

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 15

Ymateb gan : Dr John Rose

Response from : Dr John Rose

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 question assumes that the term ‘youth services’ has some consistency of understanding across the occupation. However, it is a contested term with a number of variations of interpretation. It also fails to make a distinction between the maintained Youth Service, funded by the Welsh Government, and the Voluntary Sector. Some distinction will be made in this response to the differences, sometimes significant, between local authority Youth Service provision and that provided by National and Local Voluntary Organisations.

For the sake of pragmatism, the term youth services for this consultation response will relate to the criteria used in the National Youth Service Strategy (WAG 2014). From that starting point there is a significant body of evidence (including the audit of the Youth Service carried out by the Welsh Government) to suggest that young people in general have restricted access to locally provided ‘youth services’ and that in a number of local authorities’ access is severely restricted and possibly non-existent.

There are three broad reasons why young people’s access to local

authority youth services is restricted or non-existent;

1. The un-hypothecated process by which core funding is allocated by the Welsh Government to local authorities. This enables local decision making about how this funding is spent. The audit of the Youth Service (WG 2014–2015) clearly identifies how the Welsh Government allocation for the Youth Service is top sliced by a number of local authorities for other locally determined priorities.
2. The pressure on practice that has been applied on the Youth Service to move away from its established philosophical position. The characteristics of which has included, for example – open access provision, voluntary participation and a non-formal education and informal learning process that has not been concerned with externally verified ‘exam results’.
3. The growing dependence on external funding to make up shortfalls of core funding (£13.8 million from other sources, accounting for 38 per cent of the total income WG Youth Service Audit 2104–2015). This type of funding is almost always carefully controlled and managed to achieve specific outcomes related to such issues as reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, improving health or helping young people return to education.

In the context of Question 1 the Voluntary Sector continues to attract a growing number of young people. This is particularly true of such organisations for example as the Scouts, Girl Guides and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Probably as a result of what could be described as a traditional Youth Work approach concerned with delivering a programme of activities that young people are passionate about and which provides a different education and learning environment to that found in school. However, in general both national and voluntary Youth Work organisations are being affected by the reduction in local authority funding and by strategic decisions to align programmes more closely with formal education activities. They are also faced collectively with the challenges of securing project funding from sources that are concerned with particular outcomes which sometime don't fit with the purpose and priorities of

individual organisations.

In addition, the future of the critically important role of the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Organisations (CWVYS) is under consideration. This organisation is vital to the wellbeing and continuing development of all of its member bodies which work annually with 200,000 young people. Its central role in providing a range of well needed central services must not be lost.

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

There are 2 significant problems. First, the budget allocated to local authorities for the Youth Service in Wales is being diverted locally for other priorities. Second, is the strategic failure to acknowledge the particular education and learning role of the Youth Service because of the focus on formal school based education. Consequently, the Youth Service approach has been under threat in recent years from political priorities which encourage and direct Youth Service practice towards formal education approaches. This systemises the process of Youth Work rather than humanising it. Humanising the process is of course dependent on trusting individuals and building interventions and support from a philosophy of 'not doing things for people that people can do for themselves', an approach that requires relationship-building within communities. It also requires a commitment to widening and improving the current system of education and learning to a more holistic process. The outcomes of this approach, are young people having supported opportunities to develop in ways that suit them personally.

Strategic decision makers need to understand that Youth Work is a process underpinned by a social and political education and learning approach concerned with the exploration of such ideas as 'who am I' 'how do I fit into my world' 'what are the norms of the community and society of which I am part', 'what are 'my rights' and 'what are my responsibilities to the civic society to which I belong'?

Fundamental outcomes for young people in search of their identity and their role within society.

Urgent consideration needs to be given to maximising out of school

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 Welsh Government strategy for Youth Work is ineffective because there is a significant mismatch between the purpose principles and values described in the National Youth Service Strategy and what is being allowed to be ‘provided’ to young people. During the past 10 years Welsh Government officials have tried to determine the type and style of work being done with young people rather than ensuring the outcomes of effective practice have a positive impact on a wide range of Welsh Government policy areas.

The approach between Welsh Government departmental responsibilities is ineffective primarily because of a lack of a coherent or joined up approach. This is being caused by a fundamental lack of understanding by officials of the nature of Youth Work. The Youth Service is not being listened to and it is not in a healthy enough position to challenge the confusion arising from the Welsh Government. What is required is a coherent strategic position on how the outcomes of Youth Service provision, as this is identified in the National Youth Service Strategy, can make significant contributions to

time as part of an empowering and participative process involving young people in the lives of their communities.

