

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

YW 22

Ymateb gan : Plant yng Nghymru

Response from : Children in 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.

The overall aim of the Committee’s ‘snapshot’ inquiry is to review the effectiveness of Welsh Government’s strategy and policy in respect of youth work. The salient points of this response concentrates on the following:

- Young people’s access to youth work services;
- How effective the Welsh Government strategy and policy on youth work is;
- Funding for youth work (Local Authority, Welsh Government, European, Third Sector);
- Any other issues considered relevant to the Inquiry.

When considering these matters, as a result, and from our experience, across the landscape of Wales, services from a local perspective highlights a very differing picture that is dependent on the approach of the local authority and set in the context of an extremely challenging funding climate and the differing needs of young people.

In-effect, these needs are dependent on variables such as geography (rural/urban/transport issues); language (Welsh and/or minority ethnic languages); cultural identity; demographic (predominant age may be either at the younger, middle or older end of the 11-25 spectrum) etc. Whilst it is recognised that there should be flexibility to meet local need, nonetheless, the lack of statutory guidance proves problematic when looking at the universal picture of youth work across Wales today.

To reiterate, in the context of available funding and resources (a great majority of public funding available to support youth work in Wales is administered by local authorities with funding allocated from the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) provided by Welsh Government. It is

important to note that the RSG is an unencumbered funding stream and it is therefore a decision of local authorities as to how this funding is utilised in order to best meet their local needs and priorities, this fundamentally includes the provision of youth services) youth work needs to be as accessible to young people as possible. Given the important aspect of the voluntary relationship with young people, it should be highlighted that recent Welsh Government approaches (i.e. National Outcomes Framework for Wales (NOFW) that proposes services will be measured on “Recognition/Accreditation of achievements must be careful to not dissuade some young people from using the youth service and this should be offered as a **‘choice’** only, rather than an implicit **‘expectation’**”.

Accordingly, the failure to maintain the universal/open-access approach nationally towards the delivery of youth work / support services would be indirect conflict with the guiding principles of the Extending Entitlements agenda, i.e. Learning and Skills Act (Section 123) and of course the recently adopted Youth Work Charter for Wales (marketed as the minimum offer of youth work). It is also important to note that The Youth Work National Occupational Standards (2012) states that 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”.

Incidentally, in a recent consultative exercise with young people (on behalf of WG) they commented that the Youth Work Charter for Wales had not been consulted on or circulated previously (thus contracting itself) – it should be noted that the Charter was also developed in isolation to current policy development. Concerns were also raised by the growing emphasis on youth work in formal education rather than the traditional universal approaches to youth work.

Young People also commented that there needs to be a coherent approach that would afford consistency across all youth work settings, i.e. both statutory & non-statutory youth work settings.

Concerns were also tabled around issues of funding and many young people commented that the ‘universal / open-access’ nature of youth work (based upon their experiences) is fast becoming lost within the context of targeted provision and outcomes based delivery practices.

The sector also needs to give due consideration on how youth work / support services continues to measure and capture soft-outcomes (these can enable active citizenship and create opportunities for youth engagement).

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

It is vitally important that youth work should remain as accessible to young people as possible (reinforcing the Ten Entitlements Agenda). Given the important aspect of the voluntary relationship placed upon the guiding principles around the delivery of youth work with young people, we should be careful to not dissuade some young people from using the youth service, due to pressures placed upon the need to measure outcomes / and demonstrate the impact of service delivery etc. As well as being beneficial in providing safe places to relax and have fun, open access services provide a non-stigmatising environment where potentially vulnerable young people can identify themselves and be identified as requiring further support. The personal and social skills gained via youth work opportunities are essential for engagement ('functionality') in communities for young people of all abilities (youth work also helps young people with future employment opportunities).

To reiterate, this situation could possibly be resolved from a policy perspective by guidance affording a clear expectation of realistic deliverables and by ensuring that young people are listened to. National underpinning guidance (enshrined in law) will enable tangible deliverables that take into consideration that youth work should be offered as a '*choice*', *reinforcing the universal aspect of youth work*.

To conclude, relationships with young people are based on voluntary engagement and underpinned by the five pillars in **Youth Work in Wales: Principles & Purposes** –*“Educative; Expressive, Inclusive, Participative and Empowering”*

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.

In order to review the effectiveness of Welsh Government’s strategy and policy in respect of youth work - it is vitally important to highlight the relevant underpinning guidance needed to answer the Learning and Skills Act (2000) (the Section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act (2000) states that Welsh Government:

May direct a local authority to:

- a. provide youth support services*
- b. to secure the provision of youth support services*
- c. to participate in the provision of youth support services.*

Youth Support Services (YSS) means those services that will encourage, enable or assist young people to:

- a. participate effectively in education or training*
- b. take advantage of opportunities for employment, or*
- c. to participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.*

The act allows local authorities to also provide, secure or participate in the provision of youth support services for a 'particular class of young persons'.

New guidance for this area of work was due to be refreshed in 2009 (following a national Welsh Government consultation exercise) and 2014, yet currently no guidance has transpired, so it should be assumed that Section 123 underpins this area / sector.

