



A New Vision for a National Youth Work Strategy
Consultation Response September, 2013

The *Wales Principal Youth Officers Group* (PYOG) is the representative group of officers nominated by each local authority as the professional and strategic head of the youth service. The Group has an established role in advising on the strategic development and delivery of youth services and other associated initiatives on behalf of the *Association of Directors of Education in Wales* (ADEW) and are a sub-group of the ADEW structure. The PYOG also has a strategic connection with the *Welsh Local Government Association* (WLGA).

The *Welsh Local Government Association* (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, the three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities are associate members. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.

The WLGA and PYOG recognise the importance of a continuum of learning and the important contribution which youth work can and does play towards improving outcomes for young people in Wales aged 11-25 years by enabling "...*young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential.*" Youth Work National Occupational Standards.

The WLGA and PYOG welcome the opportunity to comment on the consultation for *A New Vision for a National Youth Work Strategy*. The publication of the consultation comes at a time when there is considerable change in the structures and delivery of education across Wales. It is important that the role of youth work, as an educative methodology, is articulated within this context.

Youth work can be incorrectly referenced and inter-changed with other (different but no less valuable) work with young people. The (welcomed) intent of Welsh Government to develop a second strategy for youth work in Wales provides an opportunity to further

clarify the specific role of youth work with its own principles, purposes, professional base and value to young people and other stakeholders.

Consultation Response

General Comments

1. Any future national youth work strategy must be seen as an opportunity to build on the previous National Youth Service Strategy for Wales. *Young people, youth work, Youth Service* set the strategic direction for a specific form of work with young people, as underpinned by a workforce of full and part time professionals, support and volunteer youth workers. It is felt that there is some work to do to ensure that the Vision Paper reflects this strategic nature in setting the direction for and scope of youth work in Wales as well as defining the resources available to achieve this. In its current form, the Vision paper focuses on funding and structures, mentions little about a strategic direction for youth work and includes little in the way of definition (scope).
2. The WLGA and PYOG propose that the vision for youth work should be:
"To support, enable and develop young people to fulfil their potential by providing high quality youth work services which respect the views and opinions of young people by encouraging their role in participation, design, creation and establishment of such services, meeting their needs and aspirations"
3. The proposed first strategic aim of youth work should be:
"To enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential." Youth Work National Occupational Standards.
4. It is essential that the sector learns from the strengths and challenges of the previous National Youth Service Strategy (2007-10). Whilst the evaluation of this strategy is referenced in the Vision Paper (P. 3), the recommendations within have not been explored in sufficient detail.
5. In line with the current *Programme for Government* and subsequent focus on improving outcomes for service users, the WLGA and PYOG is surprised that there is no mention of outcomes for young people. The strategy (2007-10) identifies three broad themes/outcomes – active participation; wider skills development and

enhanced emotional competence. It is the view of the PYOG and local government that these ought to be carried forward to the next strategy as starting points.

6. As evidenced in the *PYOG Core Business Paper* (April, 2012) the statutory Youth Service 'offer', as based on *Youth Work in Wales: Principles & Purposes*, is varied, is determined by the needs of young people in each locality and includes:
 - non-formal and informal learning opportunities and recreational support (a form of learning outside the traditional classroom environment)
 - personal and social development (opportunities to develop skills such as social confidence, motivation and self-determination, resilience, participation)
 - Information and Advice services
 - Health & Wellbeing programmes
 - Leisure and activities (including arts, cultural and sporting activities)
 - Participation

7. The local government Youth Service contributed fully to the development of *Extending Entitlement: Supporting Young People 11-25* and the PYOG is keen to ensure that the messages and entitlements within this document, which still provides the legislative framework for work with young people, are not lost. *Extending Entitlement* still receives wide approval and admiration in the UK and across Europe. The positive impact and messages which the 10 universal entitlements have made in recent years would be usefully be retained.

8. Whilst the majority of youth work in Wales is delivered by two distinct sectors, statutory and voluntary, the sectors work together at local and national level to ensure quality, consistency and avoid duplication in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people. An example of this joint working is the recent establishment of the *Youth Work Alliance (Wales)*, a national, strategic forum whose membership is from the PYOG the *Council for Wales Voluntary Youth Service (CWVYS)* and *Education and Training Standards (ETS) Committee*.

