

Interim Youth Work Board for Wales

Time to deliver for young people
in Wales

Achieving a sustainable delivery model
for youth work services in Wales

First report

Please contact us for more information or to tell us your experience of youth services.

Interim Youth Work Board
Youth Engagement Branch
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ
e-mail: youthworkboard@gov.wales

 [@WG_Education](https://twitter.com/WG_Education)

 [Facebook/EducationWales](https://www.facebook.com/EducationWales)

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1. INTRODUCTION

“When I feel lost, scared and alone, youth work is home”.
Young person.

Youth Work in Wales has demonstrated its value to young people time and again although the impact of austerity has been devastating for the sector. Youth work has shown its resilience, but its foothold is precarious.

The impact of COVID-19 on young people is profound. Lockdowns across the UK, the local restrictions and the firebreak in Wales has seen youth work step up to the challenge. It is clear that youth work services are needed to respond and support young people but if the sector is to survive and thrive a radical transformation is required.

In this initial report we set out what we’ve learned operating in the space between Ministers, government officials, young people, and services (both youth work services and wider services supporting young people) for the past two years. If we are serious about protecting and developing youth work services for young people in Wales, we must act now to secure its future.

The pandemic has provided yet more evidence that youth work is an essential service for young people. But we need to be clear. There is no universal youth work offer for all young people between the ages of 11 and 25 living in Wales. We believe that entitlement must be realised with a clear vision and strategy for young people in Wales including a commitment to develop our youth work services.

The Children, Young People and Education Committee ‘snapshot’ inquiry¹ on youth work was a positive stimulus as was the work that Margaret Jervis published in 2018 *Our Future – A review of Extending Entitlement*.² We welcome the support Welsh

¹ National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee “*What type of youth service does Wales want? Report of the Inquiry into Youth Work*” December 2016

² https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-04/180316-our-future-a-review-of-extending-entitlement_0.pdf

Government is now giving to youth work. We want to build on that commitment and provide a challenge.

The recommendations we outline below are ambitious, bold and far-reaching and require commitment and action. Our remit as a Board is to establish a sustainable delivery model for youth work in Wales. Although our work is not yet concluded it is clear to us what the direction of travel needs to be. We are advocating for:

- new legislation.
- a national body to take responsibility for a programme of change with a regional partnership approach to inform and develop local delivery.
- the development of a new funding model.
- an innovation and outcomes framework for youth work, and
- a new digital youth work offer to young people in Wales encompassing the establishment of a youth information service and youth entitlement card.

We are doing this not to create change for its own sake. Our focus has always been on how youth work can be sustained to enrich the lives of all young people.

We set these recommendations now in the hope that in the year ahead we can work with young people, Welsh Government, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and local authorities, Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services (CWVYS) and voluntary youth work organisations, as well as organisations who rely on youth work partnerships, to make these recommendations a reality.

Keith Towler

Dusty Kennedy, Efa Gruffudd Jones, Eleri Thomas

Jo Sims, Sharon Lovell, Simon Stewart

Interim Youth Work Board for Wales

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving a Sustainable Delivery Model for Youth Work in Wales – Direction of Travel Required

We believe there are governance and delivery issues that need to be addressed and these can be summarised as follows:

Governance recommendations

Welsh Government should:

1. Establish a young people led governance structure for youth work in Wales.
2. Establish a legislative basis for youth work in Wales.
3. Set a vision for children and young people in Wales by appointing a minister within Cabinet with a portfolio that includes youth work.
4. Review the funding model for youth work.
5. Prepare to establish a national body for youth work in Wales.
6. Establish regional delivery partnerships supporting local delivery.
7. Establish an innovation and outcomes framework for youth work in Wales.
8. Strengthen the current Education Workforce Council (EWC) legislation so that the gaps in registration criteria are closed.

Delivery recommendations

Welsh Government should:

9. Work with the sector to commission a youth information service for Wales as part of a digital youth work offer.
10. Pilot and then roll out a Wales 'Youth Entitlement' card.
11. Increase the availability of youth work services through the medium of Welsh and support a pilot project to inform the work. It should also ensure that providing youth work through the medium of Welsh is a priority for the national body for youth work in Wales in the future.

12. Build on its commitment to develop and promote the youth work profession with a career structure offering progression.
13. Establish a youth work in Wales brand and a resource to co-ordinate and promote the youth work sector to its partners and to support communication across the sector itself.

Rationale for Direction of Travel

1. Welsh Government should establish a young people led governance structure for youth work in Wales.

“Giving young people a space to influence what happens and let them influence the youth work they are a part of”.
Young person.

All the structural arrangements outlined below assume a young people led approach. This means that we need to establish a mechanism for young people to be directly involved in the design and delivery of youth work services. This is something that young people themselves repeatedly call for, from being included on national bodies to having a say in how their local services are provided. In Wales we have a proud track record on young people’s participation and rights based practice. A youth participation and engagement plan that is co-designed by young people is central to what we describe below.

The Young People are Thriving Strategic Participation Group have been instrumental in enabling and supporting the facilitation of young people actively shaping the Youth Work Strategy for Wales. The message is clear – young people want to be part of decision-making processes and be involved in governance and planning. We therefore recommend that a young people led governance structure for Wales is of paramount importance.

2. Welsh Government should establish a legislative basis for youth work in Wales

“Letting people know what youth work is and making youth work better ... helps other people understand about youth work and how we are going to achieve it.”

Young Person.

The current legislative basis for youth work in Wales is weak and open to interpretation. The Learning and Skills Act 2000, which was amended to enable *Extending Entitlement*, Wales’ flagship youth policy at the time, to ‘reach’ up to the age of 25, does not refer specifically to youth work. Instead it considers ‘youth support’ work. Most people refer to the guidance document *Extending Entitlement: Support for 11 to 25 year olds in Wales 2002*³, as it does specifically talk about youth work in the context of supporting young people.

