

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 17

Ymateb gan : Grŵp Prif Swyddogion Ieuenctid Cymru a Cymdeithas
Llywodraeth Leol Cymru (CLILC)

Response from : Wales Principal Youth Officers' Group (PYOG) & Welsh
Local Government Association (WLGA)

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.

1. For the benefit of this and following answers in relation to this inquiry, the PYOG (the network of strategic leads for the Youth Service in each of the 22 local authorities in Wales) wishes to recognise and reinforce the Committee's apparent intention to consider youth work services', as distinct from other (no less valued but different) work with young people – the key purpose of youth work being defined 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*' *National Occupational Standards (NOS)*'. The work is carried out with young people aged 11–25 years and is done so via a voluntary engagement.

2. The process of registering youth workers with the education workforce regulator, the Education Workforce Council (EWC), from April 2017 should assist in providing further clarity on the professional status of youth work.

3. Under the *Learning & Skills Act* (2000) Section 123, local authorities are charged with the statutory responsibility of providing, securing or participating in Youth Support Services in

Wales. The Youth Service (the framework by which youth work is delivered) is a key element of this offer and is often the lead agency (as has been recognised via recent Estyn YSS lines of enquiry) in this process, including a substantial role in increasing capacity via support and training for organisations within a local area. This is done by carefully considering the needs of young people aged 11–25 in each local authority area against the resources available to discharge this function, including prevailing demographic trends (age, gender, geographic dispersal, protected characteristics etc). Provision is also delivered in the context of requirements in *Extending Entitlement*, the Welsh Government Directions and Guidance derived from the *Learning & Skills Act*.

4. By its nature, youth work is available to all young people, regardless of background or ability, an offer and approach (known as universal or open access), which is highly valued by young people and which is reinforced by the WG *National Youth Work Strategy for Wales* (2014–18, page 2). It is widely recognised that such an approach can remove stigma¹ and put many young people in touch with more specialist provision who may not otherwise have had the knowledge or ability to do so.

5. In light of recent tight funding challenges in local authorities and also in part due to Welsh Government policy (in particular the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework), youth work has seen an increased targeting of its services e.g. towards young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), meaning that fewer young people are accessing the provision whilst also resulting in fewer opportunities for them to mix with and learn from others from different backgrounds. The PYOG does recognise that youth work skills are particularly valued and effective in such circumstances e.g. re-engaging young people who have become disengaged from mainstream services e.g. formal education.

6. Feedback on youth work provision in Estyn inspection reports in recent times indicate a strong performing sector e.g. during the recent era of Young Peoples' Partnerships, whilst the leadership and

management of YPP's drew criticism in a number of areas following inspections, the quality of youth service delivery was found to be consistently high and remains so, particularly around relationships with young people.

7. The PYOG recognises the variation in core (Revenue Support Grant, RSG) funding between local authorities across Wales, which the Committee has drawn attention to (mentioned in greater detail later in this response). However, this does not always have a direct correlation with either level or quality of provision e.g. youth work is also funded by a variety of other sources such as ESF, Families First, Communities First and other local, and national funding streams.

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

8. The over-riding concern of the sector currently is that of stability and sustainability. Despite ongoing funding challenges and the subsequent changes to available budgets, as well as shifting policy approaches from Welsh Government, local authority youth services are keen to retain the benefits of youth work and so have sought to reconfigure provision e.g. via streamlining services, merging with Youth Offending Services and generating income via other sources. Some areas are considering or have taken rather more acute action in commissioning services or changing governance structures by moving to alternative delivery models (ADM's). The new structures taking shape and learning taking place as part of this process is constantly shared across PYOG membership. Regardless of what new structures are determined, the PYOG maintains that the unique identity of the intervention and support offered by youth work needs to be retained and recognised for the benefit of the young people it comes into contact with.

9. The voluntary sector has an important part to play in the delivery of youth services and they are also affected by the current challenging circumstances. A number of voluntary sector organisations rely on local authority funding either directly or

indirectly via the level of in-kind support offered.

10. In this context however, youth workers across Wales remain totally committed to supporting and serving the young people they work with on a daily basis. The work-force and young people are fully engaged in the necessary process of change at local level – change which can bring a welcomed and fresh approach, as well as improved outcomes.

