

# Attitudes towards working ‘Out-of-hours’ with Young People: Christian and Secular Perspectives

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## Abstract

*Based on empirical research, this article considers the different attitudes towards working ‘out-of-hours’ (ie. outside of a typical youth work session) with young people. Using a survey of 55 youth workers in a small post-industrial town, it finds that there is a clear split between workers from Christian and secular organisations, with Christian organisations fostering a significantly more positive attitude towards engaging out-of-hours with young people. This is understood through a framework that compares the ‘new professionalising’ agenda faced by many workers funded through public moneys, with the vocational and incarnational theological underpinnings of much Christian youth work. It concludes by arguing that this difference in theoretical concepts influences an observable difference in practice, and that greater dialogue between the sectors would be beneficial to well informed, safe, and appropriate use of ‘out-of-hours’ work.*

**Key words:** youth work, professional boundaries, out-of-hours, professionalising, vocation, comparison, Christian, secular.

THE PURPOSE OF this survey-based research was to discern attitudes towards out-of-hours contact with young people by youth workers from Christian and secular sectors, and apply it to a theoretical framework. This research focuses upon the opinions and experiences of youth workers (paid and volunteer, full and part time) from a post-industrial north-eastern town. The questionnaire defined ‘out-of-hours’ as ‘using free time’ or, for volunteers, ‘those times outside of a typical, regular, organised session’.

This article considers the contemporary theoretical foundations of both secular and Christian youth work as found in their respective literature for the purpose of comparison when exploring a theoretical rationale to the differences observed in the results. Ultimately this article concludes that workers in a secular setting may be required to adopt a more bureaucratic deficit model of youth work which is based on an acute perception of risk and anxiety surrounding ‘youth’. In this atmosphere decisions about professional boundaries become duty-based, where universal rules are applied, thus providing a rationale for a more stringent set of responses against working out-of-hours with young people. By contrast the Christian sector has significantly more literature regarding ‘vocation’ and working ‘incarnationally’. Though there is little in the Christian literature on ethics, it would be consistent to see professional boundaries as being situational and character-

based, relying on the sound judgement of the worker as to where the limits of their 'calling' lie.

Ultimately, the aim of this article is not to pass judgement on either secular or Christian perspectives on working out-of-hours with young people. Rather, it is to show that this difference exists, to offer a theoretical rationale as to why it exists, and to argue for an increase in dialogue between the sectors for the sake of improving practice, uncovering assumptions, and becoming more aware of workers' own 'theories in use' (Schön, 1983).

## Youth work: contexts and cultures

### *Youth work as a Profession*

Though many authors are happy to consider youth work a 'profession' this term is rarely defined (Belton, 2009: vii; Sapin, 2009: 1; Roberts, 2009: 3-4; Bradford, 2012: 34). If it is being used as an antonym for 'amateur' (and amateur is taken to mean 'incompetent' or 'unskilled' opposed to 'unpaid') then there is a strong case for a youth work 'profession' (Nicholls, 2012: 103-104). Banks (2004) suggests that 'profession' is an essentially contested concept. There are, however, common themes amongst the definitions, such as the distancing of the professionals from their clients (Banks, 2004: 20-21; 1999: 5; Austin et al, 2006: 81; Kelly, 1990: 167; Knapp and Slattery, 2004: 555; Powell, 1990: 178; Popple, 1995: 55), maintaining status and power (Banks, 2004: 20-21, 118; Kelly, 1990: 167; Powell, 1990: 179), and having a monopoly on certain knowledge or skills (Banks, 2004: 22-23). Despite Nicholl's protestation (2012: 109) the term may refer to 'quality' and 'skill' in the minds of the practitioner, but perhaps not in the mind of the manager or policy maker, nor even the young people who value 'non-professional spaces' (Sharkey and Shields, 2008). This is perhaps why Banks (2004: 32) recognised an 'identifiable strand of reluctance' towards the professionalisation of youth work.

The 1980s saw the rise of a form of professionalism based on a managerial bureaucracy. It was an externally imposed, controlling, homogenising system that focussed on targets and outcomes (Banks, 2004: 38; Gilchrist, 2004: 76, 18). This increased under New Labour, where the managerial agenda prized innovative increases in efficiency, performance, and participation. Working to procedures and predefined targets undermined the autonomy of youth workers (Banks, 2004: 152-153; Davies and Wood, 2010) and risked putting external requirements above the young people's needs. In this context youth workers could seek to uphold the dominant interests and legitimise the structures that gave them a privileged position (McCulloch and Tett, 2010: 39).

With regard to government policy in general, and its specific effects on youth work, this increase in bureaucratisation is seen through the marketisation of services for young people that seeks 'efficiency' and 'results'. The government policy 'Positive for Youth' (Department for Education 2011), for example, promotes the holistic wellbeing of young people in rhetoric, whilst in practice it appears that the priority is preventing 'risky' behaviours (Davies, 2013: 16; Department for

Education, 2011: 9-10). This difference between rhetoric and practice is possibly best seen in the 2013 progress report (Department for Education, 2013) which concentrates on easy-to-measure targets, such as accredited outcomes, alcohol intake, numbers of young people involved in social action projects, and the numbers of young people engaged in local decision making.

