

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

Consultation response

Name: Dominic MacAskill, Head of Local Government

Organisation: UNISON Wales

e-mail/telephone number: d.macaskill@unison.co.uk 01792 483918

Address: UNISON Wales
The Courtyard
Wind Street
Swansea
SA1 1DP

Responses have been placed under each of the main proposals of each themes of the consultation document.

Theme 1 - Delivering Education

Youth Services work in partnership with all secondary schools, including Welsh-medium schools, to support the engagement and progression of young people

UNISON agrees that youth services and schools should work in partnership in the best interests of young people, and also that non-formal education has traditionally been under-valued. However, UNISON members are wary of over-formalising such partnerships. For example, in areas where youth services have been physically located in schools, this has served to undermine the youth services and cast them in a subservient role to schools. The partnership between the two needs to be based people and relationships, rather than physical buildings.

An independent evaluation of the impact of youth work in (and with) schools is conducted by December 2017

a target will be set to drive up the number of youth workers holding JNC-recognised youth work qualification

the Welsh Government will continue to promote and support high-quality nationally recognised professional training for youth workers.

UNISON welcomes these proposals. However we should warn against the Welsh government following its English counterpart in setting up an Institute for Youth Work (IYW). The IYW seriously risks undermining the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) and the professionalism it represents, and so we urge the Welsh government to make clear its ongoing support for the JNC, as a body and a professional standard.

local authority Youth Services support a central role in delivering the 'lead worker' brokerage function as part of delivering the wider Youth Engagement and Progression Framework

guidance and information sharing protocols be developed to support work between the Youth Service and other bodies (such as Careers Wales) by summer 2014.

UNISON broadly welcomes these proposals.

Youth Services seek to extend opportunities for young people to achieve national accreditations

Youth Services provide young people with the opportunity to use and develop their Welsh language skills and raise awareness of the value of the Welsh culture

Youth Services continue building relationships with health services to promote positive health and well-being outcomes.

UNISON broadly welcomes these proposals but is concerned that the drive for, and any expansion of, national accreditations is not at the expense of, or distorts, maintaining the ethos and notion of Youth Work. Informal education's main value is that it allows those receiving the education an equal influence over the delivery and outcome which will be distorted by an over reliance on prescriptive accreditation.

Theme 2 - Building Capacity

through funding LAs be directed to work with the voluntary Youth Service to strategically build capacity of the Youth Service on a local basis

in partnership with Youth Services the Welsh Government will develop a recommended minimum service level agreement to be used between the voluntary and statutory Youth Service to clarify roles and expectations

LAs develop an annual work plan demonstrating their joint statutory and voluntary Youth Service offer to young people.

UNISON supports the involvement of the voluntary sector of youth services, but this needs to be regulated and implemented appropriately.

Vulnerable young people often have few financial resources and relatively poor financial prospects. Therefore, it is likely to be difficult to lever resources from the private sector. The kind of long-term partnership working which young people need is best suited to a free exchange of ideas and methodologies between providers, which may be contradictory to a competitive market where bidders may withhold information on their approach because it could undermine their competitive advantage.

UNISON's vision for the role of Voluntary and Community Service (VCS) organisations in young people's services is one focused on taking advantage of the VCS's sector's qualities – community links, the ability to identify gaps in public sector services, innovating, developing new solutions, and advocating and campaigning on behalf of vulnerable groups.

At the moment, in young people's services and in other services, VCS organisations are involved through a fairly crude system of procurement. As long as an organisation fulfils the requirements of a tender, they are entered into a price competition in which the cheapest bidder wins. Organisations can therefore only win contracts and funding by engaging in a 'race to the bottom' in terms of staff pay and conditions. The cuts are of course exacerbating this. UNISON has lots of evidence of the impact of this system on employees.

UNISON also has a lot of evidence of the effects of this system on the organisations and the services they provide, which are becoming increasingly generic, and not providing the theoretical benefits of involving the VCS sector. Norcare, a provider of services for homeless young people in the north east, have told us how they used some leftover capital to invest in research, which led to some interesting new ways of working being suggested. When Norcare took these ideas to the commissioner (the local authority), they were told that these ideas sounded good, but the work would have to be re-tendered so that others could bid. Norcare therefore have no incentive to invest in this manner in the future, and good new ideas will not emerge.

UNISON supports the involvement of organisations in the design of services – which, given their knowledge of local issues in their communities, they should be well placed to do. Instead of a local authority asking 'who can provide this generic service cheapest', they should be asking 'who can help us shape a service which meets local needs?'

UNISON thinks that more partnership working is needed – with the public sector working alongside VCS organisations which can provide niche/specialist services which the public sector can't provide.

