

Youth Work: Professionals Valued



A research report on the future of the JNC collective bargaining agreement by Unite the Union.

“It feels like someone in the Government has made a decision to break youth work so badly, that it can’t be put back together again. It’s what they did with the railways. When they made a decision to privatise the railways, they said, let’s break it up so badly, that they won’t be able to put it back together again. That’s what it feels like they are doing to youth work”.

– Response from Senior Youth & Community Work Manager

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Foreword

Unite is proud to lead the campaign to protect our youth and community services. They play a vital role in supporting young people, families and communities in the most disadvantaged areas. Ideological government cuts have decimated the service and left many young people and communities without the support and contact that youth services offer.



Alongside these devastating cuts, youth workers have simultaneously faced attacks on their very profession itself. Service redesign, marketisation, deskilling and attempts to abolish the youth worker professional standards underpinned by national terms and conditions. I therefore welcome this useful research exploring the potential impact of the loss of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth and Community Workers (the JNC).

The research findings confirm our fears that the imposition of austerity measures has devastated the sector. Employers are engaged in a divide and rule exercise, which feeds a “race to the bottom” and increasingly imposed a “one size fits all” culture on the sector. The profession is being deskilled and jobs are becoming out-sourced, short-term and temporary as a norm, with workers in the sector having jobs, not careers, with the interrelated loss of dignity at work. Practitioners have been forced to trade stability for flexibility in a way that benefits the employer, not the young people, nor communities with whom they work.

The report shows how our members have not taken these changes lying down and through a belief in their service, they have fought to save what they can. In the face of cuts in England and Wales they have been forced to move to “family work”, “early intervention work” and “targeted youth support work”. If that transition had not taken place the cuts would potentially have been even worse.

There is also an underlying message of hope for the JNC. Despite the threats it faces, the majority of our respondents do value this collective bargaining agreement. This is not because of sentimentality, nostalgia, or resistance to change but because pragmatically, it benefits youth and community work to be delivered in framework which interlinks professional qualifications; a set of fit-for-purpose terms and conditions and collectively negotiated national pay scales.

The JNC is seen as the recognised benchmark of the profession and many argue that it is integral to the identity of youth and community work and to their practice. Despite recent changes, the JNC is seen as the best fit for the work. Unite knows it is important not just to **retain** the JNC, but to fight for its **implementation** throughout the sector. We at Unite are up for that fight.

Len McCluskey,

Acknowledgements

This report is based on research undertaken by the Regional Youth Work Unit of Yorkshire & Humberside. Our thanks go to Patrick Ambrose and his team for their hard work, professionalism and their shared passion for youth work.

We would like to thank all respondents for their frank, honest and open contributions. We have endeavoured to ensure that all contributions are anonymised as far as possible and have tried to edit out any details which would lead to the identification of individuals or particular organisations.

We would like to thank those organisations and individuals who have encouraged others to participate in the exercise and who shared the link to the consultation with member organisations, colleagues and through newsletters bulletins emails and periodicals.

Thanks also to Carolyn Lowry, Colenzo Jarrett Thorpe, Kerry Jenkins and James Lazou their substantial editorial work and to for their dedication and support to the Unite CYPW section National committee in their continued defence of the JNC and the battle to save youth and community services.

Lastly thanks to our members, workplace representatives and lay leadership, we know you already make many sacrifices to make a valuable contribution to young people's lives and society. However, we recognise in addition to that the dedication and personal sacrifices you make to defend your colleagues in the workplace and protect your profession from the onslaught of austerity measures.

Executive Summary

The *Youth Work Unit Yorkshire and the Humber* was commissioned in April 2017 by Unite the Union, through the CYPW section, to conduct this research. It was as a direct response to an attempt by the Local Government Association (LGA) to remove the national collective bargaining agreement called the Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth and Community Workers (JNC) in 2015-2016.

Aim

- To consult with youth and community workers, youth work academics and young people concerning the collective bargaining agreement: the JNC
- To explore the relationship between JNC terms and conditions, salary scale and the qualification framework
- To explore the professional status of youth and community work and youth and community workers

Methodology

The research involved primary research through online surveys and interviews of three core stakeholders in the JNC, specifically youth and community work practitioners, youth and community work academics and young people that access youth services.

The research included a comprehensive literature review examining both UK and international research into the history of the JNC and the youth work profession and the impact of recent developments in the service associated with de-professionalisation and market reforms.

Scope and limitations

The scope of the research is limited in the geographical spread, which is primarily the findings of young people, practitioners and academics in youth work in England

Another limitation of the research has been the timescale. The research was time bound to a short period of three months in spring of 2017. This has meant the sample group of 126 respondents is not a large-scale study but a snapshot of the variation of findings, collated through qualitative research methods.

Research findings

1. Young People

100% of the young people who responded clearly value youth work and youth workers. They articulated the benefits of it, including: being heard, which was identified as very important to them; being supported and challenged; an improvement in confidence and

self-esteem and they emphasised how they valued the help which is given at times of stress and crisis.

They understood and articulated the consequences the removal of youth work would have for them such as isolation; lack of self-esteem and confidence; no extra-curricular activities; no support or guidance and no safe places to go.

Young people recognised youth work as a profession; 100% felt youth workers should be trained /qualified to work with young people and that the training should relate to their youth work roles.

2. Practitioners

There were a number of re-occurring themes:

- **JNC Terms and conditions**

94% felt youth work needed to retain its JNC terms and conditions, to maintain its recognition as a distinct profession working with young people. 79% of respondents had experienced changes to their terms and conditions with attempts to move them away from JNC, including to move them to hybrids, cherry picking from several other national agreements. Experienced workers who had moved to new roles and newly qualified workers were given, less favourable terms and conditions.

- **Youth Work Provision**

55% of Youth workers had experienced change to the services that they deliver. Targeted work resulted in less delivery during traditional unsocial hours; 73% responded that these changes had a negative impact on provision for young people. Also, that they had a negative impact on youth workers as they had to deliver in new roles outside of their area of expertise. As well as being managed by an individual or organisation with little understanding of youth and community work and its methodologies. The negative impacts of marketisation of youth work was reflected in many responses.

- **Professional Identity, training and qualifications.**

98% shared evidence of the de-professionalisation of youth work citing posts increasingly being advertised with a requirement for a lower level of qualification (level three not a JNC recognised degree). 99% responded that JNC recognised professional qualifications and training were necessary to guarantee quality and approach.

3. Academics

75% of respondents felt that youth work was experiencing de-professionalisation.

There was positive recognition of the role of JNC in providing a standards framework, quality assurance against which to benchmark and recognition that if it were to go, so might the profession.

There is a dichotomy for HEI providers whilst they teach, against the JNC standards for youth and community work, their students are potentially entering employment that increasing doesn't employ them as youth workers or on JNC terms and conditions.

Consequently, many feel they would still teach against the JNC standards, but may have to satisfy internal pressures and deliver a course on working with children and young people.

Conclusions

There is vast evidence to show that youth work is a professional practice and possesses a clear and defined methodology of how youth work professionals work with young people in their communities. Most significantly young people have articulated strong evidence of the benefits of youth work to both individual young people and to groups.

Despite this fact, youth and community work as a profession has been undermined and eroded through market reforms and funding cuts. This is evidenced in the reduction in recent years of the numbers of JNC degree programmes in England, the number of students enrolling on undergraduate courses and reduction of statutory youth service providers employing youth workers on JNC terms and conditions. Concerns are, if these trends were to continue, youth work, could lose its professional status within as little as one generation.

This is having a detrimental impact on both the quality and quantity of youth services available and these are leading to socially damaging outcomes to UK young people and the communities they live in. Practitioners reported that all these changes appeared to come about as a result of cost savings, as opposed to strategic moves to improve provision or deliver it more effectively.

There is no evidence base to support that the current trend of scrapping statutory youth services have been beneficial to young people or communities; also, that employing or redeploying youth workers in targeted provision provides more benefit than retaining them in universal open access youth work provision.

The report's findings illustrate how within the youth and community work sector, the JNC represents and provides a tangible recognition of the professional identity of qualified workers. It provides a professional formation framework, linking the quality assurance of academic training courses, through an agreed professional endorsement process, to a set of terms and conditions, which give recognition to the challenging nature of the work and to the unsocial hours in which the work traditionally takes place.

The report concludes that the JNC, while not perfect, is the best option open to the youth work and that it should be protected, in order to secure the profession and services for years to come.

Key recommendations

- i. A specific Minister for Youth Affairs whose responsibility is to be an advocate and voice for young people in Government, attending Cabinet. The role would straddle Government departments and assess the impact of Government policy on the hopes, aspirations and lives of young people.
- ii. Government should create a national youth forum to consult young people on policies that affect them, giving them powers to challenge policies that will affect their interests.
- iii. Parliament should establish a joint parliamentary commission on youth services to consult with young people, communities and key stakeholders of the sector on the impact loss of or change of provision has had on the lives of young people, communities and key stakeholders and make recommendations for legislative and other action.

- iv. The introduction of a Statutory Youth Services bill that places new legal duties and obligations on local authorities to provide a professional youth service and meaningfully consult young people on any changes to local services; especially cuts, closures and removal of services.
- v. A Parliamentary Select Committee report on the impact of the changes in government policy on youth and community work, with a comparable cost analysis of short term programmes against universal open access provision. This should assess the impact of cuts and policy changes, in order to make recommendations to government on how to stop the further de-professionalisation of youth and community work.
- vi. The UK Government and the Governments of the Devolved Nations where responsibility for youth services sit, must develop a national strategy involving stakeholders to resist further de-professionalisation and retain and return local authority youth service funding to a well-resourced, statutory provision and seeks to protect and preserve the JNC.
- vii. The protection of the JNC quality standards through the establishment of a Youth and community workforce licensure system, workforce register including a revocable license to practice, protection of the title, CPD scheme and code of ethics as exists in many other professions.
- viii. Stakeholders within the community and youth work sector must develop a communication strategy to educate students on youth and community courses about the JNC.
- ix. Stakeholders including the JNC, Trade Unions, ETS committees, Training agency group, HEIs and Youth work employers must carry out a national review of local and national training for youth work.
- x. Local authority employers must work in partnership with trade union staff side groups to develop policies and procedures to support those workers already redeployed, to maximise their impact in new roles.

1. Professional status of youth and community workers

1.1. What is youth and community work?

Understandings of what youth and community work is, are often based on the context and experience. As this is often varied, there is no internationally accepted definition of youth and community work (Dunne et al., 2014). Highlighted also by Devlin (2012) when he describes how in France, youth work (as we practice it in the UK and Ireland) is a hybrid of four different professions there.

In the UK an agreed definition is provided in the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Youth & Community Work which state: *'The key purpose of youth work is to enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential'* (NOS, 2008).

1.2. Is youth work a profession? What is a profession?

"Characteristics of a profession are; a systematic body of theory; professional authority; sanction of the community, a regulative code of ethics and a professional culture."
Greenwood (1957)

Youth work has its roots in volunteering and activism, therefore professionalisation within youth work have always had its opponents. Broadly we use the word profession to refer to a person's job or occupation. More specifically it refers to occupations which have a status, underpinned by a body of knowledge, which when gained by an individual, deemed at a level sufficient to practice allows the person to enter into its ranks.

Kate Sapin neatly wraps up some of these elements into one definition:

"Youth work is a professional practice with young people, based on certain values and principles, requiring the establishment of voluntary relationships with young people, links with communities and other relevant organisations and professional supervision from experienced practitioners. Respect for young people is at the heart of youth work values, in a profession that works 'where young people are at' with a positive, participative and anti-oppressive approach". (Sapin 2013)

Youth work uses a range of tools to engage young people, based within non-formal and informal education approaches (Singh, 2015, Dunne et al., 2014). Professionals outside the sector misinterpret these activities, seeing them only as 'fun' or 'diversionary' (Davies, 2013).

1.3. Origins of the profession

The important feature of this definition of youth work is the recognition of the *professional* nature of the service, as recognised by Kate Sapin above.

Youth work has evolved in the UK from a totally voluntary activity to provide recreational and informal educational activities for young people outside of work and school settings, by employers, churches and uniformed organisations.

The concept of professionalisation of the service accompanied the introduction of formal state provided youth services in the post war period following the 1960 Albemarle Report that set out a national response to public concerns about teenage delinquency in the late 1950s. The report outlined the need for local government agencies to take on responsibility for providing extracurricular activities for young people and resulted in a statutory youth service sector providing youth centres and paid full-time youth workers for the first time across the whole of Britain.

Despite having a statutory youth service from 1960, there was intense debate within youth work in the UK over professionalisation up until the early 1980's. Resultant in the Community and Youth Service Association (CYSA), applying for recognition as a trade union and abandoning their roots as purely a professional association. From this the Community Youth Workers Union was formed (CYWU).

Cooper (2013) describes as a contributor to the then debate and for the decision to reject professionalisation to a trade union was based on that *"professionalisation would lend support to the kind of "expert-client" hegemonic pitfalls of professionalisation identified by Illich, whereas trade unionisation would avoid the hegemonic pitfalls and show solidarity with forms of working class organisation."*

In 2006 the CYWU merged with the Transport and General Workers Union, who went on to merge with Amicus to form Unite the Union. The section has since changed its name to the Community, Youth and Play Workers (CYPW) to recognise the play workers in its membership. Paradoxically it was a rejection of professionalisation which led to the formation of the trade union, which is now the defender of the profession as Unite hold the secretariat and the majority of seats on the staff side of the JNC report; Joint National Committee for Youth and Community work.

Albermarle also ushered in the JNC national collective bargaining agreement for workers, who were then moved from fragmented, uncoordinated and uncontrolled sets of terms and conditions, to a carefully considered and nationally agreed framework linked to a set of standards which both employers and employees could understand, trust; measure and be measured against.

The modern JNC continues to seek to protect standards and safeguard the profession:

*"The JNC was established in 1961 following recommendations from the Albemarle report on the youth service in England. The Staff Side is currently made up of: **Unite** who hold the Secretariat with 8 seats, **University and College Union (UCU)** with 2 seats, **National Union of Teachers (NUT)** with 2 seats and **UNISON** with 4 seats".*

(CYPW 2017)

The **reach** of the JNC agreement is captured in the following clauses:

"(a) This Agreement applies to persons employed as youth and community workers by local authorities in England and Wales or voluntary organisations in receipt of grants from local or central government or the Welsh Assembly Government

(b) Although this Agreement does not apply directly to youth and community workers employed by voluntary organisations, the Committee recommends that this Agreement should nevertheless be applied by all voluntary organisations employing youth and community workers.

*(c) Part-time employees shall have applied to them the pay and conditions of service **pro-rata** to comparable full-time employees in the same employment”.*

(JNC Agreement, updated 2012)

In addition to providing the pay-scales against which youth and community work jobs are graded and paid, the JNC agreement contains a set of terms and conditions directly related to the needs of the profession, particularly linked to the nature of the work undertaken and the way in which it is delivered, for example in relation to unsocial hours work.

Whilst the geographical remit of the JNC agreement is listed as England and Wales, in practice it also covers Northern Ireland which did not have alternative collective bargaining structures for public sector employees as a result of the conflict and direct rule from the Westminster Parliament. The National collective bargaining agreements from England and Wales are adopted by a local Northern Ireland JNC committee.