'Positive for Youth' holds a strong neo-liberal agenda where the development of young people's character is equated with adopting a disposition attuned to the values of the market (entrepreneurship, enterprise and a competitive attitude) and where a good citizen is 'dutiful' but uncritical (Brooks, 2013). The document also appeals to the biological sciences to create an essentialist approach to 'youth' that appears to simplify the myriad cultures and stages young people inhabit, shaped by gender, sexuality, class, religion and ethnicity – despite having alluded to some of these differences a few pages earlier (Department for Education, 2011: 7-9).

According to Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo (2013) this bureaucratic, neoliberal approach to youth services promotes discourses of risk and problematizes the young people through a hegemonic 'narrative of delinquency'. It belittles discourses of marginalisation that would challenge social inequalities and the structural forces that maintain them (see also Nicholls, 2012). There is no evidence of an awareness of such structural forces throughout 'Positive for Youth'; rather the appeal to neuropsychology affirms the individualist nature of these 'issues'. One assumes, when contracts for providing services to young people are placed on the open market the successful bidders will have shown their commitment to the individualised 'youth as risk' discourse, attacking individuals while ignoring underlying structural causes, and replacing long term ideals of human flourishing and social good with short term goals based on indicators of risk and assumptions of deficiencies amongst young people (Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo, 2013: 1699). Indeed, the laudable commitment to information sharing between organisations for the sake of safeguarding, prevalent in policy discourses since 'Every Child Matters' (HMSO, 2003), is one also imbued with practitioners maintaining the hegemonic 'narrative of delinquency' (Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo, 2013).

The main facet of a deficit based bureaucratic 'new professionalism' investigated here is the use of externally applied 'professional boundaries' that inform and regulate the relationship between the young person and the youth worker. Austin et al (2006: 81) describe boundaries as 'the edge of appropriate helping behaviours and allow for clarification of what is permitted in professional... relationships'. Over recent years there has been a steady increase in the professional boundaries which distance the worker from the young person (Banks, 2004: 21-22; 1999: 5; Austin et al, 2006: 81; Kelly, 1990: 167; Knapp and Slattery, 2004: 555; Popple, 1995: 75; Powell, 1990: 178).

These boundaries have proven benefits to youth work and young people. They prevent well-meaning workers becoming heavy handed and patronising (Banks, 2004: 54). They prevent anxiety over role confusion by young people and protect them from manipulation by workers (Austin et

al, 2006: 81). An increased sense of professionalism can also increase the media attention an occupation receives, increasing its influence over policy (Gabor, 1990: 84). Ineffectual boundaries can actually reduce or inhibit the ability for a young person to make a free choice and, at the extreme, this relationship can then become exploitative (Knapp and Slattery, 2004: 553-554).

However, youth work is fraught with dilemmas between maintaining boundaries and facilitating young people's development. Blacker (2010) suggests relationships are key to negotiating positive change within a young person, but they offer difficult ethical issues (see also Adams, 1998). He argues boundaries can become a list of what we 'should not be doing' as youth workers without acknowledging the nature and purpose of the relationship. Collander-Brown (2010: 41) agrees about the role of relationships, saying 'in the midst of all the new technical-sounding verbiage concerning targets and outcomes it is easy to lose sight of the truth that it is the relationship between the young person and youth workers that is central to the work', and here he explicitly explains out-of-hours contact as beneficial to this relationship if we are to understand life from the young person's perspective and move from being 'target orientated youth workers'.

'Dual relationships' (when a worker is also a family member, neighbour or family friend) is perhaps the best example of 'professional boundaries' and working out-of-hours in the literature. Sercombe (2010) argues dual relationships produce conflicting expectations that can hamper the educative nature of youth work. He says 'the general consensus is that dual relationships should be avoided where possible because it is difficult to avoid conflicts of interest' (p.80). By comparison Pugh's (2007) article on dual relationships in social work is significantly more positive. She suggests relationships can become more complicated than assumed when talking of 'professional boundaries', particularly in small rural communities where the worker and the user will meet, and even socialise, outside the professional relationship. Though she acknowledges several 'tensions' in maintaining a dual role, she recognises some advantages to a dual relationship. It can have a humanizing effect on the worker/user relationship, local knowledge can be of great value, as can acceptance by the community. Although during the discussion on vocations, incarnational youth ministry and character-based ethics (below), 'dual relationship' may be better understood as one singular relationship the worker performs in many situations (ie. a youth worker maintains that identity outside of the youth centre).