Two main actions are required;

1. Ensure that the funding allocated by the Welsh Government is spent on delivering Youth work programmes as these are identified in the National Youth Service Strategy;
2. Recognise the importance of a holistic education and learning approach that gives equivalence to non-formal education, informal learning and formal education.

a wide range of Welsh Government policy areas.

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

Consideration needs to be given to maximising out of school time for the benefit of young people and as part of an empowering and participative process involving them in the lives of their communities. This could be achieved by using the estimated £40 million per year (an estimated £300million during the last decade or so) provided by Welsh Government in a more creative way to promote active citizenship and the social empowerment of young people during their leisure time. This approach would be concerned with getting young people more active, developing citizenship skills and supporting personal citizenship. Active citizenship would require voluntary participation in economic, social, cultural and political activities delivered in an outcome driven non-formal education and informal learning framework outside of school. Learning would be seen as part of an activity not necessarily the main point of the activity. The answer to developing young people's growth and development in a way that encourages active citizenship and personal citizenship requires a more holistic approach to education and learning than that found in school. Non-formal education and informal learning outside of school should be primarily concerned with supporting growth into citizenship and developing skills for active citizenship by;

1. promoting participation in the labour market, cultural life, education and public decision making;
2. creating opportunities for discussing topics such as identity, knowledge and moral issues;
3. practicing and developing participatory pedagogy;
4. developing participation skills in practice

To maintain at least parity with educational developments in many other countries consideration needs to be given to developing a complementary education approach that uses methods used in many elite British schools. This approach would be concerned to achieve the bullet points above through simple but effective strategies linked to young people's passions. For example, young-people-managed

societies, sports clubs and music events are easily identified possibilities.

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 funding provided by Welsh Government has remained fairly consistent over the years. However, it is reduced in most instances by alternative local authority priorities to a point where the Youth Service is unable to provide an adequate service to young people, which is a requirement under relevant legislation. This has a subsequent effect on funding to National and Local Voluntary organisations by a reduction in both direct funding and in access to services such as for example training, information, buildings and transport.

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

What is required is a hypothecated budget to local authorities or a new structure for the delivery of Youth Work outside of the local authority framework. This new structure would be concerned to maximise provision for young people through a more balanced financial partnership between the maintained and voluntary Youth Work sectors.

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).

The last time these sorts of questions were asked in Wales the conclusion of the Committee set up by the Welsh Government in 2001 was;

“the costs of a complete and comprehensive Youth Service which would cover both universal services to young people and targeted youth work would require in the region of £100 million per year”

It was recognised that this significant level of financial support would not be made available and that more realistic recommendations would have to be made. Priorities would therefore need to be determined. The first priority identified was to increase the numbers of full-time workers at a cost over 3 years of £10.35 million. The second priority was the refurbishment and maintenance of buildings. There was unanimous recognition of the dire condition of a large number of buildings used by the Youth Service throughout Wales. It was estimated that throughout Wales there were more than 200 buildings used by the maintained Youth Service. These buildings, it was claimed, were in a:

“poor condition and getting progressively worse. The vast majority were also identified as lacking access for the disabled and raise serious health and safety concerns.”

(HMSO 2000a:49)

It was calculated that the cost of refurbishing all maintained Youth Service building in Wales would be approximately £20 million. No financial allocation was made to develop new facilities in areas where none existed.

The third priority was the provision of minibuses, mobile units, IT facilities and information materials for young people. Supporting these

allocations would be a corporate budget designed to develop, support and maintain a strategy embracing all services for young people. This priority would cost over 3 years of £4.8 million.

Driven by these priorities, the total requirement for new money by the maintained Youth Service was identified over 3 years as £30.1 million. The final decision was to allocate £10.45 million over 3 years. Despite the optimism for a new, more positive era for the work of the Youth Service – created by the rhetoric of recently appointed politicians – sufficient levels of resources to support a regeneration process were not made available.

The situation as not improved in the past 15 years rather it has deteriorated to a point where many young people no longer have access to Youth Work programmes. They are unable to become involved in a process where they can develop interests they are passionate about. Strategies could also be developed to guide young people into adulthood through a range of activities such as residential activities, study visits and voluntary work. The role of the Youth Worker in these programmes would be critical in that it clearly recognises that young people need to mix with adults in order to participate, contribute and to learn. It also reduces young people's contribution to range of current Welsh Government policy, particularly the preventative role outlined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

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?

There are two recommendations that have to be made;

1. That Welsh Government listens to the evidence related to the critical importance of an education system that is made up of three parts. Formal education of the sort provided by school. Non-formal education and informal learning of the sort delivered by the Youth Service to young people in the community. Within this model there would be clear recognition that each of the separate elements are important in their own right.
2. That a new model for financing the Youth Service is found and implemented. The Youth Service is starved of cash at the same

time as local authorities are diverting financial resources away from it.