The weakness of the legislative base places youth work at risk of further budget cuts and does a disservice to the profession across the maintained and voluntary sector. (For a helpful review of the policy context for Youth Work in Wales: *Context of Youth Work in Wales, 2020*⁴ prepared for the Wales Leadership and Management Programme Steering Group).

In our view a strong legislative base would enable a universal offer for all 11-25 year olds to be realised.

The professional status of youth work in Wales needs protection and must be secured in legislation as an essential key service for young people aged 11 - 25. In addition the legislation should establish a national body for youth work in Wales, set an innovation and accountability framework, commit to a funding model, integrate or establish regional partnerships to support local delivery, establish a Wales youth information network and make provision for young people to be included in the governance of youth work in Wales.

The Board is committed to working with Welsh Government, young people and the sector to begin work on a legislative model.

³ Section 123 of Learning and Skills Act 2000 Guidance *Extending Entitlement: Support for 11 to 25 year olds in Wales. 2002*

⁴ <https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=2794>

3. Welsh Government should set a vision for children and young people in Wales by appointing a minister within Cabinet with a portfolio that includes youth work

“Youth work should have strong leadership at all levels and will benefit from collaboration.”

Young person.

Welsh Government needs to set a vision for the delivery of services and support to children and young people across all portfolios, strengthened further we believe by a ministerial appointment in the Cabinet; a Minister for Children and Young People. We feel strongly that responsibility be established for setting an over-arching vision for children and young people, providing scrutiny and oversight for the delivery of services and support, ensuring a rights based approach is delivered across portfolios with a focus on improving and enriching the lives of all children and young people in Wales, and that this must be owned by Welsh Government.

4. Welsh Government should review the funding model for youth work

“If you aren’t funding youth work, you aren’t funding my future ... sustainable means long-term and long lasting.”

Young person.

Welsh Government funds local authority youth work via the Youth Support Grant (YSG) and the Local Authority Revenue Support Grant (RSG). Whilst the YSG is based on an agreed plan to deliver youth work, the RSG is available for local authorities to spend based on their locally identified priorities. Although the RSG contains a notional amount for youth services, sometimes local authorities spend more than that, however sometimes they spend less. Welsh Government also funds the third sector via the National Voluntary Youth Organisations (NVYO) Grant Scheme.

The RSG has reduced from £44.2m in 2010/11 to £31.4m in 2018/19. Welsh Government provided a further £6.2m for core youth work services, and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework in both 2019/20 and 2020/21, and a further £2.5m for mental health and well-being and £3.7m for youth homelessness taking the total to £10m. The NVYO and CWVYS grant scheme provides £784k in 2020/21.

This funding in no way accounts for the total youth work spend in Wales but it acts as an important lever to attract funds from other sources. The voluntary sector is constantly working on fundraising that has brought significant added economic value to Wales securing monies for revenue and some capital costs (trusts, foundations, in-kind contributions, Erasmus +, Police and Crime Commissioners, private sector).

Whilst the Board was able to influence the criteria for the YSG we take the view that the current arrangements across all available funding do not yield the best return. We have seen local authority actual spend on youth work diminish despite the allocation within the RSG and voluntary sector organisations are struggling. This is not a sustainable position.

The Interim Youth Work Board is well placed to undertake a funding review and seeks a response from Welsh Government, the Welsh Local Government Association, CWVYS and the voluntary sector to commit to finding a new funding model.

The drafting of legislation outlining a statutory basis for youth work will require a resource base. We believe we need to develop a shared understanding of what is currently funded to inform and agree a new model for the future.

5. Welsh Government should prepare to establish a national body for youth work in Wales

*“It’s about young people for young people ... but it also brings together different organisations so everyone is on the same page.”
Young person.*

We have seen during the pandemic how important youth work is for young people. The establishment of the Interim Youth Work Board has resulted in a broader remit being realised in response to the expectation of the sector. The Board has worked closely with officials in the Welsh Government Youth Engagement Branch and across the youth work sector in Wales with some success but the demands on this central ‘unit’ are not sustainable in the long term.

There is a need to recognise that a central body for youth work does need to be resourced. The status of such a body would, in our view, benefit from being independent of Welsh Government.

The national body would need to be representative of the sector with equal weighting given to maintained local authority and voluntary sector members. We recognise that democratic accountability is important and so would see this operating on a social partnership basis (local authority, voluntary and private sector) with autonomy for local delivery accountable to young people, elected members and trustees.

The remit of a national body would be the co-ordination, development and provision of support to youth work services in Wales. It should also oversee funding and accountability, training and accreditation, support innovation in practice, implement a rights based approach and assist in the development of an outcomes framework whilst taking forward responsibility for delivering the Youth Work Strategy for Wales in both the Welsh and English languages.

The lifespan of the Interim Youth Work Board has been extended into 2021 but consideration will need to be given to a shadow body to cover the transition period between the work of the Board and the establishment of a national body through legislation.

6. Welsh Government should establish regional delivery partnerships supporting local delivery

“By focusing youth work on the development of young people, we’re building a better future for Wales.”

Young person.

The establishment of Local Authority Public Service Boards⁵ (PSBs) saw the demise of Children and Young People’s Partnerships (CYPPs). The loss of the CYPPs is often referred to within the youth work sector as a strategic mistake, with a lack of focus on children and young at a senior level, resulting in local delivery feeling exposed and weakened as a result. Regional Partnership Board (RPBs)⁶ bring together health boards, local authorities and the third sector to meet the care and support needs of people in their area. We have not seen much evidence to suggest that youth work services attend or contribute to these discussions at PSBs or RPBs.

⁵ Established by the Well-Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015

⁶ Established by the Social Services and Well Being Act 2014

CWVYS has a regional structure and the Principal Youth Officers Group in Wales is also considering a regional approach.