### ***Youth work as a Vocation***

So far it has been argued that in some forms of 'secular' youth work the 'new profession' has become an increasingly common paradigm on which to base the occupation. However, there is at least one alternative paradigm on which youth work is based, one that is common – but not exclusive to – Christian youth work: vocation. For example, Ahmed et al (2007) found youth workers in faith communities regularly spoke of 'calling' and vocation, and their youth work was often inseparable from their faith and life. It's a theological term originally used to refer to those

believed to be called by God to a particular ministry. This could be further extended into a secular understanding of vocation: there are certain social roles deemed as being particularly important for the functioning of society or having a humanitarian telos (Hansen, 1994: 259-260). In this section it will be argued that 'youth work as a vocation' helps to provide a framework for understanding the differences between secular and Christian approaches to out-of-hours youth work.

A vocation – secular or religious – has three ingredients. Firstly there is some form of 'calling' during which time a person is made aware they would be particularly suited to a role, which has been described as coming from God, from society or the community around the person, or from inside the individual. Astley and Francis (2009) researched people training for ordained ministry who referred to this as a 'passion', 'desire', 'instinct', 'itch', or refer to it in the past-tense in terms of 'fulfilment'. This 'calling' provides a profound motivation and deep personal commitment, through which other values and concerns are understood. There may be, for example, a dilemma between this belief in a calling to care for young people, and a policy that seeks to prevent a worker from certain actions or behaviours (such as, offering a lift to a young person on a cold, dark night).

Secondly, it requires integrity from the individual, which could either be an internal sense of values leading to the choice of a vocation that fits those values, or an external expectation that upon taking up a vocation those complementary personal values will follow. Ultimately it is a whole-life project, not able to be compartmentalised into private/public versions of self, but the vocation becomes part of an individual's identity where there is expected to be 'a significant continuity between the occupational role and the private values and concerns' (Carr, 2000: 10).

Thirdly, there is the expectation that when fulfilling a vocation others will be prioritised either through putting other people's needs first or through a sacrifice of time or pay (Haughey, 2004: x; Radcliffe, 1999: 199). Wingren (1958) produced a seminal text interpreting reformation theologian Martin Luther's understanding of 'vocation' for a modern audience. He summarises that a social role can be a vocation if a person's 'life station' is 'serv[ing] the well-being of others' (p.4). Carr (2000: 13) agrees, saying those engaged in a vocation will be 'utterly and selflessly [committed] to the personal flourishing of their charges'. This commitment to a positive outcome for others adds an ethical imperative to an occupation (Weber, 1958; Collins, 1991: 41-44; Hansen, 1994: 260; Badcock, 1998: 105-107).

When compared to a vocation a 'new profession' makes a distinct separation between the private and public self that can be seen as impersonal and externally regulated. Often these are assumed to be in the interests of the client, but can lead to the depersonalisation of practice that serves the 'professional' most (Carr, 2000: 11). Cooling (2010: 17-18) argues that the assumption of professional neutrality has led to ethical difficulties as professional standards supersede personal values that may offer a more reliable ethical framework (see also Prichard, 2007: 72).

## ***Models of youth work***

The way in which youth work is conceptualised, either as a 'new profession', a vocation, or some other occupational paradigm, is both influenced by and influences the predominant model of youth work in an organisation. Three broad models will be considered in brief here: deficit-based, asset-based, and incarnational approach to youth work.

### ***Asset based approach***

Within this model youth workers see young people as full of potential to be realised, and informal education may be the single most important tool for this. Rosseter (1987:2) says 'first and foremost youth workers are educators. All other roles they may fulfil at certain times are secondary. The essential nature of their work is concerned with bringing about change'. Based on the work of liberal educators such as Freire (1985) to combat potentially oppressive power structures, it is a means to growth and development using conversation with a commitment to democracy, fairness and equality (Brierley, 2003: 83-86; Jeffs and Smith, 2005).

### ***Deficit-based youth work***

When approached from a deficit model, young people are assumed to be problematic and in need of fixing. Current thinkers argue that youth work is changing in emphasis from voluntary and dialogue-based to coerced and prescribed (Jeffs and Smith, 2010b: 4-5; Batsleer and Davies, 2010; Jeffs, 1997: 164; Weil and Percy-Smith, 2002), with 'workers [being] denied the capacity to create long term relationships and build projects with an aura of permanence' (Jeffs, 1997: 163; see also Dean, 2004: 78). Funding requirements can cause youth workers to vilify young people by exaggerating negative traits and assuming they are deficient and require 'fixing', potentially forcing them away from the organisation's original aims and values (Gilchrist et al, 2003: 8; Jeffs and Smith, 2010a) – indeed, as seen above, this is implicit in both 'Positive for Youth' and its later progress report (DfE, 2011; 2013), and the commissioning process and system for measuring the effectiveness of third party programmes which suppose workers will solve the problems associated with the 'risky' stage of 'youth'.

### ***Incarnation***

Asset and deficit based youth work could be seen as a meta-theory underpinning the common daily practices and assumptions of workers. The incarnational model works at a more practice orientated level and as such isn't directly comparable to asset and deficit based youth work. In fact, it is entirely possible to have both an asset-based and deficit-based incarnational model of youth work. It is discussed here, however, because it offers a rationale for the opinions on out-of-hours contact with young people within the Christian sector.

