

The role and value of youth work in current and emerging agendas in Wales, Autumn 2015

Introduction

Youth work, with its unique methodology, principles and professional practice as defined by *Youth Work in Wales: Principles & Purposes*ⁱ is a key and major contributor to the sustainable development of Wales and the wellbeing of its future generations and thereby should be central to service provision with appropriate emphasis, support and resources.

In a complex and difficult environment, young people have the right to expect high-quality targeted, specialised and open access youth service opportunities, delivered by enthusiastic, well trained and professionally qualified youth workers. Youth work is delivered through a variety of settings and methods e.g. centre-based work; street-based, outreach and mobile work; work with a broad range of members of the community; residential work; targeted provision for specific groups in a variety of environments including for example schools, the youth justice system and health environments.

As stated in *Youth Work in Wales: Principles & Purposes*, the five pillars of youth work in Wales are that it is:

- **Educative**
- **Expressive**
- **Participative**
- **Inclusive**
- **Empowering**

The key purpose of youth work is 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.

Young people's achievements and contributions to society both as young people and during their transition to adulthood is a subject which is omnipresent in political and academic debate across media platforms, the civil service, local government, the voluntary and private sectors alike.

In recent years the pendulum of this debate has swung towards formal educational attainment and, in particular, academic achievement e.g. the threshold/requirements of GCSE A* to C grades, national rankings in the Pupil International Student Assessment (PISA) tables etc. Within this debate, the youth work sector has also seen its role in formal educational establishments (in particular schools) pushed to the fore, with formal reviews of the role of youth work in schools carried out in both England (by the NYA in 2013) and Wales (by Welsh Government in 2015).

Current context

In Wales, youth work has recently seen a welcome recognition of its role via the flagship policy *Youth Engagement and Progression Framework* (YEPF), where youth workers are given status for their engagement, brokerage and lead worker skills. Alongside this is the “compelling, exciting and ambitious vision for a new curriculum for Wales” (Minister for Education, Huw Lewis, February 2015), *Successful Futures*. This review of the schools’ curriculum, researched and written by Professor Graham Donaldson, has concluded, the recommendations have been pored over and a new format will emerge in the coming years as a “curriculum fit for the 21st Century”. In his evidence gathering, Donaldson refers to children and young people (and other stake-holders), calling for “greater focus on general social competencies” and to a current over-emphasis on assessment, qualification and performance management.

Many “social competencies” are learnt by seeing and doing, by experiencing and failing as well as succeeding – the ability to cope with failure, to bounce back and learn from the experience (resilience). Youth work, as a complementary educational provision, provides not only opportunities for young people aged 11-25 to build and re-build aspects of their lives, to reflect and evaluate but also provide learning programmes in their own right using different (but complementary) techniques in supportive environments which offers an alternative for young people and to seek to achieve their full potential.

With **young people spending around 85% of their waking time outside of formal education** (Professor Tim Brighouse *Education without failure*, The Royal Society of Arts Digital Journal, Autumn 2008ⁱⁱ), the Youth Service and youth work offers all young people opportunities, regardless of their background, abilities and circumstances, to develop their personal and social wellbeing, to access formal, non-formal and informal education and improve their employability and life chances. Young people benefiting 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 adult.

There is broad recognition that formal educational attainment is boosted significantly when teachers focus on wider personal and social development e.g. the success of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programmes, which applies to children and young people of all abilities. A recent study by Bath Universityⁱⁱⁱ on the Impact of Non-formal education (2012, p.17) states that:

“young people at the higher levels of qualification report greater skills development during their involvement with youth organisations” and that “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”.

The CBI and ACAS (2012)^{iv} point to the under-achievement of employability or ‘soft skills’ (*“personal qualities or behavioural attributes, as opposed to technical skills or job competencies”*) by young people entering the world of work, skills which youth work has been developing with young people for over a hundred years.

Youth work therefore can be just as relevant to the gifted and talented as the young person on the fringes of education or deemed to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

Youth work’s role

Youth work is widely recognised as having a crucial role to play in developing young peoples’ ability to transition successfully to adulthood, in becoming positive contributors to their local communities and recognising their place in and contribution to the global community.