Introduction

9. In building on the previous National Youth Service Strategy, a National Youth Work Strategy first and foremost needs to define its purpose and scope e.g. by re-stating its client base as young people aged 11-25 years and defining its workforce. The latter requires some debate and discussion with the sector as, whilst it is accepted

that youth work needs further clarity, any definition requires a level of flexibility by avoiding over-prescription, as based on the needs of young people. In this regard, the sector also needs to be fully engaged in the ongoing debate around the developing *Education Workforce Council* (not mentioned in the Vision Paper but a potentially important development for youth work), which intends to include the registration of youth workers as part of its second phase of introduction following legislation. It is also important that Wales engages appropriately with colleagues in England around such matters to ensure consistency and portability in relation to the *Institute for Youth Work* in England.

10. The WLGA and PYOG are pleased that the role and benefits of non-formal learning are highlighted in this section, reflecting 14-19 Learning Pathways Policy. There is currently a high-profile debate around the relationship between youth work and formal learning institutions (in England and Wales) which is also welcomed – schools, FEI's, work based learning and youth work are all engaged in this discussion. Local authorities and the PYOG are committed to play their part in the discussion around youth work provision in such establishments. However, we must not lose sight of the varying needs of young people in this context – e.g. not all young people wish to access youth work during school hours or in school buildings. Some young people e.g. those NEET are unable for whatever reason to access school curricular and/or school buildings; others see benefit in youth work provision because it offers different learning environments, other than the classroom.

11. As part of the broad range of services on offer to young people in the Youth Service, the PYOG recently carried out a survey of local authorities' youth work provision in formal educational settings. 100% of respondents (18 out of the 22 areas replied) indicated that they delivered youth work in schools. 9 (50%) delivered programmes in Pupil Referral Units, two in units for Emotional and Behavioural difficulties and one (6%) in a prison. 6 (33%) youth services provided programmes in colleges of Further Education but no youth service delivered in a University. Some youth services added that they delivered programmes for post-16 young people NEET. 82% of this work is involved with Year 11 to 12 transition and 41% across Year 6 and 7. the most commonly delivered programmes are community/citizenship (94%), youth forum/school councils and independent living (83%), Basic Skills (72%), Essential Skills (78%), enterprise activities (56%) and sports leadership (33%). Others listed were health & wellbeing, multi-media, Welsh language and culture and international work. Other mainstream activities supported are information, advice and guidance (88%), school events and visits (82%), Learning Coach (77%), counselling (35%), family support and home visits (59%) and other support for core activities include

National Curriculum subjects and Personal and Social Education (PSE). This survey shows the breadth of valued activities currently delivered in formal education settings, providing a base line for further debate and discussion with stakeholders in continuing to provide assurance that the offer meets the need.

12. Should youth work take on a greater role in schools, there is an urgent debate to be had around how this will be funded. A great deal of youth work in schools is/has been funded by external sources and, as a result, has in recent years decreased in some areas. Local authorities are in a period of unprecedented cuts in core funding. These pressures will continue, with the situation in some areas resulting in youth services bearing a disproportionate impact of these cuts. Should there be a greater emphasis on youth work in schools, this should also not be at the expense of other youth work delivery such as detached work, open access etc. as this would undermine or remove a wide range of services currently available in communities, also having a direct impact on young people.
13. *"Non formal education and its recognition are an essential component in the building of lifelong learning societies...the match that has been identified between the skills demanded by employers and those gained through non-formal education in youth organisations confirms this impact on young people's employability"* Study on the Impact of Non Formal Education, University of Bath (2012). **Youth work is complementary to formal education and must remain distinctive from it if it is to be effective.**

Theme 1 – Delivering Education.

14. The WLGA and PYOG are supportive of raising the profile of youth work as a key partner in education delivery. It is recognised that all young people should have access to high quality education. However, we must remind ourselves that education, whilst an important element of youth work delivery, is one element of the 'offer'. (Being) *Educative* is one of the *5 Pillars of Youth Work* in *Youth Work in Wales: Principles & Purposes* (Youth Work in Wales Review Group, January 2013). The other pillars being *Expressive, Participative, Inclusive* and *Empowering*.
15. Many young people for whom educational engagement and/or progression is not perceived as an issue access youth work; e.g. these and other young people may see information and advice or health and wellbeing as matters about which they wish to engage with a youth worker, not necessarily education. Further, as an open access service, as well as young people not in education, employment or training (NEET),

youth work can and does have a role with middle and high achieving (gifted and talented) young people who may require complementary input for the development of wider skills (social confidence, communication, teamwork, life-skills, citizenship). There is a growing field of evidence of the benefits of open-access youth work for all young people e.g. it can remove any issues of stigma as well as provide broader learning opportunities by facilitating young people mixing with other young people from different backgrounds.

