

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee
Ymchwiliad i Waith Ieuenctid | Inquiry into Youth Work

YW 07

Ymateb gan : Safonau Addysg a Hyfforddiant (ETS) Cymru
Response from : Education and Training Standards (ETS) Wales

Question 1 – What are your views on young people’s access to youth work services, including, for example:

- levels of provision across Wales and any regional variation;
- issues relating to access for specific groups of young people e.g. language, disability, rurality, ethnicity.

There is substantial evidence in the public domain to suggest that young people in the UK have been disproportionately affected by austerity. Unison has recently published a research report detailing the impact of reductions in funding for youth services in England and Wales –

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/08/23996.pdf> .

In Wales – whilst accepting there are significant differences between local authority areas – austerity budgets have already led to substantial reductions in resources available for the delivery and development of youth service activity. There is a regrettable lack of detailed and aggregated information about the nature and impact of such reductions on youth programmes and young people in Wales. Nevertheless, it is clear that one major outcome has been a significant reduction in preventative open-access, community-based youth work (sometimes called “universal” youth work), which is delivered by a wide range of providers including local authorities, community, voluntary and faith based organisations, and uniformed groups. At the same time as open – access youth work has been in retreat, there has been an increased focus on interventionist work with young people deemed at risk. The cumulative effect of such pressures means that the existence of two of the fundamental principles of youth work in Wales – that youth work starts where young people are, and that young people engage on a voluntary basis

- is under threat. When Julie James AM, now the Minister for Skills and Science, spoke at the National Youth Work Conference in Cardiff on 17th March this year, she made the point that traditional youth work delivery is being dismantled in Wales. She spoke of her desire to see youth work capacity sustained in order that the youth work sector could contribute, for example, to the ambitious agenda for learning detailed in the Welsh Government's "Successful Futures" report. This is a theme to which we will return later in this response.

In regard to "The Well-being of Future Generations" Act, youth work can make a significant contribution to the implementation of the Act's long term goals. The nature of youth work activity means that it is often preventative, and youth workers are particularly skilled in assisting young people to take a greater role in the democratic process through supporting youth forums, for example. Empowering young people, too, is at the heart of youth work. If Welsh Government intends that young people will receive the support they need to make their voices heard more strongly in their communities, youth workers are well placed to provide it.

A draft report, commissioned by the Welsh Government and presented to the Youth Work Reference Group earlier this year, pointed out that there are very significant differences in the quality of the contributions made by youth services to the development of the Welsh language. Young people's access to youth work delivered through the Welsh language is patchy and inconsistent. This is regrettable and inefficient, and arises, in part, from a vacuum in the strategic leadership of youth work in Wales. We will return to this theme later.

We believe there are likely to be significant differences, across Wales, in opportunities for young people to engage with local youth services / organisations through internet-based applications and through social media. This is an area worthy of further research.

If you believe that there are particular problems, how do you think they could be resolved?

ETS recognises that officers of the Youth Work Branch work very hard to support youth work in Wales. We are appreciative of this. But there is a discernible lack of strategic leadership capacity in the Wales youth work sector. This is not new; it was, for example, mentioned in a 2010 Estyn survey of professional qualification training for youth workers in Wales – <http://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/survey-professional-qualification-training-youth-workers-wales-february-2010>. However, its continued absence has been thrown into sharp relief by the sustained political and professional commitment to improving the performance of schools and – by extension – their pupils. As recent Estyn inspection reports of education consortia have shown, success in improving outcomes for young learners depends, in part, upon three factors: combining clarity of purpose with strong leadership and sufficient resources to drive change; effective and sustained regional working; and intervening through both support and challenge. The first two factors, in particular, are largely absent from youth work in Wales. The absence of a national lead organisation for youth work in Wales, combined with the absence of a targeted and costed action plan for supporting the roll out of the National Youth Work Strategy, limits the capacity of youth work, and youth workers, for supporting the exciting and developmental agenda for young people’s learning in Wales.

Improvements could be made through:

1. Improving the strategic leadership of the youth work sector in Wales. What is needed is a national lead organisation for youth work, sector-led and responsive to the needs and interests of the sector. Some preparatory research work on how to achieve this has already been undertaken, and discussed in the Youth Work Reference Group, but progress appears to have stalled.
2. The National Youth Work Strategy is at its mid-point. Review what has been achieved to date and drive forward on what remains. Develop a costed action plan and communicate this to stakeholders.

3. Build a much better picture of the impact of austerity budgets on youth work, community and voluntary youth work organisations, and local authority youth services in Wales. Use this as part of the evidence for reviewing the effectiveness of the National Youth Work Strategy to date.

