

Chapter 7

Managing a public service in a business culture

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Achieving your Youth and Community Work degree

This chapter is about policy change, commissioning, collaborative working, performance management and innovation. It will help you to meet the following National Occupational Standards (February 2008).

- 3.3.2 *Develop productive relationships with colleagues and stakeholders*
- 4.2.3 *Identify and address new youth work opportunities*
- 4.2.7 *Work in partnership with agencies to improve opportunities for young people*
- 4.4.1 *Monitor and evaluate the quality of youth work activities*

Introduction

In this chapter we explain how the changes in public policy over the last 30 years have affected services for young people, including youth work. We show how attempts to introduce a market into public services are leading to a commissioning process designed to clarify expectations, specify requirements and bring into play a wider range of service suppliers. We set out what this means for youth workers and their skills in management, including how they manage their performance. We show that managing services for young people in the current policy climate requires youth workers to analyse the interests of stakeholders, develop partnerships with other service suppliers and create networks so that the expectations of all stakeholders for efficient and effective provision can be met. We stress the importance of innovation if youth work is to remain dynamic and responsive; and the importance of demonstrating that the work that is done with young people is of public value.

Making the policy shift

Over the last 30 years there has been a major change in the ways in which public services have been perceived, managed and provided. These contrast sharply with the dominant culture of the first 30 years of the welfare state. In the first period (1948–78) public services were seen as the province of the state – both national government and local authorities. The health service, schools, transport, the major utilities and industries such as coal, gas and steel were seen as properly being in public ownership. Under Conservative and successive New Labour governments over the second period (1979–2009), the policy has been to introduce efficiencies by privatising the major industries and transport and by introducing more of a market to public services and opening them up to the private sector and to what is now known as the third sector – voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises. The premise upon which this policy is based is that services will become more efficient if the previous monopoly provision by the state is broken up and ‘customers’ are offered greater choice and diversity. It is a policy that is much contested both by service users and those who provide the services.

Many people working in these services do so because they are committed to the idea of being in public service. The assumption is that we pay taxes to join society in the same way that we pay a ‘membership fee’ in return for which we expect to receive certain benefits, goods and services free or at very modest cost. Government policy has been to shift the role of the state from being the single provider of such services to being the commissioner by securing services from other suppliers.

ACTIVITY 7.1

- What do you think of this shift in policy?
- Is it one to which you subscribe?
- Would you rather see the state as the single provider?
- When thinking about this you need to consider which model of public service provision works in the best interests of young people; what evidence do you have to support your point of view?

Creating a market

The business model has prevailed and public services, including youth work, are increasingly being put out to tender. Local authorities are no longer expected to provide services directly themselves but to secure them and ensure what is referred to as ‘contestability’. As far as youth work is concerned, or more specifically the positive activities which form a core component of the youth offer (this will be discussed more fully later in this chapter), government expects there to be a market at which providers from different sectors can display their wares and from which young people can choose which activities or programmes they want to take part in.

There are two sets of reasons for introducing markets to public services, *managerial* and *political*. The *managerial* rationale concerns efficiency for which two different arguments

are proposed. The first is *productive* efficiency where goods and services are provided at lower costs and the low-cost providers will replace the high-cost providers; this is said to encourage new entrants to come to the market. Second, there is *allocative* efficiency where only goods and services that people demand will enter the market (Flynn 2007, p 203). The rationale is that the response of providers to the demands of users is more likely to produce what people want than some bureaucratic procedure. If these efficiency aspects are to prevail, the service user has to know what is available and how to access it. Service providers, such as youth workers, have to ensure that the user has access to the relevant information and may have to stimulate demand too.

The second reason is *political* in the sense that when it comes to public services politicians, whether they be national or local, do not like to be seen to be closing things down unless they are dangerously or dishonestly run. No councillor is likely to propose the closure of a local amenity if there is some evidence that the local community wants it to stay. However, if the market forces closure, then the politician is off the hook.

So for reasons of efficiency and politics markets have been introduced by policy makers, often under the guise of giving people greater choice and control over public services. There has been some ideological spice added to the policy as well. Compulsory competitive tendering was first introduced under a Thatcher Conservative government in order to break up the monopoly control exercised by local authorities and to give the private sector greater business opportunities (Flynn, 2007).

So for a number of reasons features of the public service landscape have been opened up to the market place. Commissioning, which is perhaps a less politically charged term than compulsory competitive tendering, is the process through which this is done.

In its guidance to local authorities on their duty to secure positive activities the government is specific:

The local authority . . . should seek to manage its resources as efficiently as possible. It 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.

(Para 79)

[When considering alternative provision to its own the local authority should] consult other 'persons' it considers appropriate . . . partner agencies, professional organisations or other independent bodies and individuals operating in an advisory capacity.

(Para 82)

[The local authority should] satisfy itself that it has assessed the merits of different delivery options . . . and will also need to provide alternative providers with the information they need to decide whether to take an interest.

(Para 83)

The criteria for considering which provider to secure services from include:

- *cost to the service user and to the authority;*
- *quality;*

- *timing;*
- *location;*
- *access to target groups and individuals;*
- *sustainability;*
- *and whether an alternative provider would be better placed to respond to young people's needs/desires.*

(Para 86)

Local authorities should identify clearly the outcomes sought before commissioning positive activities. They should also recognise that service level agreements can provide a helpful way to record expectations of quality and performance – [i.e. what is to be done and how well it should be done].

