

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 26

Ymateb gan : Youth Cymru

Response from : Youth Cymru

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.

Youth Cymru is a charity with over 80 years' experience of supporting youth work and young people. We work through a network of 205 member organizations in every county in Wales concentrated in the poorest communities. Our members worked with 238,197 young people last year. This evidence is based on their experience.

Access to youth work services varies greatly across Wales. Part of the difficulty here is establishing what 'youth work services' are. It is relatively straightforward to establish the reach of statutory youth work provision, provided directly by local authorities, as the Welsh Government annual survey collects this data. While attempts have been made to gather data about the scope and reach of voluntary youth services there is still a lack of consistent information in this regard, making effective mapping difficult. This needs to be addressed.

Access to youth work services is a particular issue for young people in rural areas. Various innovative solutions have been attempted to address this, including mobile provision. There is a concern that one frequently used solution, the provision of youth work on school premises at lunch time or immediately after school may feel to work for one group of young people for whom youth work can have a particular benefit - those disaffected from formal education

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

Young people facing barriers to participation, for example those from BAME groups, LGBTQ young people and disabled young people, need both access to groups where they can be with and gain support from other young people like themselves and support to access mainstream services.

In some counties there is a need for better coordination between the statutory and voluntary youth work sectors to ensure a consistent offer meeting a wide range of needs.

Youth work services are likely to be most effective if they are planned and designed co-operatively with young people. The principle of voluntary engagement means young people won't use services that are not what they want or need.

There is a need for a comprehensive, dynamic assessment of youth work needs, and systematic planning for provision. Our members have differing views as to how best to achieve this. Some favour some kind of national, Wales wide agency, some a strong, clear requirement on local authorities. There is broad agreement that legislation is needed to clearly establish young people's legal right to receive youth work services, and who is responsible for ensuring those services are provided.

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 ongoing commitment of successive Welsh Governments to youth work is very welcome, and is viewed with envy by colleagues in the sector in England where central government has withdrawn all support.

The very existence of a National Strategy sends a clear signal, albeit one that is limited in its scope and could take a more cross cutting approach, given the wide range of Welsh Government agendas to which good youth work can contribute.

There is broad welcome for the Charter in the Sector. However, it remains unclear how the Charter will be delivered. It refers to a new Framework, and to a representative strategic body, but it is at yet unclear how these will be developed and what the role of the representative strategic body will be.

The process around the development of a proposed National Outcomes Framework has been flawed, and it seems now that what will emerge is a tool to measure activity, rather than to measure the difference that activity makes. It is not clear whether this will supersede, add to, or be separate from the current data gathering process in which local authorities must participate.

The Quality Mark process is ongoing, and so it is hard to comment as yet on its effectiveness. There has been a concern about the Government's decision to use an agency outside Wales to develop this work. This is something of a trend, undermining the sector in Wales.

There is a need for a much clearer cross departmental approach.

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

Youth work contributes to a wide range of Welsh Government priorities, including promoting health and wellbeing, promoting inclusion and community cohesion and tackling poverty, as well as the contribution to improving employability. There is a need for a cross departmental approach, as, during recent years structures have led to a tendency to value targeted work and employability above other areas.

We recommend -

- A Refresh of the National Strategy, taking a broader view of youth work's contribution.
- Work on the development of a representative strategic body to consider that body's role and deliver clarity. Will it be there to represent the sector's views to Ministers, to advise Ministers, or to make decisions?

- Legislation to clearly establish young people's right to receiving youth work services and who is to have responsibility for providing them.

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

Youth Work in Wales benefits from ongoing Welsh Government funding. The core support provided through the National Voluntary Youth Organizations funding stream supports UK wide and international organizations in having Wales national structures, enabling those organizations to deliver on Welsh Government priorities, and enables national Welsh organizations to have core stability to enable them to bring in additional resources and provide expertise. This should be continued. The Third Sector brings considerable revenue into youth work, through sources like the Lottery, direct fundraising, and partnerships with the private sector. It would be useful if this could be quantified.

Welsh Government funding provided through Local Authorities is also valuable, but it is not ring-fenced, and, given the pressure on Local Authority budgets it is not surprising that, given that youth work is not a service that must legally be provided, few spend all of their indicative RSG funding on youth work. This needs addressing.

Major concern about how the funding currently going into youth work from various European sources will be replaced when we leave the EU.

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

We recommend:-

- That the Welsh Government continue to provide core support to national youth voluntary organizations through NVYO
- That the Welsh Government resolve the issue of the indicative funds provided for local authorities through the RSG not being spent on youth work. This could be achieved by ring-fencing the budget, but withdrawing the funds from local authorities and planning and providing services nationally, or by legislating to make it mandatory for local authorities to ensure youth work provision.
- That work is done with the Third Sector to better understand the resources these organizations bring into youth work from a range of sources.
- That Welsh Government work with the sector, statutory and voluntary, to fully identify the scale of European funding from various sources that goes into youth work in Wales and develop a long term plan for replacing those sources after we leave the EU.

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).

There is a difference of view amongst Youth Cymru members about workforce issues. Broadly, the statutory sector welcomes the moves towards registration of youth workers and increasing professionalization, while voluntary organizations are concerned that this risks devaluating the vital contribution of volunteers and community based staff who may lack formal qualifications but have invaluable experience. A balance needs to be struck.

The Quality Mark remains work in progress. I have already mentioned concerns that it has been developed by outside 'experts' who may lack knowledge of the particular circumstances in Wales. This has been a trend in recent years - for this branch of Welsh Government to commission 'experts' from outside Wales, who then have to be 'educated' by the sector here before their work is relevant. We question this approach. There is a wealth of expertise in the sector here that could be used. Specifically with regard to the Quality Mark it is of vital importance that it is seen as relevant and useful by the Third Sector or it simply will not be used by Third Sector organizations.

Youth Work in schools can have a valuable role, providing services to young people in rural areas who would find it hard to access evening services because of transport difficulties. It is, however, important, that the principal of voluntary engagement is maintained, and that youth workers are not merely used by schools to help manage challenging behavior, as has happened in the past.

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?

Our one recommendation would be to legislate to place on a clear, unambiguous, statutory footing young people's right to receive youth work services and to set out clearly who has the legal duty to ensure that these services are provided.

Consideration could be given to developing the methodology used to establish 'sufficiency' with regard to paly provision, placing a duty on each local authority to assess the need for youth work provision and to plan for it and ensure it is delivered.

Alternatively, a new national body could be established by law, with the duty to plan services nationally and ensure they are delivered.

In these difficult financial times Welsh Government will need strong levers to ensure that their very welcome policy commitment to young people's right to receive youth work services is actually delivered. We believe that the most effective way to ensure this long term is to place that right on a statutory footing.