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Analysis for Policy

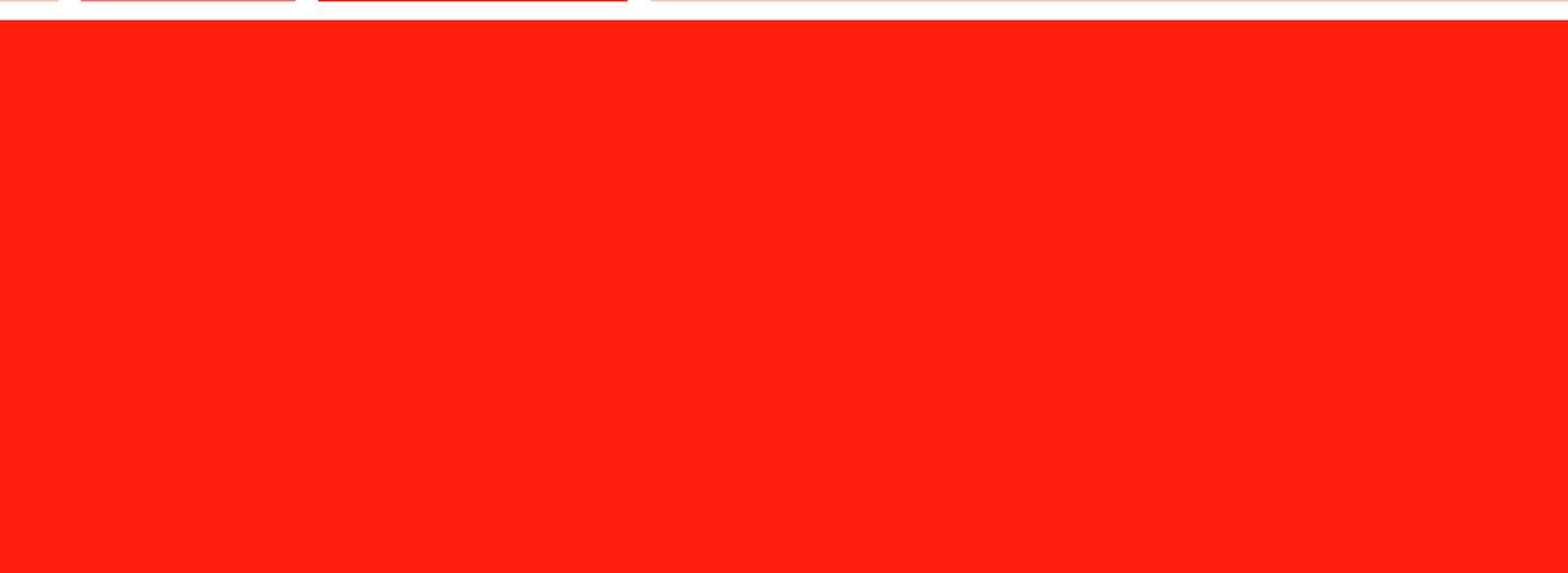
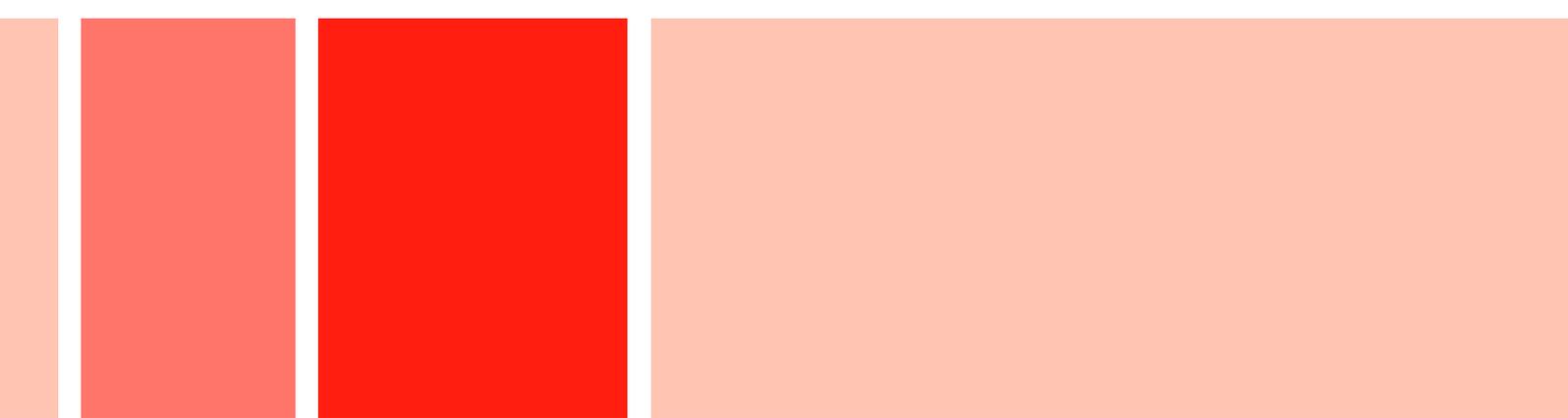


Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Ymchwil gymdeithasol
Social research

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Evaluation of the National Youth Service Strategy for Wales (Summary report)



Evaluation of the National Youth Service Strategy for Wales

Arad Research

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Assembly Government

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Welsh Assembly Government Social Research, 2010

ISBN

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Introduction and background

1. This report presents a summary of the findings of the evaluation of the National Youth Service Strategy for Wales: Young People, youth work, Youth Service (the Strategy) commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government and undertaken by Arad Research. The evaluation took place between October 2009 and July 2010.
2. The aims of the evaluation were defined by the Welsh Assembly Government as being:
 - to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy to date in achieving goals set out in Welsh Assembly Government policies and strategies; and
 - to identify and consider the impacts of strategy delivery arrangements across Wales, local areas and regions, both for individuals and providers.
- 1.1 The specific objectives of this evaluation, were agreed as being to:
 - assess the success of the strategy so far, in its aim of enhancing the ability of the Youth Service to deliver a wide range of informal and non-formal learning opportunities for young people between the ages of 11-25 which they choose to engage in;
 - assess the success of the strategy in setting realistic strategic goals for all Youth Service partner organisations to achieve within an appropriate timescale;
 - identify any barriers or constraints that have impeded the progress of the strategy to date;
 - collect opinions on how best to support practitioners in recording evidence of the impact of strategy activities on the active participation, skills development and emotional competence of beneficiaries; and
 - provide recommendations for possible future development of the Strategy and or the processes / activities within it.
3. The National Youth Service Strategy for Wales was launched in March 2007, providing a vision for youth work in Wales and its role in contributing to the Assembly's policy agendas to support young people. It included an action plan

to promote a more integrated and coordinated approach to the delivery of youth work across Wales. It also sought to ensure that young people have a voice in shaping the youth work services provided for them and are able to influence wider policy developments that impact upon them.

4. The research involved reviewing key documents relating to the delivery of the strategy; collecting evidence from practitioners through a survey and qualitative interviews; further interviews with wider stakeholders and with higher education institutions; follow-up visits to six local areas to collect more in-depth qualitative evidence and discussions with young people during visits to maintained and voluntary sector youth clubs. The study would not have been possible without the time and effort generously given by these various partners and the evaluation team is grateful to all who contributed.
5. Evidence collected during the evaluation was analysed thematically, reflecting the priorities and topics set out in the National Youth Service Strategy. Each of these is addressed below.

Resources for youth service provision

6. The total income for the maintained Youth Service in Wales increased during the lifetime of the Strategy, rising from £36.7m to £44.5m. This is, in part, due to additional funding tied to the delivery of the Strategy. Local authorities also benefitted from greater funding drawn from a range of additional sources. The evaluation found, however, that there are significant variations in budgets allocated for Youth Service provision by local authorities.
7. The additional investment secured during the Strategy's lifetime served to increase the amount spent across Wales per young person. Spending increased from £63 per head in 2006-07 to £74 per head in 2008-09, an increase of 17.5%. Spending per young person, however, varies considerably across local authorities, ranging from £26 per head to £135 per head in 2008-09.

8. Many practitioners welcomed the opportunities presented as a result of the additional funding linked to the Strategy. Senior managers noted that additional capital and revenue funding had an impact, leading to the introduction of new services for young people, particularly enabling the delivery of additional outreach and detached youth services.
9. Some youth workers consider that variations in spending lead to inequalities in terms of the quality and range of opportunities for young people. A lack of funding remains the key challenge facing organisations delivering services to young people, with budgets likely to come under increased pressure in coming years.
10. There is scope for local authorities to increase the funding allocated to Youth Service budgets to better reflect funding amounts set out in the core Welsh Assembly Government grant. Some practitioners suggest that this may be more likely if local Youth Services were required to work towards common national standards.