We believe there is merit in establishing a unified regional approach to multi agency strategic planning and collaboration with a key emphasis on children and young people. For youth work this would have to be linked to the co-ordinating function of the national body, to oversee and support local delivery arrangements.

7. Welsh Government should establish an innovation and outcomes framework for youth work in Wales

“The Youth Work Strategy for Wales says it will provide opportunities in safe spaces, allow youth work to be accessible, provide support for youth workers, allow youth work to be valued and understood, and is a long-term model for youth work to be delivered.”

Young person.

As things stand youth work providers are drawn in to some inspections as partners in the delivery of a service. Youth work has not, however, been subject to an inspection regime. Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales, have already committed to developing a framework approach for youth work in Wales. We welcome this as a positive move and look forward to working with them, young people and the sector to develop something that encourages innovation and establishes an outcomes framework. Further, we see this as an opportunity to promote professionalism and practice development within youth work in line with *Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes*⁷

8. Welsh Government should strengthen the current Education Workforce Council (EWC) legislation so that the gaps in registration criteria are closed

“With the right support you can achieve anything, and youth workers provide that support.”

Young person.

⁷ *Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes* October 2018, Youth Work in Wales Review Group (CWVYS, PYOG, EWC)

The legislation that underpins the current Education Workforce Council (EWC) registration of youth work staff has loopholes within it, which could result in safeguarding risks for young people, parents, guardians and the public. In summary, there are workers undertaking youth work on a paid basis who are unregistered but work in statutory and voluntary settings. They have yet to gain formal qualifications. There are also unregistered practitioners working in settings outside of the statutory and voluntary sectors, for example in housing associations, faith organisations and private settings. This is not the case in schools, further education and work based learning where all staff delivering or supporting teaching and learning are registered.

We are pleased that Welsh Government have committed to revising the existing legislation to widen who within the youth work services workforce must register with the EWC.⁸

Delivery Recommendations

9. Welsh Government should work with the sector to commission a youth information service for Wales as part of a digital youth work offer to young people

“How are you supposed to know what you are getting out of it, if you don’t even know? ... if we know what we are entitled to then we know if we are not getting it.”

Young person.

The Welsh Government is committed to extending a universal offer of youth work support to young people aged 11 to 25.

Meic⁹ provides a confidential advocacy and advice helpline service for young people up to the age of 25. However we no longer have a national information service. We have found that young people struggle to find out what is available to them locally, across Wales and internationally. The absence of a national infrastructure for information and digital youth work undermines Welsh Governments commitment to a universal youth work offer.

⁸ Current requirements are set out in *The Education Workforce Council (Registration of Youth Workers, Youth Support Workers and Work Based Learning Practitioners) Order 2016*

⁹ <https://www.meiccymru.org>

This lack of a national infrastructure for information and digital youth work severely hampered the efforts of the sector to respond to the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. The necessary restrictions on face-to-face youth work meant that digital was the only option for a lot of youth work in Wales. While individual services and practitioners in the maintained and voluntary sector responded with enthusiasm, creativity and tenacity in their efforts to reach out to young people using digital media, they did this without national frameworks, guidance and standards for how to operate safely and effectively.

It also became clear that existing concerns about digital poverty were having a real impact on the ability of young people to keep in touch with youth work, as well as with education, health and social care that was now only available online. Young people unable to access equipment or bandwidth remain doubly disadvantaged and excluded from services.

The pandemic aside, in our everyday lives, as citizens of all ages, how we access information, communicate and socialise has increasingly moved into the digital realm. In contrast, the professional lives of youth workers – particularly but not exclusively in the maintained sector – have remained largely in the analogue age.

Welsh Government should work with young people and the sector to establish a national framework for digital youth work and a youth information service. This would enable all young people to access information about the availability of youth work services and support and enable youth workers to provide that service through digital media where this is the preferred option for young people. We see this as a necessary development to complement but not replace the delivery of face-to-face youth work services. It should follow the principles agreed by the Youth Work Board's Digital Advisory Group and include:

- Nationally agreed guidelines, standards and ethical principles for digital youth work.
- Content in Welsh and English that is locally created by young people and youth workers but regionally and nationally curated.
- Recognition of the value of digital creativity as a means of engagement for youth work in its own right (for example coding, graphic design, audio and film production).

- Addresses digital poverty and its impact upon accessibility for all.
- Co-production and service design with young people as the basis for what this offer might look like.
- Service user feedback and quality assurance built in along with the ability to use information and reporting and service improvement for the youth work sector.
- Recognition of diversity and inclusion in line with what young people have told us that accessing youth work services digitally meant they felt included, sometimes for the first time, as this approach broke down barriers and increased connectivity and involvement.
- Training and workforce development to make these principles real.

10. Welsh Government should pilot and then roll out a Wales ‘Youth Entitlement’ card

“So young people know what they are entitled to.”

Young person.

Using service design methodology, encapsulating the digital youth work offer principles, work should begin on establishing a ‘Youth Entitlement’ card that would be free of charge to all 11 – 25 year olds living in Wales. Similar to the model developed in Scotland with Young Scot¹⁰. The card has the potential to:

- Be an accredited proof of age card.
- Outline what is available to young people in their local authority area, across Wales and internationally.

The card should have the capacity to also be used for:

- Money off travel concessions.
- School lunches.
- Discounts with partner retailers and leisure providers.
- Accessing a rewards programme.

¹⁰ <https://young.scot/the-young-scot-card>

11. Welsh Government should increase the availability of youth work services through the medium of Welsh and support a pilot project to inform the work. It should also ensure that providing youth work through the medium of Welsh is a priority for the national body for youth work in Wales in the future.

“It supports young people’s rights and empowers children and young people.”

Young person.

Cymraeg 2050¹¹ sets a target for having a million Welsh speakers by 2050. Youth work has an important part to play in achieving that aim. Young people have the right to receive youth work services through the medium of Welsh.