16. Youth work offers a specific approach towards young people which is predicated on the choice of engagement by the young person. This approach, which has an educational purpose, can and does lend itself to engaging, challenging, supporting and improving personal and social development but can be incorrectly referenced and inter-changed with other work with young people. The sector accepts that youth work can and does have a recognised and valued role with specific groups of young people, including those NEET. The WLGA and PYOG do contend though that by focussing a disproportionate level of resource to what is a small (but no less significant) percentage of young people, could be detrimental to the wider population. It is also widely accepted that there is currently a number of funding sources with a huge amount of funding being invested in the 10-12% of young people (aged 16-18) who are NEET. Much of this is unco-ordinated, resulting in numerous organisations trying to do exactly the same thing in the same local area with the same young people. To avoid a 'churn' of young people entering and exiting education, employment or training it should also not be forgotten in this context that retention is as great a challenge as engagement.
17. As the document refers to, youth work can and does provide a valuable complimentary provision to formal education. Some of this is recognised by Estyn in their annual report (2011-12) in relation to the quality of and outcomes from alternative education, which are reported as being on the whole good. Whilst the Youth Service only provides some of this alternative provision, this is one example of the benefits of youth work as part of this continuum of education.
18. There is a desire by members of the WLGA and PYOG to improve such formal education/youth work partnerships. However, the document does not offer any suggestions as to how this could be achieved and a great deal of funding provided in recent times for such programmes (under Cymorth) has since disappeared or been reallocated under the Families First funding. As a result a number of these programmes have also ceased.

19. In relation to one of the goals in 14-19 Learning Pathways - to raise the parity of esteem of vocational learning alongside academic learning – the WLGA and PYOG suggest a similar approach with non-formal learning as a complementary (not alternative) educational experience/achievement. Terminology can play a big part in perception and perpetuation of perception can in turn result in entrenched views. The use of the term 'alternative' can denote the lesser of two mutually exclusive possibilities; therefore, the use of the term 'appropriate' would perhaps be more fitting and can start to shift perceptions of these learning programmes and the learners participating in them?
20. The WLGA and PYOG agree with the principle of extending opportunities for young people to achieve national accreditations. However, this too requires further definition. Many worthwhile and nationally recognised awarded accreditations e.g. Duke of Edinburgh Award, Youth Achievement Awards and many Agored Cymru awards do not appear on the Database for Approved Qualification (DAQW), which could put many young people at a disadvantage as schools do not recognise them. These achievements play a big part in recognising learners' broader achievements in contributing towards (for example) the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification. However, this needs to be considered in the context of a great deal of recent research which indicates that what young people want most from the youth service is a place to go to 'hang out', where they have a variety of activities to choose from in an environment where they feel safe. Therefore, the emphasis must be on 'opportunities', which is a strength of the nature of youth work i.e. young people should not be made to take up such opportunities as this may have the reverse effect.
21. The document refers on a couple of occasions to further development of the youth work workforce e.g. "the proposals...to drive the professionalism agenda and equip those in the service to operate on an equal footing with others supporting and educating young people" (P.9) and "a target will be set to drive up the number of youth workers holding JNC-recognised youth work qualification(s)" (P.10). Whilst the WLGA and PYOG fully support these proposals, it is far from clear how this will be funded or how it will be achieved – in fact, it would appear later in the document that the current Training Grant will no longer be available. Workforce development requires a strategic approach based on the needs of the sector and young people, including initial training and continuous professional development. The PYOG would appreciate urgent discussions on how WG expects this drive to greater "professionalism" will take place in the context of reducing core funding, and the potential for further pressure by the implication of removal of the Training Grant,

which seems to go against the statement that “the WG will continue to promote and support high-quality nationally recognised professional training for youth workers”.