The 10 Entitlements

Extending Entitlement (2002): support for 11 to 25 year olds living in Wales remains the current Welsh Government direction and guidance for all defined Youth Support Services activity. The 10 Entitlements, as set out below, are a set of rights afforded to all young people in Wales,

Every young person in Wales has a basic entitlement to:-

- ▶ Education, training and work experience - tailored to their needs
- ▶ Basic skills, which opens doors to a full-life and promote social inclusion
- ▶ A wide and varied range of opportunities to participate in volunteering and active citizenship
- ▶ High quality, responsive and accessible services and facilities
- ▶ Independent, specialist careers advice and guidance and student support and counselling services.
- ▶ Personal support and advice - where and when needed and in appropriate formats - with clear ground rules on confidentiality
- ▶ Advice on health, housing benefits and other issues provided in accessible and welcoming settings

- ▶ Recreational and social opportunities in safe and accessible environment
- ▶ Sporting artistic, musical and outdoor experiences to develop talents broaden horizons and promote rounded perspectives including both national and international contexts.
- ▶ The right to be consulted, to participate in decision-making and to be heard, on all matters which concern them or have an impact on their lives

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

Consequently, since 2010, some local authorities across Wales have had to develop / identify key priorities for addressing any possible shortcomings identified through Estyn's Local Authority Education Services for Children and Young People (LAESCYP) Inspections. In particular, a key-reoccurring theme has been the Youth Support Services (YSS) Agenda.

In-effect, a common theme emerging from Local Authority Education Services for Children and Young People (LAESCYP) inspections since 2010, - seems to be in relation to the fact that some Local Authorities and other partners do not generally know the scope and range of youth support services in their areas and this is impacting on their ability to plan effectively or to measure the impact of YSS on the wider opportunities available to young people. Accordingly, it could be argued that this is partly due to the lack of clarity regarding the need for clear statutory underpinning guidance in relation to specific youth work policy and strategy matters (including 'The Youth Work offer'; The Wales Charter for Youth Work; The National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014 to 2018 etc.).

To conclude, clear concise statutory guidance (enshrined in law) is needed (this guidance needs to be coterminous with the SS&WB and WB of FG Act - and echoed by coherent Welsh Government departmental responsibilities that afford a cross--departmental and coordinated approach to future delivery and regulatory requirements across the sector.

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

Refer to question 1

Nonetheless, Welsh Government will also urgently need to explore the implications of **Brexit** and what this means for **Wales**... around the future delivery of youth work programmes (currently accessing European funding)) and set against the current backdrop of austerity measures.

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

Consideration to be given to a hypothecated funding model coterminous with supporting guidance that safeguards the future delivery of youth work (statutory – non-statutory) across Wales.

A national survey / audit of youth work delivery be introduced (this would also capture funding models / and any associated risks; such as post Brexit delivery options).

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).

In order to address the questions to be raised by the Committee, it will become necessary to establish what Youth work services are available for young people so that collectively across Wales we can assess if provision meets the need in-terms of access to services.

A recommendation could be to undertake a national mapping (Youth Work / Support Services Organisational Survey) (undertaken on a local authority basis with both statutory and non-statutory services, including uniformed, faith and sports groups) to gather evidence in order to establish a comprehensive overview of current youth work provision and identify the needs of young people aged 11-25. This may enhance the logistics and rationale proposed within Welsh Government’s recent consultation document: Out-of-school education settings and fundamentally address safeguarding matters with the mandatory requirement that all organisations partake in a national survey.

The survey, undertaken locally, could then be used as a national proxy measure for the 10 Extending Entitlements and unquestionably allow local authorities to assess local Youth Work / Youth Support Services provision against the Welsh Government direction and guidance for all Youth Work activity.

In addition the survey should fundamentally contain indicators to help measure robust Safeguarding and Safe Recruitment procedures among all youth work providers across Wales (statutory and non-statutory, including departments within council’s, voluntary organisations, faith groups, uniformed groups, local sport and leisure clubs).

This critical national strategic assessment of youth work and its providers (local intelligence) should also feed into the local Well-being Plans and meet regulatory requirements such as Wales Audit Office, Estyn, and Welsh Government.

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 requirement to introduce a National Youth Work (YSS) Survey/Audit – this should be underpinned by clear updated statutory guidance:

To conclude: while the link between poverty and poor educational outcomes is strong, research evidence shows that this relationship is not inevitable. Youth work providers have a role to play in helping our young people across Wales ‘succeed against the odds’ in education, by offering them opportunities to participate in a variety of activities which will improve their skills and self-confidence, that reinforce high standards for behaviour, academic aspirations and allowing young people to have a voice and choice.

Understanding the youth work delivery landscape will hopefully create a far more coordinated vibrant community of Youth Work (Youth Support Services) providers, across all local authorities in Wales. Nonetheless, it will be critical for underpinning guidance to be issued, i.e. guidance that is enshrined in law (e.g. Learning & Skills Act).

Austerity in Wales means that we see ourselves facing uncharted waters and more creative ways of working should be explored. This approach can look to better match local provision with need, share ideas, best practice, raise issues of concern, provide support, maximise resources, and most importantly ensure young people are safe. The data captured by a national Youth Work (YSS) Audit should also be coterminous with the future roll-out of the National Outcomes Framework for Youth work.