

A vision for a new national youth work strategy for Wales 2013–2018

Consultation response form

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Responses should be returned by **16 September 2013** to:

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Department for Education and Skills
Welsh Government
Sarn Mynach
Llandudno Junction
LL31 9RZ

Or completed electronically and sent to:

e-mail: NationalYouthServiceConsultation@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Question 1 – Do you agree with Proposal 1?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
X			

Comments We agree that youth services should work in partnership with secondary schools. Youth services can add much to the experience of young people in schools because they play a key role in connecting non-formal and formal learning and make a contribution to the development of coherent pathways to learning for all young people. Whilst schools concentrate their efforts on providing young people with access to the formal qualifications they need to help them make their way through life, youth work gives access to the broader, complementary, skills valued by employers such as team working, communication skills, resilience and creativity.

Not all secondary schools appreciate the benefits that youth work approaches can deliver to pupils. Whilst ETS recognises that not all statutory youth services sit within local authorities' education directorates, the Welsh Government (WG) could do more to assert the status of and role of youth work as a **key educational service** by encouraging local authorities to consider the advantages of locating their maintained youth services within educational directorates. Youth work organisations in the voluntary sector also provide benefits to schools and local government and WG could do more to encourage schools, in particular, to take a more expansive approach to partnership working with youth services. We will return to our next point elsewhere in this response, but any increase in youth work in schools should not be at the expense of open access, community-based provision which performs a separate, but very valuable, function.

ETS warmly welcomes WG's intention to reinforce the professionalism of youth workers and youth services. However, the Consultation Document does not seem to us to give sufficient attention to the contribution of the voluntary sector in regard to its value base and its commitment to working with young people. We also wish to make the point that better structural arrangements need to be in place (including workforce intelligence, workforce development proposals, access to continuing professional development) if youth work as a profession is to flourish. Consequently, we are disappointed to note that there is no mention in the Consultation Document of WG's previously expressed intention to extend Registration to youth workers as part of the wider education workforce. ETS would expect to see concrete proposals for extending Registration given due prominence in the forthcoming Strategy document.

We further agree with the proposal to conduct an independent evaluation of the impact of youth work in schools, although we consider that a completion date of December 2017 is too far away. Measuring impact (as distinct from measuring outcomes) is something that many organisations struggle to achieve and the person-centred approach of youth work makes measuring impact more complex. We welcome the WG's intention to increase the number of youth workers holding JNC-recognised youth work qualifications and are pleased to

note the WG's commitment to continuing to promote and support high quality and nationally recognised professional training for youth workers. ETS recognises, however, that many voluntary sector youth work organisations do not provide access to JNC conditions of service: indeed, many are heavily reliant on volunteers. ETs would be pleased to see more volunteers / workers in the voluntary sector achieve Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications but we recognise that more resources are required to achieve this. CWVYS currently provides access for member organisations to Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications (through arrangements with the YMCA Wales Community College) and such organisations can also access the CWVYS induction programme "A Stepping Stone to Youth Work". As such, the building blocks are already in place for increasing the number of volunteers / workers holding appropriate qualifications in youth work. Whilst there is currently no requirement for volunteers or voluntary sector workers to undertake such training, ETS is aware that some local authorities provide support to voluntary sector youth work organisations as a means of encouraging a greater take-up of available opportunities. This seems, to us, worthy of further development once there is more information available about the nature of the voluntary sector workforce (in this respect, note our response to question 15 below). ETS wishes to remind Welsh Government that the 2007 Youth Service Strategy set a minimum target of 90% appropriately qualified workforce. ETS urges the Welsh Government to ensure that its firm commitment to ensuring an appropriately qualified workforce is not watered-down in the forthcoming Strategy.

Page 8 of the Consultation Document makes reference to the Youth Work Training Grant which is distributed to local authorities on a formula basis for supporting continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for youth workers. We are concerned to note that the proposed new funding structure (page 16 of the Document) makes no mention of the Training Grant going forward. We strongly urge the WG to make explicit its commitment to on-going CPD by ensuring the Training Grant continues to be available to all Welsh local authorities and that its extension to the voluntary sector is formally recognised.