Welsh medium youth work should be strategically planned to ensure that the current fragile situation is improved, with attention given to workforce development and sufficient, sustainable funding.

The *Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011* sets out a legal framework for imposing a duty on some organisations to comply with one or more standards relating to the Welsh language. The duties resulting from the Welsh language standards mean that organisations must not treat the Welsh language less favourably than the English language, and should promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language, making it easier for people to use the Welsh language in their everyday lives. Further requirements to promote the Welsh language are specified for Local Authorities by means of an additional set of standards, called the ‘promotion standards’. Section 31 of the Welsh Language Measure states that a ‘promotion standard’ means a standard (relating to any activity) that is intended to promote or facilitate the use of the Welsh language more widely. Local Authorities should follow any guidance given by the Welsh Language Commissioner on Promotion Standards to inform their planning and provision of Welsh medium youth work whether delivered or commissioned.

¹¹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy.pdf>

Recognising language preference and providing Welsh language youth work is a necessity for a youth centred approach in Wales.

The Welsh Language Youth Work Task and Finish Group have proposed developing a pilot project to inform the work of the proposed national body for youth work in relation to delivering youth work in Welsh across Wales. The guidance produced could be used in any interim period, and should deal with planning and funding issues.

12. Welsh Government needs to build on its commitment to develop and promote the youth work profession with a career structure offering progression

“Youth workers need to be valued. If they don’t feel valued why are they there? They need to be properly trained and qualified ... we are entitled to have the best youth workers ... they need support from other youth workers.”

Young person.

The youth work sector is diverse and operates across a range of settings with a workforce of managers, paid staff and volunteers. The profession is underpinned by a clear framework of qualifications that are professionally endorsed by Education Training Standards (ETS) Wales¹² on behalf of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth and Community Workers (JNC). This provides a strong foundation from which to develop the workforce.

Feedback gathered from the sector through the Workforce Development Strategic Participation Group suggests that whilst there is a clear route to become a qualified youth worker, beyond that there is room for improvement. There is no clear understanding of the scale of the youth work workforce and how it is deployed. Funding is insufficient to support youth work training across local authorities, voluntary sector and for volunteers. There is also little opportunity for continuous professional development (CPD). This is heightened by the lack of a plan for workforce development in the youth work sector. The sector needs to move away from an approach to CPD that is piecemeal and opportunistic towards one that is systematic, progressive and sustainable.

¹² <https://www.etswales.org.uk>

There are a number of positive developments under way, including further embedding the Quality Mark¹³ and the introduction of a new programme of leadership and management development. However, until there is a fuller understanding of the scale and reach of the sector, it is difficult to determine exactly what is needed and to what extent it is required.

Estyn recently conducted a thematic review on youth work training and have made a series of recommendations.¹⁴ Those recommendations are in line with our understanding and we fully support them.

As a Board we recommend the following:

- A full mapping exercise to be undertaken on the scale and reach of the sector. This could explore any issues around recruitment and retention.
- Work with the EWC to undertake, and publish, a skills audit.
- Develop a youth work workforce development plan.
- Explore the level of funding required for youth work training for youth work paid and volunteer staff.
- Further develop qualifications and CPD.
- Work with key groups and partners to promote youth work as a career.

13. Establish a youth work in Wales brand and a resource to co-ordinate and promote the youth work sector to its partners and to support communication across the sector itself

“People need to know what youth work is ... we need youth work to be noticed. We can do this by getting other people involved.”
Young person.

¹³ <https://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/accreditation/the-quality-mark-for-youth-work-in-wales/qm-information.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-report/value-youth-work-training-sustainable-model-wales>

There are lots of good examples where funding by Welsh Government, coupled with the goodwill and own resourcing by the sector, collaborate to good effect. This is not sustainable in the long term and a public relations and marketing function would form part of the remit letter for a new national body.

In the meantime we need to identify a youth work in Wales brand with a dedicated resource to co-ordinate and promote the youth work sector to its partners and to support communication across the sector itself.

There is a considerable amount of work here which would include increasing communication across the sector, supporting delivery of the Youth Work in Wales Marketing Plan and promoting youth work to partner organisations and potential funding bodies. We see this as an important interim measure, until such time as a national body is established, as part perhaps, of a *Year of Young People* celebration during the course of the next Senedd term (2021 – 2026).

3. WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TELL US ABOUT YOUTH WORK

Throughout this report the voice of young people is provided and is taken from the various conversations we have facilitated as a Board with the help of the youth work sector in Wales.

Before the pandemic and at the outset of our work, with the help of the Young People are Thriving Strategic Participation Group, we initiated the *Let's Talk Youth Work* conversations with young people. We wanted to understand what young people think about their youth work services, how services should be developed further and to sense check with young people the recommendations we are making as a result.

The *Let's Talk* sessions were facilitated by youth workers from voluntary and local authority provision across Wales. Holding conversations with young people in their youth work settings on a one to one or group basis enabled young people to have their voice heard by the Board.

With the help of Youth and Community BA students at Glyndŵr University a poster was produced about the Youth Work Strategy for young people. This was accompanied with a video where young people explain how the strategy is helping them and the youth workers who support them

<https://gov.wales/youth-work-strategy-through-voices-young-people>

It became clear that young people wanted representation on the Youth Work Board itself to help shape the future of youth work services now and for future generations. As a result, we advertised for young people to join the Board and 25 applications from across Wales were received.

At that point the pandemic and national lockdown suspended the recruitment. We decided to maintain contact with all who applied and held discussions via Zoom in Welsh and English. In addition, we were really pleased to receive feedback from the Pembrokeshire Youth Assembly and other groups of young people including some from EYST (Ethnic Youth Support Team) on how Covid-19 has impacted on young people in the BAME community. In total we estimate that over 1,000 young people have so far contributed to the work.