However, as a degree-qualified profession, whilst youth work has its own suite of National Occupational Standards (NOS), qualification framework and receives a status equal to (for example) teaching and social work, there remains a lack of understanding as to what it does and in recent years it has lost some ground in regards to recognition of its contribution. Due to its less formal (but no less impactful) relationship with young people, it could be argued that it too may have inadvertently fallen victim to Donaldson’s assertion of an over-emphasis on assessment, qualification and performance management.

Targeted provision for vulnerable young people, including teenage pregnancy advice, youth justice teams, drug and alcohol misuse services and homelessness support each have its place. Crucial to any youth work ‘offer’ however is that it is accessible in a variety of settings, including communities as well as school. Open access services, including a range of leisure, cultural, sporting and enrichment activities often based around youth centres provide a **non-stigmatising environment** and the two approaches often can’t necessarily be separated. In 2011, the Westminster Education Select Committee reported that:

One thing about open-access youth work is that it is not stigmatised. People are not referred to a youth worker; they take part in youth work provision and their needs are identified ... It is not like you are going to the place where the naughty boys go. If we take that out—that provision is largely going—we will lose a big access route for young people to get more specialised services.

The report goes on to say:

We understand that when public funding is limited priority may be given to services which support the most disadvantaged. However, our evidence showed that open-access services can sometimes be as effective as targeted ones in reaching those young people, that both can perform similarly life-changing roles in young people's lives, and that young people often move between them. Consequently, in determining which services to commission, local authorities must recognise that an open-access service could be more appropriate than a targeted one for improving certain outcomes for young people, or that both types may be needed.

The Youth Service contributes to numerous requirements in the current Welsh Government's *Programme for Government*, where the respective areas have an impact on young people. In 2016 the *Social Services & Wellbeing Act* (which received Royal Assent on 1st May, 2014) will be implemented and will place new duties on local authorities which will require the Youth Service to play its part. The *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act*, 2015 also demands a response from youth workers and young people to ensure its ambitions of making Wales prosperous and sustainable country are met.

Whilst the capacity of the sector continues to be affected by ongoing austerity measures, the Youth Service in Wales remains committed to young people and is keen to continue to play a positive role in their education and general development. The sector has a great deal it can offer to these debates and would welcome involvement in them.

Contribution to WG priorities/developments

Youth work, via its unique relationship with young people, is a major contributor to the sustainable development of Wales and the wellbeing of its future generations but it has the potential to play an even greater role.

For example, the University of York, in research carried out for the Audit Commission in 2013^v point to the

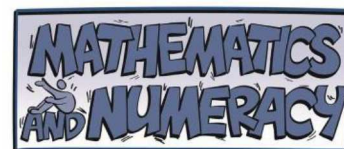
"relatively inexpensive youth support projects (which) produce major public finance savings. This indicates that cuts in such programmes will result in very significant rises in public expenditure".

They estimate that the average life-time cost of a young person not being in education, employment or training (NEET) is £104,300. [The contribution of youth work to the programme for government](#) was mapped by the sector in 2013 and the breadth of policy areas influenced (whether directly or indirectly) is extensive. Taking into account the areas which impact on young people's lives, it ought not be too surprising but, nonetheless, demonstrates the impact the sector has:

Theme/Key Action	Contributes	
	Directly	Indirectly
Growth and Sustainability	√	
Public Services	√	
Education	√	
21 st Century Health Care	√	
Supporting People	√	
Welsh Homes		√
Safer Communities	√	
Equality	√	
Tackling Poverty	√	
Rural Communities	√	
Environment & Sustainability		√
Culture & Heritage of Wales	√	

Successful Futures - the new curriculum

Professor Graham Donaldson was commissioned by the Minister for Education in 2014 to carry out a review of the schools curriculum. Following extensive consultation, Donaldson reported his work in February 2015 and all 68 recommendations were subsequently accepted by the Minister in August 2015. Work is ongoing to develop the new curriculum, which will be based around 6 areas of learning and experience:



Youth work can make a contribution to most of these areas of learning and experience, particularly (but not exclusively) *Health & Wellbeing* via:

- **Information** - Good advice and support is crucial to the overall development of young people and can inform patterns of behaviour for the rest of their lives. Good youth work provides a young person with not only information and advice on numerous issues which are relevant in their lives but also provides the individual with the skills and tools by which to make informed decisions around these.
- **Sex and relationships education (SRE), Substance misuse and other issue-based learning** – Young people face many complex issues and access to appropriate SRE and other, issue-based information should be available to them when they most need it. This is not always during ‘school hours’ and young people do not always wish to access such advice in formal settings, though this may for some be the case – choice and flexibility is important.

- **Leisure/Activities** – as part of an overall healthy lifestyle youth work offers the opportunity to take part in a number of sporting, indoor and outdoor activities as well as arts and cultural activities and experiences, including national and international exchanges and Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme

Over 1,000 Arts and Drama projects were delivered by local authority youth services in 2013-14, contributing to the Expressive Arts; over 600 projects of citizenship; over 400 projects of participation/youth forum/youth council; over 400 projects on Welsh Culture; over 2,000 projects on sports and physical activity and over 100 European and International exchanges; over 200 projects involving information technology <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/youth-services/?lang=en>

A **high quality workforce** will be required to deliver *Successful Futures*, so WG has also commissioned the *Furlong Review*, which has delivered recommendations for improving initial teacher education and the *New Deal for the Education Workforce* to support and raise the status of the education workforce in Wales. Given the recognition of youth work as an education provision and that the profession falls within scope of the new *Education Workforce Council* (EWC), the new regulatory body for educational practitioners in Wales, from 2017, it is somewhat surprising that the sector is not also involved in or covered by either Furlong or the New Deal. It is also recognised that, whilst our schools, colleges and other formal educational institutions all have an important part to play, they cannot do this on their own – to quote an old African saying, “It takes a village to raise a child”.

The youth work sector continues to evolve and improve the quality of its workforce via local authorities and voluntary sector organisations as employers and via the [Education Training Standards \(ETS\) Council Wales](#) as the body which endorses training programmes but there have yet to be national discussions on developing collaborative approaches between schools and youth work. As the relationship between youth worker and young person is voluntary and led by the young person, choices of engagement and access points will vary but, with only so much manoeuvrability within formal education, there seems to be scope for enhancing the capacity of both youth workers and teachers but particularly teachers, who may not have sufficient time to focus on issues such as self-efficacy and resilience.

Furlong remarks:

If the teaching profession itself is to make its proper contribution to the raising of standards in our schools in the way that has been set out in the Donaldson Review (2015) then what is needed is a form of initial teacher education that is expansive rather than restricted, one that gives teachers themselves the skills, knowledge and dispositions to lead the changes that are needed. At present, that form of initial teacher education is not available in Wales.

Perhaps this provides an opportunity for youth work and teaching to better understand and learn from each other’s different but complementary methods?

Wellbeing of Future Generations Act

The *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of a sustainable Wales. Youth work contributes to the 7 goals in the Act thus:

Goal	Examples of contribution
A prosperous Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Young people are able to take a leadership or supportive role through junior leader and peer education schemes.➤ Development of wider employment skill sets e.g. communication, team work, inter-personal skills, leadership skills➤ Young people encouraged to play a positive role in their communities➤ Providing opportunities to participate, regardless of background➤ Broadening horizons and raising aspirations by providing new and challenging experiences➤ Developing employability skills which encourage young people's progression➤ Youth Work in schools - promoting the engagement of young people➤ Links with Communities First Action Plans
A resilient Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Self esteem, anti bullying projects.➤ Confidence - raising activities with young people
A healthier Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Healthy eating programmes➤ Time and location flexible sex and relationship Education➤ Substance misuse programmes➤ Up-to-date and good quality information and advice
A more equal Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Promoting equality and diversity and challenging oppression is a central function of youth work➤ Intergenerational work➤ Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender information and awareness➤ Disability awareness➤ Combating and challenging hate crime/extremism➤ Anti-discrimination practice➤ Developing self-esteem and resilience➤ Developing social inclusion
A Wales of cohesive communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Learning "soft" skills and essential skills needed to sustain communities➤ Gaining an understanding of mutual support and the needs of others➤ Participation in positive activities➤ Environmental improvement projects

	➤ Duke of Edinburgh Award citizenship/volunteering
A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	➤ Eisteddfodau, theatre workshops, youth exchanges ➤ Events held through the medium of Welsh, production of Welsh medium literature ➤ Delivery of youth work and training/learning opportunities through the medium of the Welsh language
A globally responsible Wales	➤ Youth exchanges ➤ Global citizenship projects ➤ Cultural and identity awareness programmes ➤ Environment programmes

Social Service & Wellbeing Act

Youth services act as an important preventative provision, often **keeping a young person from getting to a critical point** where further interventions e.g. social services, housing, CAMHS, police etc. are required. By working closely with a young person, helping them navigate through their difficulties and experiences, the need for more acute and expensive interventions is often avoided.

However, many young people using youth services are already disengaged from mainstream services and are often vulnerable. Some are currently in the care of social services, others perhaps need to be but do not have the motivation or ability to seek help. As well as assisting young people to become self-sufficient and interdependent, **youth workers are also competent advocates**, acting in the best interests of the young person whilst aiding the skills developments of that individual.

Youth services have a strong history of collaborative working with numerous partners, from both statutory and voluntary sectors and youth work skills are often in high demand, particularly those of engagement and brokerage of services. Of paramount importance too, to any good youth worker and youth service is ensuring young people are safe – all local authority youth services have close links with their Local Safeguarding Boards and are keen to ensure these relationships continue under the requirements of the new Act.

Some other areas where youth workers are skilled and experienced and can contribute towards the demands of the *Social Services & Well-being Act* are:

- Participation – influencing service provision by service users e.g. via Youth Councils and Youth Forums
- Providing accurate and up-to-date information, advice & assistance in accordance with the *Wales Youth Information Standards*^{vi}
- Work with young carers
- Work with young parents

Conclusion

Youth work is a key contributor to Wales' continued efforts to ensure that its younger population is healthy, happy and prosperous via the powerful relationships built around a voluntary foundation and driven by the needs of the young person.

Whilst the Youth Service is recognised as carrying out excellent work in engaging with and progressing young people who have become disengaged, **its wider role in offering activities and programmes for all young people is crucial in preventing young people reaching this position.** Not all young people will need or want to access youth work support but many do and will either do so continually or may dip in and out when they need it. Young people from all backgrounds and abilities require the support and skills development offered by the service and, whilst targeted interventions continue to increase in frequency and focus, open access services play a key role in ensuring that all young people engaging with youth work are positive contributors to our communities and that **young people from all backgrounds and abilities are able to learn from each other.**

Through good partnership working between youth services and relevant organisations, improvements in personal and social skills will continue, as will young people's ability to make sense of the world they live in and the contribution they can make. There will be challenges in this journey however - the recent National Youth Agency (NYA) commission into the role of youth work in formal education found that:

"Two areas where youth work is seen to be of particular benefit are in the delivery of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Sex & Relationship Education (SRE)...There are however a number of obstacles to overcome. Communication is a recurring issue for both those working in the youth sector and those employed in formal education. Youth workers can often struggle to articulate the value of their profession. However, schools can also fail to communicate adequately how they want to work with youth workers to support their students"^{vii}

Whilst underpinned by its core set of values, the Youth Service has a history of being flexible to the needs of young people and has a tradition of successful joint working with numerous partners in both the voluntary and statutory sectors in improving outcomes for young people.

ⁱ <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/publications-lifelong-learning-leisure-and-information/youth-work-in-wales-principles-and-purposes-january-2013/>

ⁱⁱ House of Commons Education Committee (2011) citing Professor Tim Brighouse. Education without failure, The RSA Digital Journal, Autumn 2008

ⁱⁱⁱ http://issuu.com/yomag/docs/reportnfe_print

^{iv} <http://www.cbi.org.uk/campaigns/getting-the-uk-working/making-young-people-job-ready/>

^v <http://www.york.ac.uk/spsw/research/neet/>

^{vi} <http://www.promo-cymru.org/resources-2/national-standards-quality-assurance-framework>

^{vii} <http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Commission-into-the-role-of-youth-work-in-formal-education.pdf>