11. The PYOG also contends that the notion of *education* has received a rather narrow focus in Wales – whilst formal education is of course important, we all learn in different ways and at different stages and **non-formal and informal learning opportunities have an important role to play in both accessing formal learning and as a mechanism for learning in its own right.** The benefits of these approaches need to be better understood and recognised in a broader contextualisation of education.

12. In an era with increasingly targeted policy, the PYOG is concerned that many of the traditional benefits of youth work are being lost. One of the defining features of youth work is that of association and the educative power of playing one's part in a group – groups of young people of all backgrounds and abilities learning from each other's different circumstances and aspirations, which can also be hugely beneficial for emotional well-being. For example, if young people deemed to be NEET are only being exposed to other young people who are NEET, it can be more challenging to change attitudes and mind-sets.

13. A few years ago, the then Children's Commissioner for Wales expressed concern around a lack (or absence) of institutional knowledge in certain areas of policy across Welsh Government departments in relation to children and young people's issues. This has also been evident for youth work as a high turn-over of civil service staff has resulted in a continual need to re-visit the meaning and purpose of youth work at strategic level. It would be useful and productive to look at developing a shared vision and understanding

of youth work, including the values underpinning that provision and support.

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.

14. *Extending Entitlement* was an ambitious document which clearly articulates the 10 Entitlements which young people should expect from youth support services in Wales. Its content of course remains relevant today but perhaps requires a new focus, clearly articulating the role of youth work. In recent years there have been a few attempts to re-write *Extending Entitlement*, whilst other policies have emerged and taken priority e.g. the 7 Core Aims in *Rights to Action; Learning Pathways* (2004); *Learning & Skills (Wales) Measure* (2009); *Youth Engagement & Progression Framework* (YEPF, 2013). Should a review of *Extending Entitlement* (and the role of youth work within) be deemed a priority again, the PYOG would welcome full involvement in such a process.

15. In relation to more recent youth work-specific strategy and policy, whilst the PYOG welcomes the recent focus by Welsh Government on the profession with some merit to some of the content and themes e.g. the Charter makes a useful attempt to distil the 10 Entitlements in relation to the contribution of the youth work sector, due to the lack of involvement of the sector in their development and uncertainty regarding their status, there is an apparent low impact of these at strategic and operational level. The PYOG considers too many strands of work and recent publications to have been missed opportunities.

16. The writing of the first WG strategy for youth work in Wales

National Youth Service Strategy for Wales: Young People; Youth work; Youth Service (2007) saw colleagues from the field of youth work fully engaged in its development, from conception stage. Numerous meetings and events were held across the sector to elicit views of individuals and organisations, who were able to influence and shape it and to comment on the deliverability of its themes and priorities. This brought about not only a boost to morale as it engineered a great deal of welcomed debate (not all of it comfortable but necessary nonetheless) and cross-sector working and learning. The real benefit of this approach was ‘buy-in’ with individuals and organisations taking ownership. Whilst the evaluation of the strategy was never completed (a missed opportunity for learning for future strategies), the strategy included clear actions for each part of the sector (Welsh Government; local authorities; voluntary sector organisations and the higher education sector), whereas the current strategy includes actions only for Welsh Government.

17. More recent times have seen a different approach in the production of Welsh Government policy and strategy. There has been far less involvement of the sector and, at times, work and/or documents have been published in circumstances where the sector has not been informed beforehand e.g. the announcement of the development of the National Outcomes Framework by the National Youth Agency, at the National Youth Work Excellence Awards in 2015 and the recent Youth Work Charter, launched at the WG Youth Work Conference in March. Likewise, the current strategy was developed without involvement of the sector. This is important as youth work organisations are delivering front line youth work on a daily basis, have practical experience and understanding of the funding issues and have an understanding of what works. For any strategy to be successful, it requires the full understanding of and buy-in from the workforce delivering it.

18. Following the closure of the *Wales Youth Agency* in 2006, youth work capacity, leadership and influence within WG has declined over

time. In 2007, when WYA staff transferred into the Civil Service, the then Branch had 10 members of staff. The branch was then reduced over 10 years to three members of staff, losing its profile and status in the process, which has also seen its status as a branch reduce to a small team within a branch. This shows a systematic downgrading of youth work within Welsh Government.

19. Welsh Government could do more to improve the profile of youth work across the organisation and outwards. The PYOG would be more than willing to play its part in doing so and, by doing so, could increase the impact currently being made by sharing knowledge, expertise and capacity. Regrettably, it is rare that Welsh Government engages with important youth work stakeholders (including the PYOG) unless invited to do so e.g. by attending PYOG meetings. Whilst developing the YEPF, youth work's profile did receive a boost and the sector was presented with opportunities to engage in its development. However, whilst appreciating this recognition, this was not specifically about youth work but rather an aspect of youth work – that of work with young people NEET. Likewise, a great deal of youth work goes on in communities as well as schools, a process valued highly by those engaging with it, as well as the wider community involved, but often over-looked elsewhere. As can be seen by the recent PYOG publication [*The role and value of youth work in current and emerging agendas in Wales*](#), youth work's contribution is extensive. However, this is not obviously apparent in recent Welsh Government policy, which has focussed on young people NEET and youth work in schools.

20. Welsh Government has established a Ministerial *Youth Work Reference Group*, which has met a number of times in the last couple of years. However, this has been ineffective as it has not produced any tangible outcomes, membership has become disillusioned and agendas are didactic. This may be in part due to its sprawling membership which, in attempting to capture views across the sector is too broad and has failed to make an impact.

21. The PYOG would like to see more joined up planning between departments in Welsh Government where there are obvious links to

youth work. Examples of this include the development of Families First new programme, Play, YEPF, Youth Work, Careers Wales, Employment/Skills, Social Care, Health and wellbeing – so many of these areas impact on young people and youth work and yet seem to be developed in isolation of each other.

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

22. Welsh Government's role is to set the strategic direction for youth work in Wales and local authorities, who have the statutory duty to deliver youth services, are responsible for delivering that strategic vision. It is preferable therefore that local authorities be fully involved in discussions with Welsh Government on the development of that vision. With a shared vision that is based on sound knowledge and experience of best practice, then it is much more likely that the vision will be delivered successfully. The Youth Service has a strong tradition in being positive, flexible and in working in partnership both across and beyond the sector itself – as a collective of delivery organisations, the sector is constantly in touch with young people on the 'front line' and therefore is well practiced in understanding and articulating their needs. It is felt that this knowledge would help shape more effective central government policy and strategy.

23. Whilst using an educative approach, youth work by its nature supports young people, regardless of their background, ability or need. As a number of policy areas affect the lives of young people (health & social care, housing, culture & sport, transport etc.), central youth work policy needs to reflect this accordingly – for example, other current relevant legislation such as the *Social Services & Well-being Act, Future Generations Act*.

24. However, having made reference to this, youth work is not always well understood. As an education provider in its own right, whilst valued almost universally, its contribution is not always recognised, particularly at strategic level. The PYOG would like to see the status of youth work receive a higher profile within Welsh

Government.

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

25. As with all other public sector organisations, funding for youth work continues to be challenging and has seen a reduction over a number of years. Youth work is responding to these challenges as positively, however, the reduction in funding has posed a serious strain on the delivery of youth services in their originally intended manner of being universal/offering open access provision.

26. The way in which youth work in Wales is funded can be seen as both a strength and weakness – whilst levels of local authority core funding vary, services continue to be innovative in accessing external funding. This can bring added value and flexibility to the way in which services are shaped and delivered. However, where services either identify a desire (or where circumstances dictate a need) to access such funding streams, the application process can be intensive and time-consuming, as well as requiring a skill set not always readily available in the work-force, changes focus for managers and can take workers away from direct contact with young people.

27. Given the opportunities which European funding has offered young people, there is a strong probability that the Brexit vote will negatively impact young people more than for other British citizens. For example, if it disappears, the Erasmus+ programme will leave a substantial gap in funding and opportunities for young people gaining experiences via exchanges with other European countries. Further, a great deal of the successful work carried out to implement the ‘brokerage’ and ‘support’ role required within the Welsh Government Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) Action Plan is currently funded for the next 3 years by ESF. Unless funded differently, this level of intensive support to young people may well disappear and lead the YEPF to be ineffective.

28. In relation to Third Sector organisations, whilst many of these

are self-sustaining, local authorities support a great number of such organisations both in direct funding (e.g. via the Youth Service Strategy Grant), training and via in-kind support.

29. In the context of education service provision and the impact of youth work in this context, it is also worth recognising that the spend per head via youth work is a tiny proportion of that which is spent through our schools (for example). Total spend per head (for ages 11–19) in 2014–15 was £111 for youth work (Welsh Government Youth Work Audit) compared to £5,607 per head in schools.