As we progress we are now working with young people to set up their own youth work panel that will link directly to the Interim Youth Work Board to maintain and build on the momentum.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales has recently published *Coronavirus and Me*¹⁵. Over 23,700 children and young people aged 3-18 shared their views through the *Coronavirus and Me* survey. It outlines the worries children have, how they are feeling during the crisis and shines a light on their experiences during the pandemic. Young people of secondary age had more negative feelings than younger children, with 16% feeling sad 'most of the time'.

"The pandemic has highlighted just how important youth work is to children, young people and their communities. At the earliest stages of the pandemic, we saw youth workers changing the way they work to reach young people, as well as supporting community efforts such as supporting learning in school hubs. For so many young people, youth work is an important part of their lives and essential to their development into adulthood."

"On countless occasions as Commissioner I've heard directly from young people that their local youth work project or group has made a fundamental difference to their ability to engage with their community, peers and education and has brought additional enjoyment and purpose to their lives. As we continue to struggle with the ongoing pandemic, young people are going to need the relationship based approach that youth work brings more than ever."

Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales.

There is so much richness in what young people tell us about the value of youth work in their lives. The benefits to young people could be summarised as being a service that:

- Provides safe spaces and trusted adults.
- Builds confidence, self esteem and identity.

¹⁵ https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FINAL_formattedCVRep_EN.pdf

- Helps to develop new skills and abilities.
- Provides opportunity to be creative and expressive.
- Helps to develop respect for others.
- Helps to maintain or work towards positive mental health.
- Helps to develop a better understanding of social relationships promoting inclusion and diversity.
- Increases their participation in decision making.
- Provides opportunities for fun and play.

“Youth work can help us to (be) our best and lead us the good way ... the relationship between young people and youth workers helps young people grow.”

Young person.

Youth work doesn't just mean providing a response to pick up those who fall between the cracks, it's about casting a wide or universal opportunity, one that is accessible, where young people build social and wider networks, have safe spaces to go, and trusted adults to rely on.

Given the benefits of youth work for young people this is both desirable and achievable and speaks to Welsh Governments rights based approach.

4. RIGHTS BASED APPROACH TO YOUTH WORK IN WALES

“Accessible for everyone to use aged 11-25. No matter their identity, background or needs.”

Young person.

We see youth work firmly rooted in a rights based approach with the direct involvement of young people in the design and delivery of every stage.

In Wales the *Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011* places a duty on Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) when making decisions about proposed new policies or legislation or when reviewing or changing existing policies.

Youth work practice is driven by the voluntary principle that views the young person as an individual, beginning from where they are at and encouraging them to go beyond where they start. Youth work has a value base that is centred on inclusion and equality and is grounded in respect for young people.

“Young people have the right to express themselves and be safe.”

Young person.

Young people as well as youth workers and youth support workers often refer to the trusted relationship. The importance of having an adult outside your family or friendship group who is able to be there for you. An adult who offers advice, advocacy, support and opportunity. This is an inclusive approach that is centred on the individual.

“If not accessible, nobody would know, everyone should have the opportunity.”

Young person.

By inclusive we mean creating an offer or opportunity that is welcoming, participatory and values the voices of everyone. To do that we need to identify, understand and actively remove barriers that exist for certain groups. We recognise that work is needed so that youth work can be delivered across Wales in this way. You only have to look at the availability of youth work in the Welsh language, or listen to the experience of young people who say

their race, sex, gender, disability, faith or heritage often leaves them feeling left outside, to see that aspiration and reality are too far apart.

There is no need to redefine what youth work is or what it sets out to do. This is well established and in *Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes 2018*¹⁶ the Youth Work in Wales Review Group (CWVYS the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services, PYOG Principal Youth Officers Group and EWC Education Workforce Council) define Youth Work as:

“Youth work in Wales is based primarily on a voluntary relationship between young people and youth workers. The Youth Service is a universal entitlement, open to all young people within the specified age range 11-25.”

We need to be clear. We support this definition but the universal entitlement for all 11-25 year olds living in Wales is not capable of being delivered given the capacity restraints the youth work sector is working within. We believe that entitlement must be realised with a clear vision and strategy for young people in Wales including a commitment to develop the capacity of our youth work services.

Principles and Purposes sets out the Five Pillars of Youth Work in Wales describing opportunities for learning that are educative, expressive, participative, inclusive and empowering. When you understand the strength of what is described here it becomes much easier to understand why young people value youth work as highly as they do. They see it as both a right and an entitlement.

¹⁶ <https://www.cwvys.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/YOUTH-WORK-IN-WALES-PRINCIPLES-AND-PURPOSES.pdf>

5. YOUTH WORK'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

“(I feel) uncertain about the future, no answers are being provided.”

Young person.

With the onset of lockdown in March 2020, the way in which vital youth work services and support for young people were delivered shifted seemingly overnight. With new strict social distancing in place, voluntary and maintained services were faced with a difficult problem: how to continue their work with young people, many of whom were extremely vulnerable. However, it was in this difficult context that the creativity and innovation of the youth work sector shone through. Driven by its commitment to ensuring young people's rights, entitlements, and in supporting them to understand their responsibilities, youth workers - both volunteer and paid professionals - began exploring new ways of engaging with the young people they worked with.

Within a short space of time many youth work services were delivering support however they could. Youth work was taking place on doorsteps, in public spaces, in schools and hub settings, over the phone, and in digital spaces – through one-to-one sessions and group work online, and via the provision of digital information. This work extended a lifeline to young people around the country, and particularly the most vulnerable among them, helping them to reconnect with their peers, access new safe spaces online, and engage with trusted adults who were able to provide advice and guidance. In addition to this, youth workers found themselves building stronger relationships with parents, carers and families as part of their efforts to engage the young people that live with them.

“Being involved in online youth work has given me a routine only thing lost is face-to-face physical contact.” Young Person.

