

## Response 106. Youth Work Strategy Implementation Board

### Youth work statutory framework consultation.

**Draft Guidance – [Youth work in Wales: delivering for young people \(draft guidance\) | GOV.WALES](#)**

**Consultation document (framework) - [Youth work in Wales: delivering for young people \(consultation document\) | GOV.WALES](#)**

**Secondary Legislation Changes – [The Youth Support Services \(Provision of Youth Work\) \(Wales\) Directions 2025](#)**

The Youth Work Strategy Implementation Boards statement in response to the draft statutory guidance for youth work in Wales.

The members of the Youth Work Strategy Implementation Board are:

Sharon Lovell, MBE, (Chair)

Dr Simon Stewart

Joanne Sims

Shahinoor Shumon

Lowri Jones

Marco Gil-Cervantes

David Williams

Sian Elen Tomos

Deb Austin.

The Youth Work Strategy Implementation Board was established in 2022 to advise Welsh Government and the Minister/Cabinet Secretary for Education on the recommendations in the report; Time to Deliver for Young People in Wales: Achieving a Sustainable Delivery Model for Youth Work Services in Wales which had been set by the Interim Youth Work Board. Recommendation two of the report stated, ***“Welsh Government should strengthen or establish a new legislative basis for youth work services in Wales.”***

The Youth Work Strategy Implementation Board are pleased with the progress made with the sector to develop the draft consultation statutory guidance that have been issued by Welsh Government and want to thank everyone who has been part of this work to date. We wish to share with you our collective views as a board on the areas where we believe the proposed legislative changes will advance a rights-based approach for young people in Wales and where we believe further work is needed to achieve equality of access to youth provision and a governance structure that will ensure the sustainability of youth work in Wales.

We believe young people deserve excellent youth work provision based on a rights-based approach. We are set with three priorities, as a board, 1) To strengthen the

current legislative guidance, 2) To undertake a funding review of youth work in Wales and 3) To explore the establishment of a national body. We believe the legislative foundations set within the proposed guidance must be interconnected with a future governance structure for Wales and our fundamental view is that this is to be introduced by a national body for youth work in Wales with robust accountability and leadership for and with young people in Wales.

The board's views on the guidance are set out below under five areas we believe youth work will be strengthened by these proposals and five where we wish to see changes following this consultation.

## **Strengths**

- 1) **Framed around a youth work entitlement.** The board are encouraged to see the proposals include a youth work entitlement and youth work offer for young people that is developed through engagement with young people and is based on what young people say they need/want, and which aims to introduce, protect and strengthen activities delivered in both Welsh and English. We also agree with youth work being a universal right for young people alongside targeted opportunities. We are encouraged to see young people will be co-producers within the partnership plans proposed.
- 2) **One sector approach alongside youth work being valued and understood by a wider cross policy and practice approach.** The board believes that one of the fundamental key aspects to sustainability is for the maintained and voluntary sector to work together in partnership; recognizing the contribution each other makes to delivering youth work in Wales. From the funding review, we know that youth work is being valued and understood more from other sectors; in particular; youth justice, play, homelessness and we want to secure this further across formal education settings, health and social care. Youth work is for everyone. We agree with the vision for youth work in Wales and believe this is the solid foundation for the sector and for Wales to be a country where:
  - Young people are thriving
  - Youth work is accessible and inclusive for all
  - Those delivering youth work are supported throughout their journey and careers to continuously improve their practice
  - Youth work is valued and understood
  - There is a sustainable model for youth work delivery.
- 3) **A Welsh context.** The Right Way: a children's rights approach in Wales details five principles which should underpin the development, delivery and monitoring of all strategic plans on a national and local level. The Board are pleased to see this proposal alongside the plans being align with the seven well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 providing an up-to-date context for the framework in which youth work is to be delivered.

- 4) **Five-year plans.** The Board agree with the need for long term plans which are renewed and revised annually and led by local authorities within their statutory duties. We do believe in equal power and an equal voice with the voluntary sector and young people with a specific focus on inclusion, diversity and Welsh language provision. We believe the voluntary sectors contribution to the creation of plans need to be clearer within the statutory guidance and request this to be reviewed as stated within our considerations for change section. This is due to the fragility of the voluntary sector in relation to current funding arrangements and allocations. If youth work is to be sustained across the voluntary and maintained sector both areas need to thrive.
- 5) **Valuing youth work as a profession.** The Board is encouraged to view the workforce development section within the guidance which acknowledges that youth work is delivered by a rich and varied youth work offer and operates from the contribution of many different people. We agree that workforce development linked with the development of career progression is key to ensuring sustainability and confidence within the sector. The proposed five-year plans considering the wider workforce development which includes volunteers is encouraged.

