

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 12

Ymateb gan : Estyn

Response from : Estyn

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.

Intelligence from Estyn’s local authority link work and follow up inspection work with local authorities, indicates that the focus for local authority youth services has been changing over the previous three years.

These changes are predominantly about reducing the direct provision by local authorities of a broad range of open access community based youth work. This is replaced increasingly by more targeted project work, predominantly focused on intervention work to support the neediest young people into education and training. This has inevitably resulted in a change of emphasis away from a focus on ‘starting with young people and the needs they present’, and working with young people who voluntarily engage with youth workers. Increasingly youth workers are taking more of a casework-based approach to their work, which is focusses on a much smaller population of young people, who are referred into the provision from outside agencies.

The shift is towards more interventionist approaches, which are designed to meet young people’s needs as defined by the referring agency. This means two of the underpinning principles of youth work (working with young people around the needs they present, and young people’s engagement on a voluntary basis) are either reduced or removed.

Estyn's intelligence also suggests that the funding available to local authority youth service has declined steadily over this period.

The Welsh Government's data unit collects annual data on the range and scope of youth work provision across Wales. The Welsh Government's data unit is best placed to provide this evidence, especially the aspects regarding access to services for specific groups of young people e.g. language, disability, rurality, ethnicity.

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

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.

Welsh Government's National Youth Work Strategy provides an important steer for youth work professionals, local authorities and voluntary organisations. The strategy clearly states the priorities of the Welsh Government, and sets out how the youth work sector can contribute to these. The educational function of youth work and the contribution of youth work to young people's learning are clearly set out in the key Welsh Government publications, especially the Wales Charter for Youth Work, and the National Youth Work Strategy. The Youth Work Strategy in particular sets as an objective the strengthening of the working relationship between youth work and formal learning. However, the responsibility for achieving this objective is defined for youth work alone, as there are no similar priorities defined for schools and FE colleges in strategic documents aimed at these providers.

The first national youth work strategy was published in 2007, and

updated with a new strategy in 2014. The 2014 strategy is now at its mid-point, and its impact on the sector should now be evaluated.

The two most recent Welsh Government publications 'The Youth Work Offer' and the 'National Outcomes Framework for Youth Work', also provide important information about the Welsh Government's intentions for youth work and its contribution to young people's development. However, it is difficult to use the strategic aims defined in these documents to hold providers to account appropriately, as the defined outcomes remain generic.

Estyn welcomes the publication of the Youth Work Offer, and the Charter for youth work. However, as these documents were only recently published (during 2016), we cannot comment on their impact.

The intelligence available to Estyn arising from nine of the local authorities subject to follow up inspection work shows that local authorities continue to work in partnership with other local youth work providers, and the local authority generally takes the lead in this work. However, Estyn's follow up work has also highlighted the shift in provision away from open access community services, to more targeted services frequently with a stronger emphasis on reducing NEETs than addressing young people's social inclusion and health needs.

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

The Welsh Government could strengthen its approach to the development of youth work through a more integrated strategic approach. One opportunity for this arises from the development of closer links between the youth work curriculum for Wales and the revisions of the school curriculum proposed by Professor Donaldson in Successful Futures. In particular, the four outcomes proposed by Professor Donaldson have a lot to offer youth work and youth services, and would form an effective basis for proposing outcomes and indicators for youth work sector, as well as providing clear overlaps in outcomes between youth work and formal educational settings.

The key outcomes for the Youth Work Offer and the National Outcomes Framework could also then be clearly mapped against these four outcomes, with the opportunity to identify a range of key elements against which these can be evaluated.

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

Estyn has no up to date data on youth work funding other than that already provided through the Welsh Government's annual audit on the range and scope of youth work provision across Wales. In addition, it is Estyn's view that the Welsh Government's approach to non-hypothecation of youth service funding which is part of the local authority's RSG may compromise the adequate delivery of services for young people at a local level, and influence the parity of services across Wales. Although the Welsh Government provides an indication of the level of funding for youth services, the use of that funding is not linked in any way to minimum expectations about the quality, quantity, or availability of youth work for young people. This makes it very hard to hold local authorities to account for how they prioritise funding for youth work and youth support services, how they then spend this nominal sum, and for the quality of the outcomes from this spending.

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

While recognising that the Welsh Government's approach to non-hypothecation of youth service funding is likely to remain, the Welsh Government might provide clearer expectations about the service levels and the quality of service young people might receive from local authority funded provision. This steer could then be used by local authorities to help them prioritise their spending and to account through elected member scrutiny, and annual returns to Welsh Government, for the impact of that spend more clearly.

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).

1 The statutory basis for youth work provision sits within the Learning and Skills Act 2000 section 123(1). The Welsh Government’s statutory guidance for youth work in Wales, which arose from that Act, is set out in its policy documents for Extending Entitlement. Within those documents, the role of the local authority in providing and securing suitable youth work (youth support services) through partnership arrangements to meet the needs of its young people is well defined.

2 Extending Entitlement identified the importance of using these partnership approaches to identify, prioritise, and then to plan collaboratively to meet the range of young people’s needs, which youth support services can meet.

3 Subsequent to Extending Entitlement, the Welsh Government published a national youth work strategy in 2007, and a revised national youth work strategy in 2014. Both of these strategy documents identified key national priorities for youth work in Wales and proposed a series of actions for Welsh Government, local authorities and the voluntary sector to address these.

4 However, there has not been an effective and common management information structure against which the Welsh Government, local authorities, and youth work managers can get in place commonly held intelligence to assess the suitability of youth work provision to meet young people’s identified and prioritised needs.

5 The publication of the Welsh Government’s ‘The Youth Work offer’; its ‘Charter for Youth Work’ and its ‘National Outcomes Framework for Youth Work’ are each intended to help move this forward. These publications propose an approach which is intended to help youth workers, their managers, trainers and those who make policy, to plan and evaluate how broad, aspirational aims for well–

being can be translated into services for young people and what the priorities for face to face youth work might be”.

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?

Seek to achieve a better integration between the strategic developments across the whole education sector, which brings together the formal, informal and non-formal learning provision of young people. Currently these strategic themes are not well enough mapped or linked.

The core outcomes that arise from the four outcomes proposed by Donaldson’s ‘Successful Futures’ impact well beyond the classroom. These outcomes provide a challenging agenda for the development of young people as engaged and empowered citizens. It is important that all education providers are able to work together to achieve these high ambitions for the young people in Wales. A segmented education sector will not serve this purpose well enough.