Through these approaches youth work has continued and often strengthened its contribution to different government agendas, inadvertently helping to deliver one of its own strategic objectives, that youth work be valued and understood. This has been achieved through:

- Supporting formal education by providing learning support for those studying from home or in the classroom.

- Improving health outcomes by keeping young people aware of how to maintain good physical and mental health.
- Tackling loneliness and isolation by engineering social support, activities and networks with their peers online; or working with police to ensure effective engagement with young people during this difficult time.

The youth work sector has also been successful in ensuring that young people have a real voice in the decisions being made and making sure young people feel they are being listened to.

The pressure on our youth work services has been demanding. One youth work manager in a local authority described how things are:

“I’ve just accepted that we are in constant high alert mode! Juggling emergency response with operational norms, and literally just come out of another thematic review meeting with Estyn to discuss our approach since September to supporting learning and vulnerable learners. At the same time rejigging the team to respond to requests from the Police to provide detached work through lockdown (which we will), but getting those risk assessments prioritised and signed off all takes energy and time!”
Local Authority Youth Work Manager.

There is no doubt that this work is a key essential service. This is where the weak legislative basis shines a light on a real deficit. Youth work is not a designated essential key service and as such those who were working in such a way have not benefited from that recognition. It is true that many local authorities did see their staff as essential key workers but many practitioners across local authorities and within the voluntary sector did not have that recognition. This is something we feel needs to be addressed in legislation.

Alongside, and as part of these efforts by practitioners, the contribution of young people to the fight against COVID-19 has been vital and reflects well on both young people’s attitude and understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves. The overwhelming majority of young people have abided by lockdown measures and many have supported their communities in different ways, often caring for those who were shielding or needed support.

Engagement with young people conducted by the youth work sector and the Interim Youth Work Board itself found that while, for the most part, young people were missing youth clubs and other social activities, many had found the online youth work offer, outreach work, and youth information provided helpful and convenient to use.

The youth work sector itself has faced significant challenges during this period. In some local authorities, staff were re-deployed to other duties. In the voluntary sector the need to furlough staff and maintain levels of funding has demonstrated fragility. Some are forecasting serious financial uncertainty.

CWVYS has surveyed its members and has recently published the *CWVYS Report on the Impact of COVID-19*.¹⁷ Whilst it shows how creative the sector has been in responding to the crisis it also reports serious concerns about the future in relation to the impact of furloughing, continuation of funding and basic survival.

Case Study: Urdd Gobaith Cymru

Urdd Gobaith Cymru, established in 1922, is a national voluntary Welsh language youth work provider. Its turnover (pre-COVID) for 2020/21 was projected to be £11.5 million, 81% of this is generated through its own commercial activities, the Urdd's economic value to Wales was £32 million and employed 320 staff. The pandemic has resulted in a loss of income, projected turnover for 2020/21 will now be £2.8 million. 80% of this is projected to come from public funds. The Urdd has lost £8.7 million of income that is generated from its residential centres, membership fees and community provision. The Urdd now employ 150 staff (reduced by 54%).

This has had a huge impact on its services, and predominantly on young staff and those in rural communities where there is little alternative employment. The loss of income means the Urdd cannot plug gaps and match fund jobs and provision where funding was scarce, therefore this will mean the loss of Urdd Welsh language provision across Wales. It has highlighted the fragility of the funding model for consistent youth work provision in Welsh across Wales.

¹⁷ <https://www.cwvys.org.uk/cwvys-report-on-the-impact-of-covid-19/>

Despite the best efforts of the entire youth work sector, and the enriched offer via digital platforms, it is natural that young people are now starting to want services to reopen safely. They want to reengage with their friends in safe spaces, have fun, take part in activities and have more routine to their lives. The challenge for youth work providers, in the face of increasing uncertainty, is how they can meet that demand.

“My main point that I think it was good that we are now adapting to a young persons world. We are moving with the times and I think we need to accept that as a whole in society rather than be resistant to that. But we shouldn’t under look the value of face to face work and reminding each other that we are humans!”

Young person.

According to population forecasts by Welsh Government Stats Wales, the population of 11 – 25 year olds in 2020 stands at 560,707. It is forecast to increase to 573,572 by 2030¹⁸. The 0-25 population today is approximately 30% of the total population and will be 28% of the population by 2030. It is difficult to quantify how many young people actually access a youth work service but it is likely to be less than 20% of the total.

Given the way in which youth work has proven its value and is seen as a key service by young people, it is hard to argue that it could respond to an increase in demand. That demand is likely to rise however as mental health and well-being concerns increase as a result of the growing pressures young people are facing with uncertainty in nearly every aspect of their daily lives.

‘The Senedd’s Children, Young People and Education Committee has been told that children and young people could experience the ‘collateral damage’ of the COVID-19 pandemic. Losing access to their schools, youth services and being more isolated from their friends could clearly have a significant impact on young people’s

¹⁸ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Population-and-Migration/Population/Projections/National/2018-based/populationprojections-by-year-age>

mental health and well-being. Through our Committee's scrutiny of youth work we already know the incredibly valuable role these services can play in supporting and enriching young people's lives. We have recently heard directly from youth service providers about how they have been innovative, adapting their services to make sure they continue to support young people in these recent months.'

'Managing the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people needs to be a top priority for the Welsh Government. Delivering universal, open access, and bilingual youth services must be a key part of that.'

Lynne Neagle MS, Chair Children, Young People and Education Committee.

Building a sustainable delivery model for youth work in Wales is now a matter of some urgency.

6. YOUTH WORK'S CONTRIBUTION ACROSS GOVERNMENT PORTFOLIOS

“There has been lots of great work on mental health and what support is available in your area, this should be developed further.”
Young person.

Youth work practice and approaches role model the expectations and behaviours identified in the *Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*¹⁹, contributing to the seven wellbeing goals and delivering in line with the sustainable development principles. It will continue to do this by working toward prevention and long term outcomes, collaborating with young people and practitioners, and developing integrated solutions that directly involve service users.