The Qualifications Framework which is an integral part of the JNC agreement provides a rigorous structure against which professional standards can be measured. It is seen by many of our respondents as linked inextricably with our identity and in terms of quality assurance, being a vital tool in ensuring cost effective delivery whilst ensuring quality standards of service.

The JNC committee has licensed three Education and Training Standards (ETS) committees in England (NYA) Wales (WETS) and a North/South ETS committee in Ireland to carry out the endorsement and quality assurance of Higher Education Institution (HEI) courses, which wish to have their courses endorsed as JNC recognised to professionally qualify youth and community work students. Each ETS committee reports annually to the JNC.

A positive professional identity is very important to our respondents. Doug Nicholls argues that the desire for a positive professional identity is not just about status, but has its roots in a search for dignity at work and public recognition of work which has been well done (Nicholls 2012).

Where it has been compromised or undermined by an externally generated move away from traditional youth work practices, tensions come to the fore. In their report, *Professionally Qualified Youth Workers: an investigation into the careers, employment and perceptions of professionally qualified youth workers in Northern Ireland*, Sam McCready and Dr. Tony Morgan found that:

“The status of community youth work and how it is observed and regarded by other professional bodies, was frequently highlighted as being of prime concern and consideration. There remains among many practitioners the belief that the youth work profession is looked down upon and is not given sufficient credence or value by other professional colleagues and disciplines, including the formal education and social work sectors”. (McCready and Morgan 2014)

The two examples are brought together by Sockett (1996), quoted by (Evans 2008) *“Professionalism is about the quality of practice **and** the public status of the job”.*

1.4. Profession under assault

There is a perception that, over the last ten years or so, the profession has faced a slow but deliberate merger with other disciplines and professions overseeing the dismantling of the structures and identity of the youth work profession. Creating the perception that work with young people is equivalent to youth work (Davies, 2013). This is being followed by a full-blown and urgent 'race to the bottom' in terms of pay and conditions speeding the de-professionalisation of the work and bringing about savings for the government, who have provided little leadership or direction (Davies, 2013).

Without a real political champion or national policy development, members of the profession have sometimes become involved in endlessly arguing over the value of the work. The House of Commons Education Select Committee praised the value of universal youth work in 2011, despite that the service saw unprecedented cuts.

Wide scale redundancies and redeployment led to many workers, who through no fault of their own, found themselves working in a culture and structures which they felt was alien to them and to the profession of which they thought they were a part.

Bernard Davies, writing in *Youth & Policy* in May 2013, having listed multiple threats to youth work as a profession identified that there were two responses one to support those continuing to work with resilience and integrity as a youth and community workers; or adapt to situations "working with young people" around a framework of youth work values and principles laid out in a letter from the In Defence of Youth Work campaign.

The transition of a profession with specific skills into new multi-disciplinary teams led to tensions. Ofsted commented that for joint working to be successful, staff in different disciplines need training and support to develop a '*clear and shared understanding of roles and responsibilities...which can be shared, the strengths of each being utilised to their full potential when working with young people...While different professions may struggle to comprehend different approaches and working philosophies, young people do not*' (Ofsted, 2015)

1.5. New Managerialism and the Neoliberal agenda

The introduction of New Public Management (NPM), with its drive for efficiency and cost savings through the application of private business approaches implies by default that the public sector was neither efficient nor able to spend money wisely. Nicholls (2012) suggests that new management approaches have damaged delivery and services to the very people that need them.

"A climate of fear and bullying pervades in this new target-driven culture. Contract managers have replaced public servants. Community organisations, that once channelled collective recognition of need, are transformed into bodies forced to compete for funding contracts, and their ability to criticise poor or irrelevant plans is marginalised. The composition of the workforce has been deliberately altered. Gone are skilled, stable teams. Many are fearful of redundancy, and many in local government are still embroiled in time-consuming battles of implementing single status pay and conditions agreement. Managers with little understanding of the service they are managing bark out orders and a relentless pursuit of outcomes that may, or may not be publicly beneficial". (Nicholls 2012)

Demilly & De la Broise (2009) recognise that changes to job roles, where staff are being asked to perform tasks outside of their professional knowledge and skills, leaving less time for the job they were employed to do, is creating a sense of inadequacy, as tasks are badly performed. Wennström (2015) identifies NPM as a principle cause of the de-professionalisation of the education sector in the West.

Other professions would argue they have experienced similar pressure as defined in the definition of de-professionalisation, we have used in our study.

"The systematic deskilling of professional positions, a process which occurs in a workplace when non-qualified or less-qualified individuals are used to perform work which is more properly performed by appropriately qualified individuals, this includes the down-grading of tasks and replacing the requirement for professional qualifications with generic classifications not requiring specific qualifications" (Professionals Australia 2014)

Recent research carried out by the NYA would indicate that UK youth services are more than part way through some of the processes linked closely to the definition above:

*"A quick analysis of job search engines during week commencing 21st November 2016, produced 359 jobs using **Youth Work** as the search criteria. Of these:*

- 24 indicated youth work in the job title
- 41 indicated a requirement for a professional youth work qualification,
- 72 required a professional qualification in work with children and young people,
- 25 indicated that they did not require degree level for management posts, but a level 2 qualification in youth work". (NYA 2016)

A quick internet search produces a similar pattern of results in June 2017.

Will Hutton in 1995, identified the impact of market-forces and NPM approaches on the public sector.

"There are strong positive returns from training and education if the proper levels of skills are attained. Vocational training provides a significant return for those who undertake it relative to those who have no qualifications at all. If returns for individuals can be high, then the wider social returns on good education are high too, even if they are notoriously difficult to measure. The British Government makes no serious attempt to discover what those returns might be and therefore what the appropriate level of investment in human capital – people's knowledge and capacity – should be. As with so much expenditure, the Treasury actively resists the very idea of such calculations, preferring instead to downgrade the existence of 'public goods' and 'social returns' and rely as far as possible on market judgements and individual incentives. In consequence, the economy is dug further into a pit of low skills, low wage equilibrium. The urge to marketise every aspect of the way we live, in the name of efficiency, has eroded the fabric of our social life, which in its turn has weakened the economy". (Hutton 1995)

Westergaard and Resler (1982) make the point that the power of public sector professions is comparatively weak as they lack the market power to define their own work and to control recruitment and they are therefore the least able of the professions to exert pressure and develop autonomy.

It would therefore seem that the power of the profession still lies with collective bargaining and collective action expressed through the JNC. If that were to be weakened or disappear, so might the profession.

1.6. Conclusions

In its formative years, youth and community work in the UK had an identity crisis about whether it wanted to be viewed as a profession. With its roots in volunteering and activism, reticence of elitism, and principles of practice which underpin practice which does not disempower young people and communities, permeated a negativity around professionalisation. As the profession evolved however, a systemic body of knowledge grew and with it, acceptance, within youth and community work of its professional identity.

The literature strongly points to this conclusion, with a vast evidence to show that youth work is a profession and possesses a clear and defined methodology of how youth work professionals work with young people in their communities.

This is theoretical base of the profession is evident by the existence of peer endorsed JNC qualifications at degree and postgraduate and masters level in the JNC national agreement.

The literature also points out that the professional status has been under significant threat in recent years due to factors and trends associated with new managerialism, marketisation of services, austerity and a lack of concern for disadvantaged young people and their communities from the Government both locally and nationally.

2. Research aims and methodology

2.1. The aims of this research were:

- To consult with youth and community workers, youth work academics and young people concerning the collective bargaining agreement: the JNC
- To explore the relationship between JNC terms and conditions, salary scale and the qualification framework
- To explore the professional status of youth and community work and youth and community workers

2.2. Target population and data collection:

The target populations were identified in the brief. The research team designed three self-completed on-line data collection forms as their principal means of seeking the views of target audiences:

- Youth and Community Work Practitioners
- Youth and Community Work Academics
- Young People

Having previously piloted a set of questions in all three categories at a series of youth and community work related events, the research team used feedback from this exercise to reformulate the questions to ensure that they achieved maximum clarity in the final on-line versions of the questions.