(Para 89)

(DCSF, 2008)

How does this impact on youth workers? Whether you work for the local authority or for a voluntary organisation it requires you to be able to demonstrate that the provision you make is efficient, effective and produces the outcomes required. If the project or centre you work in is to be considered for commissioning, it has to be noticed and on the data-base that local authorities and their partners are now required to have in place (on the internet) so that young people know what kinds of positive activities are available, where, at what times, at what price and of what quality. Never has it been more important for youth work projects to promote their projects and have supporting evidence to show that the work is good and worth investing in. Youth workers have to face both towards the young people they work with and provide for and towards this policy driven funding/commissioning system.

ACTIVITY 7.2

- *What do you think about this idea of having to demonstrate your results in order to win resources?*
- *What arrangements are in place in your organisation for doing this?*
- *What benefits do you think this process brings both to providers and to users of services for young people?*

Setting clear expectations and negotiating terms

If your project or centre wins a commission, this is likely to be the subject of a contract or service level agreement. There are benefits to both the commissioners and those being commissioned: expectations are clear on both sides and there should be no confusion

about what is to be provided and on what terms. There should be absolute clarity about the tasks that are to be done, the activities provided, the intended outcomes and what measures are to be put in place to ensure that these are properly monitored (see Chapter 6). It is imperative that you only sign up to any agreement if you are confident that you will have all the resources you will need to provide the service and produce the outcomes. It is no use complaining afterwards that the work was under-resourced. If it is, you should not sign up to it.

It is clearly implied from this that you need to have developed effective negotiating skills to engage in a contract or service level agreement. And if you cannot agree to what the commissioner wants, it is prudent to have an alternative in your negotiation strategy. You have to know when to introduce this as an option on the table – probably at a point where it is clear that the deal on the original proposal is not going to be closed.

You should also be aware of which factors are going to weigh most heavily with the commissioners. They are looking for the project that offers the standard of service they want at a price that they can afford. They should not necessarily be going for the cheapest option. They should be securing the one that offers best value: a proper balance between quality and cost (see Chapter 6 for further discussion on quality, cost and other factors).

If you and your organisation are to be taken seriously as a provider and to be a contender in the market place, then you need to be able to demonstrate a number of important things.

- You are a team worth investing in; that means you have people with the qualifications, experience, knowledge and skills to do the job required at a good enough standard to meet requirements. This means not just having CVs in place and up to date but also having available references and testimonials to the quality of work you have done.
- Your project or centre is a serious organisation with all the necessary policies and procedures in place, not just written down in manuals but actively carried out in your day-to-day business. This includes the obvious ones such as health and safety, a criminal records check and child protection procedures; and the less obvious such as a compliments and complaints record which shows, in the case of the complaint, what its substance was, who made it, when, what was done about it, any implications for the operating procedures of the organisation, and when the complainant was notified about the action taken (see 'Setting up infrastructures' in Chapter 6).
- Your project is willing to work in partnership with another or more if between you it is possible to demonstrate that you can provide a fuller service to young people that gives better value.
- Some evidence of the impact of the work you do on the young people, their families and communities. You have to be able to show that you can make a difference. The commissioners should be convinced by a combination of qualitative (case studies and 'stories') and quantitative (data) evidence (see 'Monitoring, evaluation and reporting' in Chapter 6). It is helpful if you and your team can readily put these in front of them.

Commissioning the youth offer

The Government introduced Section 507B of the Education Act 1996 which was inserted by Section 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This received Royal Assent on 8 November 2006 and Section 6 was commenced on 8 January 2007. In England, under this legislation (introduced in 2007) all local authorities and their partners are required to make a youth offer as an entitlement to all 13 to 19 year olds in their area. This consists of four elements:

- positive activities for all young people;
- targeted youth support for those at risk or who have additional needs;
- information, advice and guidance for all young people;
- the active involvement of young people in shaping, providing and reviewing services and opportunities.

Procurement

This is a technical term referring to a part of the commissioning cycle – see page 100 – when invitations to tender are circulated, bids assessed and services are purchased from suppliers or providers.

It is possible that all the services contained within this offer will not be commissioned – some may be retained ‘in-house’ by existing providers. It is certainly expected that positive activities will be commissioned.

It may be that local authorities will determine that the targeted youth support is not put out to tender but is managed through locality-based integrated service teams by the local authority and its partners, including, for example, the schools and the primary care trust.

When it comes to targeted youth support, the boot may be on the other foot for commissioning services. You may find yourself commissioning youth work interventions. You may be identified as a lead professional overseeing a programme of support and development for particular young people who have been identified as at risk and then ‘targeted’. This means you are trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework. The lead professional’s task is to identify a programme of prevention and intervention which will enable the young person identified as in need of this support to move from being at risk to being out of risk, or from being excluded to becoming included in service provision. This programme is likely to consist of different activities and interventions which have to be coordinated. This may entail a particular service provider, such as an outdoor adventure specialist, being commissioned to run a series of activities in which this young person takes part, along with others in the area for whom the same programme is deemed appropriate. So here you as youth worker are acting as a commissioner of particular services or activities for a young person or a designated group of young people who stand to benefit.