“Developing skills around team work, resilience, emotional intelligence and empathy will be more important than ever as the ways we live and work are changing quickly. We can no longer think of these skills being imparted by teachers alone. A holistic package of education delivered by a broad range of ‘educators’ in partnership with young people is what is needed not only to ensure that they can access the jobs of the future but to also ensure they can have a life well lived.”

Sophie Howe, Future Generations Commissioner.

As set out in the Youth Work Strategy 2019²⁰, youth work brings significant benefits to young people. This alone provides a robust rationale for investing in its delivery. However, this is amplified when considering the benefits accumulated to Wales by supporting young people to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

A sustainable future for youth work in Wales should also mean young people are enabled to question things and challenge injustice anywhere in the world, and that this understanding and awareness of the world should be intrinsic to youth work. We have seen this within the Black Lives Matter movement and the way in which young people have championed concerns about the environment and global security.

¹⁹ <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>

²⁰ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/youth-work-strategy-for-wales.pdf>

Within *Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes* and the *National Occupational Standards*²¹ the role youth work has to play in global citizenship and issues of sustainability are clearly set out.

Youth work in Wales contributes to a number of government priorities including, but not limited to achieving prosperity for all, achieving excellence, equity and wellbeing in education, and tackling poverty and reducing the inequality gap and disadvantage that have been exacerbated under COVID-19.

Play and youth work policy overlap and there is a need to ensure that there is coherence so that sufficiency in play opportunities for children might also be echoed in the provision of sufficient youth work opportunities for young people in Wales. The Ministerial Play Review²² has actively sought youth work involvement in its work.

Similarly there is a strong overlap between Youth Work and Youth Volunteering. Many youth work practitioners began their youth work journey as a young person attending a youth club or activity, then became a volunteer before developing a career interest. Youth work has a strong 'grow your own' culture and actively supports community engagement and activity through a citizenship model.

Alongside this the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) is lead partner in Wales for #PowerofYouth. This 5 year campaign aimed to increase social action (namely volunteering, fundraising, campaigning) of young people aged 10-20, by gaining support from voluntary, public and private sector. The campaign is due to end in December 2020 and the WCVA are actively exploring what the legacy of this will be in Wales. An opportunity therefore exists to align and integrate youth work and youth volunteering.

Increasing youth work opportunities and experiences in Welsh will contribute to the ambitions of *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers (2017)*, by providing more opportunities for young people to learn and use Welsh in social situations beyond the school gate or home.

²¹ <http://www.youthworkwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/National-Occupational-Standards-for-Youth-Work-2002.pdf>

²² <https://gov.wales/written-statement-update-ministerial-play-review>

“Mae cynnig cyfleoedd i bobl ifanc gymdeithasu trwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg tu allan i furiau’r ysgol yn hanfodol os ydym am gyrraedd y miliwn o siaradwyr.”

“Mae’r Urdd, y Ffermwyr Ifanc a’r Mentrau Iaith yn cynnig rhai cyfleoedd gwerthfawr i bobl ifanc gymdeithasu, ac mae’r gwaith maent yn ei wneud yn glodwiw iawn. Ond mae hefyd angen i adrannau ieuenctid o fewn pob awdurdod lleol gymryd cyfrifoldeb ac integreiddio’r Gymraeg i’w gweithgareddau, gan sicrhau fod siaradwyr Cymraeg o fewn eu timoedd gwasanaethau ieuenctid. Dylent hefyd sicrhau bod unrhyw waith a gomisiynir yn cael ei gynnig drwy’r Gymraeg.”

“Hoffwn hefyd weld colegau a phrifysgolion yn gosod targed ar gyfer denu siaradwyr Cymraeg i’r proffesiwn, fel bod gennym gynrychiolaeth deg o siaradwyr Cymraeg yn y maes.”

“Providing opportunities for young people to socialise through the medium of Welsh outside school is essential if we are to reach the million speakers.”

“The Urdd, Young Farmers and Mentrau Iaith offers valuable opportunities for young people to socialise, and the work they do is very commendable. But there is also a need for youth departments within local authorities to take responsibility and integrate the Welsh language into their activities, ensuring that there are Welsh speakers within their youth services. They should also ensure that any work commissioned is offered through the medium of Welsh.”

“I would also like to see colleges and universities set a target for attracting Welsh speakers into the profession, so that we have a fair representation of Welsh speakers working in the youth sector.”
Aled Roberts, Welsh Language Commissioner.

Youth Work will play an important role in delivering on some of the key commitments in *A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care* (2018), ensuring equity in physical and mental health outcomes by supporting young people to make healthy lifestyle choices and signposting them to support.

Youth Work also has a role in delivering on the *Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales*²³ as it seeks to develop integrated approaches to prevention, trauma informed practice and a child first response to those at risk of offending. We know that building a sense of belonging, supporting young people to develop resilience and understand the impact of their emotions and actions also directly contributes to reducing the risk of exploitation or criminal activity

Attending youth work provision will also help to combat loneliness and isolation, something which young people report feeling under lockdown measures, and promotes community cohesion, with young people being supported to understand their rights, exercise their voice, and participate in the decisions that affect them.

Youth work services make a direct contribution to the economy of Wales and also impact indirectly by helping to build the skills in young people that are valued by employers, and through invest to save approaches that reduce more costly interventions further down the line.

Finally, a lot of youth work is actually very enriching providing opportunity to participate and develop interests in the arts, culture and sport.

²³ https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/youth-justice-blueprint_0.pdf

A sustainable youth work offer and the seven wellbeing goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015



Figure 1: A Sustainable Youth Work Offer and the seven wellbeing goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Source: Future Generations Commissioner for Wales (2020)

7. BUILDING MOMENTUM

“Its important to stay in touch giving young people a chance to have their voices heard in decision making and planning.”