The research team were of the opinion that on-line versions of the questions would give the maximum coverage of target audiences, given that hyperlinks provide an easy and stress-free way of sharing access to the consultation process and encourages maximum participation. The research team are very grateful to partner organisations for sharing the information about the research through their bulletins, newsletters, websites and Facebook pages.

In order to ensure that the views from all interested parties across the sector were captured, separate interviews were also conducted with workers and young people in the following categories:

- LGBT+
- Local Authority Heads of Service – or the equivalent
- Children in Care
- Young Carers
- Academics
- Those involved in Youth Voice work

2.3. Responses:

The research generated feedback from 126 respondents broken down this way:

66 Youth and Community Work Practitioners;

48 Young People

12 HEI Youth and Community Work Academics.

It should be noted that the responses from academics were mostly the result of team discussions, within different Higher Education Institutes, fed back as a single response.

Given the nature of the research, responses were sought that were weighted heavily towards the production of qualitative answers. As with previous related reports, respondents made very effective use of the questions, which were set up to ensure they were open ended and useful, to facilitate the most effective process of collecting valuable data. Most importantly, the research team wanted to allow participants space to develop arguments; express opinions; make observations and identify themes.

3. The views of young people

The online survey asked a series of questions to young people about their experiences of youth services and why they access them.

The results are broken down by various themes below.

3.1. Do you think that youth work is valuable and if so, why?

100% responded they felt youth work was valuable because:

- It gave young people opportunities
- They felt listened to and respected
- They got support, built skills and self esteem
- It was the first point of contact in obtaining support and access to provision

Some typical responses:

“Yes, it ensures that all young people have someone there for them when they need help and support. Youth work helps young people to deal with issues such as emotional wellbeing and stress, but at the same time giving them a good platform to have their voice heard”.

“Youth work is very valuable because it is beneficial for young people today, as it can improve their self-esteem, they can make friends and do something positive and productive that they can enjoy”.

3.2. Is it important that youth workers should be trained and qualified? If so, why do you think that? If not, why not?

100% felt youth workers should be trained /qualified – to work with young people in order to have the skills and knowledge to deliver a quality, safe services, responding to young people’s needs and know what to do, especially around providing support.

They also felt the qualification allowed them to be able to pass on their learning and educate young people.

They compared youth workers to other professions who work with young people and expressed the expectation they would be qualified.

“Yes. If a youth worker is trained, they know properly how to do their job. You would want your child to be taught by a qualified teacher, so you should want your young person to go to a group run by a qualified youth worker”.

“I do think that youth workers should have some form of mandatory training before they are allowed to practise as a 'youth worker'. This is for the simple reason that it ensures young people are working with workers that are experts in their line of work and can offer the best services for young people. This is alongside the reason that it ensures that the workers themselves are getting the best out of their job and responsibilities”.

3.3. Please give at least one example of anything a youth worker has done for you or with you and what it meant to you.

The major issues raised were that youth workers helped young people to have their voices heard (30%), support with personal development such as confidence and self-awareness (24%), provided help and support (21%) and also offered support with skills, practical help and motivation.

Some typical responses:

“Without my youth worker, I wouldn't be where I am today. She has helped me so much to be more confident and has helped me feel better about myself. She is very understanding and always listens to us and makes sure that everyone's points get heard”.

“A Young Carers Youth Worker has helped me by involving me in the Young Carers Council, which has helped my confidence and independence, and has also inspired me to follow a career in politics as it has stirred up my passion for it”.

3.4. Do you think that youth workers should be paid for doing youth work?

With one exception, all respondents felt that youth workers should be paid, as they do a challenging job, work unsociable hours, need to be multi skills and know how to support young people and deliver safe programmes.

Some typical responses:

“Yes, youth work is a valuable and important job that should not just be left up to volunteers but to paid professionals who can afford to put their time and effort into the role”.

“I do think that youth workers should be paid for doing youth work. This is because, just like any other adult, it is a full-time job and commitment”.

“Yes, because they use their weekends to take us on residential and meetings even when their office hours are finished”.

3.5. What difference would it make to you if there were no youth workers?

Young people reported the loss of extra curricula activities, increased isolation, loss of voice for young people, loss of self-confidence, support, guidance and informal education to help them understand the wider world.

Some typical responses:

“It wouldn't be the same. A lot of my friends also have contact with them, so if there were no youth workers, our lives would be so different”.

“There will be no safety and no one who could help out at the youth centres and also to help out young people who rely on youth workers to help them.

“If there were no youth workers my life would be a lot more mundane as the majority of activities that I do involve youth workers. I wouldn't have gotten the opportunity to go to parliament twice, I wouldn't have met people who I now consider close friends of mine and I would have a very empty CV”.

3.6. Do you think that it would be hard being a Youth Worker? Why?

All the young people felt youth work is hard due to the conflicting pressures, wide range of skills and knowledge needs, working with and responding to different needs all at the same time. However, a quarter also thought it would be easy, a mixture, as youth work is rewarding, fun as well as challenging.

Some typical responses:

"I think that it would be hard to be a youth worker, simply because of the large range of issues that they have to deal with and the skills that this requires. For example, not everyone is able to be a good listener, able to listen to a young person's issues and act upon these accordingly".

"Mixed as some teens would be hard to work with, but you would get to do fun things".

3.7. Could you ever see yourself doing youth work?

The majority of respondents said they would consider a career in youth work (64% said yes, and 12% maybe), so they could give something back to those who had supported them, recognised the need for young people to be supported, wanted to ensure young people have a voice and provide opportunities.

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A typical response:

"I think I would participate in youth work in the future as the role seems interesting and rewarding. I also want to give back to the organisations that have helped me".

3.8. Conclusions

It is clear from this research that young people value youth work and youth workers. They understand better than most the impact it has because they are the beneficiaries of it. Respondents to the survey reported that youth work helps their personal and social development; allowing them to feel heard, supported and challenged by the youth service as well as contributing to raising their self-esteem, confidence and supporting them during times of stress; as well as protecting and advocating for them.

The respondents recognised isolation as an issue for young people and identified youth work as key to preventing this. Many have also voiced concerns about losing their youth service, and that this could lead to isolation, loss of self-esteem and confidence, lack of extra curriculum activities, guidance or safe places to go.

Crucially for this study they felt that youth workers should be professionally trained and remunerated properly as it was important work.

The report therefore recommends:

- A specific Minister for Youth Affairs whose responsibility is to be an advocate and voice for young people in Government, attending Cabinet. The role would straddle Government departments and assess the impact of Government policy on the hopes, aspirations and lives of young people.
- Government should create a national youth forum to consult young people on policies that affect them, giving them powers to challenge policies that will affect their interests.

- Parliament should establish a joint parliamentary commission on youth services to consult with young people, communities and key stakeholders of the sector on the impact loss of or change of provision has had on the lives young people, communities and key stakeholders and make recommendations for legislative and other action.
- The introduction of a Statutory Youth Services bill that places new legal duties and obligations on local authorities to provide a professional youth service and meaningfully consult young people on any changes to local services; especially cuts, closures and removal of services.

4. The views of practitioners

The online survey asked a series of questions to youth work practitioners about their experiences since 2010.

The results are broken down by various themes below.

4.1. Have your terms and conditions changed since 2010? If so what are the differences?

The majority of respondents, (79%) have experienced changes to their terms and conditions with the majority moving away from the JNC. In over half (56%) of cases, this was due to their employers changing their existing terms and conditions. A third (34%) experienced changes as they took on new roles, moved jobs or went to work for other organisations.

Changes included: pay cuts or freezes; reduced holiday entitlement; changes to core hours, expectation of evening and weekend work and changes to job roles including a move away from universal to targeted and family work.

21% of respondents did not experience changes to their terms and conditions. Their employers have retained JNC, it was never implemented in the first place, or they joined the profession post 2010.

Some of those respondents, including part-time workers who have never been employed on JNC terms and conditions may be unaware of the benefits of the Pink Book in relation to pay, holidays and TOIL arrangements. For instance, some workers we interviewed, who were new to the profession, seemed to be suffering from the debilitating effect of unknown unknown's, in that they didn't necessarily know what they were missing in their terms and conditions. They see a job advertised, and just accept that those are the terms and conditions attached to that job. They have nothing with which to compare that job.

Where posts have been re-filled, employers, it would seem, have almost universally used the opportunity to introduce different terms and conditions, in a way which achieves savings. Many workers are in posts with *hybrid* terms and conditions, with some of the benefits of JNC, but with *cut and paste* contracts, job descriptions and job specifications.

Some typical responses include:

"I was employed under JNC Terms & Conditions for 15 years within a local authority. I had reached the top of my scale. In 2015, I was made redundant. I now work in the voluntary sector for a charity. I have had my responsibilities increased considerably. I am now senior management and have responsibility for budgets, staffing etc. but my pay has dropped by £5000 pro-rata (I am now part time). My holiday entitlement has decreased from 7 weeks to 4 weeks, and sick pay is the minimum. I don't hold this against the charity which is always trying to improve T&C for employees; it's an economic necessity. I no longer work evenings or weekends".

"I was on JNC but had to take a pay cut and lose holidays. My role is now targeted work, and the job description fits more with Early Help and Family Support. My job title has been changed. The new role is more casework than youth work. No youth clubs or street-based work is involved. Outreach is now focused more on enforcement than relationship building".

"I was working under JNC and was then moved to local T&Cs to 'harmonise' the workforce. I have lost pay and leave. I still work unsociable hours when others do not".

“I am a professionally qualified youth worker and have worked for the same local authority for near 30 years as a youth worker. I was on the JNC professional scale point 21 but since 2010 I am now employed on NJC 7. I am now earning approx. 7k less per year and have lost 6 holiday days. Toilets work the same but core hours are 7am - 7pm and we are paid approx. £40 a month additional to work the extra 2 hours per eve, 4 times a week so that we can keep projects open till 9pm. My job description is not fit for purpose”.

“I have never worked under JNC, and have worked for various employers: Local Authority and Voluntary Sector. Since 2010 I have experienced salary freezes, reduction in support staff (admin, ITC, finance) and a reduction in professional development and training opportunities”.

4.2. Has changing terms and conditions impacted on the type of work you do as a youth worker?

There appears to be a symbiotic relationship between the move away from traditional youth work delivery and changes to the terms and conditions of workers whether or not they are employing youth work strategies in their roles.

Over half (55%) have seen a change to their delivery, of which:

- 58% was due to a shift towards targeted/family work away from the delivery of universal or open provision
- 13% said yes but no clear reason was provided
- 6% had experienced a shift towards universal/open access away from targeted
- 6% had changed organisations
- 6% had more paper work
- 6% were now delivering a mix of targeted and open access work

23% reported that there was no change to what they deliver, predominately by workers in the voluntary sector while 17% responded that this was not applicable).

When interviewed one Senior Youth Work Manager explained that they didn't want JNC qualified workers, as they were “trouble”. They wanted newly qualified workers, straight from University who could be moulded into shape and who didn't have the baggage or expectations which older and more experienced workers might have of their terms and conditions. This was openly linked to a change in practice in that authority.

Some typical responses:

“The changes in my terms and conditions mirror a change from open access work to carrying out targeted work only”.

“Since the changes, I am now working as an Early Help Senior Youth Support worker and I am expected to work with families, not just young people, via referrals. Open access youth work is still happening, but nearly went last year, so it is definitely under threat”.

“My Local Authority takes advantage by paying less for my additional skills when I still have to pay my student loan so I am taxed twice which would not have been a concern if the Government had not lied about the need to be JNC qualified to do the job I wanted to do. Furthermore, the majority of Social Workers are being paid considerably more and lack the skills or the enthusiasm to engage families that a fully qualified and experienced Youth

Worker has the ability to do. Unfortunately, Managers are not looking from the child and family's point of view as they front load assessments and cut interventions".

"There is more targeted provision, based on need. But this does not take into account that all young people have a need, so young people from supposedly affluent communities can be excluded. There is a pressure to perform and achieve targets and results which does not take into account the process of youth work".

"There is now less time to plan, prepare, deliver and record my work and this has impacted on the quality of my work".

4.3. Do you think these changes have impacted on young people and the services they receive?

73% responded yes, they had seen changes of which:

- 79.5% reported that there had been a reduction in opportunities for young people, with less provision open on evenings, weekends and school holidays
- 33% commented that they had seen a reduction in quality of delivery and support given to young people, due to untrained staff, lack of funding or time to prepare
- 7.5% commented directly on the impact for young people, with a rise in risky behaviours
- 13% felt the work was more directed, with less emphasis on starting where the young people are and demonstrating little recognition of need
- 2.5% felt that services and support for young people had improved, as they could now access specialists quicker in a multi-agency team.
- 11.5% responded NO
- 9.5% responded Not Applicable

6% responded they felt young people wouldn't notice the changes.

Some typical responses:

"I don't think young people notice the changes, they have nothing to compare their offer to as they were not young when 'youth work' was delivered differently with less focus on cost and time and more focus on developing relationships and engagement".

"Prior to restructures and changes in terms and conditions, we had qualified part time staff to help deliver sessions. Most have taken redundancy pay and young people have now lost the regular bond and relationship that workers built up with them. We are now reliant on letting unqualified and inexperienced volunteers and/or private companies, profit from working with young people. Management seem happy to let this happen just to fill out the weekly delivery calendar. There is no Quality Assurance"

"Using the term 'universal' for youth work has not been helpful, as this is perceived as meaning young people who need no real support. There is no recognition that young people who previously accessed the wide range of open access services would nearly all now be eligible for being regarded as 'targeted'.

"Local Authority youth work services continue to be cut and as a result youth work has suffered immensely. No longer is youth work seen as an important profession".

4.4. Explain why or why not, Youth Work needs its own terms and conditions, to maintain its recognition as a distinct Profession working with young people.

94% responded that youth work does need its own terms and conditions – for the following reasons:

- 73% wanted professional recognition, to ensure that safe, quality work was delivered and there was also a request for a licence/registration as with other professions.
- 22% to reflect the unsociable hours worked
- 14% in recognition of the needs of young people
- 4% reported that it provides a structure and focus for the work
- 2% wanted to be able to demonstrate that youth work isn't social work
- 6% responded No

Unite, through the CYPW section, has asked for a licensure structure to be created. Unite's members in this section have voted unanimously, for over two decades in favour of the development of a register linked to the following: a revocable Licence to Practice; a code of ethics; protection of the title youth and community worker; And a (CPD) Continuous Professional Development training scheme.

In the continued absence of a UK wide specific licensure scheme for community and youth workers, youth workers in Wales decided to be included on their education workforce register in April 2017.

Some typical responses:

"It is a distinct profession with unsociable hours and intense work with some of the most vulnerable young people in society. The pay and benefits do not come close to recognising the true value of youth work".

"Because of Quality Assurance; Occupational Standards... the list is endless".

"There should also be a professional register/licence to practice to reflect the experiences and training of Professional Youth Workers, so that not just anyone who sets up youth activities/project can claim to be a youth worker!"

"Youth work is a profession; we are often terrible at promoting this and as such it is barely recognised by the wider population. Where youth work delivers success, it is greatly valued by other professionals and this should be promoted. For me, this success is down to the value base of the profession and the ability of youth work to build relationships with young people - particularly the idea that young people are not labelled, negatively, and seen always in terms of problems or through a deficit model. Signs of Safety, a model increasingly being adopted by Social Work, follows a similar approach and is heralded as new. Pah!"

