YOUTH MATTERS – PARLEYING AND PUSHING ON
what Bill thinks we should now be doing about *Youth Matters*

There's plenty of talk about *Youth Matters* - some doubts and not a little exasperation:

'muddle headed'
'why don't they just say what's going to happen?'
'not enough nit, and hardly any grit at all!'
'"careers education" gets three mentions in three-hundred paragraphs!'
'what are they trying to tell us?'
'they really don't understand us!'
'what's anybody actually supposed to do about this?'

It's a pity that the green paper could not have been written around a more recognisable portrayal of what we have been doing. It would have allayed anxieties. And we can safely assume that youth- and social-workers have their own versions of such reactions.

But the green paper is not about what we have been doing, it is about what we need to do - reform. Different game - the word-count score-line was 'careers education' 3; 'reform' 46. That's an away win!

So now what are we to make of it? *Youth Matters* rates a lot more thought.

If we are to move forward on *Youth Matters* we still need to negotiate with its assumptions and grab its opportunities – both to parley and to push.

The parleying has to do with assumptions about the extent of change in contemporary society. We must either refute them or negotiate. To ignore, or to rebut - because they don't fit our assumptions about ourselves - would be to invite marginalisation.

Pushing-on means looking for opportunities for useful action. It is not what policy does with us but what we do with policy. It happens with every policy initiative - the reality emerges after the launch.

parley and push

So, where are the negotiations and opportunities? Some examples:

economy and culture
We've learned to talk about careers-education-and-guidance in terms of employability and economy. But the policy ground is shifting. *Youth Matters* is as-much interested in social-and-cultural change as economic-and-technological change. This is change in our learner's experience, not least in how they accord trust. If they change so must we. There's a lot of room for negotiation and opportunity here.

IAG and curriculum

Youth Matters gives careers-ed few mentions because it sees it as part of the personal-development curriculum. It repeatedly looks for this kind of integration - between a range of resources and the requirements of contemporary change. It needs reformed curriculum – at least as much as reformed IAG. Careers-ed was never going to cope; even psd would struggle. The integrated relevance of Tomlinson is yet to have its day. Opportunities here.

professional and voluntary

No big budgets promised in *Youth Matters*. The strategy is to maximise available resources. The tactic is integration, linking existing resources to new projects - both curriculum- and community-wide. It will mean more projects calling on other-than-professional partners and in other-than-specialist roles. It'll not harm our professionalism, though it should cause us to rethink it. We can parley that, and then maximise the opportunities.

14-19 and life long

At first sight there doesn't seem to be much hope for life-long careers work. But there is this: the proposals will put careers work in a position where more people will be able to find it, learn to trust it, use it - and (here's the point!) come back for more. That may not be a policy for life-long careers work; but it is a life-long dynamic we can use. Big push needed here.

national and local

We could get used to thinking of careers work as a global phenomenon, framed by universally-applicable targets and standards. The green paper doesn't see us that way. That's why it's short on operational detail – it expects us to work differently in different locations. It offers us a new position among our users – 'locality'! We are expected to be able to turn what we know of our own communities – their cultures and their economies - into a basis for arriving at appropriate frameworks for local action. This is the green paper's biggest challenge to our capacity for negotiation and for taking opportunities.

what now?

We won't refute the assumptions in *Youth Matters*. If anything, it has underplayed the extent and direction of changed attitudes among young people.

There is one issue on which we need both to parley and seize an opportunity – big time. *Youth Matters* maps several layers of management – local authority, children's trust, Connexions, schools-and-colleges. Much of what they will do will be central-services tasks – hiring-and-firing, commissioning, regulation, staff–support, resource allocation, back-up facilities, evaluation, dissemination and so on. It's not hard to see, in each case, where appropriate subsidiarity will settle.

Its less easy to see where programme management will locate. *Youth Matters* will mean working with professional and voluntary helpers, non-specialist and specialist partners, curriculum and community-wide. This kind of management does not resemble tasks set up by bureaucracies – with clearly-defined boundaries and roles. If we go about this with any imagination and sensitivity at all, we are

going to be setting up a lot of good-will driven and opportunistically-arranged projects. It is how we're going to learn how to do this well.

We've been here before. Remember the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative – which, when it got into its stride, managed local projects calling on integrated help - like *Youth Matters*.

Shouldn't we be considering 'YM consortia' - for programme management on a neighbourhood basis. There's experience out there. Let's call on it.