Integrated policy development and delivery

11. The National Youth Service Strategy aimed to establish a new integrated structure, linking national, regional and local policy making and delivery. The structures put in place since the publication of the Strategy pave the way for a more integrated approach to planning Youth Services, with greater opportunities for regional collaboration at all levels.
12. The regional partnerships for both Principal Youth Officers (PYOs) and the voluntary sector are important developments that are consistent with the regionalisation agenda set out in Making the Connections. These partnerships are providing strategic direction for the delivery of activities and actions set out in the Strategy; they have led to greater cross-authority training for youth workers and, in some cases, they are being used as forums to share effective practice.

13. The impact of the regional groups has been seen in a number of ways: one group's work informed the development of the National Workforce Development Strategy; another group helped develop national standards for the Youth Service in Wales.

14. A number of elements within this integrated structure existed either informally or in another guise prior to the publication of the National Strategy. However the Strategy did provide renewed impetus that has helped formalise and strengthen a collaborative and partnership-based approach to the delivery of services.

Workforce development

15. The objective set out in the Strategy to develop and introduce a National Workforce Development Plan for the Youth Service has been achieved, however this was a slower process than originally anticipated. The development of a manifesto for the youth work workforce in Wales, along with the roll out of the Workforce Development plan promises to deliver a more coordinated approach, with an emphasis on regional planning.

16. PYOs consider that progress is being made in improving the skills and qualifications of the youth workforce, but that this is a medium to long term objective. In recent years, the proportion of the workforce holding Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) professional qualifications has fluctuated, however it remains far below the target included in the National Youth Service Strategy.

17. Evidence collected from practitioners as part of the evaluation indicates that training opportunities are increasing. The challenge is to ensure that the training delivered reflects the priorities and vision set out in the National Strategy.

Voluntary sector actions

18. Structures are in place, both through the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services (CWVYS) and the regional voluntary sector consortia, to ensure that the vision and priorities set out in the National Strategy can permeate down to

organisational and delivery levels in the voluntary sector Youth Service. However the Strategy remains a peripheral issue for many of the smaller voluntary sector organisations.

19. The newly established regional voluntary consortia have an important role to play in the strategic direction and management of Youth Service activities in the voluntary sector. They are an opportunity to bring together appropriate partners to work with the regional PYO groups and with regional Welsh Assembly Government officials to help inform national policy and share effective practice.
20. Youth workers consider that collaboration between the voluntary and statutory sector has become more effective during the past three years. Relatively few, however, attribute this directly to the Strategy, noting that there are many reasons why voluntary and statutory organisations work increasingly closely together to delivery services to young people.

Ensuring quality and measuring impact

21. The Youth Service uses a range of tools to demonstrate the impact of youth work on young people. In some cases, the approaches adopted pre-date the Strategy, while other local authorities have introduced new systems during recent years. Many practitioners have been involved in the piloting of Demonstrating Success¹.
22. Practitioners and youth service managers support the move towards agreeing and implementing national standards for youth work. Robust management information systems (MIS) are required to ensure the effective roll out of the standards. Local authorities have improved their MIS, with some having invested in new systems with funding allocated under the Strategy.

¹ Demonstrating Success is a new approach to measuring the progress and outcomes of children and young people in Wales being developed by the Welsh Assembly Government. The Demonstrating Success project is developing a set of indicators, tools and guidelines to measure the achievements and progress of young people in a range of settings, capturing changes in their social and emotional dispositions and skills (SEDS). For more information, see <http://demonstratingsuccess.co.uk/>

23. The vast majority are now using robust MIS, which will contribute to better planning and benchmarking of performance and provision. It is important that there is compatibility between the different systems in use, to ensure that the data being collected is fit for purpose, particularly with the prospect of common national standards coming into use.

Structure and organisation of local provision

24. Local authorities have reviewed the structure and organisation of Youth Service provision during the lifetime of the National Strategy. Youth workers reported that opportunities for young people to take part in activities have been extended, with a particular focus on greater outreach and detached provision. The Youth Service carries out assessments of need systematically and the information collected informs the way in which provision is planned and delivered.