The term incarnation refers to the belief that divinity and humanity coexisted in the person of Jesus (McGrath, 2001: 368). It is the assumption that the itinerant preacher who travelled around Palestine 2000 years ago was simultaneously Yahweh, the God of the Jewish people. The purpose of the incarnation is believed to be God's self-revelation: in Jesus, 'God is communicating God, not ideas about God' (McGrath, 2001: 371). As such it enabled God, living in heaven, to experience suffering and death and therefore to understand human experience through his own experience (Grudem, 1994: 563).

Though there are multiple variations of incarnational youth ministry, as a crude summary it is essentially prioritising the relational element of youth work, with an emphasis on the vocation and integrity of the worker, and in which the young people are expected to have an awareness of the wider context in which the youth worker lives. Jesus is often used as an exemplar where the worker attempts to live a 'Christ-like' life to act as a role model for others. This could work in a secular setting when many workers already see themselves as role models, which may or may not include specifically modelling the values Jesus portrayed (Jefferis and Smith, 2005: 95; Russell, 2007; Brierley, 2003: 137-143). This relational incarnational ministry can also include ensuring humility through recognising the self-limiting nature of God's descent into humanity (O'Collins, 2002: 60-64), living amongst those being worked with (Michael, 2007; Forrest, 2000; Exley and Dennick, 2004: 276-281), showing a lasting commitment to young people and being willing to go beyond the remit of the role (Russell, 2007; Veerman, 1997; Fenton, 1998; Hunter, 1999), being a compassionate presence (Barden, 2011; Fenton, 1998), and being genuine – allowing young people to observe the worker's vulnerabilities (Fields, 2002: 91-94). Root (2007) sums up all these elements of an incarnational model as 'place-sharing'. Referring to theologian Bonhoeffer he believes in a God that 'stands in our stead', he says that 'place-sharing demands that I stand so close to the other [i.e. young people] that his or her reality becomes my own, his or her suffering becomes mine' (p.110; see also Nash and Palmer, 2011). However Root (2007) also warns this incarnational-relational model can be used as a 'strategy of influence', and the relationship can be used with a particular predefined aim – typically conversion.

Therefore, although in the youth work literature an asset-based model is either assumed or encouraged, in reality the 'new profession' of youth work that some organisations are based upon assumes a deficit model. In Christian youth work, though, both the asset and deficit models exist as meta-theories, a third incarnational model is often used which provides a rationale for a more positive approach to out-of-hours work.

### ***Risk and Youth Work***

If a deficit approach and the rise of the 'new professions' is based in part on an increase of anxiety and the requirement of control – be that managers' control over workers or workers' control over young people – one may ask where this has come from.

Beck (1992; Beck et al; 2000) views contemporary culture as a 'risk society'. He believes deindustrialisation brought identities based upon choice (see also Bauman, 1992; 1995), producing two facets of the 'risk society' – uncertainty (or detraditionalisation) and responsibility (or individualisation). Uncertainty is required to adapt to the pace of contemporary life, but also means many of society's institutions (such as marriage and childhood) have changed rapidly and no longer offer the promise of stability they once did. The increase of the responsibility of the individual which would once have lain with the community or the 'expert' has increased the level of stress and pressure to ensure citizens of the risk society make the 'right' choices at the 'right' times, thus becoming 'motivated by anxiety' (Beck, 1992: 49).

Boholm and Corvellec (2011) attempt to uncover why some aspects of contemporary life are considered a risk, and others not. They separate the 'object of risk' (which may not be a material item, but an ideology or pastime) from the 'object at risk' – which is usually a person or people group, but could also be an ideology. The relationship between the object of risk and the object at risk are often hypothetical and exaggerated, and start with a series of 'what if' questions that become 'imaginary accounts of dramas that might occur if certain conditions are met' (Boholm and Corvellec, 2011: 181). As such the modern way to deal with risk is to increase the number of steps between the object of risk and object at risk until the 'causal chain' becomes perceived as an implausible series of events. Another common way to reduce the risk is to increase the chain of responsibility above the object of risk. In youth work, for example, an error in judgement on behalf of a worker also becomes the responsibility of management to ensure their staff are well trained and following policy, thus creating an atmosphere of control as the object of risk moves up various levels of an organisational hierarchy (Boholm and Corvellec, 2011: 182).

The perception of risk increases the requirement for control, and the acknowledgement of the need for close control provides a fertile plain for bureaucracies to develop. Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo (2013) argue that the narrative of risk and delinquency in public discourses around young people become a 'barrier' for good youth work because the 'main function of youth work [becomes to] control, monitor and restrain the problems of youth' (p.1702), and it legitimises the institutions' increase in controlling and medicalising the behaviours of young people (Finn et al, 2013).

### **Ethics**

So far an argument has been forming along two lines that offer a framework for understanding the forthcoming differences in opinions on out-of-hours work between workers in Christian and secular organisations. The 'new professionalism' becoming inherent in much youth work is based on a deficit model, which appears to have been influenced by the 'risk society'. In contrast, literature and empirical research already conducted into a Christian context has considered youth work as a vocation and using an incarnational model (which can in turn be influenced by deficit

and asset based approaches to young people). Considering the ethical framework organisations may base their practice on can also help to understand these differences of opinions towards out-of-hours practice.

Banks (2010: 13-17) presents three metatheories of ethics that can underpin practice. Moral philosophers during the Enlightenment believed ethical rules could be discovered and understood in a similar fashion to the work of the scientists around them. Kant, working at this time, developed a set of principles that valued the individual's autonomy and rights above all else, and where an ethical decision is one which follows a universal principle (Banks, 2004: 115). The increase of the 'risk society' and the increased control of the 'new professions' has led to ethical judgements being made by management and presented in policy documents as universalised rules to follow. Though rule-following may not be strictly Kantian, this borrows the idea the right action is following a prescribed principle. Utilitarianism – conceived of at a similar time – places moral worth on the outcome of an action. The 'right' action is that which produces the most 'good' for the greatest number of people and is often invoked when budgets are stringent and efficiency or 'value for money' is praised. Kantian and utilitarian approaches are 'principle based' and they do not include other important factors for ethical decision making, such as the motivation or character of those making ethical decisions.

Alternatively, Banks says, character based ethics are contextualised and based upon internal 'virtues' with an ultimate aim (or telos) in the flourishing of self and others. A youth worker must live up to these 'virtues' in order to act ethically, it is a matter of integrity. It fits well with a vocational and incarnational model of youth work, which requires a holistic ethical framework on which to base a consistent set of decisions and practices in personal and 'professional' life. Banks concludes that in reality all these ethical frameworks are required to cover the plethora of issues youth workers face.

### **Summary**

The argument developed from the literature is that the narratives of risk surrounding popular discourses of youth have legitimised the increasing attempts to control young people and youth workers, and promoted a definition of youth based around their deficiencies. This has been enacted through the increase in the bureaucratic 'new professionalising' of youth work in secular settings, which has encouraged a duty-based and utilitarian ethical commitment. By contrast, youth workers from Christian traditions are seen to embody a 'vocation' and, potentially, an understanding of an incarnational model of youth work that seems to promote a character based approach to ethics, with greater flexibility and a different approach to risk. These frameworks shall be used below to offer an explanation for stark differences between 'secular' and 'Christian' responses to working out-of-hours with young people.

## Methodology

The questionnaire design was essentially descriptive, seeking to count how many youth workers in different contexts hold certain opinions and attitudes towards the implementation and rigidity of boundaries (Oppenheim, 2000: 112). The hypothesis was to test whether workers in secular and Christian organisations have different perspectives on 'professional boundaries' and working out-of-hours with young people. Most questions were closed and based on brief scenarios that asked youth workers to what extent, on a scale from one to five, they agreed to a particular out-of-hours issue. For example: 'youth work and your personal life should be completely separate', and 'it is acceptable to add young people as "friends" on social networking sites'.

All youth workers practising within the same unitary authority were invited to participate in the study. The sample frame was developed with the help of the local Voluntary Development Agency (VDA) and the Local Authority who both had online databases of organisations known to and/or funded through them. Local uniformed organisations and church based youth workers were also contacted, as these organisations were often not represented in the databases. All organisations in the frame were asked to take part either in person at meetings, or via email.

To comply with the ethical norms of research, all participants were assured of anonymity and any precise information that may identify an organisation or an individual has been generalised (De Vaus, 2002: 63). The nature of the questionnaire had a very low risk of causing harm and all of the university guidelines were followed. Participants were also offered the results.

Due to the possible scope of this research and the resources available, one unitary authority was chosen as the population. Although there may be interesting results that can be shared with other areas, the scope of this research does not allow any firm conclusions outside of this town. Rather, to increase its generalisability, future research may test the results in other areas. The lack of qualitative data to aid in understanding why these opinions were held, or the nuances and level of judgement the workers would make, proved frustrating. However, an ongoing ethnography-based PhD by the author in this field is helping to increase this understanding.

In total 55 surveys were completed. These were gathered partly through paper questionnaires and a web based survey hosted by Bristol Online Surveys. The data was then analysed using SPSS.

## Findings

14 of the 55 respondents (26%) worked in the statutory sector, 17 (31%) within a faith based organisation, and 24 (44%) were other third sector organisations (this included uniformed organisations, a charity working with young fathers, local community organisations with youth groups, and participants from at least one large national charity with a local project). Based on

an estimated number of youth workers in the town provided by the head of the youth service, this equates to around 20-25% of the town's youth workers. Of the respondents a quarter (25.5%) reported no formal training in youth work (six respondents from the faith-based sector and seven from the third sector). Only one respondent from the statutory sector had no formal training – however, as the statutory and secular third-sector organisations are considered together due to the similarities in results, the proportion of respondents without education in youth work is similar between the faith and non-faith groups.

