

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 29

Ymateb gan : UNSAIN Cymru

Response from : UNISON 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.

UNISON has growing concerns over young people’s access to youth services. There has been a significant cut in youth services across Wales for the period 2012–16 and it is inevitable that young people suffer as a result.

Funding cuts have resulted in a reduction in service provision. There has been a cut in both full and part-time jobs, youth centre closures, and cuts to youth service places for young people.

In the context of rising long-term youth unemployment and high rates of child poverty across Wales, youth services are increasingly important so it is vitally important services are protected.

In a recent survey of UNISON youth work members, the overwhelming majority of respondents said cuts were having a particular impact on young people from poorer backgrounds. More than half said there were particular problems for young black people, young LGBT people, and young women. So it appears that the cuts have hit precisely those people who often need youth services the most.

In addition, respondents felt that cuts to youth services meant: that young people felt less empowered; that it was now harder for young

people to stay in formal education; young people are finding it harder to get jobs; there is an increase in mental health issues among young people.

We recognise and welcome the continuation of the education maintenance allowance as one way to encourage young people to remain in formal education, but the accessibility of youth services is also a factor.

In addition, a loss of youth services is likely to increase the burden on other public services that are accessed to resolve problems and there is clearly an associated cost on those services.

The general direction of travel for the Welsh Government has been to focus on prevention rather than cure and to empower people to remain as independent as possible. Yet this ethos is not being applied to youth services.

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

UNISON is fully aware of the budgetary pressures faced by local authority as a result of the austerity policies being administered by the UK government. However, public services are unsustainable if this continues.

UNISON believes there should be a statutory duty to provide youth services. When youth services are cut, the benefits to young people and communities are lost, along with the savings they provide in intervention services at a later date.

Full and fair funding is required to deliver effective youth services.

Youth services should be saved and kept in-house and youth workers should be paid fairly for the work they do.

Additionally, young people should be involved and consulted in the decisions that affect the services they use.

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 National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014 – 2018 rightly identifies the crucial role that youth work can play in Wales. However, good quality services need adequate funding and this is a major issue for youth services across Wales.

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

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 vast majority of funding for youth services comes from local authority budgets. It is these budgets that are under growing pressure as a result of the UK government’s austerity agenda. Clearly, local authorities are faced with difficult decisions about how to allocate funding and so non-statutory areas become vulnerable.

With such a dire financial situation as the background, it comes as no shock that youth services have been under fire, despite the short and long-term consequences.

Funding for youth services in Wales has reduced by more than £6m across Wales in the 2012–16 period – a significant amount. As a consequence, over 350 youth workers have lost their jobs with a disproportionate number being part-time workers. There has been in excess of 100 youth centre closures in Wales, which is a considerable

number in Wales. UK-wide there has been a closure of over 600 youth centres, so within a UK context this also seems disproportionately high.

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

It is clear that austerity is not working. Youth services require full and fair funding in order to be effective. We believe the Welsh Government should be making a stronger case to the UK government for fair funding for Wales. This is with reference to both the Barnett Formula and funding more widely.

Public services such as youth services are unsustainable under the current financial pressures.

Investment in services for young people, and in fair pay and treatment for youth work staff, will reap dividends for the whole of society, making real savings in social care, social security and the criminal justice system.

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 Wales, 363 youth service jobs have been lost, of which 63% were part-time. This is a significant reduction in numbers and clearly has a disproportionate affect on part-time workers. Clearly the impact on the individuals who lost posts will be devastating, but there has also been an impact on those who remain employed as their workloads have consequently increased.

Public service workers need to receive pay increases which are in line with the rise in the cost of living. Their additional spending power will boost local economies, create additional tax revenue and benefit savings for the Treasury, and kick-start sustainable recovery.

In addition, whilst UNISON has been engaged with and has supported the notion of the registration of the education workforce in Wales, we must ensure that the process if registration is applied fairly. The current recommendation outlines that youth workers should pay a registration contribution equal to teachers, yet they rates of pay are not comparable. Furthermore, we do not believe that youth workers will gain the same value from registration as teachers currently do.

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?