Question 2 – Do you agree with Proposal 2?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	X (with caveats)		

Comments. It is hard to argue against a proposal which – if properly implemented – should serve to provide a consistent and trusted avenue to support for those young people at risk of disengaging from education and learning. Nevertheless our support for this proposal is hedged around by caveats which we explain below. There is a strong case for preventative

measures to be put in place for young people who are at risk of disengagement, or who may already be disengaging. However, the causes of disengagement are many, complex and inter-related, and negative outcomes for the individual can never be entirely forestalled. History also teaches us that whilst arguments in favour of prevention have been made repeatedly and convincingly across a range of policy areas, at times of financial difficulty it is sometimes seen to be politically expedient to cut preventative approaches than to reduce more visible provision elsewhere.

Having made those points, we agree that local authority youth services are well placed to take on the “Lead Worker” role envisaged by the Consultation Document. Youth workers take a person-centred approach to young people and are often trusted by young people because of the voluntary relationship that exists between them. Any Lead Worker role would need to respect that relationship, which is at the heart of all youth work. If the Lead Worker role is to have the status it deserves, and the power of influence it demands, it requires each local authority chief executive and Leader to evidence their commitment to it.

Because of its importance we make this point again – a youth service commitment to implementing the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework should not be carried forward at the expense of open access youth provision. There is a false dichotomy in arguments for or against open access and/or targeted youth work. Open access youth work allows for productive relationships to be built between workers and young people in non-stigmatising environments, with such relationships then permitting more specialised interventions for some young people. Whilst ETS recognises that WG sees the Lead Worker role as one to be delivered by statutory youth services, we are aware that there is concern within the voluntary sector that the role of voluntary youth work organisations in providing intensive support to some young people does not appear to be recognised in this section of the paper.

It is self-evident that the effective delivery of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework depends upon the development of fit-for-purpose guidance and information sharing protocols. Care will need to be taken to ensure that the sharing of information does not serve to damage the relationships of trust which exist between youth workers and young people.

Question 3 – Do you agree with Proposal 3?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
X			

Comments There is little to disagree with in proposal 3. Youth services have already done much to provide young people with access to appropriate qualifications and have also provided opportunities for young people to develop their Welsh language skills and their understanding of the Welsh culture. Access to appropriate qualifications is critical in helping some young people to re-engage with learning and to continue on their learning journey. But youth services have done much more than this. International work provides opportunities for young people to gain a greater understanding of the place of Wales in the European community and beyond. Assisting young people to understand their rights, and how to engage as active citizens, does much to help them understand their roles in shaping a better community, a better society, and a better world. More work will need to be undertaken to understand the resource implications of extending access to appropriate qualifications for young people in contact with youth services.

We agree that stronger partnership working between youth services and health services is an area worthy of further development. Youth work can, for example, make a significant contribution to positive mental health. We are unclear, however, why no mention is made of strengthening opportunities for stronger partnership working with sport, leisure and arts organisations. We also make the important point that whilst young people may very well wish to avail themselves of accreditation opportunities by virtue of their engagement with youth services, the voluntary nature of that engagement means there is no requirement for them to do so.

We encourage the Welsh Government to recognise that youth work also does much to broaden horizons and (crucially at a time of austerity) raise individual aspiration. The “Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes” document makes this contribution explicit.

Question 4 – Do you agree with Proposal 4?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	X		

Comments We agree there is a need for local authority and voluntary youth work sectors to work together more productively at local levels, although much good practice already exists. We think that the required capacity building may

be harder to achieve whilst the purchaser/provider model of provision remains the dominant relationship between the sectors. This model works against a more sustainable co-production model involving local authority maintained youth services, the voluntary youth sector, communities, and young people themselves working together in the development of Service Level Agreements and annual work plans. We suggest that the planned work on a new Service Level Agreement to manage that relationship needs to be sensitive to this issue and that the process needs to be open and transparent.