Question 2 – How effective do you think the Welsh Government strategy and policy on youth work is?

In considering this question you may wish to think about:

- the Welsh Government’s specific youth work policy and strategy such as ‘The Youth Work offer’; The Wales Charter for Youth Work; The National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014 to 2018;
- Welsh Government departmental responsibilities and whether there is a cross-departmental and co-ordinated approach to support youth work provision.

The National Youth Work Strategy is important for a number of reasons. It is evidence of the Welsh Government’s welcome commitment to young people and to youth services. It highlights, too, a number of ways in which youth workers, and youth work organisations, make important contributions to policy imperatives. The Strategy exists within a supportive policy environment for youth work in Wales, evidenced, for example, in the commitment to add qualified youth workers to the Education Workforce Council’s Register from April 2017. Nevertheless, there is a feeling that the Strategy is not sufficiently inclusive: it identifies a range of actions to be undertaken by the Welsh Government itself, but does not say enough about the contributions expected of other stakeholders towards delivering the Strategy’s outcomes. One interpretation of this is that the Welsh Government lacks confidence that the Welsh youth work sector can take the lead in delivering on the Strategy’s key actions. This is regrettable.

We have already suggested that the time is right to monitor the impact of the Youth Work Strategy to date and to drive forward on what has yet to be achieved. Youth work has a clear educational function, and developing the contribution of youth work to young people’s learning (particularly through strengthening the interface between youth work and formal learning) is a key tenet of the

Strategy. Research presented to the Youth Work Reference Group, and highlighted in the March conference in Cardiff, shows there are some good examples in Wales of youth workers working effectively with schools to improve the life chances of young people. Yet much of this work is ad hoc and too reliant on relationships between committed individuals in the youth work sector and in schools. Such work is particularly vulnerable to budget cuts and to changes in local priorities. This is not strategic and there is no clear focus in Wales for driving collaborative working between schools and youth work organisations.

Any comprehensive youth work “offer” should include three elements: open-access, community-based provision; provision geographically targeted at areas of greatest social and economic disadvantage; and provision targeted at priority groups (those at risk, or most vulnerable). This “offer” is fundamental to the successful implementation of the Wales Charter for Youth Work, publicly launched by Julie James AM. These elements are not mutually exclusive: targeted interventions are most effective when located within a comprehensive framework of service delivery.

The Charter is an important contribution to youth work, forming the Welsh Government’s promise to all the young people of Wales. It is important that mechanisms are now put in place to bring the Charter to a much wider audience. We consider that the Welsh Government may need to be more directive in reminding all those organisations receiving money from the public purse for youth work of their responsibilities to live up to the promise now enshrined in the Charter.

The ETS Committee, which I Chair, is charged specifically by employers (through the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) of the Local Government Association) with ensuring that programmes of training and learning which lead to qualified youth worker status can produce workers with the skills and knowledge required to do the job well. In line with our responsibilities we will continue to champion the youth work profession and we will continue to promote the value of qualifications in youth work. We are clear that there is a

relationship between quality of work and qualifications. Because of this we were pleased to see the Welsh Government committing itself, in the National Youth Work Strategy, to increasing the number of workers in Wales holding a JNC recognised youth work qualification. We believe that the monitoring of progress towards achieving this is best located within a group established to review the effectiveness of continuing professional development (CPD) available to youth workers and to drive forward workforce development.

How do you think the Welsh Government could approach its youth work strategy and policy differently / to better effect?

We think there should be more transparency of cross-departmental working within the Welsh Government. We are unclear about what discussions are taking place internally about youth work. A moot point is the contribution that youth work could make to the Welsh Government's intentions for improving the ways in which children and young people learn in Wales, as set out in the "Successful Futures" report. A confident youth service could play a significant part in helping to develop the confident, empowered and dynamic learners that Wales needs in the post-Brexit world.

Professor Donaldson spoke to the March youth work conference. There are clearly many ways in which the non-formal and informal approaches to learning practised by youth workers can help improve the educational outcomes, and the life chances, of our young people: these approaches (which focus on helping young people to shape their own learning) are in tune with the intended outcomes of "Successful Learning". Yet the debate on implementing "Successful Futures" appears to be happening without any youth work input.

It is our view that the four Welsh education consortia should be charged with establishing mechanisms for engaging youth services, and youth work organisations, in discussions about the contribution that youth work can make to the wider learning of young people. There is a clear need for providing opportunities in Wales for the youth work sector to have more of an influence on strategy development where the focus is on young people.