The commissioning system is only one element that needs changing if we are to realise the benefits of the VCS. Whatever the system of funding, it has to be properly resourced. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations estimates that the Government's cuts agenda will take out £3billion from the VCS – at a time when most organisations are reporting increased demand for their services, and many are reporting having to cut jobs. The few hundred million pounds that the Government has put into the sector is dwarfed by this amount being taken out due to the cuts, and these cuts are leaving the sector completely incapable of providing its existing level of services, let alone, increasing its role.

Many Government documents have focused on cutting red tape in order to create opportunities for the voluntary sector to get involved in service delivery. Genuine waste and unnecessary bureaucracy should be avoided, of course, but regulations which ensure decent employment standards, equalities standards for employees and service users, health and safety for employees and service users, and safeguarding

for vulnerable people, should not be compromised. If they are, then the professional standards that the Welsh government is keen to promote will not be realised.

Welsh Government work with partners to consider the value and role virtual Youth Service delivery could play in Wales.

UNISON welcomes the commitment to making the best use of technology to improve youth services. However, personal relationships remain the bedrock of all successful youth work, and such face to face contact should remain the central plank of all youth services.

Welsh Government offers both 'core' and 'targeted/project' funding opportunities to national voluntary youth work organisations (see funding section)

from 2014 we will introduce new arrangements to engage, and facilitate dialogue with, the voluntary Youth Service.

In the context of our comments above about how the voluntary sector should correctly be engaged in youth service provision, UNISON welcomes this commitment to fund fully any providers involved in the provision of youth services. Indeed, the financial benefits of properly funded youth services are clear. The Audit Commission report into the benefits of sport and leisure activities in preventing anti-social behaviour by young people estimates that a young person in the criminal justice system costs the taxpayer over £200,000 by the age of 16. But one who is given support to stay out costs less than £50,000. But the over-arching problem is the massive cuts in local authority funding, which have led to the scaling back and disappearance of youth services, whether provided by the public sector or the voluntary sector. Local authorities across Wales have had to cut hundreds of thousands of pounds, losing many professional youth workers. Without new investment in youth services, many of the Welsh government's laudable ambitions for youth services will not be achievable.

A crisis is developing as a result of local authorities scaling back or reconfiguring their youth services in response to spending cuts. Open access provision for young people is fast disappearing as councils focus on targeted youth work. Specialist provision for young people e.g. for those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) are being cut back. UNISON believes that youth services will be the first public service to disappear in some areas. Years of professional expertise and partnership working between the statutory and voluntary sectors are being lost.

UNISON thinks all young people are entitled to the rewards and benefits of good quality youth work that provides open access services alongside proper support for targeted interventions. Young people want and need to be able to socialise in a safe and secure environment. Open access provision reaches out to and offers vulnerable young people early intervention; these young people might be missed by other services or their needs might escalate before they are picked up by the targeted service. In poorer communities youth clubs and open access provision are the only services available to young people. 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 youth and community method relies on establishing trust and sometimes long-term relationship building. Young people can enter and leave services over a period of time and results are more likely over a long timeframe; short-term indicators cannot easily measure the impact. Good youth work transforms lives but the benefits may be less immediate and less obvious. It is difficult to measure social and personal development empowerment, confidence and resilience. In addition, youth work operates in a multi-agency setting – isolating the impact of a simple intervention ignores the fact that there might be several influences. The best measure is the fact that the young person wants to access the service and engage.

Theme 3 – Accountability and Results

to develop and implement a National Outcomes Framework by September 2014

a Youth Service Reference Group (see proposal 9) to advise on the development of the National Outcomes Framework

to implement a Youth Service Quality Mark by December 2014

developing the annual National Youth Service Audit as a tool for benchmarking and identifying high-quality practice

an independent review of the impact of Youth Services to be undertaken in 2017/18 to inform the future delivery of Youth Services in Wales.

UNISON broadly welcomes these proposals and would urge the Welsh Government to ensure that UNISON, as the voice of youth workers, is fully involved in the rolling out of these initiatives.

the Welsh Government will work with the Youth Service Reference Group (see proposal 9) to bring together advice on the possible benefits of new guidance for Youth Services which are preferably on a statutory footing.

to establish a Youth Service Reference Group with representation from key stakeholders, which will directly report to, and advise Ministers on, the implementation of the National Youth Work Strategy by December 2013

to establish ‘communities of expertise’ to share and develop good practice in respect of this strategy and wider Welsh Government priorities.

UNISON would support these proposals on the basis that:

- UNISON is provided with a prominent role in the Youth Service Reference Group;
- The Group has real influence on Ministers; and
- Youth workers have a real say in the ‘communities of expertise’