4.5. Is it important for practitioners to have undertaken dedicated youth work training? What difference has this made to your practice or to those with whom you work? Is there a level that practitioners should reach to be able to call themselves a youth worker?

Only one respondent said no, the rest felt training was crucial to Maintain and underpin youth work principles and practices including the delivery of quality, safe provision and provide recognition

However, training to what level was felt to be reflected in the job role, so anything from locally qualified level 1 – 2, and up, with many respondents suggesting a degree was necessary. Some however felt that experience was also essential and most important of all was the ability to be able to relate young people and build positive relationships.

There does seem to be a lot of support for recognition to be allocated in the way this respondent describes in the second part of their response. However, current recruitment practices need to change to reflect this and keep it a reality:

"Yes! It's imperative as it enables workers to develop a distinct set of underpinning values and principles. It ensures these are embedded in practice. It protects the distinct relationship that youth workers have with young people. It informs the methodology used by youth workers. I think a JNC recognised qualification from level 2 onwards should enable people to refer to themselves as sessional or assistant youth workers but I think the degree should be the requirement for someone to refer to themselves as a Professional Youth Worker"

Another typical response is captured here:

"I believe that youth services should be delivered by a range of individuals with a variety of experiences, training and qualifications. I do believe that there should be a minimum standard achieved before an individual can be described as a youth worker".

4.6. Do you think youth work is being de-professionalised? Please explain your answer.

We are using the following definition of de-professionalisation: *"The systematic deskilling of professional positions, a process which occurs in a workplace when non-qualified or less-qualified individuals are used to perform work which is more properly performed by appropriately qualified individuals, this includes the down-grading of tasks and replacing the requirement for professional qualifications with generic classifications not requiring specific qualifications"*

The evidence provided by respondents to the survey which fed this report seems to confirm the hypothesis of an increasingly de-professionalised sector, with many personal accounts of activity which sound very much like a "race to the bottom" is well underway.

Only two respondents said they didn't feel their organisation had de-professionalised youth work, another responded that as their service had been closed, it couldn't be de-professionalised.

The rest gave examples from their own experience that reflected a general feeling that youth work and what it can contribute to the development of young people is not recognised by budget decision-makers or partner departments or organisations.

The majority felt that this was down to shrinking finances and the need to save money, resulting in the use of, or commissioning of, organisations which use unqualified staff or volunteers. The National Citizenship Service (NCS) was cited repeatedly as an example of this trend. The lack of professional development and training opportunities was also cited as was the reduction in resources and delivery.

Some compared the current trends in youth and community work to other professions such as teaching, health and social care. One respondent felt youth workers were contributing to the de-professionalisation of other services by working within these, frequently for less pay such as family intervention workers, thus turning the argument on its head.

One respondent made the case that protectionism is, at least partially, at the root of a desire to shield the profession from perceived assaults.

There are other worrying trends, captured clearly in a response providing evidence which relates directly to the de-professionalisation agenda in which a practitioner is asked to work outside of their field of expertise a classic symptom of de-professionalisation:

One senior youth work manager describes the wholesale de-construction of youth work structures as an act of vandalism.

Some typical responses:

“The majority of new employees working with young people have no formal youth work qualifications. I acknowledge that Early Help, social work, and targeted work are very important. However, Youth work is different because it allows young people to shape the services open to them. They are the controllers of their own destinies. Youth workers just facilitate their journey to reach their true potential. Other work is all about procedures, or prescription and therefore the intrinsic and elusive relationship between youth worker and young person is lost”.

“I feel that in my area there has been an attack on professional youth work and an attempt to downgrade the service in general. The move towards Positive Activities was used as an excuse to discourage educational issue-based youth work and was seen as a way to remove qualified staff by the systematic deconstruction of the service. The charitable organisation I work for still insist on JNC approved level 2&3 trained staff for its paid workers where we are commissioned to deliver youth work.”

“Broadly, neoliberal policies seek to marketise and quantify the work. Cheaper work is often prioritised by (stretched) commissioners over better work. Employing on cheaper terms and conditions such as NJC means that more work can be done but of a lesser quality (inherently) - except that at the moment it seems that qualified workers are happy to find work on any terms so have flooded these positions. However, as demand decreases for qualified workers in posts, fewer will inevitably seek youth work qualifications and soon enough quality will begin to suffer on a widespread scale. One serious case review could either bring youth work to its knees or help decision makers realise that quality assurances (such as systematic training) need to be in place.”

“Of course, it is being de-professionalised. Look at NCS. How much money has gone to this programme instead of local government services. Even local prevention funding pots generally go to NPOs. This is because of the inability of the youth sector in general to point out their contribution in helping mental health; youth justice; NEETs and ASB issues. The informal education route was a severely flawed attempt in youth work, trying to specialise. You have education - why try to compete with that behemoth?”

“The use of volunteers to run youth work sessions means a downgrading of the value of the profession. Not because volunteers aren't valuable or skilled, but there is no longer a route through to professional qualifications and jobs. The expectation is that people will do the work for free. This used to be accompanied by training and qualification. Young people are missing out on professionally skilled practitioners. The unreliability of services results; opportunities to safeguard young people are reduced”.

4.7. Respondents were given an opportunity to share any other comments:

Respondents felt that all youth work organisations/sectors should work together to provide leadership and promote a clear message describing what youth work is; its direction, impact and provide the evidence it has to prove this. Youth work needs to reclaim its language and be ok with providing both universal and targeted work, something that it has always done.

“This area of practice, youth and community work, currently faces serious pressures. I believe the NYA through the ETS committee; the Institute for Youth Work; In Defence; Regional Youth Work Units, where they exist, and the Unions have significant roles to play in working separately and together to retain an area of professional practice that has been significant to young people in the past and equally will be in the future. Here national, UK and international links are important to support practice”.

4.8. Conclusions

The survey has illustrated that there appears to have been a systemic drive by government and employers to undermine and de-professionalise youth and community work.

Practitioners reported re-occurring themes including major changes to terms and conditions, changes to job roles and pay loss, leave and inferior TOIL arrangements. Many were asked to work outside of their area of expertise by management with little knowledge of youth work, with reports of marketisation, de-professionalisation and deskilling.

In the views of practitioners these changes have resulted in reports of a decline in the quality of services that were delivered and a negative impact on provision for young people.

Youth workers cite government policy such as the establishment of the National Citizens Service (NCS), as redirecting funds for a short term, one off experiences for young people, away from a universal open access, with longevity of provision and arguably therefore better quality of relationships and services to young people and communities. This is not a reflection of the quality of work of NCS staff, many of whom are JNC qualified Youth and Community workers, but shows a significant failure in government policy on the long term needs of young people.

The report therefore recommends:

- The introduction of a Statutory Youth Services bill that places new legal duties and obligations on local authorities to provide a professional youth service and meaningfully consult young people on any changes to local services; especially cuts, closures and removal of services.
- A Parliamentary Select Committee report on the impact of the changes in government policy on youth and community work, with a comparable cost analysis of short term programmes against universal open access provision. This should assess the impact of cuts and policy changes, in order to make recommendations to government on how to stop the further de-professionalisation of youth and community work.
- The UK Government and the Governments of the Devolved Nations where responsibility for youth services sit, must develop a national strategy involving stakeholders to resist further de-professionalisation, retains and returns local authority youth service funding to a well-resourced, statutory provision and seeks to protect and preserve the JNC.

5. The views of academics

The online survey asked a series of questions to Youth Work Academics about the impact of the loss of the JNC on the courses that they teach.

Most of the responses to the survey were the result of collective discussions within the institution and reflect the views of groups of academics. The results are broken down by various themes below.