## **Consideration for changes**

The Youth Work Strategy Implementation Board believes there are several areas within the draft statutory guidance that need to be amended or consideration for additional legislative reframe developed. These are stated below.

### **1) Review definition of youth work in Wales**

The board believes the current proposed definition excludes the voluntary sectors contribution along with the value that volunteers bring to the sector and are part of the delivery of youth work provision. We also believe that it excludes individuals working within the maintained sector who are working towards a qualification and needs a stronger regard for the wider sector who value, invest and participate in the youth work sector. We also believe this current proposed definition also has unintended consequences for exclusion of underrepresented groups where we have heard that obtaining qualifications are challenging. Delivery of youth work by qualified staff, (as is currently suggested), prevents youth work being achieved in Wales from a diverse range of individuals who are all on a journey within their progressional, personal and professional development. The Board also recognises that for many young people who value youth work it enables and empowers young people to be part of the workforce from a peer led youth work approach and we suggest this needs to be recognised alongside a youth led governance structure, (as part of recommendation one in "Time to Deliver." Review definition in terms of

language “education”. Youth Work is an informal educative approach and needs to reflect this within any definition. We believe the current definition is too prescriptive and we want a Wales where we build, encourage and grow. We would wish to see acknowledgement *to the principles and purposes of youth work in Wales* and as a board believe the Scottish definition of youth work is one where it is clear and inclusive – for reference this definition from Youthlink Scotland is:

***Youth work is an informal education practice that supports young people’s social, emotional and educational development. Youth work can be adapted across a variety of settings, and typically engages with young people within their local community. This could be at youth clubs and youth centres, youth cafes, community groups, uniformed and voluntary organisations, or youth action and participation groups. You might also include youth work at youth counselling units, drug and alcohol projects, at outdoor education centres, or on the streets via outreach programmes and detached youth work. Youth work can also take place in schools, where youth workers are embedded within the school staff team, working to ensure young people are supported to achieve the best educational outcomes through higher levels of engagement, attendance and attainment.***

We would strongly recommend that the definition proposed is at least changed from youth work *is delivered* by qualified youth workers to youth work *is led* by qualified youth workers as we do acknowledge the importance of the youth work workforce being trained and qualified. Being led by qualified youth workers is to ensure strong accountability and governance within a national, regional and local framework.

## **2) Partnership Plans**

The purpose of the proposed partnership plans is to set out the aims and objectives for five years which are reviewed annually based on the evidence of the needs of young people. This five-year vision is to be aligned with the national youth work strategy, which is encouraging, however, the board believe that if the five-year plans are to be successful, they need a partnership approach that have representatives from different policy areas such as play, youth justice, health, education, social care, etc. We propose that consideration is given to the voluntary sector co-chairing the partnership boards and that members include young people. We believe the sustainability of any plans need to be supported by resources and funding with a clear accountability structure that includes a national body for youth work in Wales. We also believe plans should be supported by creating a national reporting template which includes clear objectives for increasing opportunities for young people to access youth work with a clear equality assessment action plan.

### **3) Accountability and Governance**

Whilst we agree that plans need local scrutiny and designed to reflect local and national needs/priorities, we strongly believe it should go further with an accountability and governance structure that not only includes Welsh Government but is supported by a CEO/National Director within a national youth work body and board for Wales. This person would have accountability to supporting local authorities and the voluntary sectors Chief Officers to ensure the five-year plans are in line with the vision for youth work in Wales.

### **4) Cabinet Secretary Portfolio**

To advance the value of youth work being valued and understood and protected we would wish for a Minister to support the Cabinet Secretary which would include a portfolio for young people and youth work.

### **5) Participation Standards in Wales**

The Board would suggest reviewing the participation standards in Wales to reflect the statutory guidance and the youth led governance approach to youth work in Wales to complement the Quality Kitemark for Youth Work in Wales and the advancement of inspections by Estyn for the sector.

**The board would recommend that with the establishment of a national body for youth work in Wales, any revised statutory guidance is reviewed within the first end of the 5-year planning cycle proposed. Furthermore, with the sector, evaluate its impact on improvement to outcomes for and with young people and its progress to sustainability. If it is determined that a Youth Work Act for Wales would advance further the protection, rights and entitlements of youth work for young people – this would be considered and implemented.**