25. Increasingly, local authorities are producing local Youth Service strategies which provide a robust local framework for the delivery of the Youth Service and, in many cases, reflect overarching national objectives and priorities.

26. Young people generally recognise that there is now greater choice of provision and better opportunities to engage in the Youth Service. However, some remain frustrated about the lack of local provision and the quality of facilities.

27. Isolating the impact of the Strategy on the structure and organisation of Youth Service is difficult: a number of local authorities reported that reviews and reorganisations had been 'in the pipeline' prior to the Strategy's publication. As such, the Strategy confirmed what was already in progress and was not a catalyst for change. Other PYOs valued the guidance provided by the Strategy as they led internal reviews of provision.

Young people's engagement in decision making

28. The National Youth Service Strategy charged the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities and the voluntary sector with playing a leading role in engaging young people in making decisions, planning and reviewing actions on all matters that affect them. Principal Youth Officers report that they 'routinely' and 'systematically' consult with young people and involve them in the planning of services delivered to them. Processes to ensure the involvement of young people in decision making are built into local Youth Service strategies in many areas.

29. A majority of practitioners surveyed during the evaluation noted that young people are involved in decisions that affect them. This was supported by young people themselves who feel that they are able to play a role in decisions about services delivered locally and that their views are taken into account. This participative approach, many examples of which were provided, is planned at a strategic level and filters down to individual projects and youth centres.

30. Less clear is the extent to which such activities are directly attributable to the Strategy. In some local authority areas, the actions linked to promoting the participation of young people were set out in plans that pre-date the Strategy. In other local authority areas, PYOs and youth workers noted that the Strategy underlined the importance of processes that were already in place.

Youth work training in higher education (HE)

31. A range of professional courses in youth and community work are provided at five higher education institutions in Wales. Across the HE sector in Wales, there are over 600 people enrolled on youth and community work courses. Many of these students are funded by the Youth Service (through grant funding provided by the Welsh Assembly Government).

32. Institutions reported healthy increases in numbers applying for, and enrolling on, youth and community work courses during the past three years. One institution

noted that numbers for the current academic year were more than double those at the time when the Strategy was published. Other institutions had also seen sustained increases in take up. The introduction of degree level professional qualifications from September 2010 may result in yet greater levels of interest.

33. Institutions have reviewed and restructured courses, working with employers to try and ensure that the programmes delivered meet their needs. The evaluation found examples of good joint working between higher education institutions (HEIs) and Principal Youth Officers. HEIs have also expanded the number of places available for youth work training, reflecting growing demand for professional qualifications.

34. However there remain concerns about the quality of links between HEIs and PYOs and whether current programmes are succeeding in producing the high quality graduates required to deliver the vision and goals set out in the National Strategy. Some youth work students felt that their programmes of study would benefit from more practical dimensions. Work placements do provide youth work students with important opportunities to gain valuable practical experience. However, it appears that the quality of placements is variable.

Broad conclusions drawn from the evaluation

35. The Youth Service Strategy clearly brought welcome attention, and funding, to the Youth Service. This was a sector that had previously suffered due to a lack of overall vision and central strategic direction. As such the concept of a Strategy was received with enthusiasm by the sector as it was seen to provide, for the first time, a framework which was relevant to youth work in Wales. However, in previous sections of this report the original actions have been compared with what has taken place in the period 2007 – 2010 and it is clear that not all the actions have been achieved. In this section each of the overall aims and objectives of the Strategy are considered in turn, before more general recommendations for the future are presented.

Overall vision

36. *Young people, youth work, Youth Service* stated that the Strategy will:

Provide a vision for youth work in Wales and its impact in contributing to the policy agendas of the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Strategy has been a welcome document offering a vision for the whole sector to work towards. While some of those interviewed may have queried the finer points contained within it, all agreed that there was a need for a Strategy. From the outset there was buy-in from the Principal Youth Officers and there is evidence that locally the Strategy has shaped delivery to different degrees. It has acted as a useful framework for the development of the Youth Service across Wales, both in the statutory and voluntary sectors and while the general consensus is that the document has not been a radical driver of change, the actions included in the Strategy have served as reference points for those working in the Youth Service, particularly those in planning and managerial roles. On occasion it prompted quite significant changes or additions to work programmes while elsewhere it was used more as a checklist to ensure that current delivery was in line with Welsh Assembly Government thinking.