There is, however, no way of knowing whether some specific organisations are over-represented as many participants declined to say the name of their organisation, which was an optional question to ensure anonymity. Originally it had been hoped there would be a fourth group used for comparison, 'uniformed organisations'. This would have been valuable in understanding more about the 'uniqueness' of the framework underpinning Christian youth work argued for above – it may be possible, for example, that uniformed organisation leaders have a sense of calling or vocation in the work they do, and equally they are typically self-sustaining, requiring little external financial support from large grant giving organisations.

25% of respondents have deliberately met young people out-of-hours, and 76% have met a young person either on purpose or coincidentally. Of these, 11% say they see young people they work with out-of-hours daily and 15% weekly. 51% of those who see young people out-of-hours do so monthly, or less frequently. This leaves 24% of youth workers who say they have never met a young person they work with outside of usual sessions or working hours. About half of the respondents are sure young people do not know where they live, and 73% do not make an out-of-hours phone number available to young people.

Respondents in the statutory and third sector are far more likely to have never met young people out-of-hours (86% and 92% respectively), while 59% of youth workers in the faith sector have deliberately met a young person. Although only 38% of youth workers are aware young people know where they live, a far greater percentage of faith based workers (71%) know young people are aware of their home address compared to the statutory sector (21%) and third sector (25%). Potentially this is due to 71% of faith based workers living amongst the young people they work with (28% statutory, 29% third sector), thus demonstrating that the unique problems and benefits of dual relationships identified in the literature review are more prevalent amongst faith based workers. An even more extreme association is seen with the availability of a personal phone number, with 59% of faith based workers making one known to young people and 40% claiming to receive a phone call or text from a young person at least weekly, compared to no statutory workers and 23% of third sector workers who have made numbers available.

We can therefore be confident that there is an association between the sector a youth worker works in and what they report about out-of-hours contact with young people, with those in the faith sector

being far more likely to say they meet young people out-of-hours, live amongst them, and make out-of-hours contact possible through personal phone numbers.

Youth workers were asked to provide their opinions on the severity of breach of boundaries (if at all) across 16 scenarios on Likert-type scales from 1-5 (1 being no breach, and 5 the most severe breach). The strength of association was measured using appropriate statistical tests, and only those with a statistically strong association are included in the analysis below. Some scenarios show extremely strong levels of association in the answers given from different sectors. 31% of faith based youth workers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'it is good to seek opportunities to be with young people outside of the typical youth work setting'. Although this figure may not be as high as imagined following the discussion on the influence of the incarnational model in Church based youth work, it is significantly stronger than the statutory sector (0%), and third sector (8%). 94% of statutory workers disagree or strongly disagree with that statement, showing very few in that sector see any benefits outweighing the risks.

Another strong relationship is the belief that youth work and personal lives should be completely separate, with 93% of statutory and 79% of third sector workers agreeing, while just 18% of faith based youth workers agree. A similar difference is observed when asking about social networking sites, with 41% of faith based youth workers agreeing it is acceptable to be 'friends' with young people online, while 100% of statutory based youth workers would 'strongly disagree'.

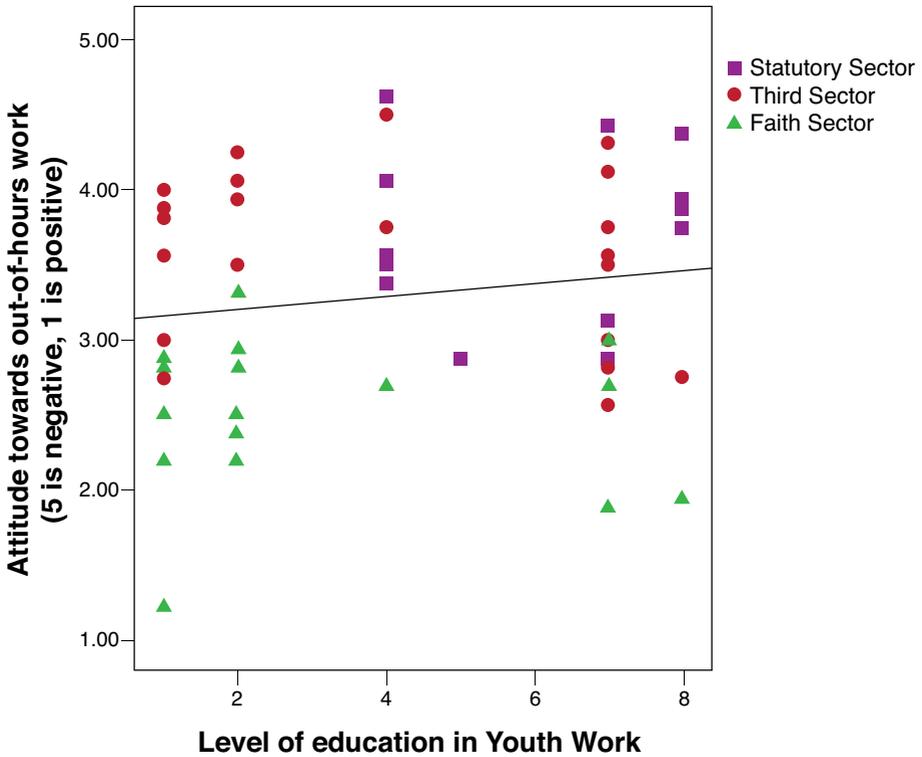
So far we can conclude that, out of those who returned the survey, statutory and third sector organisations have little difference in terms of their workers' perspectives on boundaries with those in the faith sector being more likely to have a lenient approach to out-of-hours contact, and are more willing to engage in it, possibly because of the increased dual-role nature of faith-based youth workers who live in the same area as their young people and the prevalence of the incarnational model.

