

Report title:**Research to inform development of the youth work strategy****Report details**

This report relates to a research paper that Welsh Government commissioned Wavehill researchers to produce to inform the future work of the Interim Youth Work Board in its aim to deliver the vision outlined in the Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2019. The research aimed to consolidate what is known about the youth work sector in Wales and develop a theory of change to inform a future sustainable delivery model for youth work. Two high level objectives for the work were set:

- to generate an understanding of effective youth work interventions and current evidence about the variety and quality of youth work models that exist across Wales, including any barriers and opportunities that should be addressed;
- to facilitate the Interim Youth Work Board to create a shared theory of change for the Youth Work Strategy based on that understanding.

This report is being published at the same time as the initial report from the Board. The Board report provides a direction of travel towards a sustainable delivery model for youth work in Wales (part of the Board's remit) based on the work completed by the Board so far. The research will be used to feed into the final report that the Board will publish later in the year and inform the future work of the Board's Strategy Participation Groups (SPGs).

Summary of main findings.

The main findings from the report can be summarised as follows:

1. Youth work can be defined by the purpose of the work being done with young people, its focus on holistically developing them and involving them as empowered partners;
2. The evidence base on the benefits of youth work in Wales is not very strong, although it has been strengthening in the last few years. Evidence from other countries highlights 'soft outcomes' including positive interpersonal relationships and self-confidence, as youth works biggest benefit. These soft outcomes can improve hard outcomes like educational participation and attainment;
3. There is an inconsistent and incomplete picture of youth work provision in Wales. Reporting requirements mean there is a good picture of what is delivered by statutory providers in Wales, but much less is known about provision delivered by voluntary and third sector organisations;
4. Welsh Government figures suggest participation in youth work has decreased since 2013/14. In 2018/2019 around 15 per cent of 11-25 year

olds¹ in Wales were registered members of local authority-delivered youth work compared to 20 per cent of all 11-21 year olds in Wales in 2013/14.² There is no evidence as to whether this has been offset by increases in voluntary and third sector delivery. Stakeholder perceptions were that this may be due to reduced funding and a focus in this period on targeted youth work;

5. Disparities exist between local authorities in relation to volume of youth work, the nature of provision, the number of people engaged by this provision, the funding available to support it and the volume of youth work delivered in Welsh. Nationally, 17 per cent of local authority-delivered youth work projects are delivered entirely or mainly through the medium of Welsh however some local authorities are delivering all their youth work projects in Welsh, whilst some are delivering none. Without data on the voluntary and third sector it is difficult to assess the extent that young people can engage with Welsh medium youth work;
6. Engaging young people in their language of choice is essential to successful youth work. Youth work also contributes to national strategies like *Cymraeg 2050*;
7. The availability of funding to support youth work in Wales was identified by stakeholders as the main challenge facing the sector. Stakeholders across all sectors felt they were being asked to do more with less funding, which was compounded by a shift towards placing more emphasis on targeted provision towards employment outcomes in commissioning, similar to the European picture. Previous research found the 2014-2018 Youth Work Strategy focused too much on targeted provision, and stakeholder interviews in this research found more could be done to protect open access youth work in the new strategy;
8. Stakeholders felt youth work is misunderstood by policy makers, partly due to the lack of an evidence base about the benefits of youth work, particularly with regard to elements of universal provision not working towards a specific goal;
9. The effects of Covid-19 will present long term challenges for the sector, despite adaptations youth work organisations have made. Future restrictions mean existing digital delivery will need to be more closely integrated in service models, although stakeholders are keen to avoid digital delivery replacing face-to-face provision in the long term. Emerging evidence suggests the pandemic has affected the mental health of young people which will present challenges for future youth service delivery. The pandemic has allowed organisations to embed digital delivery into their offer and for youth workers to support delivery of other services, helping advertise to other stakeholders the benefits of youth work;
10. Stakeholders felt youth work has been insufficiently differentiated from other ways of working with young people that do not work with them in the same way;
11. Stakeholders felt that funding should be greater ring-fenced to establish a youth service that is accessible and inclusive to all young people in Wales. Furthermore, minimum standards should be established for what

¹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-11/youth-work-april-2018-march-2019-299.pdf>

² <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-05/youth-work-april-2013-to-march-2014.pdf>

local authorities must provide either through statutory or third sector providers;

12. Stakeholders felt that open access youth work provision and other types of provision (including other services that support young people) should be integrated. More evidence is needed to understand suitable pathways for young people from open access provision into these other types of provision;
13. Stakeholders were positive about the collaboration between the Interim Youth Work Board and Welsh Government in developing the new strategy which is a step in the right direction in terms of more collaborative working with the sector. There was concern momentum would be lost when the Board came to an end, and stakeholders supported the idea of making the Board permanent;
14. Stakeholders felt there have been insufficient resources available in the implementation of new strategies which has prevented a sustainable delivery model from being achieved. A national youth work body could be developed to achieve this;
15. Local level delivery coordination could be improved, in order to preserve and utilise built up local knowledge. The existing focus on local delivery is seen as a focus of the current model;
16. Stakeholders felt strong that it is important for young people's voices to be prominent in delivering the new youth work strategy. The principles of participation and accountability are fundamental to a children's rights approach and stakeholders felt more could be done to ensure policymakers and stakeholders are accountable to young people and include them in decisions on how youth work is designed and delivered.

Recommendations 1-9

Recommendation 1

Reflecting the lack of systematic information about youth work in Wales, particularly that which relates to non-statutory provision, Welsh Government should consider expanding the scope of the data it collects about youth work provision in Wales to include all youth work organisations in Wales, including voluntary youth work delivery. This would extend beyond existing information provided by local authorities to Welsh Government and would enable Welsh Government to establish the extent to which a universal entitlement to youth work provision has been met.