37. The Strategy's vision and its content does not however seem to have permeated far beyond the Youth Service teams in the local authorities. Some consultees were disappointed that the Strategy held relatively little sway or authority (during the evaluation, it has frequently been referred to as a document lacking in 'clout'.) It was believed that from the initial launch onwards the Strategy's profile was too low. While a low awareness of the Strategy at grass-roots level is understandable and not a great cause for concern as there is a role for the Principal Youth Officers (in the maintained sector) and CWVYS (for the voluntary sector) to translate and disseminate key messages, the comments received from some consultees that the Strategy was not on the radar of their managers and directors is of greater concern.

38. This issue of the Strategy's influence and impact has links with the development of national standards, for which there is strong support among local authorities' Principal Youth Officers. Contributors to the evaluation consider that a revised

document, with agreed national standards built in, will afford the Strategy greater weight and influence.

Sustainability

39. The second of the Strategy's three key aims was to,

Set out how to identify the staff, structure and resources required by the Youth Service in Wales to meet the needs of that vision

Since the Strategy's publication in March 2007, practitioners and young people have reported changes to Youth Service provision, with many positive developments recorded. Many of these positive developments have been in response to changes in staffing, structures and resources prompted in part by the Strategy. Resources in particular have helped the sector meet the needs of the vision. During the lifetime of the Strategy, additional funding has been secured to support Youth Services and this has been an extremely welcome boost to the maintained Youth Service.

40. While the total income for Youth Services has increased across Wales, a greater proportion of funding is through additional income, as opposed to core Youth Service budgets. There also remain significant disparities between the expenditure on the Youth Service at a local level which affects the ability of some areas to fully meet the vision of the Strategy.

41. Funding for the Youth Service is a constant concern for most of those interviewed, including those working in the maintained and voluntary sectors. There was a consensus among consultees that many strategic actions cannot be reached unless they are supported by adequate resources. There was a commonly held view among many practitioners that funding should be linked to actions and national standards, and that the availability of funding should be made known well in advance so that these resources can be considered as part of longer term planning processes.

Overview of evaluation objectives

42. The remainder of this section outlines the main conclusions that the evaluation team has drawn from the evaluation findings and offers some key recommendations for future services. It presents comments on each of the evaluation objectives in turn.

Evaluation objective: Assess the success of the strategy so far, in its aim of enhancing the ability of the youth service to deliver a wide range of informal and non-formal learning opportunities for young people between the ages of 11-25 which they choose to engage in.

Evidence collected during the evaluation indicates that Youth Service provision has been enhanced during the lifetime of the Strategy. Youth workers reported that opportunities for young people to take part in activities have been extended, with a particular focus on greater outreach and detached provision. In many local authority areas, the Youth Service assesses the needs of young people aged 11-25 and uses this information to plan provision, including informal and non-formal learning opportunities.

Increasingly, local authorities are producing local youth service strategies which provide a robust local framework for the delivery of the youth service and, in many cases, reflect overarching national objectives and priorities.

Young people generally recognise that there is now greater choice of provision and better opportunities to engage in the youth service. However, there remain variations across Wales and some young people remain frustrated about the lack of local provision and the quality of resources and facilities. This links to levels of funding for the Youth Service, which vary considerably across Wales.

While there was evidence that provision for young people has been enhanced during the past 3 years, it is, nevertheless, unclear to what extent these improvements can be attributed to the specific actions included in the Strategy. Practitioners noted that many developments were planned or underway prior to

the Strategy's publication. Others, however, appreciated that the Strategy provided a broad framework or direction for the ongoing development of the Youth Service in Wales, providing encouragement for all local authorities to review the quality and structure of provision locally.

Evaluation objective: Assess the success of the strategy in setting realistic strategic goals for all Youth Service partner organisations to achieve within an appropriate timescale.

As noted above, the Strategy is considered to have been effective in providing a broad strategic framework for the ongoing development of the Youth Service. The strategic vision included in *Young people, youth work, Youth Service* is something that organisations across the statutory and voluntary sector appear to have bought into, based on the views expressed by interviewees and survey respondents. Alongside the Strategy's broad strategic goals, one needs to consider the specific actions therein. The Strategy set out to:

Create an action plan to enable youth work to make an effective contribution to Extending Entitlement and the wider policy aspirations of the Welsh Assembly Government.

