it is clear that schools councils exist there was not a single return from a school council. Considering the methodology of distributing the pro-forma this is most likely to indicate that schools councils do not link into other participation services and networks

- *Nearly all organisations reported involving young people in planning and improving services but less than half reported involving young people in commissioning*. This may be a reflection of the fact that commissioned services as a model is less common, though there have recent moves within Children Services towards commissioning these have not yet been fully implemented.

Results
Section 2: Enquiring Minds Project

In line with participatory research principles the young people involved in the research have presented the results, conclusions and recommendations for change themselves within the video diary in the recommendations for change section. These have been directly quoted here

"Young People need to see more examples of change by other young people. During our research it was clear that some young people struggled to see how or what changes they could make, they seemed to lack vision or ambition, their tolerance and acceptance levels of things being taken away and for there being a lack of services and resources available was quite shocking. They accepted negative change and didn't understand that they had rights and could express their views and had the power to make change. They seemed to lack a general leader for the group, this resulted in nobody wanting to stand out and go against the views of their friends, their opinions were easily changed and they lacked the skills to debate. A way of tacking this problem would be to take a group of young people who are not participating to see other groups who do participate, voice their views and debate issues they affect them and to take them to see changes they have made and things they achieved through participation hopefully this would motivate the group to want to achieve and let them see young people can make a change and affect not their local community but make change regionally and nationally. Some of the barriers for the group not participating were a lack of skills, knowledge and general motivation in the correct ways of tackling issues they may have. Offering training in leadership and debating would be beneficial to the group."

"Groups need to link to other groups and larger structures We thought that the above idea would increase participation because we were meeting some groups of young people that seemed that they could be quite isolated. We believe this isolation could be caused by the workers being lethargic in creating links, it could be by geography and cost or it could be due to safety issues. This isolation meant that good practice was not shared across services and linking into other groups would allow young people to get examples of how participation has benefitted other groups and could motivate them. Workers would get new ideas in getting young people involved and would see other styles of work. Linking into other groups in a workable environment would get a broader view point and a louder voice from the young people."

"Young People need to feel safe to criticise the services they receive When speaking to some Young people we felt that they could not express themselves properly because they were conscious of what they were saying whether it is right or wrong. They also felt they could not express themselves on certain questions. The Young people sometimes feel that they have to say positive things to please staff. It's difficult to say how this will be solved because it relates to individual staff attitudes.

"Participation workers need to develop skills as campaigners/lobbyists which can be passed on to young people. In some groups the YP seemed to know what changes they wanted to make but didn't know what to do or didn't have the skills to know how to go about making the

changes! Therefore if staff were trained they could then pass on these skills to the YP and maybe if there were training workshops that both staff and YP could attend it would help."

"Young People should be supported to act as leaders. When we were working with some of the groups like Oldham they had a chair in place and we said that that was good to help participation because the chair was encouraging other young people to have a say as well as putting his own views forward. He was also keeping the group under control which would work well in a meeting. We also said that where some young people are natural leaders it might be an idea to let them run with the natural leadership and encourage the skills that they need to do that. Also maybe have training available through the North West so that young people who have some leadership skills can be trained in the other skills and then become better leaders themselves. We said that participation is more of a skill that you learn as you do it and you improve at it so having training to help people with those skills will benefit participation. We said that you should have leaders from different communities so that young people from different communities feel more comfortable and they have a leader who can relate to them and they can relate to the leader"

Results
Section 3: Youth Worker's Consultation

This section was written by Andy Hamflett, Chief Executive, UKYP and edited for this report by Dan Moxon, NWRYWU

AIMING HIGH –

UKYP/NWRYWU consultation with youth workers, North West region

Goodison Park, Liverpool, Friday 8th February 2008

The question:

The Government's stated ambition is to see a real change in the level of involvement and control young people have over the design and delivery of services. How do we ensure that we can reach out to engage those who are marginalised and least likely to participate?

The response:

Comments expressed during the wide-ranging discussion fell under four main headings:

1. Labelling and targeting 'marginalised' young people.
2. The status of participation.
3. Funding and resources.
4. Transport issues.

Labelling and targeting 'marginalised' young people

When this question was addressed, the term 'marginalised' was instantly challenged.

