

Response 101.

Youth Work in Wales: Delivering for Young People

***[Information redacted]* Consultation Summary Report - November/December 2024**

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During November and December, *[Information redacted]* engaged with young people through a survey and an interactive activity *[Information redacted]* to formulate a response to Welsh Government's consultation: Youth Work in Wales: Delivering for Young People.

[Information redacted] we were able to consult with approximately 17 children and young people aged 11 – 25 years old. This report will highlight the key findings from our survey, with some insights from the discussion *[Information redacted]*. The report is structured using the eight consultation questions provided by Welsh Government. These are then arranged in key themes that emerged through our engagement with young people.

Discussion of Findings

Q1. Do you feel that the proposed definition of youth work is clear and helps differentiate youth work from other services supporting young people?

Community Connections

The young people engaged resonated with the idea that youth work helps to build strong community connections through the use of fun and inclusive activities. One young person defined youth work as "training for adult life and... making good connections in the community."

Youth Participation Drives Youth Work

Some young people felt that the opportunity to have their voices heard was an important part of a youth work service. This aligns with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which states that children should be given the information and support they need to influence the services that they interact with.

The Role of Youth Workers

The supportive role of youth workers was highlighted - "The youth workers are there for the young people to support them outside of the activities as someone to talk to and have your back." This indicates that the relationships built through youth work are an important part of what the service has to offer young people.

Feedback on the Proposed Definition of Youth Work

Welsh Government's proposal is that youth work is defined as

Services provided within the youth support service using a distinct educational approach based on the voluntary engagement of young people delivered by persons holding a youth worker or youth support worker qualification.

The draft definition of youth work was shared with the young people. When asked if they understood the draft definition, almost three quarters (73%) of the young people responded “yes”, with the others answering either “maybe” or "unsure".

[Information redacted], we asked young people to rate their understanding of youth work based on the proposed definition on a scale of 1-10. Almost all (89%) felt positively about the definition, however some did feel that it could be improved.

The survey went on to provide a list of statements about the definition. The young people could select to what extent they agreed with the statement.

Is the definition of youth work provided..?

	Clear	Specific	Accurate	Right Length	Strong Summary
Strongly agree	1	1	1	1	1
Agree	5	5	5	4	3
Neutral	4	3	3	3	4
Disagree	1	1	2	3	3
Strongly disagree	0	1	0	0	0

The area which received the most positive feedback was the statement that the definition of youth work was clear. This indicates that the definition included the key points in a way that is digestible and informative. On the whole, the young people felt that the definition was specific and accurate. The definition has some similarities to the responses to the open-ended question about what youth work means to them.

Over half (55%) of the young people either disagreed or were neutral to the statement that the definition is the right length. Similarly, almost two thirds (64%) of the young people did not feel that the definition was a strong summary of youth work. This statement in particular aimed to capture the young people’s general perspective on the definition. The length and need for a shift to encapsulate the “social approach”, as one young person shares, could be some of the reasons that young people do not entirely connect to the draft definition.

Q2. Are there any unintended consequences in taking this approach?

Focus on Educational Approach could be Restrictive

One young person shared “I feel like it's wider than just educational approaches, it uses a social approach, a confidence building and practical skills approach, focuses on wellbeing and that creates a safe space for young people.” The focus on an educational approach could be seen as narrowing the potential of youth work, and the effects that the service can have on young people’s mental health and relationships.

Q3. Do you feel that the requirement for a youth work strategic plan will help strengthen the design and delivery of youth work?

A Youth Work Strategic Plan will be Beneficial

When asked if they think that having a youth work plan will be beneficial, 80% of respondents said “yes” with the others answering “maybe”. This shows that young people appreciate the value in having a strategic plan for youth work, and indicates that they feel there is a correlation between robust planning and strong service delivery.

Areas that should be Included in a Youth Work Strategic Plan

Young people were then asked what they would like to see included in a youth work plan. Mental health and wellbeing was a recurring theme across responses as well as the need to focus on social justice, climate change, and child poverty. “Disability inclusion” was also highlighted as an important area within the strategic plan. The need for youth work settings to be “encouraging environments” that are “accepting of mistakes,” also appeared frequently in responses. This demonstrates that young people feel their interactions with the youth work service should be supportive; allowing them to grow and learn in an informal way. They feel that youth work provisions should be person-centred, and can be easily adapted to best suit the needs, interests, and goals of all young people. One young person also shared that they feel that youth work should be a space to openly express opinions.