Young person.

Following the appointment of the Interim Youth Work Board for Wales we have worked in a collaborative way with young people, the youth work sector, Welsh Government and with partner organisations who rely on a youth work partnership to deliver.

We have sought to build a movement for change, a systems leadership approach, to secure a sustainable delivery model for youth work in Wales. The youth work sector and its partners have responded to the opportunity to work with us and on delivering the Youth Work Strategy with enthusiasm and commitment.

The Terms of Reference for the Interim Youth Work Board

<https://gov.wales/interim-youth-work-board/termsreference>

The pandemic paused the Board’s policy remit from March until October while efforts were switched to supporting the youth work response to COVID-19. The Board’s final report will now be submitted in 2021.

The timeline below tells a tale of how much has been achieved by the youth work sector in a short space of time since the Board’s arrival. It demonstrates a clear momentum in favour of securing a sustainable long-term future for youth work in Wales

Date	Activity	Comment
October 2018	Appointment of Interim Youth Work Board.	Keith Towler (Chair), Dusty Kennedy, Efa Gruffudd Jones, Eleri Thomas, Jo Sims, Sharon Lovell, Simon Stewart.
October 2018 – December 2020	Interim Youth Work Board Meetings.	16 meetings of the Board in 2 years.
April 2019	Additional Youth Support Grant monies made available for Mental Health and Well	Made available by Welsh Government with revised criteria established.

	Being and Youth Homelessness.	
24 June 2019	Publication of Youth Work Strategy for Wales.	
September 2019	Strategic Participation Groups aligned to the Youth Work Strategy were established: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valued and Understood SPG. • Workforce Development SPG. • Young People are Thriving SPG. • Accessible and Inclusive SPG. 	Membership of the Groups drawn from across the Youth Work Sector and with involvement of young people.
September 2019	Additional Working Groups established: Welsh Language. Digital Youth Work. Marketing Group.	Membership of the Groups drawn from across the Youth Work Sector and with involvement of young people.
October 2019	<i>Let's Talk</i> – conversations begin with young people about youth work in Wales.	<i>Let's Talk</i> events with young people facilitated by youth work practitioners across Wales feeding into the Board.
January 2020	EWC commissioned to develop Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales.	Funded by WG. Development process underway.
5 February 2020	Work plans for each of the SPGs were published.	
February 2020	Invitation to young people to submit applications to join the Interim Youth Work	In response to young people asking for a voice at the Board. 25 applications were

	Board sent out.	received.
3 March 2020	Poster for Youth Work Strategy 2019 published and a video released to explain how the strategy helps them and their youth workers.	Developed by young people to help others understand what the Youth Work Strategy sets out to do.
4 March 2020	Youth Work Wales Conference .	
31 March 2020	The Board's policy work put on hold by COVID-19. The Board assume leadership role for youth work during the pandemic.	All the SPGs and some groups suspended.
March – May 2020	The Board responded to safeguarding information requests.	Overnight the youth work sector had shifted delivery to digital work and this raised new questions that needed support.
March – October 2020	11 Youth Work Wales Bulletins were published with a focus on supporting youth work's response to COVID-19. Subjects included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding. • Youth Information. • Participation. • Youth Work Value and Impact. • Employability and Skills. • EYST Guest Editor special edition. • Mental Health and Well-Being. 	Published by Welsh Government with contributions from the Board and across the Sector.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Development. 	
23 – 30 June 2020	Youth Work Week in Wales.	Went ahead online with a number of contributions across the Youth Work Sector.
July 2020	Day Workshop held with the Sector on COVID-19 .	Chaired by the Board and hosted by Welsh Government via Microsoft Teams.
July 2020	Wavehill Consultancy appointed to conduct Youth Work Strategy Research (consolidating what is known about youth work in Wales) and develop a theory of change.	Brief developed by Interim Youth Work Board and commissioned by Welsh Government. Wavehill will publish in January 2021.
20 August 2020	<i>COVID-19 Guidance to Support Youth Work Services with a Safe and Phased Increase of Operations.</i>	Published by Welsh Government.
August 2020	The Board held meetings with young people who had applied to join the Board.	Purpose of these meetings was to seek views on impact of COVID on young people. Application process was suspended in favour of inviting these young people to continue working with the Board.
9 October 2020	Youth Work in Wales Excellence Awards Ceremony.	A digital event this year via You Tube.
October 2020	SPGs meet to update their work plans.	SPGs restart work as policy work suspension is lifted.
25 November	Joint SPG Meeting to	Revised work plans

2020	review all work plans and to identify interdependencies.	to be published on Interim Youth Work Board website.
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We are committed to using the remainder of our term during 2021 to build on the momentum established and to deliver on the direction of travel we have provided in this initial report.

Building a sustainable delivery model for youth work in Wales is now a matter of some urgency.

It is time to deliver for young people in Wales

8. WITH THANKS TO ...

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to:

All the young people who have contributed to this work.

All the youth work practitioners and managers who are working so creatively in the Strategic Participation Groups and Task Finish Groups – without your commitment the progress we have made would not be possible.

Sophie Howe, Future Generations Commissioner.

Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Aled Roberts, Welsh Language Commissioner.

Chris Llewelyn, Welsh Local Government Association.

Lynne Neagle MS, Chair of the Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee.

Members and Trustees of CWVYS (Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services).

Principal Youth Officers in Wales.

Police and Crime Commissioners in Wales.

Education Workforce Council.

Estyn.

Youth and Community Work BA (Hons) students at Glyndŵr University.

... for all your support and interest in Youth Work in Wales.

Officials in Welsh Government Youth Engagement Branch for your professionalism and commitment to the youth work sector in Wales.

And ...

To the volunteers, youth support workers, youth workers and managers who make up youth work services in Wales. Your commitment to young people is beyond question.