Commissioning poses managers of youth work with both threats and opportunities. If you are on the receiving end of commissioning, there may be a number of threats. These might include having your work given away to others who may be seen to provide better value. There may no longer be a year-on-year guarantee that you and your colleagues will be funded for work that you have always done. You will no longer be able to protect 'your' resources because they no longer belong to you. You simply have the resources for the duration of the contract or agreement. This makes investment in the project or organisation's infrastructure problematic unless you include that in some way in your costs. The risk is that if you do so, there might be a danger of pricing yourself out of the process altogether.

If you are on the giving end – that is, commissioning work – there are also dangers. For example, you may have responsibility for the outcomes of an intervention but no control over it. You rely on others and you may not have any direct line-management responsibility for them. Therefore if things are slipping, you may not be in a strong enough position to rectify matters. Delegation brings benefits but also risks.

As commissioner it is important that you have open channels of communication so that the flow of information is rapid and clear. You have to know what is going on at the time you need to know it. Arms-length management or delegation also entails building relationships of trust and reciprocity between the commissioner and the commissioned. These are built over time and through the experience of working together, sometimes finding common purpose in adversity. (This is not to suggest that you invite adversity, only to comment that it can have unifying properties.) It is also important that those being commissioned report frequently and accurately on how they are progressing; and that the commissioner as far as possible visits the project or centre to see the work happening in situ. It is important at all times to have valid evidence that demonstrates the benefits of the work to the user of the service and the value of the work to those who invest in it. So the mantra should be "evidence, evidence, evidence!" (see 'Monitoring, evaluation and reporting' in Chapter 6).

Other aspects of commissioning

It is important to recognise that the full commissioning process is more than procurement. If the commissioners, who may also be known as the Children's Trust, are doing their job properly, they will have an eye to completing the full cycle of commissioning, which entails completing the following stages in a logical sequence:

- Having a vision of what is to be secured, a long-term strategy and an *action plan*. This is usually derived from local area agreements and existing service strategies, which will be influenced by national and local priorities.
- *Needs analysis*, which again should already have been undertaken by local service providers in close consultation with service users – young people, their families and communities. This will also incorporate data drawn from local demographic studies.
- Having some kind of *supply map* of existing services. Most organisations will already have a directory of some kind showing what services and activities they offer.
- *Gap analysis* in which the differences between what services are providing and what appears to be needed can be set out.

- *Prioritising developments* when commissioners have a limited level of resources to provide all the services and activities as well as fill any gaps that are identified. Decisions will have to be taken concerning which are the most important.
- *Procurement*, meaning:
 - publicising the projects, services and activities the commissioners want to see;
 - inviting providers to tender;
 - selecting the providers;
 - issuing the contracts based on the cases being made and the extent to which applicants best meet the requirements of the tender specification;
 - agreeing the contract or service level agreement;
 - allocating the resources accordingly.
- *Monitoring progress* against intended outcomes, which will include reports from service providers on key indicators and periodic visits from commissioners or their agents to verify the evidence.
- *Reviewing contracts and evaluating* the whole process against the annual plan before producing an annual plan for the following year.

See the commissioning framework for *Every Child Matters* (2006).

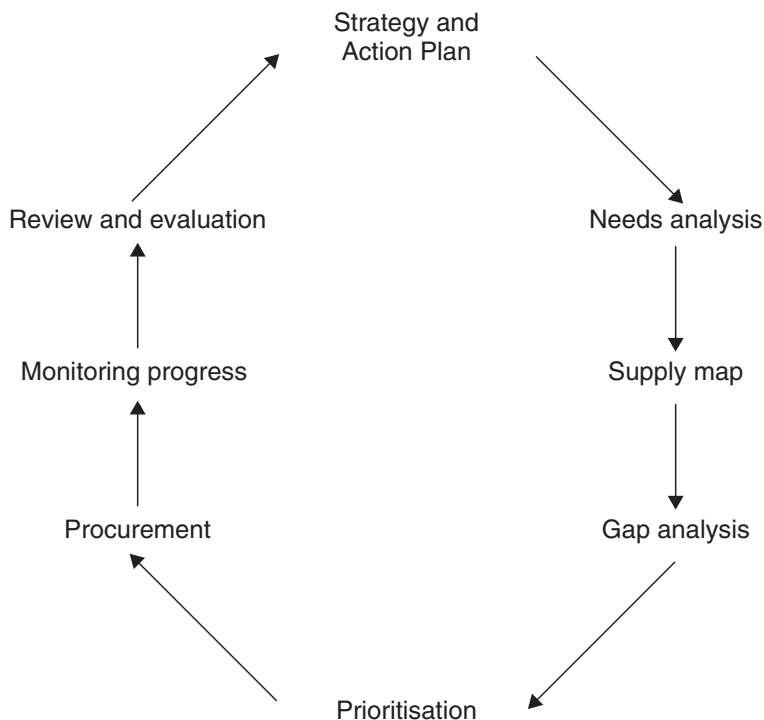


Figure 7.1 The commissioning cycle

ACTIVITY 7.3

- *What benefits do you think that commissioning will bring to young people?*
- *What problems and opportunities can you see with the commissioning process?*
- *How might youth workers and young people become positively involved in the commissioning process?*

Managing performance

Targets are a way of managing performance and have been introduced into public services over the last 20 years, drawing on a practice that has long been established in the private sector. Specific targets are set for achieving particular policy goals, such as the levels of attainment in numeracy and literacy in schools or the numbers on waiting lists for surgical operations in hospitals. By raising the first and lowering the second, the services achieve government policy priorities.