The different strands of the Strategy's action plan have been considered in turn throughout this evaluation report. However there are difficulties in assessing the impact of many actions, some of which have been criticised by youth service managers and practitioners for being imprecise and concerned with 'process' rather than outcomes. E.g. a number of actions charge organisations with 'playing a leading role in...'; 'supporting the implementation of...' or 'introducing processes for implementing a collaborative approach to...'. This perception was exacerbated by the description of the Strategy as "guidance" with "no response required".

The result is that, for the most part, partners perceive the Strategy as having not impacted significantly on the delivery of the youth service. Several other

drivers – such as local priorities or the Welsh Assembly Government’s seven core aims^[1] for children and young people- were deemed to play an equal role in shaping changes to the sector, although they may share very similar visions. There is a need therefore for the new Strategy’s actions to be clearly defined and SMART – in short the new Strategy should be shaped around clear national standards which drive activity and require partners to achieve benchmarks.

Evaluation objective: Identify any barriers or constraints that have impeded the progress of the strategy to date.

The evaluation evidence points to a small number of barriers which could have contributed to impeding the progress of the Strategy in the period 2007 – 2010: Although the analysis revealed that the level of resources available for Youth Service provision had increased since the publication of the National Youth Service Strategy, there remain a number of concerns, not least the wide variation in funding across local authorities. Although the amount spent on young people aged 11-25 has increased significantly, the differential in funding between the highest and lowest funding authorities is significant, and is likely to impede progress in terms of equality of the range and quality of provision for young people. Funding for the Youth Service is a constant concern for most of those interviewed and there was a consensus among consultees that many strategic actions cannot be reached unless they are supported by resources in

^[1] The Welsh Assembly Government translated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into seven core aims. These are:

1. Every child should have a flying start in life and the best possible basis for their future growth and development.
2. Every child and young person should have access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities, including the acquisition of essential personal and social skills.
3. Every child should enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation.
4. All children should have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities.
5. All children and young people should be listened to, treated with respect and have their race and cultural identity recognised.
6. All children and young people should have a safe home and community which supports physical and emotional wellbeing.
7. No child or young person should be disadvantaged by poverty.

the future.

Time is a barrier for many voluntary sector organisations: the capacity available to keep abreast of developments at a national policy level and to engage with local networks is often limited and can be a barrier to the full involvement of the voluntary sector organisations to engage and to contribute to priorities set out in the national Strategy.

Many positive examples of fully involving young people in decision making were presented as evidence to the evaluation, however this high level of participation was not the case across all organisations nor across all activities within one organisation. There were also frustrations expressed by some young people with regard to participation although these tended to be linked to other issues, such as funding or transport rather than lack of participation as such.

Evaluation objective: Collect opinions on how best to support practitioners in recording evidence of the impact of strategy activities on the active participation, skills development and emotional competence of beneficiaries.

Evidence received from practitioners during the evaluation research revealed that a range of tools were already in use to record and demonstrate impact of activities related to the Strategy and that they viewed recording evidence and supporting high quality provision to be linked to the implementation and application of national standards for youth work. The implementation of evidence gathering systems will support both the recording of impact and the roll-out of the standards.

Although there had been some delays in implementing evidence gathering systems, by the end of the Strategy's period the vast majority of local authorities were using (or learning to use) management information systems which will contribute to better planning and further benchmarking of performance and provision.

Evaluation objective: Provide recommendations for possible future development of the Strategy and or the processes / activities within it.

See below for the recommendations to arise from the evaluation.

Recommendations

43. Based on these findings, the report makes a series of eighteen targeted recommendations. These are set out below.

Funding and strategic planning

Welsh Assembly Government

1. The new National Strategy for the Youth Service in Wales should include, or be accompanied by, national standards for youth work. These standards will formalise the requirements for local authorities with regard to the quality and range of provision for young people.
2. In light of recommendation 1, it is essential that current levels of funding for the Youth Service are, as a minimum, maintained, notwithstanding the current economic climate.

WAG and Local Authorities

3. In order to promote equality of opportunity and provision for young people, there is a need to reduce the local variations in spending per head for young people aged 11-25, as noted in paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7 of this report. ADEW and the PYOG should prioritise this and report on progress to the Welsh Assembly Government.
4. Local Youth Service strategies should reflect the vision set out in the revised National Strategy, while recognising the range of youth work methodologies that can be applied to respond to local needs and circumstances.