It was clear that all workers understood and were adept at operating within a target-driven culture which focused work on young people with specific life-defining factors, but they had many poignant observations on the philosophy underpinning it.

Terms such as 'hard-to-reach', 'marginalised' and 'disadvantaged' were used in many different settings, without any real definition. Who defines what marginalised means? And what exactly *does* it mean?

Many thought that such 'top-down' targeting could actually be tokenistic, as so much energy was devoted to chasing certain groups of young people that the appropriate time to consider the quality of the experience was not available. Who benefits from that?

All workers clearly had a passion to involve young people who face barriers to participation, but were keen to point out that that youth work is for all, it is a voluntary contribution on behalf of

the young person, and too much targeted work actually weakened services and infrastructure overall.

It was also noted that the local police often drive forward decisions regarding young people (dispersal orders, etc), and that they have a long way to go to learn how to work effectively with young people.

Everyone understood the need for targets related to diversity to ensure those most in need are reached. However, by applying a one-size-fits all approach via directives from DCSF, filtered through the Local Authority management structure, there were many examples of resources actually being diverted away from those most in need.

The wish of the group was for the targets system to be more reflective of local need, drawing on the local experience of informed youth work professionals (nobody ever asks the front-line youth workers who they think are most in need).

The status of participation

It was pointed out that targeted work with marginalised young people obviously relied on the main participation structures in place in any local area. These structures needed further attention.

While many Local Authorities have developed excellent youth participation models, others were really struggling due to a lack of interest from senior leaders. This meant that young people and their views were often brushed aside, which was demoralising.

One particular worker believed that her job of supporting youth participation could be made easier if it was based on a constitution, code of conduct or charter which safeguarded certain principles supporting youth voice.

Some participants thought that a culture change was still needed in some Councils to enable youth participation to flourish.

Funding

There was broad acknowledgement that there is a lot of funding to be drawn down, which is very much a positive. However:

- This leads to too much competition between organisations at the local level and also results in some areas to a massive duplication of similar services. This shows the need for a more strategic overview of funding allocation in any given area to ensure a balanced range of options are available for young people.
- A lot of the available funding seems to assume that trips are the thing that young people need more than anything, and that is often not the case.
- Most of the funding is short-term, which makes it extremely difficult to plan progress, succession and long-term benefits, as you jump from funding priority to funding priority.
- Most of the funding is project-based. This puts massive pressure on often very small staff teams to enable delivery. The lack of strong core budgets will continue to impede delivery until this is addressed.

- Due to a diminishing budget, one manager felt there was no other option than to lower pay levels, even though he knew this would lead to great difficulties in recruiting staff.

- With all this in mind, there was strong agreement that to ensure a more balanced and strategic approach to youth service delivery, it would be worth shelving some of the shorter-term, project-based funding to release more long-term resources that would strengthen infrastructure and staff capacity.

Transport

The group was unanimous in agreeing that poor transport had a major impact on the ability to involve marginalised young people (and, indeed all young people) in youth work and youth participation

The workers agreed that the main issues were: cost, safety, availability and respect from bus drivers.

Re cost, bus fares in some areas were so high that four or five young people would save money by travelling to their youth centre in a taxi. What does that say about the affordability of public transport for the nation's young people?

While there was some celebration of creative use of Youth Opportunities funds to reduce local bus fares for young people (a lot of this initiated by MYPs), this was tempered by the strong belief that YOF funds should not have to be used for this. Travel should be cheap enough for young people anyway, so that funds intended for positive activities could in fact be used for that purpose.

It was also noted that young people on some Youth Opportunities Fund boards had decided not to use their resources in this way, as it was not a long-term, sustainable option to transport and they could be back to square one after a year. There was some discussion about whether reducing transport fares for young people would increase attendance at youth facilities. Some thought it would, others were not so sure (though they, too, still thought that fares should be reduced, as a point of principle – young people *should* be able to travel around their area for a variety of reasons). In general, transport was seen unanimously as a major issue in relation to the headline question.

