

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 06

**Ymateb gan : Gwasanaeth Eiriolaeth Ieuenctid Cenedlaethol
Response from : National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)**

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.

Current barriers to accessing youth work across Wales is based on the following:

- Expenditure of funding priorities in each local authority.
- Location of where young people live.
- Circumstances of young people who do not feel empowered or know how to exercise their rights to youth service provision.
- Trained, qualified, supported staff/volunteers who make up the youth service workforce.
- Strong leadership and governance with a clear vision for the future of voluntary and statutory youth provision in Wales for Wales.

Solutions:

- In order for young people to access quality led youth services across Wales the expenditure of funding has to be equitable and reflective of the social, rural and community needs of that region. Local Authorities must be informed of the funding they need to spend on youth provision in their area and evidence how this is to be spent. This evidence should take into account the views, issues and prioritise of young people in each L.A. Statutory youth provision funding needs to be ring-fenced for each Local Authority and each L.A should demonstrate how they will spend this money with and for young people.

- A population needs assessment should be achieved to ensure the right level of funding is provided and spent in each L.A. This assessment should be reflective of the population, economics, social needs, ethnicity, rurality and language needs of that L.A.
- The voluntary youth sector requires recognition for their outstanding contribution to youth work in Wales. Appropriate levels of funding is required for a body, (such as CWVYS), to provide a unified service and implement the strategic youth service vision for Wales.

Access issues for young people in care

Wales is a unique country with rich culture and diversity. However, the ability to access youth provision is often dependant on several factors. Some relating to poverty, location, ethnicity and class. NYAS work to provide statutory advocacy services with young people in the care system and therefore we have focused this response on the issues affecting them in accessing youth provision. We have asked care experienced young people, for the purposes of this review, the issues they face when trying to access youth provision across Wales. The responses have been collected as follows:

- Transport issues: “my foster carer won’t take me and the nearest youth club is miles away.”
- Money: “I only get given a small amount of pocket money a week – it would be really good if young people in care could go to youth clubs for free.”
- Opening times: “I wish it was open more – it’s only a few hours a week and I have contact at the same time with my Mother.” “I find it hard telling my friends I can’t go with them but seeing my Mum is more important to me.”
- Inclusivity: “I feel different to the others, I don’t feel I belong.”
- “What’s the point of joining – I will be moving foster placements again soon – I’m always moving.”
- “Sometimes I want to go out on the trips but it’s a pain having to ask my social worker/carer for consent – it’s embarrassing.”
- “Living in a residential home means we are placed miles away from anything so it’s not really for us.”

Solutions from young people:

- Develop schemes for young people to access the youth service free of charge and ensure they know about this.
- Ensure social workers and foster carers provide information on local youth services to each looked after young person through the statutory review and individual care plans.
- Provide mentoring services for young people throughout the youth service provision to befriend other young people.
- Open the youth club at all different times and weekends.
- More detached flexible approach to youth work – “I’ve seen a bus before that allowed us to go on and chat to others and go on computers but it doesn’t come around here anymore.”
- Flexibility of consent forms for trips. Be clear that foster carers are able to sign.

The youth service is a critical part of ensuring young people are provided with life opportunities that can sometimes make a huge difference to their lives. It can often save lives for many young people in terms of safeguarding and protection. This is an important issue for young care experienced young people and therefore a priority should be set to ensure these young people have access to youth services. Strong links with other programmes such as families first and statutory LAC reviews should be in place.

Strong leadership

A clear vision for the youth service in Wales is required which brings together “The National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014–2018,” “The Inspection, Regulation and Registration of Youth Workers,” “The Youth Work Charter for Youth Work and “The National Outcomes Framework for Youth Work.”

This response recommends that a National Youth Service Council for Wales is established to ensure this vision is achieved. This would ensure the following:

- Youth service provision is run in accordance with the right funding allocation for each L.A.
- Fully supports the statutory and voluntary sector by providing consistency across all regions in Wales.

- Strong relations between the Council and Ministers to drive the strategic vision and quality of youth work in Wales.
- Young people are at the centre of decision making for what they want their youth service to look like.
- Enable youth workers to be supported locally, regionally and nationally by delivering training, assisting in registration and workforce development.
- Be responsible for celebrating the youth excellence awards, promotion of national youth work week, achievements and contributions the youth service makes to other Welsh Government work programmes.
- Be the responsive body for providing the youth work kite mark award helped run by young people.
- Be responsible for the governance of the youth service in Wales.
- Ensure greater collective partnerships between the voluntary and statutory sector.