This all sounds like common sense but the problem is that sometimes targets can be set which may be in conflict with each other. For example, it may be possible to reduce waiting-list numbers by shortening the length of time that patients stay in hospital. However, this may result in readmissions which raise costs. So by achieving one target it is possible to miss another.

Targets can lead to the creation of what are called 'perverse incentives' (de Bruijn, 2001). This is where an unintended and undesirable effect runs counter to the policy objectives. For example, if a police service is judged and funded according to its arrest rate, then resources will be put into 'feeling collars' rather than crime prevention – a priority of policing. If a school is judged by the number of pupils who achieve Level 2 (five GCSE passes at grades A*–C), then a lot of resources may be invested in work with those pupils who are on the borderline between grades C and D in order to improve the overall score at this benchmark. This means that proportionally less resources may be directed towards those below this grade who arguably need more or towards the gifted and talented who may not be stretched enough to achieve their potential.

In youth work, local authorities and their partners were given targets to reach in Resourcing Excellent Youth Services (DfES, 2002). These were soon to be misleadingly called best value performance indicators, such as the percentage of young people aged 13–19 in an area with whom youth workers were in contact (Flint, 2005). A second target was to ensure that those who were using youth work services achieved certain kinds of outcome such as accredited awards. Some youth workers reported that the second target ran counter to the first because the numbers using the service might well be diminished if young people felt under pressure to achieve, making the experience 'more like school'. In the most recent announcement on national targets for youth work (Public Service Agreement 14, 2007), accredited and recorded outcomes do not feature but have been

replaced by an increase in participation in positive activities (more on this in Chapter 8). However, numbers of local authorities appear to be choosing to retain a focus on such targets (Davies and Merton, 2009).

ACTIVITY 7.4

- *Do you think it is a good idea to have targets?*
- *If so, what sort of targets do you think will help the service to reach substantial numbers of young people, including those who are notoriously hard to reach?*
- *Do you think it is a good idea to have a target to engage young people who are said to be hard to reach?*
- *What are the possible outcomes?*
- *What do you think is behind this?*

Performance management also means making judgements about what are sometimes referred to as the three Es (Ford et al., 2005): the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of a service or project.

Economy refers to the cost of the inputs used – the staff, the buildings, the equipment and materials to name the most important. When resources are finite – which they always are – minimising costs often becomes a service priority. This prompts questions such as:

- How much do different inputs cost?
- Are these inputs necessary to achieving our purposes?
- If so, can they be obtained at less cost?
- Are these resources properly controlled?

Efficiency is about the relationship between inputs and outputs. For example, how much is being produced as a result of the interaction of the inputs and young people through youth work interventions. An example of an output is the numbers of young people who have taken part in a youth exchange. This prompts questions such as:

- Are we making the best use of the resources we have?
- Has the maximum output been achieved from a particular input?
- Can the throughput from the service or intervention be improved without sacrificing quality or adding to costs?

Effectiveness is about producing results, the kinds of longer-term outcomes that policy makers are seeking: young people who are healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution to their communities and achieve economic wellbeing. There are two broad categories of outcome: a change of state or situation and a change of behaviour. The first kind could be a number of young people who are not in education, employment or training becoming engaged in learning or work. The second kind could be

young people who are at risk of offending changing their activities or friendship patterns so they no longer hang around with the wrong crowd and choose to get themselves fit rather than get themselves arrested. Both these changes can be induced by good youth work.

Effectiveness concerns the relationship between intended and actual outcomes and prompts questions such as:

- Has the service or intervention achieved what was expected and hoped for?
- What benefits have been gained and for whom?
- What feedback and other forms of evidence have been acquired in order to inform judgements?



Figure 7.2 A performance model

See the commissioning framework for *Every Child Matters* (2006).

Figure 7.2 depicts an open systems model to understand and monitor performance of a service. This involves identifying inputs, the process of transforming inputs into outputs, and the outcomes these can lead to (see reference to open systems theory in Chapter 3).

Inputs are what goes into providing the service, usually the people, plant and pounds, including the knowledge and skills of staff and the resources invested in them. The cost of the inputs gives a measure of the *economy* of the activity.

The *process of transformation* is the variety of methods used in our interventions with young people – the heart of most youth work.

The *outputs* are the measure of the activity that has taken place, such as the range of the activities (e.g. those on a residential programme) and the levels of achievement of the young people who take part. The volume of the outputs divided by the cost of the inputs gives a measure of the *efficiency* of the activity.

The *outcomes* are the results or impact of the services on the lives of the young people who use them. This might include progression to training or employment, or better health or more stable relationships. They also include the results of services for the wider community, such as raising standards of attainment in schools or declining incidents of youth offending. The number and quality of the outcomes give a measure of the *effectiveness* of the organisation or service.