We would also argue that the development of robust and more sustainable partnership-based models of youth service provision cannot be achieved without a commitment to move beyond an annual funding cycle.

Question 5 – Do you agree with Proposal 5?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	X		

Comments We support this proposal to develop the value and role of a virtual Youth Service delivery model. We suspect, however, that there is much good practice currently in place across Wales and any further development should only progress after a full audit and assessment of what is already in existence and its effectiveness.

Question 6 – Do you agree with Proposal 6?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	X (with caveats)		

Comments: We welcome the expressed intention to improve working between the Welsh Government and national voluntary youth organisations. We think it important, however, to draw a distinction between national voluntary youth organisations and the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services (CWVYS). The role of CWVYS in representing the whole of the voluntary youth work sector (that is, national organisations as well as the many small, local, voluntary youth work organisations that form the backbone of third sector activity in many local authority areas) is unique in Wales. We are unable to identify (from the Proposed New Funding Structure details at page 16 of the Consultation

Document) a dedicated source of funding which would enable CWVYS to continue with its representative functions. Whilst there is a role for competitive funding in the landscape of youth service activity, it is not strategic to require the representative body of the voluntary youth sector in Wales to compete for funding with others. Consequently, we urge the WG to redraft this section to make clear its on-going support for the work of CWVYS in the form of a line of funding identified for this organisation.

We urge WG to make better use of the consultative mechanisms that already exist, rather than to introduce new arrangements for the sake of doing so. Productive strategic and working relationships already exist, for example, between CWVYS and the Principal Youth Officers Group (PYOG) and ETS sees no added value in putting such embedded relationships at risk.

Question 7 – Do you agree with Proposal 7?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
X			

Comments At page 9 of the Consultation Document providers of youth work are urged to “ . . .demonstrate its value to other key educational partners”. We would argue that this is a two-way process. Whilst we believe that youth work providers have tried hard over many years – with limited resources at their disposal - to persuade others of the value of youth work approaches, (the very readable “Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes” document of January 2013 is the latest example of this), not enough potential partners have been prepared to listen.. The development of a National Outcomes Framework would go a long way to helping youth work providers evidence and articulate the positive contribution that youth work makes to young people’s overall well-being in the short, medium, and longer terms. Some useful work in this area has already been done by The Young Foundation and published as “A framework of outcomes for young people” (July 2012). A number of key findings from The Young Foundation’s research have resonance for this Consultation Document, including their assertion that “There is substantial and growing evidence that developing social and emotional capabilities supports the achievement of positive life outcomes, including educational attainment, employment and health” (page 4 of the framework report).

We welcome proposals to establish a Youth Service Reference Group (with appropriate representation from the field) and a Youth Service Quality Mark. ETS anticipates that WG would take note that ETS is currently making arrangements to pilot a Quality Mark intended to operate primarily at organisational level whilst CWVYS has its own Quality Mark for youth work activity. We also support the implementation of a review of the impact of youth services, although we make the point again that such a review would need to identify a suite of impact measures carefully chosen to be broadly sympathetic to the nature and range of the youth service “offer” to young people.

Question 8 – Do you agree with Proposal 8?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
X			

Comments: We are surprised to learn of the wide disparity in the level of core funding made available by local authorities to their youth services. Whilst local authorities would no doubt argue that the WG’s current unhypothicated approach to revenue settlements allows for local decisions on resource allocation to be made in line with local priorities, the figures strongly suggest that there is a postcode lottery in the availability and range of youth service activity. We therefore welcome the commitment to the development of more robust guidance to local authorities on exercising their statutory responsibilities for youth work.

Question 9 – Do you agree with Proposal 9?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	X (with caveats)		

Comments: The establishment of a Youth Service Reference Group to advise Ministers on the implementation of the National Youth Work Strategy is a good idea. We suggest that the Reference Group could be more influential were it to take on the role of monitoring the roll-out of the Strategy and having a further, but complementary, role in the development of a national framework for measuring the impact of youth work on key Governmental priorities. In line with

other matters identified by WG in the Consultation Document, we suggest that membership of the Reference Group could profitably be opened to senior representatives from secondary schools and health services. ETS Cymru Wales would be pleased to join the Reference Group if invited to do so. We think, however, that care will need to be taken to ensure that the balance of influence is not held by those who may have little knowledge of youth work within the Welsh context.