Integrated structure

Welsh Assembly Government

5. The revised National Strategy should seek to further strengthen the regional structures that have been formalised during the lifetime of the current Strategy by:
 - a. Ensuring that terms of reference are in place to steer the activities of regional partnerships, regional PYO groups and voluntary sector groups;
 - b. Issuing guidelines on joint working at a regional level, including collaborative approaches to service delivery and workforce development.

PYOG and voluntary sector partnerships

6. Regional groups and planning structures have a critical role to play in ensuring that the National Strategy resonates with, and is relevant to, practitioners. With this in mind:
 - a. Regional PYO groups should ensure that good practice in the delivery of strategic objectives is filtered down to youth workers and partner organisations.
 - b. CWVYS and regional voluntary sector partnerships should develop strategies for engaging with smaller organisations in the voluntary sector, ensuring that they understand the contribution that they can make to the delivery of the revised National Strategy.

Workforce development

Welsh Assembly Government / PYOG

7. The Welsh Assembly Government, working with the PYOG, should improve communication with officers responsible for coordinating training and workforce development in delivering the Workforce Development Action Plan and the manifesto for the youth work workforce in Wales.

Local authorities and voluntary sector partnerships

8. Local authorities should aim to ensure that at least 90%² of full-time youth workers in the maintained Youth Service are qualified to JNC Professional level qualification.

9. In coordinating the delivery of actions included in the Workforce Development Plan for the Youth Service in Wales, regional voluntary sector partnerships should work to increase the proportion of voluntary sector youth workers who have undertaken training that is endorsed by the Education and Training Standards Committee or is included on the National Qualifications Framework.

National standards

Welsh Assembly Government

10. The national standards should include SMART targets, with clear guidance on how they apply to the maintained and voluntary sector.

Welsh Assembly Government and ADEW

11. The national standards should be agreed by ADEW, ensuring commitment at a strategic level to achieving the targets and key performance indicators.

Engagement

PYOG

12. Regional PYO groups should ensure that effective practice in engaging young people is shared and disseminated across local authorities and with the voluntary sector. In doing so, they should refer to the good practice in engaging young people in decision making identified in this report.

WLGA

13. The dissemination of good practice in relation to engaging with young people to help shape service delivery should also extend beyond the Youth Service. Other service areas could learn from the way in which the Youth Service

² This is the target included in the National Youth Service Strategy.

engages with young people to influence and inform provision. The WLGA should consider what lessons can be learnt across local authority departments, to ensure that young people can input into other areas of service delivery that impact upon them, including health, social services, culture, recreation and education.

Youth work training in higher education

Welsh Assembly Government

14. As noted in the Workforce Development Plan, it is essential that HEIs deliver programmes of training that reflect the purpose, principles, values and outcomes identified in the revised National Youth Service Strategy. The revised Strategy should articulate clearly to HEIs the skills and competences required by the youth work workforce in order to ensure the successful implementation of the Strategy and its vision.

HEIs and local authorities

15. The Youth Service should address the recommendations relating to work placements in Estyn's recent report³ into youth worker training as a matter of priority. Specifically, there is a need to:

Improve the clarity of guidance to work placement supervisors about their educational role in courses, so they know clearly their responsibilities for developing trainees' professional skills, knowledge and understanding;

Improve access to training for work placement supervisors, to ensure they can undertake their training responsibilities and assessment roles effectively.

HEIs and PYOG

16. Strategic links between HEIs and PYOs should be improved: HEIs should ensure that representatives of regional Principal Youth Officer Groups are involved in programme development or review panels, ensuring that the courses better reflect the needs of local authority Youth Services.

³ Estyn, 2010. *A survey of professional qualification training for youth workers in Wales*. Cardiff: Estyn

Welsh language provision

Local authorities

17. Evidence presented as part of the evaluation suggests that there has been an increase in the number of bilingual and Welsh language activities for young people. These appear, however, to be in isolated areas. The Youth Service should assess levels of demand for Welsh language provision and plan provision in response to identified need.

Management Information Systems

Local authorities

18. Local authorities should ensure that they have robust management information systems in place to collect data on take up, outcomes and progression following participation in youth work activities. Where this is done effectively, local authorities are using this data to better plan and coordinate provision to ensure the needs of young people are met.