5.1. If the JNC Pink Book Terms and Conditions were assimilated into the NJC Green Book, what would that mean to the JNC course in your institution?

Respondents were split as to whether losing JNC terms and conditions and recognition would have an impact on their courses.

Some institutions responded by stressing that their courses are led by the demands from employers and that the loss of the JNC would mean that they would tailor teaching to the skills and knowledge required for the provision/services that no longer use JNC terms and conditions.

Others felt that the JNC benchmark meant that they could deliver a professional course that provided quality, recognition and status.

Some typical responses:

“This would pose potential issues with attracting future students to the professional training as the JNC qualification is so well known. It carries with it a quality assurance of the level of professional training, which may lead to a drop-in student numbers which within the current HEI sector could lead to the closure of the programme”.

“We just need to offer a programme that has sector currency regarding knowledge and skills: Key skills and knowledge which are transferable in other contexts.”

“Not a lot. we are in Wales and registration of youth workers with the education workforce council is dependent on JNC qualifications. Therefore, the JNC course would continue”.

5.2. Would your institution be likely to retain, or discard the JNC course if JNC terms and conditions were assimilated into the NJC Green Book?

The majority of respondents felt that without JNC recognition their course would change and possibly merge with other child and youth focused courses, something which is already happening in response to falling numbers and something which worries many of the practitioners who responded. However, some responded that they would maintain the course for professional recognition and registration.

Some typical responses:

“It is essential that we retain the professional status for youth work graduate programmes, as a mark of quality in graduates, However, most employers outside of local authorities and government agencies do not employ to that scale”.

“No, they would not. As long as market intelligence provides an evidence base for recruitment then they would retain the programme.”

“The institution has already moved away from a JNC validated course (for the moment) other reasons led to this. I do not feel it would have an impact.”

“We would retain. We see it as a quality mark”.

“We would retain a course - working with young people underpinned by youth work principles and ethics. If we didn't need to get JNC recognition, then this would save some work. However, we would be interested in professional validation of some kind, for example, through CLD Scotland”.

5.3. Are we witnessing the de-professionalisation of youth and community work?

75% of respondents felt that youth work was experiencing de-professionalisation. It was suggested that this is part of a wider debate on the recognition of youth work and the delivery of quality safe provision.

25% of respondents felt youth work was not experiencing de-professionalisation, as it is flourishing in other sectors and countries where registration is required.

Some typical responses:

“Getting rid of the JNC would de-professionalize youth and community work. We are currently seeing high demand for professionals with youth work skills and competencies. Taking away the JNC professional award would diminish the role of the professional youth and community worker amongst other professionals. This would be worse in formal educational institutions, health organisations, multi-agency teams, looked After organisations etc. As a quality mark, the JNC puts youth and community work professionals on a platform to argue parity of recognition. It would be a HUGE and short-sighted mistake to lose JNC”.

In contrast, some academic institutions are taking a pragmatic response to cuts in services and tailoring course to continue the training for those working with young people as opposed to youth work. With the fall in demand for professionally qualified youth workers to work in statutory youth services, HEI are having to adapt to instead meet the demands for youth work skills in other professions.

“Not necessarily. The skills, attitudes and knowledge that youth workers possess are in high demand and are extremely transferable. The current Government agenda of austerity and public sector funding cuts mean that most statutory youth services are a thing of the past. But youth workers and youth work skills are flourishing in other sectors. This has been happening for nearly 10 years. The future is about equipping those working with young people with youth work skills, and informal education ethos i.e. relationship is key, and upholding ethical practices.

Paradoxically the informal education ethos which the academic cites as the future i.e. relationships and the upholding of youth work ethical practices are identified by practitioners as some of the things that are lost when their role changes from youth work to working with young people in other settings. Relationships are not of the same quality, as longer on an equal power basis, of the young person now a client, and no longer choosing to participate voluntary.

5.4. Would the removal of the Qualifications Framework from the JNC lead to the de-professionalisation of youth work?

All respondents recognised the importance of the Qualifications Framework as part of JNC to provide a framework to ensure quality and standards. They believe that if this was removed, it would be damaging to the profession and standards of professional practice.

Some typical responses:

“Yes, there needs to a robust framework to benchmark against and there does not appears to be any viable alternative”.

“I think one of the most valuable things about a JNC qualification is that it sets and tests standards for professional practice...for me this is much more important than a separate pay scale. I feel that removing a clear, agreed standard would have a very damaging effect”.

“Yes, undoubtedly it would lead to the de-professionalisation of youth work, removal of the qualifications framework would end youth work training that is centred around the National Occupational Standards for youth work and the underpinning values”.

5.5. Given the changes in youth work delivery which have taken place over the last decade and the roles for which we are preparing students, is JNC still fit for purpose?

Feedback from respondents who felt it was fit for purpose, stated several reasons i.e. it provides a framework, recognition, standards, and quality control for the profession. Those academics who felt the JNC was not fit for purpose cited the reason as being because JNC graduates were gaining employment in workplaces not giving workers JNC terms and conditions.

Some typical responses:

“This is an interesting conundrum. Our students have been successful in securing employment in a broad range of roles, mostly working with young people or/and communities on themes / issues of concern: drugs / alcohol; mental health / wellbeing; alternative education; youth / restorative justice; etc. These are not roles that are paid on the JNC scale, so the course's alignment with JNC is irrelevant. However, based on the requirements of the JNC and the profession, these students are completing courses that ground them well in an important set of values, and help them to shape their practice to work effectively with young people and communities. It is possible that these elements could remain as part of a non-JNC aligned programme, but at least the JNC endorsement offers some kind of quality control”.

“Probably not. It could be completely re-energised if it was placed in a wider professional framework - as described above. The children, young people and families apprenticeship standard is one example where the NYA and JNC seem to want to pursue a narrow, specialist agenda - and the opportunity to give youth work the wider professional framework that workers, students, HEI's and managers want, is being dismissed.

“Yes, even though students may be going into jobs that are not on JNC terms and conditions. The JNC provides that professional status. The BA (hons) or similar demonstrates that the person can study at an academic level, but the JNC element demonstrates that they can do the job in practice.

5.6. Is the JNC integral to the identity of youth and community work?

Again, the respondents were split, with some academics reflecting that some of their students don't go into jobs using JNC. While others felt it provides identity, values, principles, professional status and it was recognised that these are being eroded across many professions not just youth work.

“For me, the values are the central identity of YCW, the value of JNC is that it forms a central point against which debates about these values can be focussed. Having something at the centre that holds these tensions is key- if we lose JNC I don't know what this would be”

“I don't think it is for many or our recent graduates, simply because they do not come into contact with the JNC pay scale / conditions of employment. We promote it as an added bonus, something extra to take away from their studies, but it is hard to make it relevant when they are on placement at (and subsequently employed by) organisations that don't use the JNC”

5.7. Conclusion

The research has shown that academics recognise that youth work was experiencing de-professionalisation in recent years with many of their students going on to work in fields that no longer count as youth work. This was largely a reflection of the changes in services highlighted elsewhere, as local authorities continue to cut back on services and no longer abide by the JNC.

Most academics recognised the valuable role of JNC in providing a standards framework, quality assurance against which to benchmark and most felt that they would continue to teach against the JNC standards. Those that did not, cited market pressures driven by employers, which were driving them to teach more generic degree courses on working with children and young people to meet demand.

Academics confirmed that the skills that youth workers have working with young people are valued and in demand by other professions. Youth work graduates are sought after in a wide range of professions. However generic youth work provision is not and the statutory youth services have been decimated in parts of England and Wales. JNC accredited youth and community work courses are closing and numbers entering into the profession are reducing.

