

By email to: youthreview@dcms.gov.uk

Monday 8 March 2021

ADCS submission to the DCMS youth sector engagement exercise

1. The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd. (ADCS) is the national leadership organisation in England for directors of children's services (DCSs) under the provisions of the *Children Act (2004)*. The DCS acts as a single point of leadership and accountability for services for children and young people in a local area, including children's social care and education. ADCS welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) youth sector engagement exercise.
2. Although the positive impact of youth work on young people's lives has been recognised by government, most notably in the Civil Society Strategy (2018), a comprehensive vision, overarching strategy and clear outcomes framework have been missing for some time. Instead, promotion of the National Citizenship Service (NCS), a 4-week seasonal programme aimed at 16- and 17-year-olds, has been prioritised.
3. The government has an important role in supporting the delivery of local services. Key statutory guidance no longer reflects the realities of local arrangements and a much-needed review has been on hold since 2019. Concerns about the variation in children and young people's access to positive activities in their local area continues to be raised by government but there have been no meaningful moves to address this reality e.g. via releasing investment. Although central prescription is not desirable, the government has not articulated an expectation about the balance between open access provision alongside more intensive, targeted work with young people who need additional help and support. Youth work provides positive activities but also offers bespoke support through trained and qualified youth workers.
4. Reductions in local government funding over the last decade are driving this variation. School and neighbourhood-based facilities have been lost during this time and commissioner/provers split is growing, with voluntary and community groups playing a larger role in overall delivery. The scale and reach of provision in local areas will continue to diverge without new investment. Funding for youth support services and outreach work is commonly drawn from multiple budgets which have also reduced e.g. the public health grant, or are time-limited, such as the Trusted Relationships Fund or the Troubled Families Programme.
5. In 2019 the government announced a new Youth Investment Fund, which hasn't yet come onstream; this is frustrating. When it was first announced, the £500 million Fund prioritised investing in physical buildings as well as the provision of services and the workforce. Over the last 12 months youth workers across the country have found new ways to reach out and support children and young people who could no longer attend services in person. ADCS would welcome a discussion about how this much needed investment could potentially be repurposed to make a bigger difference to a greater number of children and young people sooner rather than later.
6. The value of the skilled practitioners working in the youth sector must be recognised. After the events of the last 12 months, the need to train, recruit and retain the best staff to support children, young people and their families, has never been more pressing; latest NHS research shows that one in six children and young people may now have a mental health problem, up from one in nine in 2017. We need renewed

focus and investment in training and developing the youth work workforce, ideally as part of a comprehensive strategy for the totality of the children's services workforce.

7. Youth work is rooted in the principles of universal access with the aim of building trusting relationships, improving wellbeing and promoting personal resilience. This work is invaluable in identifying through a universal front door those who need additional support and providing that, often as part of appropriate wider arrangements for individuals. In the context of Covid19, ADCS would welcome discussions about the best use of all available funding; there is more that could be done to ensure nationally commissioned contracts dovetail with the local youth offer and that NCS providers reach out to the communities that could benefit the most from participation.
8. More immediately, ADCS believes NCS funding for summer 2021 should be redirected towards broader Covid-19 recovery plans. Re-aligning this funding with Department for Education's Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) and the summer 'catch-up' programme would allow local areas to strengthen plans and deliver meaningful outreach work in local communities; children and young people have lost so much more than learning during the pandemic. NCS funding must not be forfeited or clawed back due to uncertainty; there are many variables and unknowns at this time, including whether the government's roadmap for easing restrictions will progress as planned in the coming weeks and months.
9. Longer term, ADCS would like to see the focus of the NCS re-purposed and its funding mainstreamed into the long term 'recovery' work that will be necessary for all children and young people for some time to come.
10. ADCS believes the policy lead for youth work should return to the DfE. Without a clear strategy or policy statement, one which recognises the wider benefits of youth work to both the individual and society, it continues to be 'cast adrift' from wider children's services, particularly education and schools. The pandemic has had a profound impact on charities, sports, the arts plus cultural and tourism sectors which all fall within the purview of DCMS. It is not clear that DCMS has the bandwidth to capture the lessons of the pandemic or to articulate the value of youth services across government and secure sufficient investment for year-round provision going forward.
11. Members of ADCS would welcome the opportunity to discuss youth services, summer 2021 plans for the NCS and the longer-term vision for NCS further with representatives from the DCMS. Please contact the relevant policy officer in the first instance via katy.block@adcs.org.uk.