Welsh Government response

Accept: Welsh Government are committed to considering how best to expand and sharpen the evidence base surrounding youth work in Wales. Policy and statistics teams within Welsh Government intend to work closely with stakeholders from the Interim Youth Work Board, its Strategy Participation Groups and WLGA stakeholders to consider what an ideal data collection may look like, and what is achievable in the short, medium and terms. This will include how to address substantial gaps where there is currently no data routinely collected, for example from the voluntary sector.

Recommendation 2

The extent to which youth work provision is available through the medium of Welsh should be a key component of the data collection process recommended in Recommendation 1. Understanding what provision is available and where there are gaps is crucial to establishing what support is required to enable all young people who want to access youth work through the medium of Welsh to do so.

Welsh Government response:

Accept: We will ensure that Welsh language youth work is considered within the discussions with the relevant stakeholders outlined in response to recommendation 1. The Youth Work Strategy is clear that there is a need to promote and increase use of the Welsh language and culture within youth work settings. Youth work can also help achieve the aims outlined in the Cymraeg 2050 strategy. I look forward to receiving the final report from the Interim Youth Work Board that will provide recommendations about this.

Our Cymraeg 2050 Strategy is clear that provision needs to be planned for children and young people which gives them the opportunity to use or practise Welsh and instils in them positive attitudes towards the language which translates into active use. We will continue to work closely with the Welsh language task and finish group to support their valuable work and ensure youth work has a place at the table in discussions on promoting the use of Welsh language and Welsh culture.

Recommendation 3

Welsh Government should consider commissioning research into the contribution made by universal open access youth work. It should use this evidence base to justify and re-assess expenditure in this area.

Welsh Government response:

Accept in part: Welsh Government recognise that there is a need for additional evidence/collation of evidence on the positive contribution made by universal open-access youth work. This positive contribution is recognised in our Youth Work Strategy for Wales where we outlined our vision that youth work is a universal entitlement, open to all young people aged 11-25. We will work closely with the Board to consider the existing evidence, both within Wales and internationally. A decision will be taken on whether there is a need to commission research in order to expand this evidence base following the publication of the findings of the final Board report in Summer 2021.

Recommendation 4

Welsh Government should consider measures to ensure that a consistent universal open-access youth work offer is available across the country. Measures could include ring-fencing funding for open-access youth work in the

core youth work budgets provided to local authorities or establishing a duty for local authorities to make sufficient youth work provision available for young people in their area.

Welsh Government response

Accept in principle: As outlined in the Youth Work Strategy for Wales, we are committed that youth work is a universal entitlement open to all young people ages 11-25. The measures outlined in this recommendation, centre on budgeting and legislation are long term and would therefore be for the next Welsh Government to consider, following the Senedd elections in May 2021, and also following the Interim Youth Work Board's final report in the Summer 2021 to ensure consistency. In the meantime, we continue to support youth work by providing funding to local authorities and the voluntary sector via the Revenue Support Grant, the Youth Support Grant and the National Voluntary Youth Organisation Grant.

Recommendation 5

Welsh Government should consider commissioning research to understand pathways for young people from youth work into other forms of support and how youth work can work closely with more targeted forms of provision.

Welsh Government response

Accept: Welsh Government recognises that this is an important area, particularly with ensuring vulnerable young people have access to provision that best supports their needs. Initially, officials will need to undertake background work to ascertain what evidence is currently available within this area, and they will work closely with the Board and the sector on this. The information from this work will then be used to consider whether there is a clear need to commission formal research into this area following the publication of the final Board report in Summer 2021.

Recommendation 6 and 7

6. Welsh Government should consider making the role of the Board permanent or appointing it for a longer period to provide ongoing input into the development of the youth work strategy.

7. Welsh Government should use previous research to think about the future delivery model for the youth work in Wales. It should consider supporting the development of a national representative body for youth work. It should consider how statutory and voluntary providers are represented and make youth voice central to its work. It is important that the options developed are specific to the needs of the sector in Wales.

Welsh Government response:

Accept: Welsh Government have already committed to extending the lifetime of the Interim Youth Work Board into 2021. Further consideration of the future

governance structure will be undertaken following the publication of the Board's final report in Summer 2021 and the previous research will feed into this.

Recommendation 8

Welsh Government should consider how coordination of youth work provision, and coordination between youth work and other youth support services, can be best supported at a local authority level. These partnership structures should embrace the role of voluntary organisations as delivery partners working together with local authorities.

Welsh Government response:

Accept: We will continue to work with local authorities and encourage them to work closely with all partners in the youth work sector, including the voluntary sector who provide vital youth work services for many young people. We will strengthen the youth support grant criteria to support this further, underlining our commitment to support both the statutory and the voluntary sector. The relationship between youth work and playwork is being considered as part of the Ministerial Play Review which will conclude in 2021.

Recommendation 9

Welsh Government should consider how youth voice is included in national governance structures for youth work and require local authorities to include young people's voices in local authority level governance structures. Recommendations 1-8 should be understood in the context of Recommendation 9, and youth voice should be weaved into all levels of youth work planning and delivery in Wales.

Welsh Government response:

Accept: Working alongside the Board and the Young People are Thriving SPG we have already commissioned the Urdd, in collaboration with Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) Wales and Llamau to establish and manage a Young Person's Committee to work alongside the Interim Youth Work Board. Representatives from this group will also sit directly on the Board. We will continue to work closely with all grant funded organisations to ensure that young people are also involved in decision making at a local level and will continue to promote good practice at a local level through the Youth Work Excellence Awards and through our newsletter that is delivered across the sector.

Publication details.

The report will be published on 11 January 2021 on the Government Social Research page as well as the Youth Work and Engagement page on the Welsh Government website.