ACTIVITY 7.5

- Can you think of a situation where you have intervened to produce an output and this resulted in one of the two kinds of outcome just referred to?
- What kinds of outputs have you or your organisation achieved with young people?
- What kinds of outcome could these outputs be linked to?

As well as the three Es mentioned above, it can be important to use a fourth E in measuring and managing performance – *Equity*. In this case, we mean providers should be judged on the degree of equality of access to services. *Environment* is a fifth E meaning sustainability. For more information about the above terms see ‘Monitoring, evaluating and recording’ of projects in Chapter 6. See also Chapter 3 on single loop learning to contextualise the use of the three Es.

ACTIVITY 7.6

- Do all young people in your area, regardless of, for instance, gender, race, sexuality or ability, have the same degree of access to youth clubs, centres and projects?
- Or are there barriers for some that prevent them taking part on equal terms?

It is important to distinguish between targets and results and in any negotiation for a contract you should try to be clear about which you are going to be judged by. A *target* is something you aim at – it gives a general direction in which your service or project should be heading. A *result* is what your service or target achieves, whether intended or unintended. A contract might contain a target but that does not necessarily mean that you will be rewarded or not according to whether you reach it.

A contract might specify the results the client expects you to achieve, some of which may be anticipated and others not. It is important that the target does not become so important that the work of the service or project becomes distorted from its key purpose for which it has been established and resourced. For example, schools exist to provide young people with education, and with opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for a productive and contented life. They are not *responsible for* children’s weight and levels of fitness, for their safety in the community and for their family’s solvency, although they may *contribute to* them.

There is always a risk that in seeking resources to continue and sustain your work you may be tempted to adapt your practice and working methods to achieve different kinds of results to those that your project or service was set up for. If this becomes a pattern, your work can become subject to what is referred to as ‘mission drift’. Its distinctive contribution for which it is regarded may become diluted or diverted. However, if it becomes clear that sponsors of the work no longer value the distinctive contribution you have always made, then a conscious change of mission or direction could become a prudent manoeuvre for you to consider!

Working with others

Stakeholders

Policy makers have made it clear that local authorities can only provide and commission an integrated youth offer with partners, in particular with organisations and services in the voluntary and community sector. All partners are stakeholders in youth work but not all stakeholders are partners. What is the difference?

A *stakeholder* is any individual, group or organisation that has a material, legal or political interest in your organisation and may be affected by its activities and performance. This will include young people and parents, for example, and organisations which may not have a direct responsibility for young people but who have a concern for them and their communities. An example might be faith organisations or employers. Elected members or councillors are also stakeholders because they decide priorities in public services and how resources shall be used in pursuit of them. Regional government offices are stakeholders too; they represent government interests in the regions and monitor how partners are implementing policies that may have been determined in Whitehall. They want to be kept informed of ways in which local authorities and their partners are taking these forward and how successfully the outcomes being sought are actually being achieved. Perhaps the most important stakeholder group of all is the young people themselves.

A *partner* is any service provider or agency whose activities and responsibilities affect young people directly; this could be schools and colleges, the police, the health service, a leisure or sports centre. A partner is also any other organisation that may be working with you on a project, perhaps sharing the funding that is available. Voluntary and community organisations may be stakeholders or partners or both; examples would include uniformed and non-uniformed youth organisations, sports clubs and centres, youth theatres, village youth clubs.

As a youth worker you will want to know what stakeholders think about what young people need and how you can provide for them in partnership with other services and agencies. This means undertaking some kind of analysis of your stakeholders, learning about their roles and responsibilities, finding out what they want from you and telling them what you want from them so you can reach some accommodation of each other's interests and concerns. You may decide that there is some mutual benefit in working closely with a stakeholder on a particular activity, in which both partners can add value to each other's work by bringing to it an extra dimension or resource. In this instance the stakeholder becomes a partner.

A stakeholder analysis entails close consultation with the stakeholders. You may have some ideas about what a particular stakeholder wants from your project or organisation and it will be important to check these out. In doing so, other opportunities for co-operation may be raised.

Stakeholders may not be concerned about the work you do so much on a day-to-day basis. But it is wise to keep them informed of any major developments in your project or organisation and of the results you achieve. In particular it makes sense to keep them up to date about new initiatives and achievements. This does not necessarily involve a lot of

extra work. Ensuring they are included in emails or they are informed through notices on the organisation's website should not entail a great deal of expense or time. It is an important way of maintaining your profile and staying on their radar. This is essential if you want stakeholders to invest politically or financially in your work and bring greater benefits to the young people you serve.

But why co-operate anyway? Simply because it may be a requirement of a funding bid or tender that you are working in partnership with another organisation in pursuit of project objectives. It also makes sense to do so because we know that many young people have a whole range of issues and challenges they have to deal with as they grow up and many of these are interconnected.

CASE STUDY

Falling between the cracks?

Darren, a 15-year-old boy, is hacked off with school and feels he is not gaining anything from attending except grief from his teachers and peers. He comes from a home which has gained little from education and does not believe it is of much value. The mother wants the boy to help at home and is happy to collude with Darren bunking off. He hangs around with older lads who get into trouble with local shopkeepers and residents for anti-social behaviour. He has learned how to break into cars and use them for joy-riding. Darren may be getting into drink and soft drugs and engaging in petty theft to finance his habit. It is clear that the boy is at risk and that no single agency can help him tackle these risks on its own.