## Index

The indexed score is a simple mean of the 16 scenarios presented to youth workers. These figures provide an overall indication of how an individual feels about boundary issues. Altogether the index shows an average of 3.3, with a minimum score of 1.2 and a maximum of 4.6. A respondent with an index towards 1 has been more positive about out-of-hours contact in its various forms, and more likely to consider it acceptable to share aspects of their personal life with the young person, and to share in their personal lives too. The mean result for each category are 3.7 for the statutory organisation (showing a relatively strict and negative view of out-of-hours contact with young people), 3.6 for the third sector, and 2.5 for the faith based sector.

So far the analysis has focussed on the differences between sectors. Level of education and age do

**Figure 1:** The relationship between attitude towards out-of-hours work and level of education, labelled by sector worked in.



not show any significant levels of association with any of our variables designed to test the attitudes and opinions of youth workers on out-of-hours contact with young people. For example, the level of education and the index were put into a scatter diagram to illustrate how the cases look when sector worked in is being controlled for. The scatter of the plots (see figure 1) demonstrates that there was no correlation between the index and level of education, but the faith sector inhabits the bottom half of the graph below the line of best fit, showing a much more positive set of opinions on out-of-hours work, while the statutory and third sectors are much more prevalent in the top half. The relatively horizontal nature of the line of best fit shows decisively that education does not affect attitudes towards out-of-hours work, but the placement of the cases on the graph show that the sector worked in does.

We cannot be so confident, however, with the question of personal faith. This is for two reasons. Firstly, there were not enough respondents who worked for the statutory or third sector replying who had an occasional or regular commitment to a faith community, and there were no respondents

who worked in the faith sector that claimed to have 'no faith' or 'personal faith, but does not attend a place of worship'. There is a small amount of evidence using the faith based and third sector, that those who 'occasionally attend a place of worship' have a slightly stricter attitude towards out-of-hours contact (2.6 on the index) than those who 'regularly attend a place of worship' (2.1 on the index) – therefore potentially it is the level of personal faith rather than the sector of the organisation worked for that is the main cause for differences in opinion on out-of-hours work.

### Cluster Analysis

Finally the results were subject to a cluster analysis. The 16 questions on attitudes were too many variables for a cluster analysis, and the one indexed score was not sufficiently helpful to group responses, other than by sector which has already been explored. Therefore SPSS created four sub-indexes based on the area being examined by individual questions. The first was for questions relating to physical space, including seeking to be with young people outside of the youth work setting, inviting a young person to your home, and meeting for coffee. The second related to the content of conversations relating to the youth workers' person life, including religious and political affiliations, and sex life. The third was interacting with young people out-of-hours using the internet and phones, and the fourth was questions relating to the community, including watching young people perform in a play or sport, and living in the community a worker works in.

**Table 1:** Cluster analysis using the four sub-indices

Name of sub-indices		Sub-index score
Physical space (e.g. meeting out-of-hours)	Group 1	2.95
	Group 2	4.4
Personal sharing (e.g. talking about personal life)	Group 1	2.49
	Group 2	3.5
Interacting via media (e.g. use of Facebook)	Group 1	2.84
	Group 2	4.53
Community (e.g. living and working in same place)	Group 1	2.04
	Group 2	3.1

The cluster analysis takes individual respondents and puts them into groups based on statistical similarities. Here, there was an obvious split at two groups. Group 1 has the least strict views on out-of-hours contact, and group 2 the stricter opinions. Group 1 had 26 respondents in it. Their results were between 2 and 3 for all four sections (see table 1), while group 2 had 29 respondents and the results for each section were between 3.1 and 4.5. Perhaps unsurprisingly, group 1 is the home to almost every faith-based youth worker, but also includes 6 from the third sector and 4 from the statutory sector. Group 2 is a mix of third and statutory sectors, with one from the faith

sector (this person provided their employer as a catholic secondary school and used the optional 'any other comments' question to explain they were the chaplain in the school, and therefore bound by their policies). In each of the two groups, meeting young people physically and using the internet/phone to communicate out-of-hours were higher scores than sharing aspects of a youth worker's personal life and engaging in the community of the young people.