The benchmark that someone is deemed professionally fit to practice with children and young people in the UK currently is the JNC qualification. Removal of that benchmark as part of a cost cutting or streamlining of the number of collective bargaining agreements by local government is therefore short cited. It appears from academics that it is employers and the Government that has driven the moves away from the JNC, and HEIs are being forced to change their course in order to meet these pressures or face loss of students.

This report therefore recommends

- The protection of the JNC quality standards through the establishment of a Youth and community workforce licensure system, workforce register including a revocable license to practice, protection of the title, CPD scheme and code of ethics as exists in many other professions.
- Stakeholders within the community and youth work sector must develop a communication strategy to educate students on youth and community courses about the JNC.
- Stakeholders including the JNC, Trade Unions, ETS Committees, Training Agency group, HEIs and youth work employers must carry out a national review of local and national training for youth work.
- Local authority employers must work in partnership with trade union staff side groups to develop policies and procedures to support those workers already redeployed, to maximise their impact in new roles.

Conclusion

The overall narrative of this research is that the JNC offers the framework for a professional quality youth service. All three surveyed groups offered responses that echoed the trends spelled out in the literature and that without it youth work may be fragmented, de-professionalised and deskilled even further.

Practitioners and academics report that they have had to be pragmatic and flexible to cope with the transition to new forms of working and services, but it is striking that particularly practitioners and young people, do not feel that all the changes benefit young people.

The professional identity as youth and community workers is being eroded, and in adapting to work in new locations, contexts, with new or hybrid job titles and terms and conditions, being a “JNC qualified” youth and community worker is the part of the professional identity the practitioners retain as a benchmark for competency to work with young people.

It is clear that this trend has not been driven by the demands of young people but has rather been a response to government policy and austerity and its implementation through local authorities. Under articles 2 & 4 of the UN Conventions on the rights of the child ratified by the UK in 1982, Children and young people were given the right for decisions to be made in the best interests of the child and the right to be heard. Youth work bases its practice on these rights. In not consulting with children and young people on the removal of youth work provision and access to youth workers and safe places open access youth services provided, it could be argued the UK government has failed to fulfil their obligations under this convention.

It is also clear that more needs to be done to introduce a governing body and licensure system for youth and community work to protect standards and guarantee the safety of children and young people.

The system as it is, is not perfect as after initial qualification there is no process for protecting young people from poor practice, aside from workplace disciplinary procedures. A licensure system inter-linking a revocable license to practice, a code of ethics, CPD scheme and protection of the title youth and community worker, would ensure professional standards are maintained, by identifying poor practice, providing support through CPD were relevant.

The JNC is crucial to protect the youth work profession. Unite therefore believes we must do all we can to protect it.

Unite calls on the Key Youth Work Institutions which provide leadership to the sector to meet together to discuss the implications for practice for the employment of Youth and Community workers identified in this report.

Unite would like to work with partners to develop an action plan which addresses:

- Potential adaptations which can be made to the existing JNC framework to enhance its usefulness and fitness for purpose in an ever-changing employment landscape. To do this whilst maintaining its core functions and role as a repository of professional standards against which Youth and Community Work can be measured
- The development and adoption of strategies to promote universal usage of JNC in employment in Youth and Community Work settings

- Linking JNC to the introduction of a workforce licensure system for Youth and Community Work in the UK. Including a compulsory register of Youth and Community Workers in the UK, linked to a revocable license to practice, CPD -Continuous Practice Development training and protection of the title Youth and Community worker.
- A review of the designation of posts at different levels within the Youth and Community Work sector both part-time and full-time and including volunteers, with a view to adopting a nationally understood designation structure
- Development of a strategy which resists the de-professionalisation of the sector as perceived by the respondents to this research
- Conducting a national review of local and national training

The recommendations within this report were:

- i. A specific Minister for Youth Affairs whose responsibility is to be an advocate and voice for young people in Government, attending Cabinet. The role would straddle Government departments and assess the impact of Government policy on the hopes, aspirations and lives of young people.
- ii. Government should create a national youth forum to consult young people on policies that affect them, giving them powers to challenge policies that will affect their interests.
- iii. Parliament should establish a joint parliamentary commission on youth services to consult with young people, communities and key stakeholders of the sector on the impact loss of or change of provision has had on the lives of young people, communities and key stakeholders and make recommendations for legislative and other action.
- iv. The introduction of a Statutory Youth Services bill that places new legal duties and obligations on local authorities to provide a professional youth service and meaningfully consult young people on any changes to local services; especially cuts, closures and removal of services.
- v. A Parliamentary Select Committee report on the impact of the changes in government policy on youth and community work, with a comparable cost analysis of short term programmes against universal open access provision. This should assess the impact of cuts and policy changes, in order to make recommendations to government on how to stop the further de-professionalisation of youth and community work.
- vi. The UK Government and the Governments of the Devolved Nations where responsibility for youth services sit, must develop a national strategy involving stakeholders to resist further de-professionalisation and retain and return local authority youth service funding to a well-resourced, statutory provision and seeks to protect and preserve the JNC.
- vii. The protection of the JNC quality standards through the establishment of a Youth and community workforce licensure system, workforce register including a revocable license to practice, protection of the title, CPD scheme and code of ethics as exists in many other professions.

- viii. Stakeholders within the community and youth work sector must develop a communication strategy to educate students on youth and community courses about the JNC.
- ix. Stakeholders including the JNC, Trade Unions, ETS committees, Training agency group, HEIs and Youth work employers must carry out a national review of local and national training for youth work.
- x. Local authority employers must work in partnership with trade union staff side groups to develop policies and procedures to support those workers already redeployed, to maximise their impact in new roles.

Glossary

JNC

The Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for Youth and Community Workers is the body which has responsibility for the national framework used to grade and set the pay for youth work jobs.

Pink Book²

A literal description of the binder which contains, in written form, the collectively agreed JNC terms and conditions for Youth and Community Workers. Also included, is a qualifications framework and a list of those Higher Education Institutes which can provide JNC approved qualifications. Numbered updates outlining changes to terms and conditions and sets of nationally agreed pay-scales are also regularly sent out to be included in the binder.

NJC

(National Joint Council for Local Government Services) NJC scales are local government pay scales, which are also extensively used in the voluntary sector. They are a result of negotiations between trade unions (Unite, Unison and GMB) and the Local Government Association.

CYPW

Community Youth and Play Workers – one of the unions which represent workers in this sector and now a section of Unite the Union and previously the CYWU (Community Youth Workers Union) .

TUPE

Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations. The TUPE Regulations preserve employees' terms and conditions when a business or undertaking, or part of one, is transferred to a new employer.

TOIL

Time Off in Lieu – time taken off in recompense for working outside of contracted hours or outside of agreed normal pattern of work

HEI

Higher Education Institute – in this report, those Colleges and Universities providing qualifying training for Youth and Community Workers

NYA

The National Youth Agency - is an educational charity in England and Wales that works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organizations to support and improve services for young people.

ETS

Education and Training Standards Committee (ETS) is the body that provides professional validation for youth work qualifications in England, on behalf of the JNC for Youth & Community Workers.

LGBT+

Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Plus

IDYW

In Defence of Youth Work - a campaign group which seeks to defend and extend youth work as a distinctive educational practice founded on a voluntary relationship with young people and shaped by their agendas.

TEF

Teaching Excellence Framework. Aims to recognise and reward excellent learning and teaching in Higher Education.

NOS

National Occupational Standards – the standards against which Youth Work Practice is measured

VCS

Voluntary and Community Sector – bodies which provide non-statutory services to young people and communities

ONS

Office for National Statistics – collects official data on national and regional trends

CYPN

Children and Young People Now – Journal aimed at *“Everyone working with Children, Young People and Families”*

QF

Quality Framework

Race to the Bottom

A situation in which companies or organisations compete with each other to reduce costs by paying the lowest wages or giving workers the worst conditions

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CYPW



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