ACTIVITY 7.7

- *In this scenario which services and agencies could be brought together to work out a plan of prevention or intervention which will minimise the risks to Darren?*
- *Under whose authority might this be done?*
- *What would partner services and organisations be seeking to do?*
- *To whom should they be accountable?*

Partnerships

There are both advantages and some disadvantages in working closely with partners in providing support and development opportunities or positive activities for young people. One advantage would be to provide a wider range of opportunities and a network of support for the young person or group of young people. A disadvantage is that the more organisations and people that become involved, the longer it takes to agree decisions about resources, methods, sharing information and claiming credit, and taking responsibility for the results.

If you are involved in running a youth project or centre that involves partnership work, you have to take account of certain factors in making sure the partnership works. There are five tests of a good partnership and it is worth asking to what extent you are satisfying them.

- 1 Does the partnership lead to *improvement in the quality and range of services*?
- 2 Does the partnership provide *good value for money*?
- 3 Does the partnership create *new thinking* that challenges and changes service provision?
- 4 Does the partnership bring *benefits to more vulnerable groups* and communities so they achieve better outcomes?
- 5 Does the partnership *alter the balance of power* between service providers and service users in favour of the latter?

If you can muster evidence to show that these conditions are being met, then the partnership is definitely worth maintaining. If you cannot, then you might want to establish further reasons for maintaining the partnership. If your project is meeting some tests but not others, you might devise a plan for improving the partnership and the benefits it brings.

Managing work that involves partnerships is difficult, demanding but worthwhile. It requires open and clear channels of communication between partners so that information, ideas and insights can be shared and used to everybody's benefit. Poor communication breeds mistrust. It is important to keep people 'in the loop'. Sometimes you may have responsibility but no power in running a partnership project. In this case you need to exercise and develop your influencing skills (see Chapter 8).

Partnerships can be time-intensive. Like any relationship which involves a degree of interdependence, a partnership needs nourishing and strengthening. Nothing should be taken for granted and assumptions should be checked out. You must be aware of the dangers of presuming that partners know, understand and agree something. It is worth making sure they do before you take a decision because if they find out something has happened that they were not aware of, they can feel manipulated and then a level of mistrust can set in. Once that has happened, a call on your diplomatic skills may well be required.

Your own control and autonomy sometimes have to be sacrificed or at least compromised in some way when working in partnerships. Accountability gets spread more widely as you realise that you may have to report for your actions not just to your own management committee but also less directly to others as well. In addition you have to be aware that sometimes decisions and actions you take in your project or organisation that do not have a *direct* bearing on the work you are doing in partnership with others may have some *indirect* impact. Partnerships usually require you to think 'out of the box' and beyond your usual horizons; they require a degree of empathy with the way partners think and work as well as an understanding of the pressures and imperatives that influence them.

ACTIVITY 7.8

- Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages you can identify with regard to working in partnership.
- How might you build up the advantages and tackle the disadvantages?

Networking

Successful partnership entails effective networking. It means ensuring that you and your organisation are connected with others who are interested and active in the same field. It requires open and continuous communication through telephone, internet and attendance at meetings so that you are in the know about what is going on and how policy and practice are evolving. It means finding out where resources are, what new initiatives and funding streams are coming into play and then seeking possible partners from within the network with whom you can collaborate on a particular initiative.

Networking involves very different ways of working to the traditional methods of command and control adopted in public services. It is a much more open process relying on the free flow of information, ideas and influence where the constraints of bureaucratic procedures and regulation are weakened if not removed. It gives workers more discretion and room for manoeuvre in their day-to-day work but should not obstruct accountability. It means that the accountability is more diffuse so that you not only report on your actions upwards to your line manager but also to others with whom you work, including partners, stakeholders and, of course, young people themselves.

CASE STUDY

Making sex safe and healthy

Roadley, a local youth centre, works closely with the nurses and medical staff in the local hospital to provide a sexual health service for young people using the centre who tend not to make use of the services provided in their local doctor's surgery or clinic. Screening for sexually transmitted infections, free condom distribution and pregnancy testing are conducted by arrangement in the youth centre. This initiative was not established as a result of any formal partnership or service level agreement; nor has it been commissioned, coordinated or controlled by senior managers. Instead the youth workers and front-line health service staff have used their common sense and networking skills to create an excellent service that is valued by the young people and that contributes to the targets that both services have been set through the local area agreement.

Effective networking means keeping your eyes and ears open to developments and innovation. It means periodically scanning the websites of organisations to keep abreast of initiatives and see what can be learned from them that could apply to your own work. It is about making connections, not just between people but also between ideas, joining up

the dots to see how different policy drivers interconnect and how more holistic and joined-up approaches can be taken towards the support and development of young people.

ACTIVITY 7.9

- *Are you part of a network?*
- *Are you aware of or involved in informal arrangements somewhat like the Roadley one above?*
- *With which organisations, agencies and people are you in most frequent and direct contact?*
- *What benefits do you derive from this networking?*
- *Is it worth the investment of time and effort required?*
- *Are there others with whom you might need to engage to bring more benefits to your organisation and the young people you work with?*

Keeping matters fresh

Earlier we identified innovation as being one of the five tests of partnership when we asked whether the partnership creates *new thinking* that challenges and changes service provision. Innovation is not important for innovation's sake. But it is important if youth work wants to be at the leading edge of services for young people. One of the unique selling points of youth workers is their ability to get alongside young people, build relationships of trust and mutual regard with them, understand their condition and situation and pick up on what they need and want if they are going to make the most of opportunities and make progress in their lives.

