

Response 104.

Youth work Statutory Framework consultation.

Definition of Youth Work

The proposed definition of Youth Work is overly restrictive. A broader, more inclusive definition is needed to recognize the diverse contributions of all individuals and organizations involved in Youth Work. The focus should be on fostering growth, encouragement, and collaboration, rather than exclusion. Currently, there is insufficient recognition of the voluntary sector's role. An insightful definition of Youth Work comes from YouthLink Scotland, which notably does not emphasize qualifications:

“ Youth work is an informal education practice that supports young people's social, emotional and educational development. Youth work can be adapted across a variety of settings, and typically engages with young people within their local community.

This could be at youth clubs and youth centres, youth cafes, community groups, uniformed and voluntary organisations, or youth action and participation groups. You might also include youth work at youth counselling units, drug and alcohol projects, at outdoor education centres, or on the streets via outreach programmes and detached youth work. Youth work can also take place in schools, where youth workers are embedded within the school staff team, working to ensure young people are supported to achieve the best educational outcomes through higher levels of engagement, attendance and attainment. “

Youth Work Quality Standard / Qualifications

It is important to acknowledge that some voluntary sector organisations may not possess all the required qualifications yet still make valuable contributions to Youth Work. Many have earned Youth Work Quality Standards, and others bring years of practical experience. All these contributions must be recognized and valued.

We should also reflect on the Principles and Purposes of Youth Work document, developed by the Principal Youth Officers Group and CWVYS, which outlines key frameworks for youth work practice.

[Information redacted]

Youth Work and Civil Society / Voluntary Sector

Youth Work has its roots in civil society, which laid the foundational principles for the field. These origins must be understood and valued in order to maintain the integrity of Youth Work. Yet, the voluntary sector often faces a lack of parity in its involvement.

For more on this, see the article: [What is youth work? Exploring the history, theory and practice of work with young people - infed.org](https://infed.org/entry/what-is-youth-work-exploring-the-history-theory-and-practice-of-work-with-young-people/)

Unintended Consequences

The proposed definition risks creating a two-tier system within Youth Work. At best, it could lead to marginalization, and at worst, it could result in organisations being excluded or opting out entirely. The sector has been working towards unified Youth Work services, and for this vision to succeed, all sectors and specialisms must be valued. Otherwise, the sector will never realize its full potential.

Youth Work Strategic Plans

A strategic plan for Youth Work can strengthen the design and delivery of services. However, for this plan to be effective, it is essential that all stakeholders—particularly those from the voluntary sector—have meaningful input and involvement in the planning process.

Co-production – equality of partnership – participation ladder

It is crucial that Youth Work embraces the principles of co-production, where all partners are seen as equal contributors. The concept of meaningful participation must be central to this approach.

Roger Hart’s Ladder of Participation is a widely recognized framework for guiding good practice in youth work. This model can be used to evaluate the quality of participation within Youth Work settings and to assess the level of involvement of different partners. It encourages a shift from non-participation (e.g., manipulation or tokenism) towards more genuine, participatory collaboration. In this context, applying the Ladder of Participation to assess voluntary sector partnerships would help identify where they sit in terms of engagement, allowing for clearer guidance on how to enhance their participation in Youth Work activities.

(Information redacted]

Innovation, Collaboration and Partnership

While there are some excellent examples of collaboration between statutory and voluntary sectors, these partnerships are not always as strong as they should be. Previous Youth Work partnerships were designed to ensure that the voluntary sector had a stronger voice in strategic decision-making. This approach, though imperfect, fostered dialogue and led to innovative collaborations. A notable example of such a collaboration is the digital transformation of Youth Information in Wales, which evolved from a paper-based service to an online platform that also gave young people a voice. [Information redacted].

Risk and Innovation in the Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector plays a pivotal role in fostering risk-taking and innovation. Unlike more risk-averse statutory organizations, the voluntary sector often works in more agile

environments, focusing on co-production and youth-centred delivery. Harnessing the strengths of the voluntary sector can drive forward new ideas and initiatives. However, when partnerships are not built on equal involvement, the expertise within the voluntary sector can be undervalued or ignored. In some cases, this leads to competition rather than collaboration, undermining the sector's capacity to deliver impactful Youth Work.

Local Need and Youth Participation

At its core, Youth Work is a participatory activity, deeply aligned with the needs of local communities and the interests of young people. The voluntary sector's ability to connect with these local needs has driven the creation of many organizations and volunteering opportunities. Including the voluntary sector in strategic youth work planning will strengthen local engagement and enhance the overall impact of Youth Work services.