We also consider the time is now right for the Welsh Government to support the establishment of a standing group to review the training and continuing professional development of youth workers. Current circumstances mean that much accumulated knowledge and experience of youth work is being lost to the sector. Consequently, we believe it is now appropriate to develop a new leadership programme to bring on the leaders and strategic thinkers of the future.

A standing group could contribute to a new workforce development strategy and engage with the Education Workforce Council to ensure that qualified youth workers benefit appropriately from the New Deal, in line with the benefits available to other Registrants. ETS Wales would be prepared, in consultation with colleagues in the EWC, to take the lead on this.

Question 3 – What are your views on the funding available for youth work, including through Local Authority, Welsh Government, European Union, and Third Sector.

We appreciate that Local Authorities make decisions about utilising the resources at their disposal based upon their analysis of local need. There are clearly significant pressures on resources arising particularly from demographic change and from austerity budgets. Notwithstanding this, we are unable to understand the wide variety in Local Authority spending on youth services when compared to the notional figure for youth services set out in each LA's RSG allocation.

The lack of a national lead organisation to draw the sector together means that opportunities for youth work organisations to come together to maximise opportunities for external funding are limited. This is inefficient.

Youth work in Wales has benefited from European Structural Funds, particularly the European Social Fund (ESF). We are concerned our young people will be disadvantaged when such funds are withdrawn following Brexit.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

We suggest that:

1. Welsh Government should use the Wales Charter for Youth Work as the basis for issuing new guidance to local authorities about the level and nature of youth work activity to be provided and / or secured. Implementation of the Charter should serve to smooth out the discrepancies in local authorities' spending on youth work. If it does not, the Welsh Government should consider what levers it might wish to employ to achieve a more consistent approach across Wales.
2. Welsh Government should audit the level of youth work activity resourced and supported through European Structural Funds and seek to maintain this level post-Brexit.
3. At a time of significant pressure and uncertainty, the sector needs some reassurance that the representative body for voluntary youth work in Wales – CWVYS – is secured through Welsh Government funding for the foreseeable future.

Question 4 – Are there any other issues you consider relevant to the Inquiry that you think the Committee should be made aware of? (for example: workforce related issues; the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales; buildings and infrastructure; youth work in schools; transport issues; access to digital technology; Welsh Government's consultation on proposals to register and inspect some out of school education settings).

We have raised a number of these matters elsewhere in our response. In regard to matters we have not raised elsewhere, we wish to express our satisfaction that the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales is now being promoted widely and that the first awards are being made. We look forward to seeing more organisations gaining awards and their achievements promoted.

There are insufficient opportunities in Wales for introducing the benefits of youth work to stakeholders in other sectors working with young people. Not enough is done to bring youth workers together with teachers, social workers, and health workers for example. In

addition, and in order to promote the value of youth work across allied sectors, we believe the time is right to develop a national communications strategy. Whilst it is understandable that there has been a sustained political focus on helping families to achieve better outcomes for children, there is also a need to recognise that young people have their own, quite distinctive, needs and desires. The youth work sector – relevant and responsive, but often undervalued and misunderstood – has a strong theoretical and philosophical basis for its work with young people. A communications strategy would do much to introduce the benefits of youth work to a wider audience.

We are pleased that qualified youth workers are to be added to the Register of the Education Workforce Council with effect from April 2017. The EWC has communicated well with the sector and we consider that registration will do much to raise the professional standing of youth work with allied occupations. We anticipate, too, that registration will provide more information about the sector than is available at present. There are many qualified youth workers employed in other, allied, sectors, such as criminal justice and health, but we do not have sufficient information about these. Such information – as well as a better understanding of the relationship between supply and demand – will be important as action is taken in support of the Strategy’s commitment to increasing the number of JNC qualified youth workers in Wales.

Question 5 – If you had to make one recommendation to the Welsh Government from all the points you have made, what would that recommendation be?

The time is right to undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of the National Youth Work Strategy to date. The evaluation should focus on four things:

1. Identifying gains already made and considering how to sustain such gains over the medium and longer terms.
2. Identifying any barriers stalling progress in those areas where gains have not been made and considering how best to overcome such barriers.

3. Identifying the most efficient ways of progressing those commitments which have been publicly made but not yet achieved. The Wales Charter for Youth Work is an obvious example here.
4. Implementation of robust monitoring mechanisms, including mechanisms for using the expertise and knowledge of the youth work sector in monitoring the effectiveness of the Strategy going forward.