Another response highlighted that “goals and process” should be included within a youth work plan. This suggests that young people want to see achievable, measurable targets, as well as concrete steps as to how these goals will be reached.

Meaningful Youth Engagement

The young people were asked “*What do you think the Welsh Government should do to make sure Youth Work in Wales is the best service for young people?*” A number of responses highlighted the importance of meaningful youth engagement. One young person focused on the need to consult with young people across Wales to ensure that the service works for young people in different parts of Wales (e.g. unique challenges for rural areas compared to cities). Another young person shared some ideas for ways to gather diverse views - “provide an educational side as well as a productive side (with more interactive and debate classes (and) some conferences for young people to attend.” This point shows the importance of balance when engaging effectively with young people.

Young people need to be provided with the right information in order to learn or form an opinion, but they also benefit from fun and energising activities to explore topics for themselves. One response highlighted that young people should feel like their voices are making a difference. This can be achieved by providing specific and timely feedback to young people following a consultation or co-design session. One young person shared why feedback matters to them - “ensure the young people are given direct feedback and that they can see that the council cares about what they have to say. If we think giving feedback leads to change and that it matters to the council we will be much more likely to want to be involved again and share with other young people.”

Both information and feedback are included within the National Participation Standards which provide guidelines for public bodies to follow when engaging with young people.

Funding and Investment

Funding and the need to adequately invest in youth services was also referenced within the responses. One young person shared their feelings that “To ensure Youth Work in Wales provides the best possible service for young people, the Welsh Government should prioritise sustainable funding and investment, ensuring long-term financial support for youth services while reducing reliance on short-term grants.” Another young person discussed the long-term benefits of investing in young people's wellbeing through youth work. They also highlighted that youth workers “have the wellbeing support they need and the application they deserve for the work they do for young people.”

Sharing Opportunities

Young people also feel that youth services will make the most difference when the opportunities to participate are shared widely. One young person shared that “the services need to be advertised more within minority communities” whilst another discussed “spreading the word of youth work.”

Q4. Do you feel the youth work strategic plan will provide an effective accountability structure for youth work?

Methods of Promoting Accountability

Both surveys and reports were highlighted as ways to measure the success of a youth work provision in line with the relevant strategic plan. “Youth council reports” were specifically mentioned which indicates that there should be opportunities for young people to hold local authorities to account regarding their youth work offer.

Q5. The proposals are intended to ensure local authorities design and deliver youth work provision in a collaborative way according to local need. Is this a helpful approach or is there a need to be more prescriptive?

Collaboration is Essential

All of the young people who responded to the question felt that local authorities should work with others (young people, groups, schools, organisations, etc.) to make sure youth work meets young people's needs. This shows that they feel collaboration and partnership is a key contributor to the overall success of a youth work provision. In particular, they have previously shared that listening to young people is an essential ingredient. Over three quarters (78%) of the people agreed that local authorities need more support to work with other stakeholders around youth work. On the whole, the young people do feel that more support is needed to enhance collaboration, however, there may be strong case studies in certain regions.

Q6. Are the accountability arrangements proposed in the statutory framework sufficiently robust and clear?

The Voices of Young People in Accountability Arrangements

The young people were asked to share their own ideas for ways to hold local authorities accountable to delivering good quality youth work. Once again, listening to the voices of young people and allowing them the space to provide honest feedback was a priority - “interview children from around Wales who are a part of youth work...and ask them if they think they are benefiting”. One young person focused on the importance of collecting and analysing data, whilst another felt that there should be “national inspectors like Esytyn” monitoring youth services.

Listening to Youth Workers

It was also highlighted that youth workers should be engaged in discussions around progress and improvement - “collect feedback from youth workers themselves to see what could make their jobs easier or what they feel could improve their ability to do the best job possible.” Another young person explained that youth workers bring a new perspective and are able to understand the challenges of both the youth work service and the young people that it serves.

Q7. Does the proposed youth work entitlement clearly encapsulate how we collectively wish to see youth work designed and delivered?

Youth work should..?

