



5 DEVELOPING YOUTH POLICY - AN OVERVIEW

The purpose in examining the various structures, systems and institutions of a society is to gain an understanding of the position of young people, the problems they face and the potential they have. This is not the end of the matter, however, for there is little point in simply gaining a more accurate understanding and going no further. The purpose must be to develop better and more appropriate youth strategies and youth policies; policies which are grounded in an understanding of the position of young people and responsive to their needs and interests.

It follows from this that youth policies need to be made to measure and tailored to fit. While it may be the case that the structure of some youth policies lends itself to being used in other national settings, the actual content of a policy needs to be determined in the light of the national circumstances of the young people concerned.

The argument is not against international learning and the exchange of ideas; it is against succumbing to the temptation to simply adopt other countries' policies when they might be inappropriate for the circumstances in which it is planned to apply them.

It will be useful, as a conclusion to this paper, to identify some of the things which are often included in policies and strategies, and which can often be used in many different contexts. In doing this the intention is not to offer a blueprint or a model, for there are different ways in which the creation of policy can be approached. By identifying some common elements of policies and strategies, however, it should become easier to link the analysis of youth to the development of policies for them.

In the first instance, there is generally an over-riding statement of the broad aims of the policy, setting out what the policy is intended to do and achieve. For young people these aims might be divided into aims about young people as individuals and aims about young people as a group in the society.

Aims will often be expressed in a fairly general way and could include things like promoting the welfare of young people and

contributing to their ability to develop independently towards full adult status. Very often youth policies in the broad sense are concerned with smoothing, and helping in, the transition from late childhood to adulthood.

In order to achieve these aims a series of objectives may then be identified and set out. Simply put, the objectives are the means by which the aims are realised. They are the links between aims, methods and outcomes. The objectives will be more specific than the aims and need to begin to identify concrete and attainable goals. If the aim is about promoting the welfare of young people, the objective would then begin to identify the practical content of this.

As an example, the aim of improving young people's general welfare might be promoted by health education programmes which have as their objective the discouragement of tobacco and alcohol use. There is no blueprint, though, because aims and objectives have to be designed in the national setting, drawing heavily on an analysis of the position and needs of young people.

The objectives might specify priorities or targets like particular groups of young people, or particular issues which effect them. For example, the objective of discouraging the use of tobacco might identify a particular group of young people who are likely to be drawn into tobacco use.

Linked to the objectives may be a statement about methods - how the work will actually be carried out. There are a wide range of methods available for putting youth policies into practice and any single policy will probably need to draw on most of them in one form or another. Examples of methods include:

- information provision;
- advertising campaigns;
- arranging meetings and seminars;
- working with small groups of young people; and
- individual help, support and counselling.

The important point, though, is that the methods must be appropriate to the objectives because they are the ways in which the objectives are put into practice.

To continue the smoking example, an appropriate method for

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working with a group of young people identified as likely to use tobacco could be detached youth work on the urban streets where direct contact can be made. Inappropriate methods might be arranging open meetings, because nobody would turn up, or advertising in national newspapers, because the people you wish to reach do not read them. These examples highlight the importance of understanding the position of young people in order to be able to frame relevant aims, objectives and methods.

Going further, it may be necessary to specify the organisations and structures which will be needed to put these objectives and methods into operation. For some approaches a national headquarters may be required. Other aspects of policy may require more emphasis to be placed on local offices with maybe a linking regional office in between. The appropriate structure will be determined by the nature of the policy objectives and the selected methods. Central offices may be best equipped to organise national campaigns or communicate with workers across a whole country. Local offices may be the only way of directly reaching young people on the streets.

Organisations are people, and people will be needed to staff these offices and do the work, so there will need to be some consideration of staffing in the policy. Ideally the staffing section of the policy might specify the numbers of people to be involved, their level of skill and the contribution they would make to achieving the policy objectives, and where they are to be located. In all probability these people will need some training and this will need to be taken into account.

In our previous example, work on tobacco use might require a small number of managers and a larger number of fieldworkers. They may need to be distributed across a range of local offices and be trained in the medical consequences of tobacco use as well as in methods of youth work.

One of the hardest parts of a policy to develop is that which specifies exactly what work will be done with the young people. This means there needs to be something in the policy about the actual practice of the work which is being planned.

All of this work will demand resources, so these need to be specified. Naturally, the policy or programme will need to be costed and the finance raised from one source or another. The best policies in the world will fail if attention is not given to accurately and realistically costing the work.

Finally, how do you know what the issues are, where the young people are, and whether the whole thing is working effectively and

successfully? This means there is a need for some research and evaluation connected with the development of the policies and how they are working in practice.

Some of this work will have been carried out by working through the approach to understanding the position of young people which has been outlined in this paper. Work at this general level may need to be supplemented by more specific work in order to understand better the position of young people who have been identified as priorities by the youth policy.

The evaluation component should help to identify efficiency and effectiveness, and success and failure. If evaluation is arranged as a continuing part of youth provision then assessments and modifications can be made on a continuing basis. This will ensure flexibility in a particular policy or programme.

Not all policies will need all of these things, and there will be things not identified here which some policies will need to include. What all policies will need, though, is to be grounded firmly and unequivocally in a national understanding of the position of young people. For only in this way will it be possible to create policies which have any chance of success for the young people concerned. If they are not successful by that criteria, can they be successful by any other?