22. The WLGA and PYOG acknowledge the discussion on P.10 in relation to the role of the Youth Service in the developing *Youth Engagement and Progression Framework* (YEPF). However, it is felt that this discussion ought to be held independently of this consultation, which ought to be a consultation for *A New Vision for a National Youth Work Strategy*. The discussion about the proposed ‘lead worker’ role should be held in a different context as we are discussing the role of youth work here.

23. The WLGA and PYOG have concern that this, more targeted approach, may be perceived as too prescriptive and exclusive of other groups recognised as disadvantaged. As an alternative, the WLGA and PYOG propose the principle that extra support is focussed on those in greatest need. That said, the role of youth work with young people NEET (and the social exclusion agenda generally) is well recognised. Though the provision has cohesion via its core values, one of its strengths is its flexibility, being adaptable to different needs. *Youth Social Exclusion and Lessons from Youth Work: Evidence from Literature and Surveys* (EACEA, European Commission, 2013 - <http://ec.europa.eu/youth/documents/eurydice-study-social-exclusion-2013.pdf>) also recognises the role of youth work in wider social exclusion, *Here lies the importance of youth work initiatives. By reaching out to young people who are the most disconnected from support services...youth workers can act as gatekeepers to youth (re)integration in support networks* (P.11) and *In order to effectively prevent and remedy the risk of exclusion for many young people, the determinants that generate social inequalities need to be redressed. Lessons learned from the tradition of youth work indicate that this is possible* (P. 18)

Theme 2 – Building Capacity

24. Partnership Working – at a national level the *PYOG* and the *Council for Wales Voluntary Youth Service* (CWVYS) meet regularly and have a tradition for doing so e.g. the *Standing Conference for Youth Work in Wales*, and its successor the *Joint Strategic Group* (JSG). More recently the two parts of the sector have established a platform for strategic discussion, alongside Education and Training Standards (ETS) - the *Youth Work Alliance (Wales)* (YWAW).

25. At regional level the PYOG meets regularly and has done so for some time, with CWVYS having similar regional meetings based on the same geographic areas. There is scope to improve the interface between these two groups but this needs to be

considered in the context of recommendations from the Hill Review and developing Education Consortia.

26. At local level however, whilst there are numerous excellent examples of joint working e.g. training opportunities via the WG Training Grant as well as youth work delivery, relationships between the statutory youth service and its voluntary sector colleagues are influenced by the type of organisation/s active in these areas. For example, some areas have a presence of national voluntary sector youth organisations (NVYO's) and local VYO's, others only local VYO's, which may be specific in their nature of delivery (often based on grant funding) and/or be very limited in their capacity.
27. To refer again to the issue of lack of clarity/definition within the document, which refers at various junctures to Youth Service, Youth Support Services, voluntary youth services and statutory Youth Service, it is unclear as to who or what is referred to in these contexts – a definition of each is essential, particularly in relation to the voluntary sector e.g. it is difficult to respond to some of the questions around the 'voluntary sector' in the consultation without being clear as to what we're talking about.
28. With regard to the proposal to develop a 'virtual' youth service gateway, whilst it is not clear what is meant by this, the WLGA and PYOG are in principle in agreement with this. However, this development must be in addition to and not to the detriment of other Youth Service provision.

Theme 3 – Accountability and Results

29. The WLGA and PYOG welcome WG proposals to develop a National Outcomes Framework. The South West and Mid Wales PYOG region has been carrying out some work on this area, as have other parts of the sector, no doubt. The establishment of a Youth Service Reference Group to oversee this work seems an appropriate mechanism for taking this work forward – the PYOG would be keen to make a contribution to this group.
30. *Proposal 8: Developing a consultation on statutory guidance* is somewhat confusing. The Youth Service in Wales has a statutory basis, in the Learning & Skills Act, 2000. The Explanatory Note relating to this legislation at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/21/notes/data.pdf> states that:

"...it is the duty of every LEA to make sure that further education provided for in their area includes adequate facilities for recreation and social and physical training. For that purpose, an authority may establish, maintain and manage facilities such as playing fields, gymnasia, and swimming baths and may or in expeditions or other activities for people for whom they owe the duty to secure further education. The section is the statutory basis for the youth service provided by local authorities. The youth service provides a range of services including youth clubs, information centres and specialist centres and is increasingly working with young people at risk."