	Be created with young people to fit their needs	Include activities in both Welsh and English	Happen in many places, even online	Support physical, emotional, and mental well-being	Be easy for young people to access alone or in groups
Very important	6	3	4	8	7
Somewhat important	1	3	5	0	1
Neutral	1	2	2	1	1
Not important	0	1	0	0	1

Priorities of the Youth Work Entitlement

As the data shows, almost all of the young people (89%) agreed that supporting physical, emotional, and mental well-being should be a priority for youth work. These topics were mentioned frequently within other responses as areas greatly interlinked with youth work. The statement “*youth work should be easy for young people to access alone or in groups*” is also very important for most (70%) of the young people. However, this statement did receive a slightly mixed response. The majority of the young people who responded (89%) felt that youth work should be created with young people. This echoes the overarching theme of youth participation and listening to the voices of service users. Young people were also asked if local authorities should involve young

people in designing youth work services and delivery. Almost all (89%) answered “yes” and one person answered “maybe”.

Youth Work Entitlement - Mixed Responses

The young people did not feel as strongly about the statement “youth work should happen in many places even online” with around two thirds (66%) selecting “very important” whilst almost half (45%) felt this area was “somewhat important”. Similarly, only two thirds (66%) thought that it was important for youth work to include activities in both Welsh and English.

Q8. The statutory framework requires a local authority to ensure young people can participate in the design and delivery of youth work. The precise approach in achieving this would be determined by local need and structures. Is this a helpful approach or is there a need to be more prescriptive?

Using Youth Forums to Connect with Young People

When asked how local authorities can connect with young people, we received a range of responses outlining potential methods for youth engagement. One young person shared “I would love to be a youth board member for the council... that will be more interactive and give the young people a sense of responsibility and belonging as we are the future generations and our views matter.” It was also highlighted by another young person that there should be opportunities to co-design youth work provisions in spaces where decision-making power is shared. Youth councils and other forums are a way to ensure consistent engagement with young people throughout the development and delivery of youth work.

Interacting with Young People

The way that professionals interact with young people is an important step to creating meaningful youth engagement. For example, they should “meet young people where they are at” and try to see situations from a young person’s perspective. Social media was also mentioned as a way to share surveys, resources, and disseminate information about upcoming opportunities.

Additional Findings

Lack of Understanding of Youth Work

Throughout our engagement with young people, there did seem to be a lack of understanding around youth work and what was meant by the term. Some young people associate youth work with businesses. For example, one young person defined youth work as “companies coming to young people to get their opinions on their work.” Another young person highlighted businesses attracting young consumers as an important aspect of a youth work strategic plan. These responses indicate that the benefits and opportunities that youth work can provide are not being shared with young people in the right way.

Summary of Key Themes

- Youth work should encourage meaningful connections between young people, and with the larger community.
- Youth participation should be a driving force behind youth work, with opportunities for young people to share their views, co-design provisions, and influence decision-making.
- Youth workers play a valuable role within communities and are often underappreciated. Their wellbeing should be prioritised to ensure they are able to deliver a high-quality service.
- On the whole, the proposed definition of youth work is positive, however, it could be condensed and adapted based on the feedback.
- The focus on an educational approach with the proposed definition could be restrictive. The relationships built through youth work help to make a unique service and the social approach that it takes also deserves recognition.
- A youth work strategic plan will be beneficial, and should include specific goals and measurable targets.
- Disability inclusion and social justice should be prioritised within youth work strategic plans. It should also include the ways that the provision will create a supportive culture.
- The National Participation Standards should guide youth engagement when designing and delivering youth work services.
- Youth work should be adequately funded with appreciation given to the long-term benefits of investing in young people.
- Opportunities to engage in youth work should be shared widely with a focus on reaching young people from minority groups.
- Surveys, reports, and the involvement of youth councils are ways to ensure accountability in meetings with goals set in the youth work strategic plan.
- Youth workers should be given a space to give feedback to the local authority about the provision and goals that have been set.
- Youth work should focus on supporting the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of young people. Youth work should be easy for all young people to access, whether that be alone or in groups, and they should have the opportunity to co-design services so they best meet their needs.
- Local authorities should use youth councils and other forums to connect with young people about what they want to see from youth work in their area.
- When interacting with young people, professionals should have a flexible approach that can be tailored to the needs of an individual. They should be encouraging in supporting growth, development, and learning.
- There is some ambiguity around the meaning of youth work for young people. Welsh Government and other stakeholders should work to raise the profile of youth work to ensure all young people understand the services available to them.

[Information redacted]