



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

**Response to the Estyn thematic report  
Youth Support Services in Wales:  
The Value of Youth Work**

## **Estyn Remit Reports Welsh Government Response**

**Report title:** Youth Support Services in Wales: The Value of Youth Work

### **Report details**

This report responds to the Ministers for Education's remit letter to Estyn for 2017-18 asking Estyn to undertake a survey of services for young people in Wales.

This report was published in July 2018, following Welsh Government's announcement that it would begin development of a new strategic approach to youth work in Wales, and as the Interim Youth Work Board was actively being recruited to. It was therefore agreed that a response to this report would be delayed until this work had progressed further, to allow sufficient time for its findings to be considered and included. A new Youth Work Strategy for Wales was published 25 June 2019.

### **Summary of main findings.**

There are 16 main findings contained within the report which are summarised below:

1. Young people have the right to high quality support through youth work. This helps them access activities outside of formal education, make friendships and learn new skills. Where they need support to understand their life choices youth workers can provide this help.
2. The most vulnerable and marginalised young people face multiple difficulties including poverty, sexual exploitation, mental health issues and homelessness. Well trained youth workers will build effective long term relationships with those needing it to help foster young peoples' personal development, confidence and resilience.
3. Whilst there is a wide variety of legislation and policy in Wales, the UK and wider in Europe which underpins a vast range of youth support services. However these services are not universally available to all and there is no overall strategy for the planning, provision or funding of services and no one shared vision for delivery of services.
4. The type of youth support services being delivered in Wales has changed since Extending Entitlement directions and guidance was published in 2002. There has been a decline of open access youth provision and community based street work. There has been a corresponding increase in targeted, referral based intervention work with young people.

5. Open access provision is attended voluntarily and broadly based on the self-determined needs of young people. The increased targeted provision usually focusses on individuals or groups to address specific needs driven by national policy agenda's rather than the self-determined needs of young people, in particular those under 18 years old.
6. The change of focus to those most vulnerable through targeted interventions has led to young people missing out if they are not engaged with the services that could refer them.
7. Whilst the core principles of Extending Entitlement are still relevant, the large number of new policy developments have not taken into account the entitlements and rights of all young people to access services. The wide diversity of policies has weakened the ability of those delivering services to plan and delivery services effectively and in collaboration.
8. Cuts in resources have also impacted on local authorities abilities to plan and prioritise youth support services focussing on the specific needs of young people, by working with young people. Where funding provision is linked to hard outcomes such as recognised qualifications, this is more complicated where the young person themselves needs significant support before they can begin learning programmes. However, generally youth workers have shown resilience and the ability to adapt and apply the core principles of youth work in a variety of settings.
9. Youth work provision is often developed on a reactive basis, which does not ensure equality of access to open access or targeted services. It also doesn't provide services across the full age range of 11-25.
10. The voluntary sector plays a vital role in providing all types of youth services but is not sufficiently included by local government in planning processes, despite the voluntary sector now carrying out much of the traditional open access youth work.
11. There are mechanisms in place locally and nationally for consulting with young people but it is not clear how these lead to young people's voices shaping and evaluating services.
12. There is a lack of clarity among service providers about the terminology used. Youth work is often confused with 'work with young people'. Youth work refers to a professional methodology for working with young people based on a clear set of values and under pinned by the voluntary nature of the relationship between the young person and the youth worker. This is often confused with the settings in which it is delivered and with general work with young people where there is no supportive or educational aspect.
13. Youth work is a professional, skilled way of working which makes an important contribution to developing young people as individuals.

Access to a youth worker plays a key role in supporting young people with multiple barriers to learning including in a school based environment. Access to a youth worker is not always available and there is not much youth work taking place in further education colleges and work-based learning providers.

14. The important contribution of planning for the development of the youth work profession was not included in the 2014-2018 Youth Work Strategy.

15. There is no effective strategy to ensure that English and Welsh language are treated equally in the delivery of youth support services. Open access provision is often provided by the voluntary sector however there are few Welsh or bilingual services and a lack of specialist support services through the medium of Welsh.