A single body is required to take the above work forward to ensure young people receive the best possible youth service provision they deserve.

The Welsh Government should compare and contrast the current provision in Wales to the above proposed model taking into account the structure in other Countries where youth work is highly regarded and placed independently from central Government.

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

Please see solutions above.

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.

Although there is reference to the uniqueness of youth work in terms of the voluntary participation of young people the documents described are often driven by adults with outcomes shaped by adults. There is a need for young people to be at the heart of what their youth services look like and how these are shaped for the future. The UNCRC (Wales) Measure should be the fundamental piece of legislation that informs our engagement with young people.

The following needs to be considered:

- 1) What does the active offer look like in practice? How can we ensure all young people have access to the youth service? Proposals for stronger links with schools is a challenging one as the school environment is not a voluntary option to attend and therefore youth workers often find it challenging when accessing schools as they are often seen as part of the educational establishment and not independent. Schools often see the youth worker as another member of staff of the school and therefore whilst there does need to be relationships between schools and the youth service it does need to be acknowledged that this is part of a youth service provision rather than the only youth provision for some areas. This especially applies to young people in care who often miss education due to placement moves or are living in residential educational settings. This also applies to gypsy travelling young people who often are not attending traditional school settings.

- 2) Measuring an outcomes framework for youth work has always been challenging and will continue to be so. “I didn’t become a youth worker to feed reports into a computer.” This is a comment made to me recently by an outstanding youth worker in Wales who feels there is more and more pressure to complete forms rather than deliver the service with young people. Accountability is important as is evidencing the outcomes made, however, the true value of the difference youth work makes to individual’s lives can sometimes only be measured decades later. An outcomes approach with qualitative measures needs to be one designed and implemented by young people. It also has to reflect the youth work environment with little form filling.
- 3) Greater collaboration is required between the statutory and voluntary sector. With less money to go around, organisations are often competing for funding. Having a National Youth Service Council for Wales would be one of the strengths of ensuring this is achieved; to bring together services; working together for one vision and aim.

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

- 1) The concept of the true voluntary participation of young people needs to be enshrined in all areas of youth work. Young people need to be involved in the design and delivery of youth work throughout Wales with peer-led approaches that are recognised through training and accreditation programmes. The Welsh Government can commit to this by first ensuring a youth assembly is established with powers given to young people to vote at 16. This would fundamentally promote the voices of young people who are equal decision makers throughout our political life in Wales.
- 2) The regulation and inspection of youth work in Wales needs to be flexible to ensure individuals are not put off by becoming youth workers. The informality of youth work is what makes the service appealing to many young people and we cannot lose the uniqueness this brings to building trusting relationships.

3) The Welsh Government need to bring all strands of policy together – it currently feels fragmented and unclear on the direction of travel with different organisations/bodies being responsible for different aspects of service. One example of this is The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales. This needs to be run in Wales with Welsh young people being part of assessment processes for awarding the mark. The fragmentation of strands is confusing. A National Youth Council for Wales would bring all these strategies/policies and work plans together under one cohesive framework.

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

The Revenue Settlement Grant (RSG) which makes up the youth service expenditure to Local Authorities should be provided with a clear mandate that this money has to be spent on local youth service provision. The current position of this being non-hypothecated is not acceptable and enables L.A's to spend the funding how they want to.

Voluntary organisations have to compete for funding which can divide organisations. Therefore it is fundamental that CWVYS continues to support voluntary youth services with providing information on all possible funding sources, including European funding.

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

As previously mentioned:

- A population needs assessments should be achieved to determine how much is currently spent per authority on its youth service spend and what should be spent in terms of population, needs, language, social and geographical landscape.
- A National Youth Service Council should be established to provide a single framework for the implementation of youth work in Wales by Wales.

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).

- Youth work for the most vulnerable young people acts as a safeguard and protection measure against other work programmes such as child sexual exploitation, child trafficking and young people in care. We know that for some young people they confide and disclose information to youth workers for the first time. Therefore, the importance of training youth workers on these issues is fundamental and the environments that these take place need to be protected from closure.
- Young people placed in hospital settings due to their mental and emotional wellbeing need to know they have a right to access youth provision. The youth service needs to ensure its strategies include working and reaching out to young people in care, young people in secure settings, young people in mental health provision, asylum seeking young people and young gypsy travelling communities.

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 establishment of a National Youth Service Council for Wales in Wales that promotes protects and provides the youth service strategy in partnership between the voluntary and statutory sector.

This independent body would be helped run and shaped by young people for young people.