

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Hynt y gwaith gan Lywodraeth Cymru wrth ddatblygu Cwricwlwm newydd Cymru | Welsh Government's progress in developing the new Curriculum for Wales

CR 03

Ymateb gan: Grŵp Prif Swyddogion Ieuencid Cymru Response from: Wales Principal Youth Officers' Group

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

The PYOG welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee* inquiry into *Welsh Government's progress in developing the new curriculum for Wales*. As an education provision itself, youth work makes a valued (but perhaps under-recognised) contribution to the progress of young people aged 11-25 years.

Introduction

1. For those young people who access the provision, Youth Work is widely recognised as having a crucial role to play in developing their **ability to successfully navigate adolescence, the “dynamic maturational period during which young lives can pivot rapidly - in both negative and positive directions”** (Dahl, Allen, & Suleiman, 2018, p. 1) **and to transition successfully to adulthood**, in becoming positive members of their local communities and recognising their place in and contribution to the global community.
2. Youth work is based on a voluntary, trusting relationship developed over time with young people between the ages of 11-25 years of all backgrounds and abilities. Youth work has a valuable contribution to make to the education, health and well-being of these young people, which will be described in further detail later in this submission.
3. Youth Work in Wales is a registered profession with the *Education Workforce Council* and has for some time had its own qualifications framework and National Occupational Standards, which define its key purpose as 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.”

4. Youth Work offers successful preventative, open access provision which provides a non-stigmatising environment and acts as an access route for young people to receive more specialised services (see below). The **‘Five Pillars of Youth Work’ in Wales (Youth Work in Wales: Principles & Purposes) are that it is Educative; Expressive; Participative; Inclusive and Empowering.**

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Nelson Mandela)

5. Providing enriching, comprehensive and relevant education and learning experiences which equip our children and young people for modern life is the goal of all who have the interests of children, young people, progress and positive futures at heart. Whilst our formal education settings (schools) are the main providers of education, they are not the only places where young people learn. Children and young people spend only 15 minutes of every waking hour in formal education settings (House of Commons Education Select Committee (2011), citing Professor Tim Brighouse, *Education Without Failure*, the RSA Digital Journal, Autumn, 2008), meaning that the majority of their time is spent in places and situations other than schools where a wealth of learning in informal, non-formal and community settings takes place. For some young people, this is done in Youth Work settings.
6. Relationships between youth workers and young people are very much based on subsidiarity, the important principle identified by Professor Graham Donaldson in *Successful Futures* – they start from where the young person wishes to do so and respond to the identified need of that individual. As such, there is no prescriptive curriculum in the way there is in formal education settings, rather the youth ‘offer’ is developed at local level as a suite of opportunities and bespoke provision for different needs and ages, which can be accessed at different times throughout the fourteen year period (ages 11-25). Some young people will access youth work continually during this period, most will ‘dip’ in and ‘dip’ out as and when required.

Contribution of Youth Work

7. The PYOG has recently been called on (and very much welcomed the opportunity to do so) to give evidence in front of the CYPE Committee and has contributed in writing to recent relevant inquiries e.g. the Emotional Well-being and Mental Health of Children & Young People, the Youth Work Inquiry and the Youth Work Inquiry Follow-up. Whilst having no ‘divine right’ to be seen as an integral player in shaping the new curriculum, on each occasion it has been recognised and articulated by both members of the Committee, PYOG representatives and other representatives from the sector that **youth**

work is in an excellent position to be able to offer a valued perspective and influential role in the development phase of the new curriculum and can **offer an important role in delivering** aspects of it e.g. wider skills development, experiential learning, expressive arts, health and well-being, personal and social education.

8. These are areas of work and skill-sets which are integral to youth work - over 600 Arts and Drama projects were delivered across Wales by the local authority Youth Service in 2017-18, over 1,200 sports and physical activity projects and over 450 citizenship projects (Youth Work in Wales Statistical Release, Welsh Government).

“As promoted through positive youth development frameworks, having pro-social opportunities to demonstrate courage – through sports, drama, civic engagement or supporting social justice – are likely to have enhanced positive effects during this (adolescence) developmental period. Such experiences may not only prevent antisocial and self-injurious paths, but may also promote healthy trajectories and identity development” (Dahl, Allen, & Suleiman, 2018, p. 6)

9. These skills may not be so readily accessible for the (majority of) the teaching profession. Where this is the case, there is very much a role for specialists e.g. many teachers do not feel confident or competent to deliver certain sessions in Personal and Social Education (PSE) lessons such as Relationships and Sexual Health (RSE). The current curriculum being less flexible, more structured and, perhaps restrictive, does not lend itself readily to encourage such practice. It would therefore seem prudent to tap into areas where this knowledge and skill set is prevalent when considering these elements of the new curriculum. **The less formal nature of their relationship with young people can encourage young people to discuss more sensitive issues more openly.** Links to community organisations can also be exploited by youth work staff should referrals need to be made e.g. to substance misuse agencies.
10. Gaining access to platforms whereby youth work can play a part in shaping the new curriculum has proven to be beyond the sector. A number of meetings have been held with senior Civil Servants with responsibility for the new curriculum, where a paper written specifically to demonstrate how youth work can contribute has been shared <https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=738>. Positive feedback has been received about what role youth work can play, but this has gone no further. The PYOG also delivered a successful seminar on the contribution of Youth Work to the new curriculum in September 2016, which was attended by the WG Director of Education and Professor Graham Donaldson.

“The emerging (neurological) evidence points towards investments that place a strong emphasis on creating mastery learning experiences that maximise social learning and enhance status and autonomy at a key time in an individual’s development of social identity and competence” (Dahl, Allen, & Suleiman, 2018, p. 6).

11. The new curriculum also offers an **opportunity for teachers to learn from youth workers and vice versa**, to better understand and appreciate each other’s contribution, which can only enhance the learning experience. Whilst youth work and teaching are different educational approaches, they deliver their greatest impact when they both embrace and understand each other *“Communication is an 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” ((NYA), 2013, p. 6).*

12. Some examples of youth work curriculum/enrichment work:

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|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ➤ Conservation/environment | ➤ Sports Achievement |
| ➤ Community & citizenship | ➤ Outdoor Learning |
| ➤ Music & Drama | ➤ Pastoral and personal support |
| ➤ Sports Leadership | ➤ After school/lunchtime clubs |
| ➤ Youth forum/school council | ➤ Vocational programmes |
| ➤ Independent Living | ➤ Basic Skills |
| ➤ Enterprise activities | ➤ Essential Skills |

Including a selection of accredited programmes...

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ➤ BTEC | ➤ Princes Trust XL |
| ➤ OCN | ➤ PSD |
| ➤ Youth Achievement Awards | ➤ Health |
| ➤ Adventure Service Challenge | ➤ DofE |
| ➤ First Aid | ➤ ASDAN |
| ➤ Agored Cymru | ➤ Millennium Volunteers |
| ➤ John Muir Award | ➤ Youth Work Certificate |

13. The sector continues to be advised that it is still very early days (in regard to the development of the curriculum) and that opportunities will come to contribute. However, the sector is two years into the process and **youth work has not been able to contribute** – the PYOG argues that a more effective, comprehensive and inclusive curriculum will be constructed by engaging with youth work and other relevant contributors early on, not at the end of the process, when the risk is that youth workers will be ‘told’ how and where to contribute. Much better that the youth work sector is integral to the

process from the outset than as a 'bolt on' at the end. Whether this opportunity has already passed is open to debate.

14. *What Matters?* statements have already been developed in the absence of any youth work input – the sector has offered, on numerous occasions, to contribute to the AoLE working groups but continues to find itself 'frozen out'.
15. Whilst the sector has representation on the *Education Reform Strategic Stakeholder Group*, it is difficult to see how this group influences the shaping of the new curriculum and meetings of this group tend to be didactic, with little opportunity for proper discussion and influence – it is seen as more of an opportunity to update stakeholders, rather than properly involve them. Also, the Stakeholder Group's *Engaging Children & Young People sub-group*, which was gaining some momentum, stopped abruptly two years ago and has only just recently been resurrected, following lobbying from the sector. At local level, PYOG members continue to struggle to identify which schools in their local area are acting as pioneer schools and, when they do, finding a way/s to engage.

The Youth Work sector stands ready

16. There is currently a welcome focus on young people in Wales, with a similar level of activity in regard to policy development and engagement with the sector particularly around issues such as mental health and emotional well-being. These include the recent CYPE Committee's inquiry into Youth Work, the establishment of the new Youth Work Board, the impending new Youth Work strategy and recognition of the profession via registration with the Education Workforce Council. Youth work makes a valuable, often life changing and sometimes life-saving contribution to the lives and futures of many young people. Youth work skills are in high demand from sectors such as health, social justice and social care, yet it is in its own discipline, that of education that it finds itself struggling for recognition and traction, particularly in the area of shaping the new curriculum. Failure to (quickly) take advantage of what Youth Work can offer could, at best, leave youth work uncertain of its role (if any) as/when this is articulated at a later date and, at worst, result in a product which may not be as revolutionary and fit-for-purpose as it might be otherwise.