16. It is not clear how youth support services are held to account for the work they do. The introduction of the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales was positive, however it is unclear how young people's rights enshrined in Extending Entitlement are delivered and the impact of the services on young people is not well evaluated.

The report provided recommendations for local authorities and providers, as well as recommendations for Welsh Government. These are dealt with separately below.

### **Recommendations for Providers and Local Authorities**

#### **Recommendations 1 – 4 Local authorities should:**

**Recommendation 1:** Consult meaningfully with young people, so that they can influence the planning for and evaluation of the services available to them at a local level

**Recommendation 2:** Provide safe spaces for young people in local areas so that they have access to services, and activities, which support their development as individuals, and as members of their local community

**Recommendation 3:** Make sure that strategic plans have clear priorities informed by local intelligence for services that support young people

**Recommendation 4:** Make sure that local authority departments and other bodies work in partnership to provide services for young people, which addresses their needs

#### **Recommendations 5 – 7 Providers should:**

**Recommendation 5:** Make sure that their services enable young people to identify for themselves their interests, goals and needs

**Recommendation 6.** Work in partnership at a local and regional level to improve access to the range of services for young people

**Recommendation 7.** Make sure that professional youth work standards and principles are used by workers in all youth support service projects

Welsh Government will:

Work with providers, local authorities, and the Interim Youth Work Board to help drive forward activity against each of these recommendations. Our new Youth Work Strategy for Wales was co-developed with young people and the sector and they will play an important role in securing its delivery. The strategy emphasises the importance meaningful engagement with young people, partnership working, and strategic planning for the provision of quality youth work provision for young people in Wales.

Welsh Government officials and the Interim Youth Work Board will continue to work with young people and the sector in the planning and delivery of activity that will underpin and support delivery of the Strategy's aims.

## **Recommendation 8 -11 Welsh Government should**

### **Recommendation 8**

Welsh Government should provide the policy basis through which youth work, as a way of working with young people, becomes embedded in all services

Welsh Government response:

**Accept:** The new Youth Work Strategy for Wales articulates our vision for youth work in Wales - that it will be accessible and inclusive: valued and understood; and support volunteer and paid professional to improve their practice so that young people are able to thrive. In particular, ensuring 'youth work is valued and understood' will be crucial if youth work approaches are to be embedded in all services. Similarly, support for those working with young people to learn about and benefit from youth work approaches will be key. It is for these reason that the new Strategy commits us to the development of both a Communications and Marketing Plan for youth work in Wales, and a Workforce Development Plan.

### **Recommendation 9.**

Welsh Government should: Clarify the use of the terminology 'youth work', 'youth service' and 'youth support services' in Wales in order to provide a universally understood language for policy development and delivery.

Welsh Government response:

**Accept:** Through the new Youth Work Strategy the Interim Youth Work Board will be giving consideration to the development of a future sustainable model for its delivery. Part of their work, which will be taken forward with young

people and the sector, will include giving consideration to roles, responsibilities, and terminology at all tiers in the system.

### **Recommendation 10.**

Welsh Government should: Establish ways of holding local authorities and their partners to account for the quality, range and types of youth support service they provide in their area

#### Welsh Government response:

**Accept:** In 2019/20 the Welsh Government has updated the Planning Criteria and Terms and Conditions of the Youth Support Grant in order strengthen accountability, decision making, and the planning and delivery of those youth work and youth support services that are funded through the grant.

Further, the new Youth Work Strategy commits us to piloting and rolling out a model for establishing sufficient levels of youth work at a local level, as well as strengthening accountability mechanisms at all tiers across a unified youth service.

### **Recommendation 11.**

Welsh Government should: Include the qualification, training and ongoing development of youth workers in the national Youth Work Strategy for Wales

#### Welsh Government response:

**Accept:** The new Youth Work Strategy includes 5 aims, one of which is that '*Voluntary and paid professional youth work staff are supported throughout their careers to improve their practice*'. The Implementation Plan, scheduled for publication October 2019, will identify the activities and timelines for delivering against this vision, including a Workforce Development Plan aimed at supporting and improving both initial training and ongoing development of youth workers in Wales.

### **Publication details.**

The report was published in July 2018 and can be found here:

<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/youth-support-services-wales>

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.



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