Conclusion

Overall, I was extremely impressed with the can-do attitude of the workers and their willingness to use whatever tools and resources they have at their disposal to provide the best possible opportunities for the young people in their areas. I was also left in no doubt that a willingness to work with the most marginalised young people was central to everyone's philosophy for youth work, but that some thought must be given to allowing more flexible approaches to achieving this aim, based on local knowledge.

Andy Hamflett, Chief Executive, UKYP

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on this research we recommend the following strategies would develop youth engagement/participation in the North West. These are specifically aimed at the Together We Can Partnership as a potential commissioner of youth engagement/participation work though the recommendations could be implemented by any of organisations with an agenda in the field working on a regional basis.

1. Develop or fund work which supports young people to take on leadership roles

It was clearly highlighted in the Enquiring minds research that participation was more effective, and levels of engagement higher when young people take on leadership roles within the projects. This could simply be young people with natural leadership skills or in more formal positions such as chairs of groups. Within the Enquiring minds project the young people concluded that developing work which enables young people to develop leadership skills within the context of participation would promote youth engagement. In addition to this they also recommended that by targeting this work at groups or communities not involved in participation this could potentially enable young leaders to motivate other young people from those communities to participate.

2. Develop links with senior local authority leaders to promote the benefits of genuine youth participation

Within the workers consultation it was noted that youth engagement and participation was often limited by a lack of genuine commitment from senior local authority leaders, leading to young people's views being dismissed, and preventing youth engagement work from leading to genuine change within services (which impacts on point 3). In this context the Together we can Partnership could use its influence to develop links with senior local authority leaders to persuade them of the benefits of genuine youth participation and engagement

3. Develop or fund strategies which highlight any positive changes made by young people as a result of youth participation to other groups of young people

Both the Enquiring minds project and the workers consultation highlighted that many young people engaged in participation were not able to see changes to services made as a result of the work they were involved in. In some cases this was because their voices were not listened to and no changes were implemented; in others simply because changes were not reported effectively back to the young people. This acts to de-motivate young people who are engaged in youth participation and further to dissuade young people not already engaged in participation from becoming so. The enquiring minds group recommend that this could be best overcome by developing schemes which enabled groups of young people who were not engaged in participation to visit successful other successful participation projects across the region and look at examples of changes to services which other young people made. The aim of this would be to inspire groups of young people to engage in participation structures. (This point links to points 4 and 5)

4. Develop and fund links between participation groups through existing infrastructures

The enquiring minds project found that many groups often operate with too greater degree of isolation from other participation groups. This isolation was caused by geography and cost of transport (as highlighted in the workers consultation), lack of links between workers and red tape around child safety issues. Operating in isolation prevented projects from sharing examples of best practice and seeing examples of change made by other young people (see point 3). In addition where groups did link together this provided a "louder voice" for the young people leading to more effective change. To overcome this, work could be funded which enables groups to link together (see the YOF fund residential case study as an example of this). In keeping with point six this could best be developed through existing regional participation structures such as UKYP, the Participation Workers Network North West or the Children's Rights Officers Alliance North West. The results of the mapping exercise might indicate that some of this work should be directed towards schools councils, additionally the workers consultation indicates that a substantial barrier to these links is transport costs, which would need to feature heavily in strategies to developing these links.

5. Develop or fund training in effective campaigning/lobbying to staff working in youth engagement/participation

The enquiring minds project found that whilst many groups were able to identify common issues for young people in their area and articulate these, they were less well equipped with the skills to take effectively take these issues forward and lobby decision makers such as Councillors and M.P.s for change. The research team felt that training should be provided for staff involved in youth participation around running campaigns/lobbying, this would enable the staff to support young people more effectively in these areas. Additionally it was felt such training could also be delivered directly to young people

6. Recognise that any schemes funded by the partnership should not duplicate existing work and should contribute to sustainable long term development of youth participation/engagement

Based on the workers consultation we would also recommend that any work funded by the Together we can partnership to develop youth engagement should not duplicate existing funding or work. Additionally any work funded should aim to contribute to the sustainable development of long term participation work. This would mean funding core costs of organisations and infrastructures supporting participation rather than short term project based work. For instance based upon the mapping exercise indicating that statutory Youth Services are the most common type of organisation to be involved in youth engagement, the partnership may wish to enter into long term funding arrangements to support the participation work of youth services.