**Table 2:** Sub-index scores for each set of four questions

Sub-index (four questions on a common scheme averaged into one score)	Score
Use of media (internet/phones) to contact young people	3.7
Physical meeting	3.7
Personal sharing	3
Community	2.6

The average score (see table 2) of these sub-indices show that interacting in the community was the least contentious, at a score of 2.6, with sharing aspects of the youth worker's personal life being next at 3. Engaging in the same physical space as young people out-of-hours and interacting using the internet and phones were both the highest at 3.7. Split by sector the pattern is the same as already discussed with the full index score above, with the pattern following for each sub-index (that is, engaging in the community and sharing personal details are the two lowest scores for every sector, and meeting young people physically and interacting online are the two highest for each sector). Third and statutory sectors generally follow each other with no notable exceptions, and the faith based sector has a score between 1 and 1.2 lower than the statutory sector in each sub-index.

Therefore, although there are differences between sectors in their opinions of out-of-hours work, those aspects of work that are potentially more controversial in one sector, are also seen as less desirable in other sectors. This analysis has shown there is a difference in the attitudes and opinions of youth workers from the faith based sector and those from the statutory and third sector across respondents. Level of personal faith cannot be ruled out as another causal factor in this, but others such as age and level of education have been considered and eliminated as contributing factors. This has been shown by using linear regression models while controlling for sector worked in, and in using a cluster analysis which displayed two groups – one predominantly for the faith-based workers and one predominantly statutory and third sector workers.

## Conclusions

The findings from the research show two distinct groups of youth workers who completed this questionnaire. One group, predominantly working in Christian organisations, had a more positive attitude towards working out-of-hours with young people. The second, almost entirely made from workers in a secular setting, had a more stringent set of opinions on working out-of-hours. The

sector the organisation operates in was shown to be the main factor in the approach to out-of-hours work, with possible explanations of level of education, length of time as a youth worker, and age all statistically insignificant (though due to a lack of data, level of personal faith could not be accounted for).

Workers from 'secular' organisations were significantly less likely to meet young people out-of-hours than those in Christian organisations. Most youth workers in Christian organisations believe young people know their home address and make a personal phone number available – compared to a small minority in secular organisations. This could be because far more workers for Christian organisations live in the community where their organisation is based (unfortunately there weren't enough respondents from other sectors who lived where they worked to compare). Moving from reported activity to the attitudes of workers, and the pattern continues. Significantly more youth workers from Christian organisations believe it is good to seek opportunities to work with young people out-of-hours, and there's an even larger gap between secular and Christian workers on the separation of personal and professional life and the acceptability of using personal Facebook accounts to engage with young people.

I have argued these findings are best understood through considering the whole context in which the youth worker is based. Though I haven't yet been able to draw from the actual experiences of the organisations these respondents work in, I have used the literature and available theory around models of youth work, occupational paradigms, and ethical philosophy to provide a framework with which to understand these results. I have argued that youth work has a set of values designed to facilitate positive change based on the assumption young people are capable of being competent social actors, with a recognition there are some unique social and developmental tasks associated with adolescence.

Youth workers – particularly in secular organisations – increasingly find themselves taking the role of a 'new professional', where the increase in anxiety and demand for control from external partners has created a culture of close and careful management. 'Professional boundaries' cannot be separated from this narrative of risk and control, and provide the perfect foundation on which a set of duty-based ethics can be built in which 'right' and 'wrong' are predefined through policy. By comparison, those workers in Christian organisations may find themselves in a 'vocation' that requires, amongst other aspects, a sense of integrity and 'calling'. This can work alongside the incarnational model of youth work, where relationships are used to break down barriers between the worker and young person so the worker can be both an example to, and 'place sharer' with, those individuals.

It is not my intention to caricature workers from secular and Christian organisations into a set of ethical and occupational pigeon holes. It is highly likely, for example, there are some workers in the midst of a bureaucratic new-profession with a profound sense of calling to youth work.

However, I would argue that as a general framework in which to understand the differences in approach to out-of-hours work with young people between secular and Christian organisations is through their occupational paradigm, model of youth work and assumptions about young people, approach to risk, and dominant philosophy of ethics.

### **Recommendations for practice**

This difference in attitudes provides the basis for further discussion and study. Dialogue over good practice between organisations would strengthen the process of discerning where professional boundaries lie and could also help to create a better understanding of the risks and benefits out-of-hours work poses for young people. Workers from neighbouring youth projects sharing ideas of good practice regarding out-of-hours work may strengthen all organisations involved and bring to light some tacit theoretical assumptions on which their practices are based. There are, for example, questions over whose interests are really being served in increasing the distance between the youth worker and the young people, but equally a question mark over how youth workers remain accountable and young people remain safe if they were to either engage in out-of-hours work, or bring more of their private lives with them into the relationship. And to what extent does the difference in attitudes towards out-of-hours work affect the young people? It is through dialogue and the sharing of practice I believe that these questions can be answered.

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