Hi all, I hope you are all safe and well in these unprecedented and challenging times. I know many of you have continued to work very hard to support young people across the last few months, whilst others have faced periods of down time and furlough that will have had an impact on you personally and on your organisations. I’m writing to update you on a few issues that may be of interest.

Restarting the work of Sub Groups and Strategy Participation Groups

As we start to adjust new ways of working, and look at how we can broaden out the support for young people that our youth work organisations can provide, we think it is time to turn some of our attention back to the work started in the Strategy Participation Groups (SPG) and Sub-Groups before the lockdown. We want to be as inclusive as possible in restarting this work so we want to check with you first if you are still available to participate, or if you aren’t available and have any objections to things proceeding in your absence. We will, of course, be happy to keep everyone in the loop if they aren’t available to participate, so if you could confirm the best email to keep contacting you on that would also be helpful.

Support and guidance during, and as we emerge from, lockdown

It will still be some time before we return to any face-to-face meetings but there is much that can be done to move forward using new ways of working. The Interim Youth Work Board has continued to meet during this period with a strong focus and emphasis placed on making support and guidance available to the sector during this time. Hopefully you have all accessed this by signing up to the regular Youth Work Bulletins during lockdown. If you have, you’ll also be aware that we’ve been working with young people and volunteer and paid professional youth work stakeholders to develop guidance for the sector on increasing operations as we emerge from lockdown. We hope this will be published on the Welsh Government website in the coming weeks.

Our report and associated research

The impact of lockdown has, of course, meant we’ve had to push back the date of our final report into next year, but we’ll be sticking to our initial target date of December and using it as an opportunity to publish an initial report reflecting on lockdown and signalling our intentions and recommendations for the final report.

As part of the development of that report, you may remember we were about to undertake a piece of research looking at the youth work sector which would include some mapping. As you will no doubt have guessed, that piece of work has been reimagined somewhat due to the COVID-19 issues but, having met with the successful contractors – Wavehill – I feel assured that it will make a valuable contribution that will add value to any recommendations we are able to make alone.

Over the next few weeks Wavehill will be putting in place their plans for discussions with members of the SPG’s, both to help inform the initial development of the research, and for the research itself. These discussions will be mixed between individual discussions and group discussions where that would be more appropriate. The focus will be around gaining a better understanding of the range, value, quality and impact of youth work across all of Wales, your perceptions of good practice, current challenges and opportunities facing youth work – including from a COVID-19 perspective, and the challenges of delivering across different settings (rural/urban) and for those with protected characteristics. We therefore would like to provide your contact details (e-mail address) to the research company for this purpose. If you do not consent to this please let us know urgently through the mailbox. We envisage these interviews will be either over the phone or via Microsoft Teams so can you please also let us know your preferred way of being contacted and if appropriate what your telephone number is.

In summary, I would be grateful therefore if you could reply with your responses to the questions below to via the youthworkboard@gov.wales mailbox

1. Are you happy to continue and available to be part of the Strategy Participation Groups as they restart their work? If so are there any issues we should be aware of, and what is the best e-mail address for you now?
2. Are you content for us to pass your e-mail to Wavehill to be contacted as part of the research
3. Can you please provide a contact telephone number if that will be your preferred way of contact from Wavehill? Please also indicate if you would prefer to be contacted and take part in discussions in Welsh.

Finally I would like to just add that prior to lockdown we had planned an SPG event for us all to get together, our ambition of having that event has not gone away – and in many ways it will now become easier with the ability to do more online, cutting back on the time we need to travel to meetings. We will look to arrange a similar type of event in the near future and, depending on your ability to continue working with the SPG’s, we will be in touch about that as well.

Kind regards

Keith Towler