31. The WLGA and PYOG agrees with the assertion that "...there is insufficient opportunity for Welsh Ministers to strategically engage with Youth Service representatives". Wales is the only nation in the UK which does not have a body which represents and promotes the interests of youth work (England has the National Youth Agency, NYA; Scotland has Youthlink Scotland and Northern Ireland has the Youth Council for Northern Ireland, YCMI). Whilst the statutory Youth Service accepts that more can be done to engage with higher levels of central and local government and other stakeholders, the sector does lack a body representing the interests and developing the quality of youth work in Wales. Ministers currently would be required to meet with representatives of the two parts of the sector (voluntary and statutory) as a result.
32. Whilst appreciating that the end date for the previous National Youth Service Strategy was 2010 and that there is an urgent need for this to be reviewed in the context of a changing financial and policy climate, the WLGA and PYOG have concerns regarding the proposed timescales in the Vision Paper. In this context, the WLGA and PYOG request assurance that the sector will be engaged in a thorough examination of proposals in order that the final strategy is deliverable and has the intended impact.
33. The WLGA and PYOG require further clarity on what WG means by 'communities of expertise' (P. 15) and what the proposed timescale for these will be. The proposal to 'develop good practice in respect of this strategy' is also less than clear – which strategy? Assuming this refers to the *Vision for a New national Youth Work Strategy*, there is a debate to be had as to whether the field accepts the themes and proposals within. Should the themes and proposals receive such support, a further consultation for a *National Youth Work Strategy* would be expected. This is unlikely to happen until some time in 2014 so will the 'communities of expertise'.

Conclusion

Despite the title being a *Vision for a National Youth Work Strategy*, the consultation document focuses on services and funding in an apparent attempt to funnel youth work structures towards an increasingly targeted agenda with young people. Whilst the Youth Service recognises it has a role in targeted approaches, this is within the context of open access/universal provision, the benefits of which are outlined previously in this paper. Youth work should not only be about diverting young people from 'bad' or risky behaviour, but should also offer positive activities and things to do, as well as opportunities to mix with other young people and try new experiences i.e. being proactive. Many vulnerable or disengaged young people opt to attend open access provision as it is not stigmatised, often is as effective as targeted services (House of Commons Education Select Committee, 2011) and can actually act as a route for accessing more specialised services. Unison in its recent publication *a better start for young people* (2013) comment that "*Open access services can be more appropriate than targeted ones when it comes to improving some outcomes for young people but both types are needed...The best measure is the fact that the young person wants to access the service and engage*" (P. 12).

Bath University's report *Study on the Impact of Non Formal Education* (2012, P. 17) also makes reference to the role which youth work can have with young people of all abilities "*young people at the **higher levels of qualification** report greater skills development during their involvement with youth organisations*". Youth work therefore can be just as relevant to the gifted and talented as the young person NEET.

With young people spending around 85% of their waking time outside of formal education (House of Commons Education Select Committee, 2011), the Youth Service and youth work (with its own pedagogy and professional base) offers all young people opportunities, regardless of their background and circumstances, to develop their personal and social wellbeing, to access formal education and improve their employability and life chances. Young people benefitting from trusting relationships with reliable adults, a positive peer group and the chance to learn from a range of new opportunities whilst focussing on people, not problems are essential processes in young peoples' transition from young person to adulthood. Such outcomes are especially strong where relationships are locally led and trusted, "*The principle of open access allied to local leadership and a youth club's ability to build trust provides a sense of security and ownership*" Hunch: A Vision for Post Austerity Britain. London Youth, 2013.

Formal educational attainment is boosted significantly when teachers focus on wider personal and social development e.g. as borne out by the success of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programmes. Developing collaborative approaches in this regard between schools and youth work can unlock the knowledge gained in schools to help make young people more employable and positive contributors to their communities. Such an approach can also harness economies of scale. However, as the relationship between youth worker and young person is voluntary and led by the young person, choice of engagement and access points will vary, may or may not include locations such as schools and will depend on the requirements and circumstances of young people.

For further information please contact:

Eirian Evans
Chair of the Wales Principal Youth Officers' Group
Education Department
County Hall
Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire
SA61 1TP
eirian.evans@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01437 775 234