Innovation in relation to youth work means activity that:

- breaks new ground and pushes back the boundaries of professional knowledge and practice;
- develops the capacity of young people and youth workers for original ideas and action;
- fosters creative achievement that adds value to the quality and range of work.

Innovation involves professional risk-taking, combining the freedom to experiment with the use of proven skills, knowledge and understanding. It may draw on the ideas and achievement of others so as to adapt and apply them in new ways.

Innovation is the hallmark of a responsive service. To use a business analogy, innovation requires responses to emerging needs and coming up with a new product or service. It is sometimes taken to mean using an existing one in a new location – for example, youth provision in Youth Offending Institutions. A new setting can alter or perhaps transform the product. It can also mean youth workers operating in new arenas or supporting other

professionals in theirs – for example, as members of Youth Offending Teams trying to reduce the risk of youth crime or as personal advisers providing support to young people as part of the Connexions service.

Innovation could and should be sustainable. It often attracts special funding because government or some other sponsor wants to back youth work that can be shown to ‘make a difference’ and provide solutions to problems that other services cannot. If you try something new and it is successful, then it should be replicated and absorbed within the main bloodstream of the service. At this point, its claim to be innovative might be forfeited. Yet that does not mean the work ceases to be dynamic or effective. A learning organisation will absorb the lessons of innovation, disseminate them and apply them within its networks (for more about learning organisations see Chapter 3).

There is also a view that innovation is no different from effective youth work, but equating innovation with effectiveness is probably mistaken. Certainly innovative work can be effective but is not in all cases. Moreover, there are many examples of effective youth work which are by no means innovative. For example, providing alternative programmes based on youth work principles for disaffected school pupils has been taking place for 30 years;

Table 7.1 Factors contributing towards and obstructing innovation

Factors contributing towards innovation (Merton, 2001)	Factors obstructing innovation
Accepting uncertainty	Emphasis on short-term results and gains
Strongly committed individuals prepared to challenge the status quo, take risks and have a go at something different	Highly controlling management; excessive rules and regulations
Accepting controversy and contest	Conforming behaviour expecting people to do as they are told
Lateral thinking; working ‘outside the box’ and across professional boundaries	Excessive rationalism; expecting things to happen in a logical, pre-determined pattern
Knowledge, responsiveness, openness, shared values, creative staff recognising each others’ skills	Cautious, competitive and mistrustful staff unwilling to share knowledge and skills
Willing to trust partners in other agencies and contribute to broader policy agenda	Reluctance to engage in multi-agency initiatives or make resources available for broader policy purposes
Acceptance of initial costs	Over-emphasis on early accurate costs
Need and determination to (a) find a new focus and interest in the work; (b) find radical responses to issues	Contentment with status quo
Preparedness to work from young people’s perspectives and concerns	Adults setting the agenda

what is different now is the high-policy profile given to inclusion and the consequent legitimisation of such youth work interventions. Innovation must mean 'new' or it means nothing.

You may feel sceptical about innovation perhaps because it commands a great deal of attention and, consequently, resources. This is understandable if it does so at the expense of effective mainstream provision but if innovation can demonstrate new ways of making a difference to the lives of young people and their communities, then it can be justifiably recognised, rewarded and replicated. If mainstream provision is producing good results, retaining it may require you to re-cast descriptions and presentations of it in terms that 'hit the right buttons' and with references to buzz-phrases that are prevalent in policy making at the time.

Innovation is the means of change. Youth organisations which need to change what they do sometimes find it difficult because much is invested in their existing culture. There is often resistance to taking the risks which inevitably are part of change. Elected members as much as officers find it hard to sanction and support new ways of undertaking the work, even when they can see that existing methods are not proving effective. It might be helpful to identify some of the factors that seem to be key in determining whether or not innovation is likely to occur.

Innovation can also bring you competitive advantage over other agencies and services. If there is a long-standing problem or issue facing young people in your area, you may be more likely to win the resources for dealing with it if you can demonstrate that your approach is new and that you will use methods which have not been applied locally before.

Demonstrating results and public value

How do you know whether your work is making a difference and how can you show people when it is? These are crucial questions in managing yourself and your work in the contemporary policy context. Why? Because those who provide the funds and make the policies want and have the right to know. And if you cannot tell them, then you forfeit your entitlement to your share of the limited resources that are available.

One reason why government has introduced targets in public services is to give providers a clear idea of what is expected of them. As indicated earlier, targets have their uses but only if they are proportionate and do not obstruct you from achieving your core purposes. We have already explained that sometimes targets can create perverse incentives or distort an organisation's core purpose, in which case you can hit the target but miss the point. Increasingly, service providers are being asked through the commissioning process to set targets themselves. This requires careful judgement because if you set the targets too high, then you are unlikely to achieve them, and if you set them too low, you may risk not getting the work.

It is important to show that the work you are doing has public value and that it brings benefits to users of services and adds to the wellbeing of the wider community. Youth work has often provided the glue in communities, what academics, researchers and

policy makers refer to sometimes as *social capital* by building stronger, more sustainable communities where people feel safe, have a sense of belonging, do things for themselves and for each other, and participate as active citizens. Youth workers thereby also make an important contribution to *social inclusion*.

There are said to be two forms of social capital (drawn from the work of Robert Putnam, notably *Bowling Alone*, 2000):

- *bonding* social capital, which brings people of similar attitudes and dispositions together, sometimes to the exclusion of others;
- *bridging* social capital, which seeks to bring together people of outwardly different attitudes and dispositions, out of recognition that there will be mutual benefit and what they share may be more important than what differentiates them.

Bridging social capital is important in the context of young people's development, in particular those who come from disadvantaged communities. Young people's potential can be limited by the narrowness of their immediate environment. Youth workers can help to make these boundaries more elastic and can open up young people to contacts, networks and opportunities where their skills and qualities can be expressed and developed. In combination with other opportunities, youth work offers alternative routes to greater independence to those conventionally provided by education and the labour market.

Of course these kinds of outcomes are hard to measure. Is it possible to weigh or count positive relationships, trust, compassion or solidarity? Of course not, which is why policy makers and funders resort to the metrics of targets, such as the number of young people achieving accredited or recorded outcomes. These are inevitably narrower rather than broader community benefits such as social capital and, if they become the primary objective of your interventions, they can have a restricting impact on the ways in which youth workers relate to young people.

Whatever your views of the merits and drawbacks of targets and performance measures, it is necessary that you understand why they are important and that you are familiar with some of the ways in which they can be used to demonstrate impact. We can refer you to a number of different ways in which this is done in the public sector generally and in services for young people more particularly. One of the key thinkers whose approach is having considerable impact on providers of services for children and young people is Mark Friedman, an American who has devised a very simple method to use frameworks for providing outcome-based accountability. He asks three straightforward and important questions:

- How much was done?
- How well was it done?
- Is anyone better off?

In relation to the third he distinguishes between qualitative data and quantitative data. This is best represented in Friedman's quadrant (see Chapter 6).

ACTIVITY 7.10

- Under the headings of Friedman's grid on page 88 in Chapter 6, what questions does it make most sense for you and your organisation to ask?
- How easily can you collect the answers?
- What management information do you hold that will easily produce what you need to give a satisfactory answer?

There are three other questions that as a youth worker you need to have answers to if you are to demonstrate that the work you do has public value:

- Who benefits from the work?
- In what ways do they benefit?
- In which circumstances do they benefit most and why?

You will need to have reliable evidence to support any judgements or statements you make in reply to these questions.

If you can manage to collect evidence that is sufficient, reliable, up to date and accurate, then you have to think about how to get that across to the people you want to influence, including those who make decisions about where scarce resources are to be allocated. For this you will need to have a *communication plan*. This is quite straightforward. It needs to convey simple messages to key audiences at times which you consider to be most fitting. For example, if you have a good story to tell about your service or organisation which shows the positive outcomes achieved by young people and the benefits these bring to the local community, then the best time to produce these findings may be in the immediate weeks leading up to the budget-setting round of meetings in the local authority.

The communication plan should have a simple format which sets out the key messages you want to convey with the supporting data to back them up, the key audiences you want to influence, the timing of the messages and the person(s) responsible for delivering them. It is helpful if those people who have been directly involved in the work itself have direct involvement in and responsibility for shaping the messages, including young people. Positive messages can do much to raise morale and enhance performance. They can in this way increase the prospect of securing additional resources and then producing even better results and more positive messages next time.

C H A P T E R R E V I E W

In this chapter we have shown how policy changes have led to a much more business-like culture in which public services, including youth work, now operate. This has meant that much closer attention is paid to how services perform with respect to:

- better outcomes for young people;
- new processes, such as commissioning, which are intended to introduce more competition and therefore efficiencies into 'the market' of positive activities;
- new relationships such as collaboration and networking which might soften some of the harder competitive edges of the market place and enable individual services to achieve more for young people with others than they can on their own;
- the requirement on services to demonstrate their impact and public value.

These developments have in turn placed new demands and expectations on people working at all levels in services for young people. They are proving something of a challenge, and those services that are capable of meeting it might reasonably expect to be rewarded with higher levels of resourcing. Or as government puts it 'invest and reform', although it might be more realistic to acknowledge that services will have to reform before they can expect to receive the levels of investment to which they aspire.

FURTHER READING

Friedman, M (2005) *Trying hard is not good enough: How to produce measurable improvements for customers and communities*. Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing.

For current information about commissioning refer to the government website Better Outcomes: Commissioning for Children and Young People, intended to create a community of practice for Children's Trusts that will facilitate shared learning, sharing of good practice and joint problem-solving: www.commissioningsupport.org.uk/about_commissioning.aspx

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) Statutory guidance on section 507B Education Act 1996. Online: www.dcsf.gov.uk/localauthorities/index.cfm?action=content&contentID=13319&categoryID=75&subcategoryID=106

USEFUL WEBSITES

Office of the Third Sector www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector.aspx

Department of Communities and Local Government
www.communities.gov.uk/communities/thirdsector/

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