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

30. Local authority youth services are facing challenges. This has meant the loss of staff, knowledge and experience, increased targeting of young people with particular characteristics, sharing of buildings and other facilities previously for specific use of young people accessing them and other capital resources e.g. mobile provision, which can have a particularly negative effect in rural areas. Whilst all involved in youth work continue to work hard to influence and innovate, given the almost unprecedented situation that local authorities face, numerous difficult decisions are being made on a daily basis and it is difficult to see how one service can be protected over other important services that local authorities provide.

31. Whilst the sector struggles to gain clarity and unity in the face of such challenges, in the context of how other professions are represented, youth work in Wales does not currently have a single organisation which can promote and represent its interests e.g. the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) representing the interests of work-based training organisations, Colegau Cymru representing the interests of Further Education Colleges and various unions representing teachers. Whilst facing similar funding issues in Scotland, youth work there has such a structure, which also acts as a critical friend to central government and, as such, has a strong

link and profile within the Scottish Government. Both the voluntary sector and local authorities (via PYOG) have in recent years called for such a body, which could also act as an important link with the Education Workforce Council. Institutional (or sectoral) knowledge is important as the history of a profession defines its future; apart from playing an effective role on behalf of youth work in Wales, it is also felt that such an organisation could assist in ensuring youth work in Wales is sustainable – if only as an important capacity builder as/when funding opportunities return.

32. The PYOG has also been surprised and somewhat concerned recently that the sector here in Wales has not been approached to lead on a number of strands of work (Quality Mark; Charter; National Outcomes Framework). Instead, Welsh Government has chosen to engage consultants from England (including associates of the National Youth Agency, whose remit does not extend to Wales) to lead these pieces of work. Whilst there are some excellent academics and youth work leaders in England, we consider that to also be the case in Wales – indeed, many in England are envious of much of the progress that has been made in relation to youth work in Wales in recent years e.g. the existence of Extending Entitlement; the professional document (written by and for the sector) that is [*Youth Work in Wales: Principles & Purposes*](#); its retention as an education service (a core principle) and a coherent work-force. Whilst not disputing their credentials, it is apparent that some of these individuals have limited knowledge of youth work here in Wales and it is therefore somewhat perplexing that they should be developing and leading most of the new policy.

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).

33. As mentioned previously in this response, recent cuts to services have seen a big impact on Youth Service assets. Given this scenario, it would seem prudent to consider some kind of national audit of all

community based buildings and assets belonging to the sector and to consider their level of use – e.g. a number of services are now sharing buildings with other providers, as part of a collaborative effort.

34. Whilst its sustainability has yet to be determined, the Welsh Government Quality Mark is seen as a positive piece of work which has exercised the sector to learn and be involved. It is seen as a useful self-assessment tool and opportunity for shared learning, as well as an opportunity to obtain external verification of excellence.

35. *National Youth Service Strategy for Wales: Young People; Youth work; Youth Service* (2007) made reference to the Youth Service considering the role of new technologies when engaging with young people. This aspect has not been taken forward on a national basis. Whilst services are developed at local level to ensure that young people's needs are met via these new methods of social interaction, a national debate is necessary.

36. We have made reference to transport issues (particularly in rural areas but not exclusive to), youth work in schools (which has a place in the range of provision on offer but community provision being as important), buildings and infrastructure (which received a boost via the Youth Service Capital grant, which accompanied the first national Youth Service strategy but which was nearly 10 years ago) and workforce. The PYOG is aware of the recent consultation on inspection of some out-of-school settings but, apart from alternative curriculum programmes delivered by the Youth Service (which currently fall under inspection remit anyway), does not anticipate the proposals affecting youth work and the sector has not received any information to indicate this to be the case. Youth work is a non-formal/informal education activity, is not delivered via a formal education approach and does not fall under the definition of supplementary or complimentary school/s, tuition, training or learning centre (unless determined as an alternative education provision as previously stated).

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 principles and purpose of youth work are predicated on its relationship with young people – via a voluntary relationship and a commitment to association. It has a strong history in working with and empowering young people; indeed, the central pillars of youth work in Wales have been recognised for some time as *Educative, Empowering, Expressive, Participative* and *Inclusive*. It is essential therefore that young people are fully involved in shaping services going forward. Whilst their engagement in national discussions and policy development so far has been very limited, the PYOG makes a plea for young people to be offered a view and be fully involved at every step, both in this inquiry and with any developments on behalf of Welsh Government.

ⁱ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmeduc/744/74402.htm>