Question 10 – Do you agree with our funding proposals?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Comments: We have not scored this question because we simply do not have sufficient information available to us about the implications for current youth service provision of the proposed new funding structure. We are not clear of its implications for local authorities' youth work training grants, for example, nor do we know what adoption of the new structure means for the future of CWWYS. For this question at least, the devil is in the detail and we would need to understand more of the rationale and assumptions underpinning the structure before expressing a view.

Theme 1

Question 11 – Do you agree that there is significant opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the Youth Service and formal education delivery?

Comments: Yes – for the reasons identified earlier in our response. We would want to be reassured that strengthening this relationship would not be at the expense of the voluntary nature of the young person/youth worker relationship.

Question 12 – Do you agree that the Youth Service is appropriately positioned to play a key role in delivering the 'lead worker' role for young people at risk of disengagement from education, training and employment?

Comments: Yes – but please note our expressed concerns about the potential of this role to displace other, equally important, youth work activity. We think the proposals, as they stand, are unclear as to the role of the voluntary sector in working with young people at risk of disengagement and we would welcome further clarity on this matter.

Theme 2

Question 13 – Do you agree that the Welsh Government should direct resources through local authorities to support local capacity building within the voluntary sector?

Comments: We agree in part. Effective utilisation of such resources depends on local authorities and voluntary sector organisations reaching agreement on the nature and range of local capacity building activity. The voluntary sector has the capacity and desire to engage with open and transparent planning processes, but ETS would urge that expectations of what might be achieved should be realistic in the light of the resources available. Capacity building should always have the aim of improving the accessibility and quality of youth work activity for young people.

Question 14 – In which areas or through which services do you believe a ‘virtual’ youth service delivery could add the greatest value to young people in Wales?

Comments: More work in this area is required. ETS does not know enough about young people’s use of social media to frame an adequate response to this question. Directly involving young people and media industry specialists in developing any proposals for future activity is likely to be essential. ETS believes that any form of virtual youth service delivery could never replicate the value of face-to-face youth work: developments in this area should thus be focused on improving accessibility/engagement opportunities for young people and not viewed as an alternative to locally-accessible youth work opportunities.

Theme 3

Question 15 – Do you agree that the voluntary sector should be supported to participate in the National Youth Service Audit?

Comments: We strongly agree. The voluntary sector is a major provider of youth work activity in Wales. Supporting the voluntary sector's participation in the National Youth Service Audit can only lead to a more comprehensive and reliable picture of youth service provision than currently exists. We suggest that dialogue with CWVYS would be an important first step in taking this proposal forward.

Question 16 – Do you believe that statutory guidance for the Youth Service in Wales would deliver significantly improved outcomes for young people?

Comments: We are not convinced that implementing stronger statutory guidance is sufficient **on its own** to deliver improved outcomes for young people. However, more robust guidance can play a significant part in reinforcing the importance of youth services to others, and for strengthening the capacity of youth services in helping to meet a range of local, regional, and national priorities for young people.

Question 17 – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.

At previous meetings WG officials have reinforced the expressed view of the then Minister for Education and Skills that sufficient resources were already being devoted by the Welsh Government to helping young people who are disengaged, or at risk of disengagement. His firm view was that the roll out of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework could be funded from existing resources. At a time of significant austerity this is an entirely reasonable and defensible position.

Nevertheless, in asking local authorities' youth services to "step up to the plate" in taking forward the Lead Worker role for young people, WG may inadvertently be putting at risk the long-standing landscape of open access youth work provision that provides an important safety net for many young people in our most disadvantaged communities. We therefore ask the WG to audit **all resources** currently applied to work with disengaged young people with a view to diverting resources not currently used efficiently and effectively to supporting youth services in the roll out of the new Framework.

Responses to consultations may be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: