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Research to inform development of the youth work strategy

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
CWVYS	Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services
ETS Wales	Education Training Standards Wales
EU	European Union
EWC	Education Workforce Council
ILO	International Labour Organization
IYWB	Interim Youth Work Board
NEET	Not in education, employment, or training
PYO	Principal Youth Officer
SEL	Social and emotional learning
SROI	Social Return on Investment
'the Board'	Welsh Government's Interim Youth Work Board
UNCRC	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
YFC	Wales Federation of Young Farmers Clubs

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of research carried out by Wavehill on behalf of the Welsh Government between July and October 2020. The research was carried out to inform the ongoing development of work within the Youth Work Strategy for Wales, initially published in June 2019. The Strategy was developed in collaboration with an Interim Youth Work Board appointed by Welsh Government in 2018. Drawing on the views of young people, youth work professionals and other stakeholders, the Board's role is to advise on how to support and deliver a future model for youth work in Wales.
- 1.2 This research was commissioned to collate what is already known by stakeholders about youth work in Wales. It has focused particularly on what is known among sector stakeholders and within the secondary literature about the variety, volume and quality of youth work models and partnerships that exist in Wales and the key challenges and opportunities for youth work in Wales. This report is intended to inform the future work of the Board and Welsh Government as they work towards developing a sustainable model for youth work in Wales.
- 1.3 This report is, therefore, intended as a consolidation of what is known across the sector rather than original research. It is important to recognise that the recommendations and the theory of change presented in this report are, however, the responsibility of the researchers, and should not be understood as the recommendations of the board.

Context of the Research

Policy Context

- 1.4 Welsh Government has a long-standing commitment to supporting children and young people. Several pieces of legislation address the needs and rights of young people and regulate how youth issues are addressed, including:
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
 - Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
 - The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011
 - The Equality Act 2010

- 1.5 Specifically relating to youth work, Welsh Government has, through the Learning and Skills Act 2000, section 123, directed local authorities to provide, secure the provision of, or participate in the provision of youth support services, which enable young people to:
- participate effectively in education and training
 - take advantage of opportunities for employment
 - participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.
- 1.6 Building on the Learning and Skills Act 2000, Welsh Government has put a range of policies in place to ensure appropriate support and outline young people's entitlements through youth work and youth support services. Most notable among these, *Extending Entitlement: support for 11 to 25-year olds in Wales, Direction and Guidance* (2002), provided guidance for local authorities to deliver wider youth support services, including working with statutory, voluntary, and independent sector partners to:
- put in place arrangements for the provision of a Youth Service; and
 - create a Young People's Partnership to plan and ensure delivery of a coherent range of services for all young people in their area working in close co-operation with young people.
- 1.7 The role of the Extending Entitlement was to support local delivery of youth services across Wales. Each local authority was expected to work with its local Young People's Partnership to develop a local strategic plan. Local Young People's Partnerships were also required to audit need and provision in their local area.
- 1.8 Underpinning Extending Entitlement was a commitment to youth work as a universal entitlement for young people. This rights-based approach to youth work was strengthened through the adoption of the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. Elsewhere, Welsh Government's appointment of a Children's Commissioner reinforced a rights-based approach to providing services and support for young people.
- 1.9 Supporting the vision of Extending Entitlement, Welsh Government worked with sector stakeholders to develop a National Youth Service Strategy for Wales (2007) and a subsequent National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014-2018 (2014). Welsh Government also worked with the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors to set out the key principles of youth work in Wales, in the Youth Work in

Wales Review Group's Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes document (2013 & 2018).

- 1.10 Welsh Government provides support for youth work through providing funding to local authorities. The youth support grant provides annual funding to local authorities to enable them to deliver open-access and targeted youth work and to support the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework.¹

Our Future: A Review of Extending Entitlement

- 1.11 In 2018, the Welsh Government published a review of Extending Entitlement (Jervis, 2018). The review found the need for a renewed national strategy, reflecting a frustration among the sector that the changing context since Extending Entitlement was written had seen a focus on targeted youth work provision at the expense of open-access, community-based provision. It was identified that the strategy should include:

- universal open-access provision
- online youth work
- targeted youth support
- participation from young people
- sufficiency assessments carried out by Local Authorities.

- 1.12 To support the strategy, the review also recommended the need for renewed efforts to co-produce services with young people at a local level along the lines of Young People's Partnerships, as well as a national body to support youth work at a Wales-wide level. The review also identified the need for a well-resourced sector, with effective partnership working between statutory and voluntary providers, a skilled workforce across the sector, and youth information to support the overall vision of a youth work strategy.

Review of the National Youth Work Strategy for Wales

- 1.13 In 2018 Welsh Government published a review of the National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014-2018 (Wrexham Glyndwr University et al., 2017). The report found strong cross-sector support for a youth work strategy for Wales, and the sector

¹ The Youth Engagement and Progression Framework provides a systematic mechanism for local authorities to identify those in need of support, to establish the support available and to track the progress of young people (aged 11 to 25) as they make the transition from education into further education or employment. The overall objective of the framework is to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) or at risk of becoming NEET.

welcomed Welsh Government's renewed commitment to youth work, finding that "the intentions and aims of the Welsh Government have been well received by the participants nationally" (Wrexham Glyndwr University et al., 2017, p. 49). Moreover, stakeholders agreed that the vision for the sector outlined in the Principles and Purposes of Youth Work document remained relevant and should underpin any future strategy. However, the review found that there was a lack of clarity around how key policy documents such as [Principles and Purposes](#) work to complement each other. The review report recommended a National Youth Policy to bring together all relevant policies and strategy.

- 1.14 The review also found that the relationship between formal education and youth work is complex. While relationships between formal education and youth work have developed organically, stakeholders reported a need for youth work to have a broader focus than simply establishing relationships with the formal education sector. Due to the educative focus of the 2014-2018 strategy, stakeholders were concerned that the more holistic needs of young people, in terms of their social, emotional, and political development, were not fully served. Moreover, it found that any future strategy needed to ensure that there is a clear strategic understanding of the relationship between youth work and the education sector.
- 1.15 A prominent theme in the research was the prevalence of disparities between statutory and voluntary sector youth work organisations. Issues such as funding, delivery of services, strategic direction, and access to staff training and development were all highlighted in the review. The review report concluded that a future youth work strategy should include measures to ensure that statutory and voluntary sector organisations work together to share resources and funding.

Review of the National Youth Work Strategy for Wales

- 1.16 Drawing on the findings of previous research, Welsh Government worked collaboratively with the sector and key stakeholders working with young people to develop a high-level strategy for youth work provision for Wales. The strategy is built on a shared sectoral vision of Wales as a country where:
- all young people are thriving, with access to opportunities and experiences, in Welsh and English, which provide enjoyment and enrich their personal development through youth work approaches
 - youth work is rights-based, informed by young people, and collaboratively planned and supported by a skilled workforce of voluntary and paid professional staff
 - the value of youth work is understood, with clear lines of accountability.
- 1.17 To realise this vision, the strategy outlines five aims:
1. young people are thriving
 2. youth work is accessible and inclusive
 3. voluntary and paid professional youth work staff are supported throughout their careers to improve their practice
 4. youth work is valued and understood
 5. a sustainable model for youth work delivery
- 1.18 Following the publication of the strategy, in October 2019 the Minister for Education published an Implementation Document setting out how the aims would be achieved. Subsequently, the Interim Youth Work Board established four Strategy Participation Groups to work towards achieving the first four aims of the strategy. Additionally, there are three further 'Task and Finish' groups covering Welsh Language, digital and marketing, and their work will link to all of the Strategy Participation Groups.

Objectives of the Research

- 1.19 The main aim of this research was to consolidate knowledge about youth work in Wales and to inform the implementation the Youth Work Strategy for Wales. It is intended that following the completion of this research, the report will inform the future work of Welsh Government, the Interim Youth Work Board, Strategy Participation Groups, and Task and Finish Groups.

Specific Objectives and Research Questions

- 1.20 This research had two high level objectives, specifically to:
- Generate an understanding of effective youth work interventions and current evidence about the variety and quality of youth work models that exist across Wales, including any barriers and opportunities that should be addressed.
 - Facilitate the Interim Youth Work Board to create a shared theory of change for the Youth Work Strategy based on that understanding.
- 1.21 In addition to the overarching objectives, there was also a series of specific research objectives and associated questions that this research has sought to address. These are outlined below.
- 1.22 **Objective One: Develop understanding about effective youth work practice and how to measure it.**
- What does evidence generated about Wales, UK and internationally, over the past 5 years tell us about the benefits of youth work as an approach, including for young people?
 - What good practice models are there for evaluating partnership approaches to youth work and for assessing the value of youth work?
- 1.23 **Objective Two: Develop a picture youth work in Wales and the current challenges and opportunities.**
- Specifically, what does evidence tell us about the range, volume, quality, benefits and impact of youth work in Wales?
 - Which findings have been reported, and recommendations made already in research into youth work in Wales and how has the sector, including Welsh Government responded?
 - What is known about the current challenges and opportunities facing youth work both prior to and including those resulting from COVID-19 and social distancing?
 - How do challenges and opportunities vary for different groups of young people, including: across urban, rural, and coastal settings; those who are most vulnerable; and those who share protected equality characteristics?
 - What do young people most value and what opportunities and challenges do they perceive? What should be their role in improving the quality of youth work in Wales?

- What is already known about the extent of youth work offered through the medium of Welsh and the associated challenges and opportunities?
- What do members of the Interim Youth Work Board and representatives of the four Strategy Participation Groups and representatives of young people already know about good practice in youth work in Wales, the opportunities that can be built upon and the challenges that need to be addressed?

1.24 **Objective Three: Engage the Interim Youth Work Board in developing an evidence-led theory of change.**

- For the purposes of the Youth Work Strategy, what is 'youth work'?
- What are the assumptions of the Youth Work Board about how the Youth Work Strategy will produce a positive impact and a sustainable youth work model?
- What role is collaborative working expected to play in making activities produce outputs and outcomes?
- Which policy initiatives or programmes of work are considered to be part of the Youth Work Strategy approach?
- What else is going on that may contribute to or detract from the outcomes that the Youth Work Strategy is seeking to deliver? How should evaluation take these into account?
- How can findings from recent evidence strengthen their approach? What does it tell us about ways to assess the value and impacts of the Youth Work Strategy?
- What is already known about the extent of opportunities for young people and youth workers to engage with youth work through the medium of Welsh? Can these opportunities be increased? If so, how?

1.25 In addition to these specific questions, the research has also considered youth work in the context of Welsh Government policies and strategies, including the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and its strategy for the Welsh language Strategy, Cymraeg 2050.

Structure of this Report

- 1.26 The second chapter of the report presents the methodology used to conduct the research. Chapter three presents the findings of the literature review in relation to the established evidence for the benefits of youth work. The fourth chapter explores partnership models for youth work delivery and methods of assessing their effectiveness. Chapter five outlines what is known about youth work in Wales and identifies evidence gaps. The sixth chapter explores perceived challenges and opportunities for the sector, based on stakeholder views collected during primary research. Chapter seven summarises findings of the literature review and primary research in relation to how COVID-19 has affected the sector. The eighth chapter outlines perceptions of how the Youth Work Strategy for Wales can overcome some of the challenges facing the sector and make the most of opportunities available to it. Finally, chapter nine presents an evidence-based theory of change for youth work in Wales.

2. Methodology

Outline of the Method

- 2.1 A mixed methods approach to carrying out this research was agreed following a series of scoping interviews with key stakeholders. Reflecting the need to consolidate what was already known within the sector and the wider literature on youth work, the method employed drew together insights from desk-based research with findings from consultations with sector stakeholders and representatives of young people.
- 2.2 The research took place between July and October 2020 and included the following activities:
- Scoping interviews with 17 stakeholders
 - In-depth stakeholder interviews with a further 60 sector stakeholders and representatives of young people
 - Three theory of change workshops with members of the Interim Youth Work Board, Strategy Participation Groups and Task and Finish Groups
 - Two theory of change workshops with representatives of young people
 - A review of literature relating to the key research themes
 - Analysis of annual data about the sector collected by Welsh Government
- 2.3 To support the interpretation of the data and to ensure a continuing dialogue between the research and the work of the Interim Youth Work Board, two emerging findings presentations were held.
- 2.4 An initial list of contacts for stakeholder interviews were supplied by Welsh Government, with a small number of additional contacts gained through the initial interviews. The list of contacts primarily included individuals who have worked with the Interim Youth Work Board, variously as members of the board, a Strategy Participation Group or a Task and Finish Group. Five of these stakeholders were identified as 'representatives of young people' who have been involved in the board's work in developing the Youth Work Strategy.
- 2.5 In addition to individuals involved in the board's work, contacts were also provided for Principal Youth Officers (PYOs) across Wales, and individuals that were identified by Welsh Government as being able to contribute to the research as

representatives of youth work organisations or working in related areas. A small number of contacts were 'snowballed' from initial interviews.²

- 2.6 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all research activities and presentations were held remotely. Where primary research was conducted, this was carried out using Microsoft Teams. The rate of engagement with stakeholders was roughly comparable with what would be expected for research of this nature, although participation in workshops by representatives of young people was below what was anticipated prior to the research. Full copies of the discussion guides used to facilitate interviews have been included as an annexe to this report.
- 2.7 The nature of the research is strategic, so it was decided to get young people's perspective on the research through engaging those young people who were already involved in the work of the Interim Youth Work Board and to make the most of insights already collected by the Board.
- 2.8 Young people who were already involved in the Board's work as 'representatives of young people' were engaged in the research through scoping interviews, theory of change workshops and invited to 'challenge' the emerging theory of change. Five representatives of young people engaged with the research through these methods, although only two participated in the final workshops. Low levels of engagement with these final workshops may have been due to research fatigue or the online nature of engagement.
- 2.9 In addition to this engagement with representatives of young people, this report has drawn on previous research carried out by the Board, including:
- Focus groups and written consultation carried out in June 2020 with 25 young people across Wales, focusing on how their lives and youth services have been affected by COVID-19, as well as their aspirations for youth work after the lockdown.
 - An extensive consultation carried out with young people in late 2018 and early 2019, focusing on what youth work means to young people, their aspirations for the future of youth work in Wales, and what they get from youth work. A total of 23 organisations responded to the consultation, including the views of 633 young

² Snowball sampling is defined the use of "a small pool of initial informants to nominate other participants who meet the eligibility criteria for a study. The name reflects an analogy to a snowball increasing in size as it rolls downhill". Morgan, D.L. (2008) 'Snowball Sampling' in Given, L.M. (Ed.) The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods Vol. 2: M-Z index, Los Angeles: SAGE, p. 815.

people. The consultation represents the views of a broad range of young people involved in youth work provision across Wales.

2.10 In order to support and inform the research, literature reviews were completed that aimed to map and critically appraise existing evidence supporting our understanding of:

- the benefits of youth work as an approach.
- good practice models for evaluating partnership approaches to youth work and assessing the value of youth work.
- what is known about how the youth work sector has been affected by and responded to COVID-19.

2.11 Against each substantive topic, a range of academic papers and grey literature were identified. Drawing on predefined search strings, bibliographic databases including Web of Science and Google Scholar were searched and screened. Where relevant papers were identified, reverse citation mapping was conducted to identify more recent research. Some of the literature included in the review was provided by Welsh Government staff, the Interim Youth Work Board, and other stakeholders. In order to support analysis of the evidence base, data was extracted from relevant papers, including broad determinations of the strengths and limitations of the research. Due to the apparent paucity of the evidence base across some of the questions, the authors included research from the last 20 years.

Limitations of the Method

2.12 As noted above, contacts for stakeholder consultations were provided by Welsh Government and based on existing stakeholder relationships. As a consequence of the sample used for the primary research, while the balance between voluntary and statutory youth work providers and the geographical spread of organisations consulted is good, the findings should not be understood as completely representative of the sector as a whole. The views expressed during the research are likely to reflect those of organisations that are already engaged with the work of the Interim Youth Work Board.

2.13 Similarly, due to time constraints, the secondary evidence reviewed during the study were appraised using literature review rather than systematic review techniques. Literature reviews are less robust in generating an evidence base than systematic reviews and may reflect current context and stakeholders' assumptions (Robinson &

Lowe, 2015). Together, the literature reviews supporting this research should be considered to give an indication of the extent and nature of the evidence base, rather than a definitive statement of the efficacy of youth work practice, or the impact of COVID-19 on the sector.

- 2.14 Finally, it is important to recognise that this work did not attempt to systematically map or audit the youth work sector in Wales. While the research has tried to build an understanding of the range, volume, quality and impact of youth work across all areas of Wales, it has tried to consolidate what is known among members of the Interim Youth Work Board and other stakeholders within the sector, rather than develop knowledge based on primary research.

3. Findings - What published evidence says about the benefits of the Youth Work Approach

- 3.1 This section summarises the literature review exploring existing research on the effectiveness and benefits of the 'youth work approach'. These insights are drawn from a more detailed examination that is included in Annex A.

How youth work has been defined for this review

- 3.2 Youth work is not easy to define. The term is used widely, but it is not always clear that people mean the same thing when they use the term. Indeed, there is considerable academic debate about what youth work is (Davies & Batsleer 2010). Research also shows that the meaning of the term has changed over time, in line with the objectives of governments developing policies to support and foster youth work (Smith, 2013).
- 3.3 Particularly challenging for a clear definition of youth work, it is not always clear where youth work ends and other ways of working with young people begin. Dunne et al. (2014, p. 60) identifies overlap between youth work and:
- Formal education
 - Social work
 - Health
 - Justice
 - Sports
 - Guidance & Counselling
 - Culture
- 3.4 As such, most contemporary definitions of youth work define youth work in terms of a way of working with young people and a purpose underpinning the work that is done with young people (Youth Link Scotland 2005, Youth Work in Wales Review Group 2018). These principles and ways of working usually revolve around the voluntary engagement of young people as empowered partners, recognising the purpose of youth work as about holistic development and supporting young people to realise their potential, as evidenced in the UK National Occupational Standards for Youth Work (National Occupational Standards 2014, p. 4), which identify the purpose of youth work 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.”

- 3.5 While youth work cuts across the other areas highlighted above, not all activities in these areas involving young people will be youth work as they do not prioritise the holistic development of the young person. Dunne et al. (2014) identifies the difference as the hierarchy of objectives inherent in the activities undertaken. For example, sport activities that are based purely on improving performance and reaching excellence would most likely not be considered to be youth work. However, some sport clubs are engaged in youth work. A club that offers sport activities to young people with a view to involve them in positive activities, learn to be themselves, develop inter-personal skills and express themselves and where the performance aspect is equivalent or similar to these other aims, is very similar to other youth clubs.
- 3.6 For the purpose of this review, therefore, we have tried to understand the evidence for the benefits of youth work as an approach to working with young people, irrespective of the setting in which that youth work approach is taken. Although we recognise that definitions vary in different national settings, most definitions align with the definition provided by the National Occupational Standards definition.

The scope and approaches taken by the literature

- 3.7 The literature review indicates that the evidence base for the benefits of the youth work approach is not particularly strong. Research produced for the European Commission found that “a general lack of data and robust evaluation hinders the sector from demonstrating effectiveness” (Dunne 2014, p.7). One of the main problems in this area is that the literature is often poor in distinguishing between youth work and other ways of working with young people. Another challenge is that youth work is a term used to describe a wide variety of activities, and it is not evident that the benefits of youth work identified by the literature are applicable across all methods of youth work delivery. Despite these challenges, the evidence available about the benefits of the youth work approach is growing.
- 3.8 Where research relates to open-access youth work, research methods have typically taken a qualitative approach. Methodologies such as Most Significant Change and Transformative Evaluation have been adopted as they offer a

methodology which establishes a dialogue between young people, youth workers and stakeholders (Cooper, 2012 & Cooper, 2017).³

What the literature tells us

- 3.9 A key consideration in understanding the benefits of youth work as an approach is the considerable diversity of approaches implemented in practice across Wales and internationally. There is wide variation, for example, in the precise objectives, settings, methods of engagement, age groups, content, and in the underlying concepts and theories that frame and inform youth work services and support (Davies and Batsleer, 2010).
- 3.10 There is a broad range of research and evidence that supports our understanding of the role and potential of the youth work approach in practice. The evidence base is strongest in highlighting the potential benefits of youth work as an approach. We know, for example, that the focus on developing positive inter-personal relationships can have long-term benefits for young people. When effective, engagement between a youth worker and young person can support positive outcomes across a range of areas. It can build self-confidence in a young person, for example, which is an important predictor of other longer-term outcomes, including improving educational participation and attainment (Jeffs and Smith, 2010). Broader research suggests that these relationships can be more effective than other forms of formal support, including through mentoring (Hirsch, 2005).
- 3.11 Where there are gaps in our knowledge, these are most apparent in understanding the extent to which the potential impacts of certain provision are translated into actual outcomes. Across youth work the precise objectives, methods of engagement and content of support are many and varied. The nature of the evidence surrounding universal open-access youth work is qualitatively different to more targeted provision. The evidence base supporting more targeted approaches appears to be more extensive.

There is, however, limited research that accurately identifies and explains the change brought about by certain approaches and practices applied in youth work

³ The [Most Significant Change \(MSC\)](#) approach involves generating and analysing personal accounts of change and deciding which of these accounts is the most significant – and why. It is generally seen as a collaborative, if time consuming, approach to evaluation.

Transformative Evaluation is an approach to evaluation developed from MSC, focusing on evidencing the difference that youth and community work makes to the lives of young people, developed by Dr. Susan Cooper.

settings. This is especially apparent in understanding the longer-term benefits of provision (McGregor, 2015).

- 3.12 An absence of evidence does not suggest that certain approaches are not effective or potentially beneficial. Understanding and researching the change brought about by youth work is valuable. It can support the identification and recognition of good practice and can help to build broader support for and confidence in youth work provision. Importantly, it can lead to more sensitive provision, identifying and delivering support that would be most suitable and effective for different young people engaged with youth workers (Fraser, 2009). Commissioning further research in this area would provide a robust evidence base for developing a more sustainable and effective delivery model for youth work.
- 3.13 To address these gaps in our understanding, future research could focus attention on exploring the journeys young people take beyond the support they receive. This could include:
- research to improve our understanding of how embedding youth work within the wider ecology of services seeking to support young people can improve outcomes for young people
 - further longitudinal studies to explore the relationships between support and longer-term outcomes, such as educational engagement and attainment
 - exploring the extent to which youth work approaches achieve change independently of other factors in a young person's life, which would require research using experimental and quasi-experimental designs, such as the use of counterfactuals.

Evidence of the Benefits of Open Access Youth Work

- 3.14 Evidence about the benefits of open-access youth work are strongest in the area of soft outcomes. Primary research carried out in Scotland using a Transformative Evaluation approach (Fyfe et al., 2018) has found that open-access youth work opportunities typically lead to the following soft outcomes:
- confidence
 - skills for life
 - equal and included
 - friendship
 - safe and well

- able to lead and help others
- get on well with others

3.15 The research also identifies that outcomes for young people are also specific to the interests and needs of the young people engaged in the provision.

3.16 Research carried out by the Young Foundation on behalf of the Local Government Association (McNeil et al., 2012) has found that youth work leads to outcomes across seven capability clusters:

- resilience and determination
- confidence and agency
- creativity
- communication
- relationships and leadership
- planning and problem solving
- managing feelings

3.17 This framework was subsequently revised (McNeil et al., 2019), with six domains of social and emotional skills identified from youth work practice and the voices of young people:

- responsibility
- empathy
- problem solving
- initiative
- teamwork
- emotion management

Evidence of the value provided by investment in youth work

3.18 Research produced by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs has found that youth work supports young people's personal and social development, "especially at the level of open-access universal services" (National Youth Agency 2019, p. 32). For public bodies, investment in youth work has the potential to offer a significant long-term saving, with Chowdry and Fitzsimons (2016) concluding that remedial services and delayed intervention costs £17bn annually in England and Wales, or £287 per man, woman and child.

3.19 This is consistent with the findings of social return on investment (SROI) analysis carried out in Scotland and Ireland, which have identified positive returns on investment in open-access youth work. Research carried out for the National Youth Council of Ireland found that for every €1 invested, youth work organisations generate €2.22 worth of benefits for Irish Society (National Youth Council of Ireland 2012). A similar study carried out in Scotland found that “for every £1 of effort invested in youth work, there is a return of *at least* £3 of value” and “the total value of youth work in Scotland is probably *at least* £656 million – a return of £7 for every £1 of public cash”. (Hall Aitken 2016, p. 6). The Scottish research identified outcomes resulting from youth work, including:

- Better literacy, numeracy and language development
- Attaining qualifications
- Engaged in education and learning
- In employment or training
- Positive health behaviours
- Less offending
- Less dependent on welfare
- Positive parenting and relationships (Hall Aitken 2016, p. 44).

Cost savings to the public purse due to these outcomes were then used to calculate the social return on investment in youth work in Scotland.

4. Findings - Good Practice Models for evaluating partnership approaches to youth work and assessing the value of youth work

- 4.1 One of the key objectives for this research has been to understand partnership approaches to youth work delivery and how they can be evaluated. The high-level Youth Work Strategy establishes an aspiration to ensure that youth work is “planned, delivered and reviewed by a partnership approach (with each other and young people) that makes best use of the available skills, knowledge, expertise and resources” (Welsh Government 2019a, p. 16). Drawing on the more detailed literature review included in the annex of this report, this chapter summarises what is known about developing partnership approaches to delivering youth work. It goes on to summarise approaches, frameworks, and methods for assessing the value of youth work.

Evaluating Partnership Approaches

- 4.2 Partnership approaches can include a wide range of organisational arrangements and ways of working, from informal networking between individuals across organisations, through to more formal arrangements. Partnership working can be understood as founded on the relationships and shared interests and objectives between organisations working together towards a common goal (Himmelman, 1996).
- 4.3 In youth work, partnerships are considered important in ensuring that support offered to young people from the range of organisations working within a community is coherent and effective. Dunne et al. (2014), for example, identifies partnerships between youth work organisations and other groups and organisations, including schools, social services, media, police, and the local community, as key factors underpinning successful youth work practice across Europe. Broader research from the United States of America found that community organisations within effective and more formal partnerships were able to secure more grants and offer greater levels of support (Rieker, 2011).
- 4.4 There are, however, several barriers to effective partnership working. Differences in the aims, values and cultures of organisations within a partnership, for example, can lead to differences in opinion around the nature of the challenges facing the

partnership, the priorities it should focus on, and potential solutions (Harrison, 2016).

- 4.5 Further research also suggests that ideological differences and professional identities remain a significant barrier to successful partnership working, particularly across those supporting young people (Deuchar & Ellis, 2013). This can include apparent variation and tensions in the collective values, approaches and motives held by different partner groups, such as between youth workers and teachers. A key tension highlighted in research includes apparent differences in perception of the purpose and approaches to building effective and supportive relationships with young people. Qualitative research suggests that ideological differences and entrenched professional identities remain a significant barrier to successful partnership working (Deuchar & Ellis, 2013).
- 4.6 There are a broad range of practical tools, models, frameworks, and resources available to help guide the evaluation of general approaches to partnership arrangements. Working in partnership does however cover a wide range of professional practice and organisational arrangements which means that there can be no single blueprint or definitive approach. Broadly, across different tools and frameworks there are three substantive issues that are important in understanding the effectiveness of a partnership:
- **Relationships**, the types, strength, and maturity of relationships between organisations making up a partnership. This could include exploring the extent to which a partnership is informal or formal. These approaches tend to explore more qualitative aspects such as identifying common goals or perceived barriers to the partnership.
 - **Processes** and procedures that surround a partnership, including any governance structures, terms of reference, coordination and delivery of support offered through the partnership. This approach is more relevant to more formal partnership arrangements.
 - **Outcomes**, including the understanding of the difference a partnership makes as a whole, including for children and young people. This may include, for example, exploring young people's experiences and coherence of support delivered through a partnership, as well as understanding the broader outcomes the partnership may have generated.

- 4.7 Across these issues, there may be a range of potential approaches and models for exploring specific aspects of a partnership, including in youth work settings. Some approaches are highly structured and offer organisations tools to support the process of gathering information.
- 4.8 The Nuffield Institute, for example, developed an assessment tool, including a questionnaire, that can be shared with partners and can generate a quick snapshot of partnership with relatively little investment in time and resources (Hardy et al., 2003).
- 4.9 Other approaches offer broad frameworks that enable partnerships to identify and explore aspects which they feel are important, including the intended outcomes. This can include approaches that bring partners together to discuss and agree outcomes as the basis for determining the effectiveness of the partnership (Evaluation Support Scotland, 2020). These approaches offer greater level of depth and understanding and can support the overall development of the partnership itself. These approaches may be more time consuming however, and require commitment and openness from the partnership as a whole to be effective.
- 4.10 The precise processes and models used to evaluate partnerships, as well as the focus of any investigation may depend on the maturity, extent, and priorities of the partnership. It may not be appropriate, for example, to explore outcomes of a relatively new and informal partnership, where exploring aspects of the relationships and working processes may be more appropriate in the short term to formalise arrangements. This may help to create a shared vision and an understanding of what each partner can contribute towards achieving their objectives, and in supporting stronger links between, for example, the maintained and voluntary sectors. Similarly, if the capabilities, resources and time are limited within and across a partnership, then more structured tools could be more appropriate in exploring the effectiveness of the partnership.
- 4.11 How this could be achieved, and the principles and good practice that could inform any partnership assessment is considered in more detail in Annex A.

Assessing the benefits of youth work

- 4.12 Turning to understanding and assessing the benefits of youth work practice, there are similar considerations and challenges as with evaluating partnerships. Given the considerable diversity in the precise objectives, methods of engagement, and

intended outcomes of support across youth work in practice, no single approach, framework or methodology will be appropriate in all cases. The most appropriate approach may be determined by practical and strategic considerations, including the objectives of the research, the resources available, the capabilities and confidence of the team engaged in impact measurement, and the benefits or outcomes of interest.

- 4.13 There are, however, some general trends and considerations that could serve to improve the evidence base supporting youth work. This could serve to improve confidence in the role and potential of youth work from some stakeholder groups. Evidence of the benefits of youth work is likely to continue to play an important role in determining government and third sector priorities and funding, now and into the future. This presents a challenge to the youth sector, especially those that seek to secure public or philanthropic funding to support their work (McGregor, 2015). Good, high quality research can also serve to identify and disseminate areas of good practice, strengthening provision across communities and settings (Fraser, 2009).
- 4.14 Future research should seek to address gaps in our knowledge and improve the overall quality and coherence of the evidence base. Gaps in our knowledge are generated in part by trends around the focus of research, and the methods used to explore the benefits of youth work. Apparent gaps in our knowledge, such as the medium and long-term benefits of youth work, are explored in more detail in the literature review in Annex A.
- 4.15 In terms of improving the overall quality and coherence of the evidence base, this could be achieved by considering what makes good, high quality research. Improving the overall rigour with which research is undertaken is a key consideration, as rigorous approaches are likely to generate insights that are more accurate and insightful.
- 4.16 Different methods, frameworks or approaches that draw on predominantly qualitative or quantitative information will operate with different criteria for rigour. Issues such as the robustness of the method or approach chosen to explore the benefits of youth work, whether or not the approach is sensitive to change, and the relative coherence between activities and outcomes under investigation all help to determine whether an investigation is robust.

4.17 In terms of assessing the value of youth work, there are a diverse range of approaches, methods and frameworks in existence. These include approaches designed specifically for youth work organisations, as well as approaches developed for other sectors. In exploring whether a particular approach or framework is suitable, organisations could consider a number of characteristics:

- **Flexibility:** The extent to which a framework can be effectively applied to different scenarios and activities. This reflects the extent to which outcomes within an approach can be adapted to different objectives, activities or settings.
- **Applicability to youth work practice:** Linked to flexibility, this explores the potential relevance of the approach or framework for understanding youth work activity. Some approaches and frameworks are drawn from other sectors, including social work and health.
- **Information Requirements:** This explores the amount of information organisations are required to bring together in order to complete an impact assessment or research project, relative to other approaches. This is important as it may have resource implications for organisations and individuals.
- **Capability Requirements:** This reflects the extent of capabilities individuals or organisations are required to hold in order to successfully engage with impact research. Where an approach or framework requires relatively complex data analysis techniques or is framed in such a way as to require specific skills and expertise, these approaches may place higher capability requirements on individuals or organisations.
- **Robustness:** this relates to the ability of the method or approach to deliver analyses that offer accurate reflection of the impact of an activity.
- **Confidence:** This is about confidence in the framework from a range of stakeholders, including amongst policy makers and funders. Some approaches may be considered more appropriate by some stakeholders.

4.18 In terms of flexibility, those approaches, methods and frameworks that are less prescriptive tend to be more flexible. They can support organisations to explore the meaning and value of their work or activity in order to inform and shape impact measurement. These approaches focus on outlining the processes by which organisations could define and evidence their impact. Through techniques such as

Theory of Change, Logic Modelling, or Transformative Evaluation these approaches assume and promote a process-orientated approach to impact measurement. This includes facilitating discussion, both within an organisation and with young people, to explore the objectives and values of the organisation, the activities it is engaged in, and highlighting relevant outcomes.

- 4.19 Importantly, these approaches offer flexibility, enabling organisations to develop more coherent approaches to impact measurement that are more aligned to the values and objectives of the organisation, and to the precise activities they support. They also include approaches that involve young people and adults as partners in the research process, such as Participatory Action Research.
- 4.20 An example of process-orientated approaches is the Youth Programme Quality Intervention (The Centre for Youth Impact, 2019). It is a quality improvement process designed to simultaneously understand and communicate the benefits of provision, whilst seeking to embed learning and improve outcomes. Developed in the US, extensive research has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving outcomes for young people, promoting a sustainable and supportive culture of organisational reflection and improvement, and refocusing evaluation on the quality of relationships within different settings.
- 4.21 These types of approaches tend to be more complex in nature, however. They often advocate a systems approach, in which impact measurement is embedded into other aspects of an organisation's work within an iterative process. By design, these approaches also seek to achieve impact measurement through a negotiated process bringing together a range of individuals and stakeholder groups to co-design a Theory of Change and impact measurement tools. Facilitating this process can itself be a difficult task, over and above the equally complex task of collecting data and information. These approaches also tend to have higher information and capability requirements than other approaches or methods. They generally require more comprehensive data collection activities, including the use of mixed method approaches to gather both qualitative and quantitative information. This suggests that these approaches and frameworks may be more relevant for organisations that are confident in impact measurement and/or have time to embed processes across an organisation.
- 4.22 Other approaches seek to provide organisations with simpler, more accessible, and structured processes for engaging with impact measurement. These tend to focus

on the act of data collection itself, providing research tools and guidance to gather relevant information effectively and efficiently. They often include predefined outcomes of interest, with data collection tools to help organisations gather information. This reduces the resource burden on organisations and assists in other research benefits such as comparability.

- 4.23 The Centre for Youth Impact has produced a [compendium of assessment tools](#) that could support any research and evaluation activities (2020). It highlighted the UK Data Service question bank, for example, which includes a huge range of questions exploring a diverse range of subjects from well-being to experiences of crime. The Office for National Statistics, for example, have developed four questions that give a quick snapshot of someone's wellbeing (Office for National Statistics 2019). These are very easy to use, including in collecting and analysing information, organisations are able to get a sense of respondent's general wellbeing, track any changes over time, and compare general levels of wellbeing amongst a respondent group of young people with other groups. These wellbeing questions can be used in surveys to assess change potentially resulting from an intervention, and to highlight the need for services and support amongst the community an organisation serves.
- 4.24 Whilst these approaches are easier to engage with, in terms of the outcomes of interest they tend to be more prescriptive in nature. This limits their flexibility and ability to respond to specific objectives or activities. This could serve to underestimate the impact of such initiatives, especially if there is a significant mismatch in the methods of engagement and the outcomes collected through such an approach.

5. Findings - What is known about youth work in Wales

What is known about the scale and scope of youth work in Wales

- 5.1 This research indicates that there is an inconsistent and incomplete picture of youth work provision in Wales. Considerably more is known about statutory provision than voluntary and third sector provision. Information about statutory provision is provided by local authorities and collated by the Welsh Government annually, providing detail on the range and funding related to youth work services taking place within local authority settings (Welsh Government 2019b).
- 5.2 Reflecting the data provided by 21 of the 22 local authorities in Wales, the total income for local authority youth work in Wales was £31.4m in 2018-19. Budgets for local authority youth services comprise of a core youth service budget of £17.2m Wales-wide, and £14.2m from other sources, including £3.5m nationally from Families First and £3.2m from Youth Support Grant (Welsh Government 2019b, p. 10). Total funding for youth services in Wales has seen a reduction of more than 20% from the 2013-14 figure of £40.2m (Welsh Government 2014). The total spend across Wales of £29.6m results in an average spend per head among the 11-25 year old population across Wales of £56 for 2019 (Welsh Government 2019b, p. 10),⁴ which compares to £71 per head of the 11-25 year old population in 2013-14 (Welsh Government 2014, p. 14).
- 5.3 There are considerable differences in youth work budgets between local authorities, and expenditure ranges from £2.6m in Swansea to £0.4m in Ceredigion (Welsh Government 2019b, p. 10). Wales-wide spend per head masks considerable regional disparities, as local authority spend per person aged 11-25 ranges from £113 per person in Blaenau Gwent to £25 per person in Cardiff.
- 5.4 The majority of youth service spending was on staffing (77% of all expenditure), with 8% spent on resources and 6% on accommodation. One per cent of youth service spending is grant aid from the statutory youth work sector to the voluntary sector, with local authorities providing £540,000 in grant aid to voluntary youth services during 2018-19 (Welsh Government 2019b, p. 10). Comparable figures for the total funding received by voluntary and third sector youth work organisations are not currently available. While the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services

⁴ Total spend per head for 2018-19 does not include figures for Powys or Anglesey.

(CWVYS) holds data for its membership, this does not include youth work organisations that are not members of CWVYS.

- 5.5 Welsh Government figures show that 82,400 young people between 11 and 25, 15% of the eligible population, were registered members of youth work provision in Wales in 2018-19 (Welsh Government 2019b, p. 2). This is down from 2013-14 estimates of 117,200 young people registered members of statutory sector youth provision, or 20% of the eligible population (Welsh Government 2014b, p. 1). There is likely to be considerable numbers of young people engaged by youth work organisations in Wales that are not 'known' to local authorities. While youth work organisations will typically have an idea of how many people they have engaged with, this information has not been collated systematically at a Wales-wide level.
- 5.6 Figures from 2018-19 show that 11-13 year olds make up the highest proportion of young people involved with local authority youth work, with participation rates tailing off sharply after the age of 16 (Welsh Government 2019b, p. 2). There is also considerable variation in the percentage of young people registered with provision, with figures indicating that 38% of young people aged 11-25 are registered members of local authority led youth work provision in Wrexham in 2018-19, but only 4% were registered with local authority led youth work provision in Swansea (Welsh Government 2019b, p. 3).
- 5.7 In addition to engagement figures, the Welsh Government collects information about the settings in which young people are engaging with youth services. Table 5.1 shows figures for membership of local authority youth services in Wales. It demonstrates that school or college-based youth work is the most commonly engaged-with form of youth work, followed by youth clubs, youth centres and information shops.

Table 5.1: Registered members of local authority youth services attending projects at different settings

Setting Type	Total number of settings	Total number of registered members
School or college based	260	37,300
Youth club	225	31,200
Youth centre	100	24,200
Detached or outreach team	85	16,600
Information shop	20	21,000
Mobile youth service	20	16,800
Total	710	147, 100

Source: Welsh Government statutory youth work audit (Welsh Government 2019b, p. 5)

N.B. Members interact with multiple settings, so total numbers exceed the overall engagement figure of 82,200.

- 5.8 Reflecting the limits of the information available through local authorities' reports to Welsh Government, during the course of this research, stakeholders were asked about the scale and scope of youth work, although the nature of this project means that the findings are not as comprehensive as an audit of youth work provision would offer.
- 5.9 Stakeholders were asked about what they felt comprised the range of youth work that was currently being delivered in their area. A range of activities were identified in a variety of settings, which were largely consistent with the statistical information collated by Welsh Government. Settings mentioned during qualitative interviews included centre-based provision (9), schools-based provision (8), community-based provision (8), and online provision (7).
- 5.10 Around a quarter (9) of stakeholders involved in the delivery of youth work suggested that they saw the provision of youth work as something that has changed during the last few years. In some cases, this was identified as a result of targeting new groups or responding to demand from young people, whereas in others long-term change in youth work provision was seen in terms of a transition from open-access provision to more targeted forms of youth work.

"In terms of youth work what we've seen is a change over time. We had more freedom in the 1980s and 1990s into a drift from the forms to more targeted youth work at the expense of community workforce." (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“Since 2012, cuts to funding have meant that we’ve had to target our youth work on more with vulnerable and at risk young people. Cuts have affected quality as well.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.11 Wales is not unique in finding more emphasis on targeted youth work, with McGregor (2015, p. 4) identifying a trend towards “issue-specific targeted interventions aimed at ‘at-risk’ or ‘socially excluded’ groups; a focus on employability; and evidence-based youth work”. In a European context, Dunne et al. (2014 p.11-12) identified that “priorities for public funding of youth work have changed. There is greater emphasis on youth work targeted at giving young people better opportunities on the labour market and in education. Focus is increasingly on funding support to those who are socially excluded. Organisations providing universal youth work increasingly struggle to get public funding”.
- 5.12 This understanding is consistent with reports from stakeholders in Wales consulted during this research who identified an increased need to focus work on stakeholder groups including: those in the youth justice system (6), young people in need of employment (6), young people experiencing mental health challenges (5).
- 5.13 Voluntary and third sector provision were identified as an important part of the mosaic of youth work within a local area, complementing local authority provision. Stakeholders reported that in some areas, the local authority offer had not dovetailed neatly with the offer provided by third sector organisations, but in other areas services were being commissioned more collaboratively.

“One of the most important elements of the new strategy are that we are all one team: the third sector is as important as the statutory service in providing youth work opportunities to the local area.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“We work closely with the third sector as we don’t want to duplicate services. The demographic of young people that would access support through Young Farmers or the Urdd are quite different to ours, so we utilise a partnership approach. This results in a wider reach and better supported young people, so it’s essential we’re thinking about these things together.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.14 This supports the findings of a review of the National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014-2018 carried out by Wrexham Glyndwr University (2018) and research carried out by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David into partnership working between voluntary sector and local authority youth work delivery (2016). Both

reports identified that increasing amounts of the delivery of youth work services are being provided by voluntary and statutory sector organisations in partnership (Wrexham Glyndwr University, 2018 & University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2016).

- 5.15 The organisations identified across the stakeholder interviews are generally large organisations with a high national profile. However, there are also organisations involved in delivering youth work which are locally based and it should be noted that stakeholder views expressed in this research may not have fully reflected their existence.
- 5.16 In addition to ascertaining what currently comprises youth work in Wales, stakeholders were also prompted to discuss what they felt were the main gaps in youth work provision, in terms of both areas and groups of young people that may be underserved by the current youth work offer.
- 5.17 In terms of geographical gaps in provision the two types of communities where there was a consensus on their lack of support were rural communities (8) and valleys communities (5). One reason put forward by a third (7) of the Stakeholders who commented on these gaps, was that for these particular areas because they are so large in area, austerity and the closure of centre-based provision has exacerbated problems for these communities. These gaps have often led local authorities to look at different delivery models to counter these gaps.

“Geography is an issue for us. We have rural centres but tend to focus on clubs in town centres - all by bus stations but there is still an expectation of young people coming to us instead of us going to where they are. We are now trying to work with voluntary orgs to go and set up centres in those areas themselves because we don’t have the capacity to do it.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“As a PYO in a rural county, we’ve been conscious that there are 150 young people in rural parts of the county with no local provision. We’re moving towards mobile youth work- through sourcing a bus- as a means of delivering for them.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.18 Other geographical gaps that were suggested included: more affluent communities that are not recipients of funding for targeted youth work interventions, North Wales, urban communities, areas without schools, and Welsh speaking areas.

“One of the biggest issues I have is the 12 community-based clubs for 43 wards. They are all in community buildings, all wards want a youth club, but we can’t afford it. Some of the wards are so closely linked to others you can get away with it but there are some areas that need them but there’s no funding.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.19 Groups for whom support has been identified as lacking by stakeholders include LGBTQ+ young people (7), young people experiencing homelessness (6), and older young people between the ages of 18-25 (6).

“The LGBTQ+ community [is an area where provision could be improved]: we’ve tried to start targeted groups but it has been difficult to get momentum. Our agricultural communities are another. Youth homelessness is a new area for us, we work closely with housing partners to try to work with young people at risk or experiencing homelessness, but the provision is still getting off the ground.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.20 In contradiction to this, however, a number of stakeholders (7) suggested that young people who didn’t find themselves within a group to which youth work is being targeted, faced restrictions in terms of the provision they could access as youth work has moved from a more open-access model to more targeted strategies.

“There’s always going to be the protected characteristics groups, but the challenge is for those with issues that don’t qualify for the targeted groups. Like someone who is just looking to socialise, or who has a very specific issue they want to address. Closing youth clubs further diminishes this.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“If there’s a gap, it’s that there is no preventative or universal provision: it’s all targeted with troubled groups.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.21 The idea that the balance between universal and targeted youth work provision has tipped too far in the direction of targeted youth work echoes recent findings of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs. Their research found that in England and Wales “[t]here has been a sharp reduction in open-access (‘universal’) youth services, impacting also on voluntary sector provision” (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs 2019, p. 7). The report found that “increasingly short-term funding has caused a shift to short-term and targeted interventions. Open-access or universal youth services have all but disappeared from many communities” (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs 2019, p.

7). It is also consistent with the findings of the review of the previous National Youth Work Strategy for Wales, which found that “[o]pen access youth work needs to be sufficiently protected so that it can support and enable targeted provision, rather than being supplanted by it” and that “a future strategy would need to secure open access provision” (Wrexham Glyndwr University et al., 2017, p. 13).

- 5.22 The lack of systematic information about youth work provision across Wales makes it difficult to assess the extent to which youth work is universally available to young people in Wales. It also makes it difficult to assess which, if any, areas are underserved by existing provision. Rectifying this, and producing a more systematic understanding of the youth work opportunities available to young people, including the important role of third sector and voluntary youth work provision, is important for ensuring that youth work opportunities are available to all young people in Wales.
- 5.23 Following this up to ensure that strategic direction is informed by an accurate and up-to-date picture of what is available where, will be important. Asking local authorities to maintain a directory of services within the local authority area, including local authority, third sector and voluntary sector provision, could form the basis of a more comprehensive information service for young people, and lead to more joined-up and collaborative commissioning of services in the future.

Recommendation 1: Reflecting the lack of systematic information about youth work in Wales, particularly that which relates to non-statutory provision, Welsh Government should consider expanding the scope of the data it collects about youth work provision in Wales to include all youth work organisations in Wales, including voluntary youth work delivery. This would extend beyond existing information provided by local authorities to Welsh Government and would enable Welsh Government to establish the extent to which a universal entitlement to youth work provision has been met.

What is known about the extent of youth work delivered through the medium of Welsh

- 5.24 The importance of Welsh medium youth work is recognised by the high level youth work strategy, which notes that “[y]outh work recognises the importance and value of language and culture, particularly that of Wales and the need to promote the use of the Welsh language” (Welsh Government 2019a, p. 5). Stakeholders consulted during this research reported a view that youth work has the potential to contribute to Welsh Government’s *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers* strategy (Welsh Government 2018).
- 5.25 However, stakeholders suggested that the primary importance of Welsh medium youth work is that youth work “starts at whatever point young people are at in their lives” (Welsh Government 2019a, p. 5), and many young people in Wales want to engage with provision through the medium of Welsh. Providing services through the medium of Welsh was identified as something intrinsic to the youth work relationship itself, and that youth work organisations have an obligation to make services available to young people in the language they feel most comfortable using. During stakeholder interviews, a view was expressed that a universal offer, that is a youth work delivery model that makes Welsh medium youth work available to all young people in Wales who want to access it, should be the goal of the strategy in this area.
- 5.26 As with youth work provision in general, statistical information about the range and volume of youth work being delivered through the medium of Welsh is limited and only includes youth work delivered by local authorities. It is therefore hard to assess the extent to which all young people who want to access youth work through the medium of Welsh can currently do so.
- 5.27 The 2018-19 Youth Work in Wales statistical release identified that 17% of local authority youth service projects were delivered entirely or mainly through the medium of Welsh (Welsh Government 2019b, p. 6). There is considerable variation between local authorities in Wales, however, with Gwynedd reporting that 100% of its youth work projects are delivered entirely or mainly through the medium of Welsh, while no local authority youth work projects were delivered through the medium of Welsh in Flintshire in 2018-19 (Welsh Government 2019b, p. 6).

- 5.28 Stakeholder interviews explored the extent to which youth work opportunities in Wales are available through the medium of Welsh. The picture that emerged from these interviews is consistent with the statistical data compiled by Welsh Government, that Welsh medium provision is recognised as important part of the Welsh youth work offer, but that at present, it is far from universally accessible to young people. In most parts of Wales, only some activities are available through the medium of Welsh.
- 5.29 Most of the youth work organisations involved in the research identified Welsh medium provision as something they offer, with 27 of 29 stakeholders from organisations delivering youth work reporting that their organisations were offering some youth work opportunities through the medium of Welsh. However, the majority of stakeholders (15) reported that there were only certain centres, services or opportunities within their provision that offered services through the medium of Welsh.
- 5.30 Several stakeholders identified Welsh medium provision as something that is contracted out to a Welsh medium provider, and others identified Welsh medium provision as something that only certain staff were able to provide. Only a minority of youth work delivery organisations (3) reported that their organisations were able to deliver youth work through the medium of Welsh across all services.
- 5.31 In terms of being able to effectively deliver youth work through the medium of Welsh, Stakeholders suggest that there were three main ways in which they had been able to accomplish this. These were utilising external youth work providers (11), becoming involved with the Urdd (9), and employing bilingual staff members (9).

“This is something that we’re conscious of: there are limited opportunities to engage in Welsh medium or bilingual youth work. Honestly, it’s not an integrated part of statutory youth work services. Whereas in some parts of Wales, you can get youth work opportunities through the medium of Welsh, in others, it’s limited to the Urdd and Young Farmers.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.32 Stakeholder were then asked to elaborate on what they perceived to be the biggest challenges with regards to delivering youth work through the medium of Welsh. As Figure 5.1 demonstrates, a range of challenges were identified, however the most prominent by far (18) was the capacity of youth work organisations to recruit Welsh

speakers. Organisations reported difficulties finding Welsh speakers with the correct qualifications and experience.

“The biggest challenge we face is in recruiting qualified bilingual staff. Most of our Welsh-speaking staff are not qualified to degree level. The Urdd runs a very successful apprenticeship scheme, bringing really good young people into youth work - but then they often move into other areas – so we have poor retention among those.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.33 Training existing staff to be able to deliver youth work through the medium of Welsh was the next most frequently identified challenge (6). A lack of materials with which to train Welsh speaking youth workers was identified as a key barrier here. Discussion in this area not only focused on training those with no knowledge of the language to have a basic understanding of Welsh but also on building the confidence of staff who considered themselves Welsh speakers to be able to use it as part of their work.

“What we find is that they are happy to chat in Welsh but not complete their work in Welsh. There’s a lack of confidence from youth workers who do speak Welsh informally, so we provide the materials to facilitate them to use it in the workplace.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.34 Concerns were raised around reliance on external providers to deliver Welsh medium youth work, leading to it not being as integrated into delivery as respondents would like (5). This means that young people are not able to get involved in all youth work opportunities through the medium of Welsh but rather can choose to engage in one of two ‘streams’ of youth work opportunities.
- 5.35 There was some suggestion that the view that the Welsh language is ‘the language of school’ or something that is ‘forced on young people’ (4), is a barrier to engaging more young people with Welsh medium youth work opportunities.
- 5.36 A perception was also expressed that materials to support youth work through the medium of Welsh were not as readily available as English language materials (3), something that made translation a barrier to delivering activities through the medium of Welsh.
- 5.37 Stakeholders were also asked about what they believed to be the major opportunities that delivering youth work through Welsh could offer. Several opportunities for Welsh medium youth work were identified.

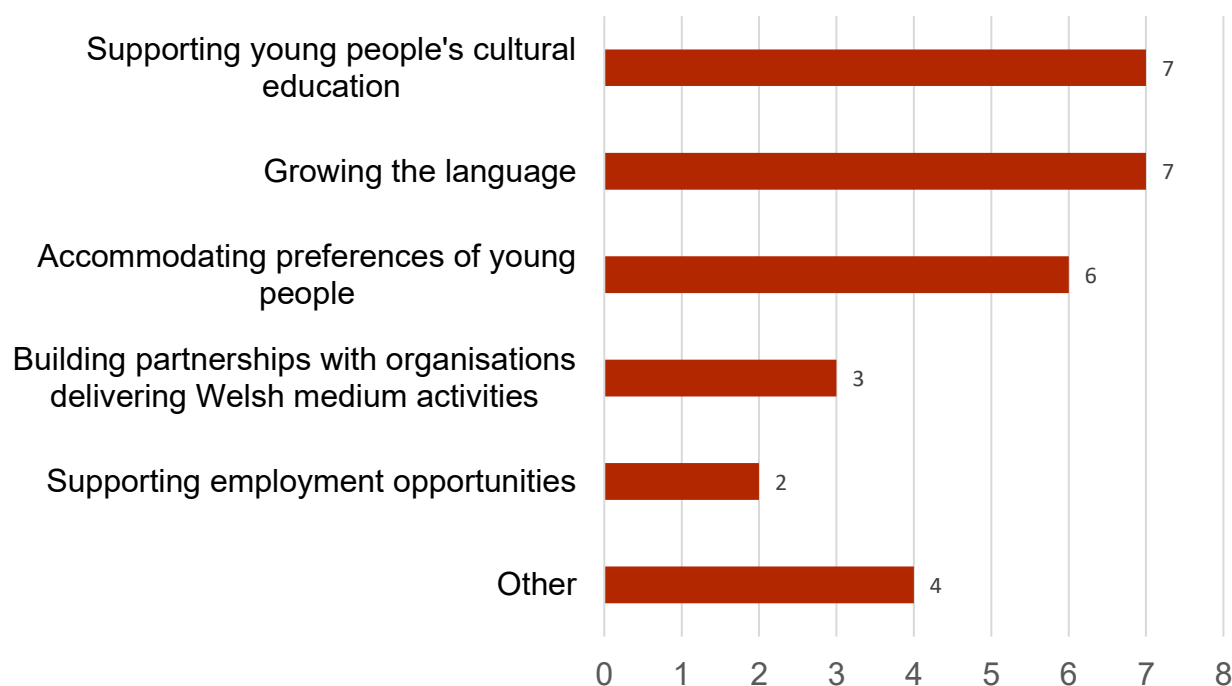
5.38 Being able to use the Welsh language to provide more cultural education was seen as one of the key opportunities (7), as was being able to use youth work as a tool to grow the language (7) not just by training staff but also by encouraging young people to speak it too

“It's about getting young people to understand the benefits of bilingualism. When you look at other small countries like Iceland where people speak multiple languages it helps them culturally and with their identity. I would also say that valleys Welsh and colloquial Welsh should be encouraged rather than stamped on. If you don't teach people to speak Welsh, you'll lose it so we need ways to encourage Welsh speaking widely.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

5.39 Many stakeholders perceive providing youth work through the language that young people choose as an important part of the youth work methodology and therefore intrinsic to delivering good youth work, rather than something that is primarily driven by external considerations, such as language strategy.

5.40 Delivering Welsh medium youth work was identified as an opportunity to build partnerships with organisations that operate through the medium of Welsh. Likewise, Welsh medium youth work was identified as an opportunity to provide employment opportunities for people using the Welsh language.

Figure 5.1: Opportunities presented by Welsh medium youth work identified by stakeholders (coded)



Source: Stakeholder interviews (N=20)

- 5.41 Despite positive overall perceptions of the value of Welsh medium youth work, and the consensus around the importance of allowing every young person that wants to, to engage through the medium of Welsh, little is known about how universal the Welsh medium youth work offer actually is. Developing a fuller picture of where youth work is provided through the medium of Welsh – based on an accurate audit of youth work organisations – will be essential to developing effective support for these activities.

Recommendation 2: The extent to which youth work provision is available through the medium of Welsh should be a key component of the data collection process recommended in Recommendation 1. Understanding what provision is available and where there are gaps is crucial to establishing what support is required to enable all young people who want to access youth work through the medium of Welsh to do so.

What is known about the effectiveness and quality of youth work delivered in Wales

- 5.42 Stakeholders were also asked about the overall effectiveness and quality of youth work currently being delivered. Stakeholders were generally positive in their responses, but also noted that there are significant limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn about the effectiveness and quality of youth work in Wales given the available evidence.
- 5.43 Stakeholders who gave a positive response were asked about the evidence they based this judgement on. Responses included: the level of Quality Mark achieved by local organisations (9), the number of qualified youth workers available in an area (5), and the outcomes of Estyn inspections (2).
- 5.44 There were also less measurable reasons provided for the general positivity about the quality of youth work being delivered. These less tangible reasons for these perceptions included: strong partnerships that had been established between organisations (6), youth workers had been successful in engaging a wide range of young people (5), and the fact that staff were recognised to possess the skills needed to conduct youth work (4).

- 5.45 For those who reported more negative views of the effectiveness and quality of youth work in their area, concerns about the lack of provision appear to have negatively influenced perceptions of the quality of youth work provision. Stakeholders reporting negative views of the quality and effectiveness of youth work provision typically identified issues with the coverage of youth work as the reason for their negative view: issues regarding funding (2), an overemphasis on targeted youth work provision (2), and the closure of youth clubs (1).

“I think young people are missing out as clubs have closed, there’s some good examples of community based youth work but there’s good examples of targeted approaches too but equally sometimes those youth workers are constrained in who they can support.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.46 Stakeholders were asked if they felt that there was any variation in the quality and effectiveness of youth work delivered in Wales. Most participants did not have anything to say in response to this question, but a small number of stakeholders did identify variation in the quality of the youth work offer that was available.
- 5.47 Some areas of variation that were suggested included: differences in the quality of work offered in different settings, for example the quality of work delivered in centres compared to on the street (6), or when different standards are used to measure the success of youth work (5). Other areas of variance identified included different levels of funding available (3), the quality of staff (3), a lack of coordination from leadership (2), and geographic disparities between local authorities (2).

Measuring the effectiveness of youth work in Wales

- 5.48 One of the aims for this research has been to determine how best to measure the quality and effectiveness of youth work. As such, stakeholders were asked about how they currently measure the effectiveness of youth work.
- 5.49 Practices identified that are being used to monitor and evaluate the standard of youth work include: the Quality Mark (11), internal assessments within an organisation (6), Estyn inspections (5) and feedback from the young people they are working with (2).
- 5.50 Stakeholders were asked how they felt the effectiveness and quality of youth work should be ensured. This is something that 15 different stakeholders indicated as a priority moving forward. Suggestions included further developing the system for

inspection and quality assurance provided by Estyn and the Youth Work Quality Mark.

“I can remember the days when Estyn inspected, there needs to be some sort of standard regardless of what kind of service you are working for. Maybe peer to peer inspection: it would share good practice and encourage the constructive criticism from similar groups.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

The Youth Work Quality Mark

5.51 The Youth Work Quality Mark is perceived by stakeholders to be a positive influence on the quality of youth work being delivered in Wales. The Quality Mark was introduced after the National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014-18 identified the need for a youth work quality mark “to challenge services, drive up quality youth work provision, support the development of a more consistent youth work offer across Wales and build confidence between services” (Welsh Government 2014a). It has two distinct elements:

- **Quality Standards for Youth Work;** a set of Quality Standards that organisations can use to self-assess the quality and impact of their work with young people and develop plans for improvement.
- **A Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales;** a nationally recognised quality award that organisations can apply for through developing a self-assessment and associated evidence, which is then externally assessed.

5.52 The Quality Mark is divided into three levels to provide scope for it to be used by a wide range of organisations of varying sizes. Each of the three levels builds on the previous level, and the Quality Mark is intended to be used as a tool for development and improvement. Welsh Government commissioned the Education Workforce Council (EWC) and Education Training Standards (ETS) Wales to further develop and deliver the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales until January 2023.

5.53 Stakeholders who expressed a view on the Quality Mark were generally positive about its role in encouraging organisations to adopt good practice good youth work practice.

“The Quality Mark is a good benchmarking exercise. We used it as an opportunity to see where we were and what we needed to do. We’re able to recognise areas that needed development.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“The Quality Mark is important. I think that could be promoted more and funded more across Wales so that it is standardised. That needs funding behind it and national recognition it should also look to be longer term.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.54 However, stakeholders also suggested that more could be done to ensure that the sector shares best practice and learning at a regional and a national level. This is consistent with Wylie’s conclusion that “good practice prototypes are rarely recognised and further developed” (Wylie 2016).

“The big thing we need to do is to find ways to share best practice at a regional and a national level. We need to find a better mechanism to do that.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“We need to be encouraging more collaborative working to share learning and best practice. For example, in my area there are interesting initiatives in Caerphilly and Newport, but I don’t feel that we’re having conversations about whether they work and whether others should adopt them.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

Evidencing the impact of youth work

- 5.55 Stakeholders were also asked about how the sector should be measuring and evidencing the impact of the work it does. A range of suggestions were put forward by stakeholders. The two most common components to the approach were that it should involve the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data (12), and that it should include the input of the young people who are supported by youth work (11).

“You need to ask young people about what difference they feel has been achieved. People need the figures and data sets - I couldn’t go to cabinet without them - but we also need to measure the effectiveness in terms of stories and opinions of the people we are working with.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.56 The input of youth workers was also put forward as something that should be essential to evidencing the impact (6), and the fact that the approach should appreciate softer social outcomes rather than just harder education or training outcomes as these have gone unnoticed in previous evaluations.

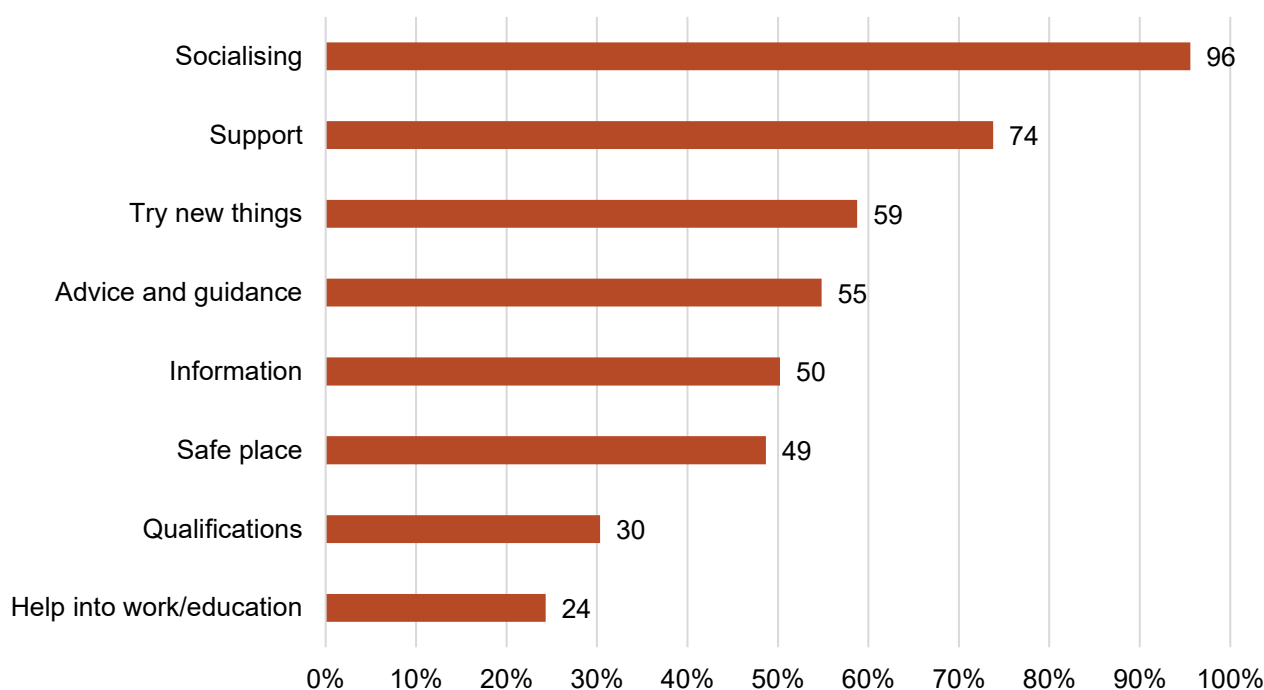
“There are challenges in terms of how we capture soft outcomes in terms of wellbeing and confidence. It would be dangerous if we shift too far towards harder outcomes in terms of accreditation and figures. The soft outcomes are really important, but often we can’t relay that to funders and policymakers.”
(Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 5.57 Data collection methods that were suggested included: external inspections (3), surveys (2), evaluation forms (2), and the collection of anecdotal evidence (2).

Young people’s views on youth work in Wales

- 5.58 To capture the views of young people regarding youth work in Wales, the Interim Youth Work Board has undertaken several conversations with young people. The first of these discussions, the Let’s Talk exercise, engaged with 633 young people via 23 separate youth work delivery organisations. The Let’s Talk Questionnaire included questions about young people’s opinions on youth work in general.
- 5.59 For example, young people were asked what youth work means to them. The most popular response to this question was socialising (96 per cent, 605 respondents). Other popular responses included support (74 per cent, 467 respondents), the opportunity to try new things (59 per cent, 372 respondents) and access to advice and guidance (55 per cent, 347 respondents).

Figure 5.2: What does youth work mean to you? (multiple choice)



Source: Let’s Talk Questionnaire (N=633)

- 5.60 The questionnaire also asked young people what they wanted youth work to emphasise more, and to emphasise less. Young people reported that they wanted to see more provision in general (weekends, summer holiday activities and longer hours), as well as more trips, life skill training (e.g. budgeting and cookery), and health and wellbeing support.
- 5.61 Young people valued a less structured approach, highlighting a desire for less emphasis on activities involving paperwork and those that they felt were similar to what was available to them in school.
- 5.62 Interviews carried out during the course of this research broadly echoed the findings of the Let's Talk Questionnaire. However, two additional themes emerged during these interviews which did not emerge from previous exercises.
- 5.63 The first theme that emerged from stakeholder interviews with representatives of young people is that several interviewees questioned the age range of youth work activities. First, it was suggested that there is a lack of clarity around why youth work is a policy area that starts at 11. This echoes stakeholders' suggestions that there is potentially overlap between youth work and the guidance and support provided for play in [Wales: A Play Friendly Country](#).⁵ The second suggestion in this area was that 11-25 is a wide-ranging age group, and young people at the younger end of this age range are likely to have very different support needs than people at its older end, and it was not clear to representatives of young people why the age range was so broad.
- 5.64 The second theme to emerge from these interviews was the importance of diversity within the youth work workforce. It was suggested that diversity, and seeing youth workers from similar backgrounds as themselves, is important for young people. It was suggested that the youth work sector needs to continue to develop in this area, to ensure that it is representative of the many diverse communities in Wales.

⁵ Playworkers operate under the ethos of the [Playwork Principles](#), which establish their professional and ethical framework. Some youth workers have undertaken playwork training.

6. Findings - Challenges and opportunities facing youth work in Wales

Challenges facing the sector

6.1 Stakeholders were asked for their input on what they believed to be the major challenges facing youth work in Wales at the moment in time other than those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic which will be discussed later in this section.

6.2 Funding was clearly the biggest challenge put forward by stakeholders (22). There was a range of opinions put forward with regards to funding including the fact that stakeholders believe they are usually one of the first services to be cut at times of austerity (5), as well as the fact that their funding through the Revenue Support Grant is not ring-fenced and has been used by local authorities to fund other priorities (4).

“We have had to close a lot of our open-access provision due to funding. At one point we had a choice between keeping our buildings or keeping our staff- there was no choice there because the staff are the important things. Rural communities have lost out because we’re now running clubs in just a few towns.”
(Stakeholder interview, 2020)

6.3 As noted previously, cuts in youth service funding have often resulted in a reduction in the open-access provision available in a local area. Stakeholders identified these cuts as something permitted by the legislative basis of local authorities’ requirement to fund youth work, with the Learning and Skills Act 2000 seen as something that has ultimately allowed for youth work funding to be diverted into other priority areas. This challenge of funding being diverted to other priority areas is not unique to Wales however and research carried out by Dunne et al. (2014, p. 12) identified that between 2009 and 2014, the “majority of EU countries have experienced cuts to public funds to youth work due to the economic crisis (at national and municipality level)”.

6.4 Another major issue perceived by stakeholders was a lack of recognition of youth work by policymakers and the other stakeholders (14). Many stakeholders within local authorities reported challenges around convincing senior decision-makers within their organisations of the value of funding youth work. Others suggested even where there was significant funding provided for work with young people, stakeholders often misunderstood the precise value of youth work (5), and other

stakeholders reported that open-access youth work had lost out to targeted support for young people focused on employment outcomes (4).

“The fact that youth work is not often understood for the profession it is [is a significant challenge]. We do preventative work, so if nothing is wrong in communities it’s often based on the work we do, we can get overlooked.”

(Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 6.5 There were also concerns regarding staffing issues, in terms of both training (6) and recruitment (6). Stakeholders reported that there were issues with regards to training up volunteers to be able to deliver youth work more effectively, as well as organisations being able to recruit staff that who have the relevant skills and hold the relevant qualifications.

“The main challenges are workforce development, assuring that standards for maintained and voluntary sector youth workers improve. The challenge will be making sure that both parts of the sector go forward together in the same way. We need improved recognition and portability of qualifications to ensure that different youth work organisations are working towards the same thing in the same way.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 6.6 In addition to the challenges identified in relation to this question, stakeholders were asked about how effectively the youth work sector works together. The majority of stakeholders who responded to this question (18) gave a mixed response, although it is important to note that only a small number of stakeholders (2) gave a wholly negative response and other stakeholders (10) were wholly positive about the way that the youth work sector works together.

- 6.7 Several respondents highlighted concerns about funding as a key point of tension between different sectors, with representatives of third sector organisations suggesting that the statutory sector is not particularly good at sharing funding. Some stakeholders identified a need to dispel the idea that different parts of the sector are in competition with one another. While the voluntary sector plays a vital role in delivering youth work, particularly given that the reduction in funding faced by statutory sector providers has left the voluntary sector to ‘fill the gap’ within youth work provision (Estyn 2018, p. 4), voluntary sector organisations have not always felt included in wider conversations about planning and delivering youth work and wider youth support services.

- 6.8 This reflects wider concerns that - at a Wales-wide level - the structures in place for planning and delivering services on a local level are not as collaborative or as inclusive as they would need to be to deliver a comprehensive youth work offer. There is considerable variation between local authorities in how effectively youth work organisations work together to plan and deliver services.
- 6.9 This is a recurring challenge for the sector. In 2018, a report by Estyn found that “presently, there is no integrated model for planning services that builds on the provision within the sector as whole. Recent legislation affecting local authorities has led to the dissipation of formal partnerships for the delivery of youth support services.” (Estyn 2018, p. 4).

Opportunities available to the sector

- 6.10 Stakeholders identified the main opportunity for youth work in Wales as being the opportunities it presents to add value to young people and communities (12). Especially with regards to its proven track record in working in collaboration with other sectors (11) meaning that it can deliver results both independently and in partnership.

“I think the main opportunities is that it’s the profession that is always there, and can be practiced in a variety of different settings for a variety of different purposes, the young person is always at the heart of it. There is a huge opportunity with regards to communities, which is that it shows young people in a great light, we show the benefits and the brilliance of young people.”

(Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 6.11 Other opportunities for youth work that stakeholders reported included: using the reach of youth work to promote other services (6), youth work can help young people to access other support services that can help them address their support and development needs (5), and the opportunity to bring a new and diverse range of people into the youth work profession.

7. Findings - How COVID-19 has affected the sector and challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic

- 7.1 Like many other sectors in Wales, youth work has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore important to consider this separately from the broader challenges and opportunities youth work organisations are experiencing. Here we present a summary of the issues raised during stakeholder interviews, as well as drawing on broader evidence and research identified within the literature review. More detailed findings from the literature review are summarised in Annex A.

Implications of COVID-19 for youth work service delivery

- 7.2 Operationally, many youth work organisations in Wales have had to reconfigure the support they are able to offer young people. This was in response to lockdowns and to comply with broader government guidance and regulations. Responses were also informed by a duty of care to reduce the risks to staff and the young people they are engaging. The sector worked collaboratively with Welsh Government to contribute to the guidance for youth work settings circulated by Welsh Government.
- 7.3 All stakeholders engaged in the qualitative research and involved in youth work delivery reported that their organisations had transitioned from face-to-face delivery towards other forms of support, including digital delivery during the initial lockdown. Since the initial lockdown restrictions were lifted in summer 2020, youth work delivery organisations have operated various forms of hybrid service, involving some face-to-face and some digital provision.

“What I understand from the field is there is a variety of different responses, some closed down, some moved to virtual and some organisations have opened back up and are training for colleagues around with safety and Welsh Government guidance.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 7.4 This experience is mirrored by youth work organisations across Europe. Broader evidence suggests that provision on the ground has shifted towards digital or blended forms of support. A study of youth work organisations across Europe, for example, found that 17 percent of organisations had transferred all support to digital platforms, whilst 7 percent reported that they had not used digital at all and reduced the support available to young people. Many organisations across Europe had developed blended offers, complementing digital support with other, more traditional methods (RAY-COR, 2020).

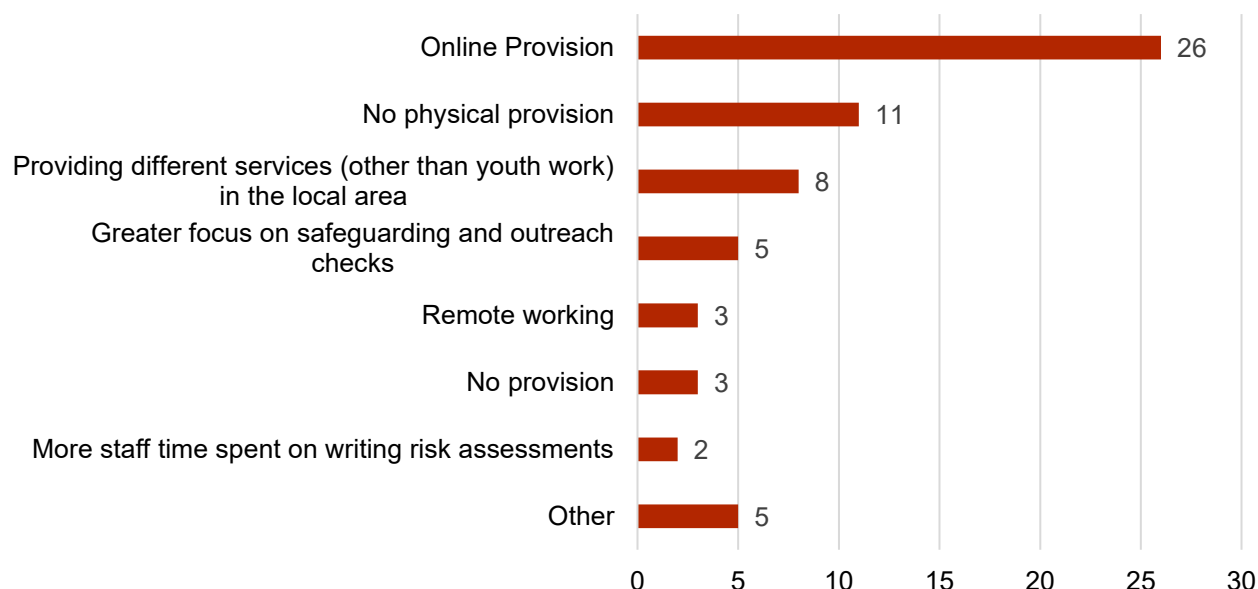
7.5 What also became apparent during stakeholder interviews was that youth workers were innovating and exploring other routes to supporting young people. Eight respondents highlighted that they had become involved in delivering different services during the pandemic. Some had become involved in the distribution of food in communities, for example, whilst others had become involved in outreach activities with some of the more vulnerable young people in their area (5).

“Youth workers were transferred to provide free school meals to eligible children. By doing so, we kept in touch with the county's most vulnerable families - so keeping in touch with the most vulnerable children, parents may not be able to access the internet to do school work - working with a school to sort that out.”
(Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“During the summer holiday, we were working in childcare clubs when schools were closed and stopped taking in vulnerable children.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

7.6 While many of these activities are driven by other objectives, the fact that staff have been able to do youth work and achieve youth work objectives while formally carrying out other activities, shows the relevance of the approach across a variety of settings, and the adaptability of the workforce.

Figure 7.1: Stakeholder views on the ways in which youth work provision has been affected by COVID-19 (coded)



Source: Stakeholder interviews (N=37)

7.7 Many stakeholders identified that the transition to new delivery models had been a success, and they felt their delivery during this time had been very positive. There is broader research to suggest that across public services, including adult social care, police and schools, organisations with more established online provision going into the lockdown, as well as sufficient internal capabilities and IT resources, were better placed to respond to the challenges of transitioning to greater online delivery (Institute for Government, 2020).

7.8 Stakeholders also highlighted that some of the changes have been perceived as beneficial and that they intend to continue them beyond the end of the pandemic. Many stakeholders believed that organisations should look to integrate the digital work that they have been using to engage young people during the pandemic into their regular delivery (25). It was worth noting however that a number of stakeholders felt strongly that this form of delivery should be used in addition to face to face provision and should not be seen as a replacement (9).

“I think what COVID has done is made us more aware of using technology to meet with people and I don't think this will replace face to face contact with people. This medium will never replace that but it will supplement that.”

(Stakeholder interview, 2020)

7.9 Other innovations and practices that should be continued into the future raised by stakeholders included the development of organisational websites and social media presence in order to engage with young people (4), the continuation of outreach work when engaging with vulnerable young people (2), and the continuation of remote working in order to grant increased flexibility to staff (2). Other examples given include the intention to continue providing staff wellbeing support and downsizing office space to reflect the success of homeworking.

“Our digital support form is something we'd want to continue: if you want to speak to a worker or get info etc, you fill out this tiny form, it goes to central inbox and send to the right youth worker. Had parents contact us through that as well. Generating online content on social media, uploading activity videos also.”

(Stakeholder interview, 2020)

7.10 Stakeholders revealed that working through the lockdown conferred some benefits and opportunities for their organisations. One prominent benefit identified by stakeholders was that the pandemic had provided time for staff training and skills

development for which there would not have been an opportunity otherwise (7). There was also the perception that some organisations had become more efficient during the lockdown due to factors such as the removal of the need to travel to different meetings and appointments (6).

“Virtual wellbeing sessions will continue, as will help with job searching or training, which we can now easily offer online. People tend to be more relaxed online in their own environment as they’re at home, and for some people you can get a lot more out of them.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“Homeworking and zoom calls for meeting have been good. The local authority is a large area so people lose half a day in travelling to meetings alone. The virtual stuff helps young people who may also be scattered, that would be expensive and hard to negotiate but doing it virtually it is beneficial.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 7.11 Stakeholders also thought the lockdown and experiences of COVID-19 had raised the profile of youth work and highlighted its importance. Stakeholders reported that they believed youth work had been needed more during the pandemic (6), that there was greater appreciation for the sector (4), and that engagement had grown during lockdown (4) with more connections with young people being made (3) and engagement with their parents.

“It’s given us time to reevaluate what we already offer and how it can change, our strong partnership with social care has helped us set a up a new service for young people on their own, digital aspects too, we have been utilising social media. Because we were working in childcare hubs, we’ve also strengthened our links with secondary schools and they are more welcoming to us now, they’re biting our hand off.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 7.12 There is broader evidence to suggest that funding was becoming an issue for youth work organisations and other community groups. This typically affected third and voluntary sector youth work organisations more than statutory providers as traditional forms of revenue, including service delivery and other income have diminished. 17 per cent of youth work organisations responding to the UK Youth Survey reported that permanent closure was likely as a result of funding concerns, particularly small or micro organisations. Also, 31 percent reported that staff redundancies were likely, with many others relying on the furlough scheme which significantly reduced capacity to support young people (UK Youth, 2020).

- 7.13 The impact on staff was another area of concern identified by stakeholders, especially around staff retention (6). Factors such as stress and financial uncertainty regarding issues such as funding and the need for possible redundancies (6), and ensuring their mental and physical wellbeing and physical health whilst delivering services that could have a risk of transmission (5).

“Staff wellbeing is a concern as we haven’t stopped really, we’ve also lost a lot of young people and we may not be able to reconnect with them any time soon. If this is going to go on for a bit longer, 6 months more restrictions and poor finances would put jobs with us at risk.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“I’m concerned that many organisations, particularly in the voluntary sector, have placed their staff on furlough and they may not still have jobs when the scheme ends. Large swathes of redundancy will significantly reduce the capacity of the sector at a time when many young people need support.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

The impact of COVID-19 on young people

- 7.14 Alongside challenges facing organisations, stakeholders were concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people. The deterioration of young people’s wellbeing as a result of the pandemic was a key concern (6), and the risk of young people that they had been working with prior to COVID-19 choosing to disengage (7).

“People are out and about and mixing and there’s a need for street work, youth workers are putting their wellbeing at risk to deal with that because they are worried about this. Domestic violence is up 53% during the pandemic and young people are stuck in these situations, it’s going to have a massive impact on them. It will leave us with a lot of damaged young people.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 7.15 There is broader, emerging evidence to suggest that the impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people fall across a range of domains, including but not limited to:
- Physical health and wellbeing
 - Mental health
 - Social and emotional development
 - Educational outcomes
 - Longer-term impacts including transitions into adulthood.
- 7.16 A key concern around physical health, for example, are the significant increases in sedentary behaviours and reductions in activity levels amongst young people (Dunton et al., 2020). The authors of the study felt that these changes could become permanently entrenched, leading to increased risk of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease amongst children and young people in later life.
- 7.17 Research around the mental health and wellbeing of young people presents a mixed picture. Whilst some robust studies have found that subjective wellbeing has remained largely consistent over time (e.g. ONS, 2020), others have slight decreases in subjective wellbeing. Studies exploring anxiety also present a mixed picture. One study found on average young people experiencing mild anxiety (ImpactEd, 2020), and another finding significant numbers of young people experiencing higher-than-usual levels of anxiety (Levita L. et al., 2020).
- 7.18 Broader wellbeing issues and the impact of lockdown measures have contributed to changes in emotional and conduct problems amongst young people. The Co-SPACE study, for example, tracked a range of indicators over time amongst 600 young people. Independently of the effects of sex, ethnicity, household income, and parental employment status, the data suggested that over time young people of secondary school age were less likely to exhibit emotional problems, were just as likely to display behavioural problems, and were more likely to display restlessness or attention problems (Pearcey et al., 2020). This suggests that, all other things being equal, issues such as restlessness and attentional behaviours are growing amongst young people.

- 7.19 Young people experiencing more pronounced mental health issues or concerns going into the lockdown were more likely to say that lockdown had made their life worse (NHS Digital, 2020a). This was compounded by the fact that services and support were considerably disrupted over the course of the pandemic, with significant drops in referrals in the second quarter of 2020 (NHS Digital, 2020b).
- 7.20 The broader impacts of the lockdown on the social and emotional development of young people appears to be mixed. Overall, evidence suggests that children and young people aged 10 to 17 across the UK may not be as happy with their relationships with their friends as they have been in previous years, however were broadly happy with their family (The Children's Society, 2020). Older young people (14-17) were more likely to remain in contact with friends online, though games platforms, social media and directly through phone, text and video. There were limited differences across different groups of young people, however those from lower income households were less likely to be reported, by surveyed parents, as having been in regular contact with friends by any means of communication throughout the period of late March to August (The Children's Society, 2020). This may be a consequence of the digital divide, in that those from poorer backgrounds are less likely to have consistent access to devices and the internet.
- 7.21 There has been significant disruption to young people's participation in education. Emerging evidence from the UK suggests many children and young people have experienced a significant and sustained reduction in their education whilst they were confined at home. During the first lockdown in March, just under four in ten (38 percent) pupils benefitted from full schooling at home during school closures (Major et al., 2020). Broader evidence from unexpected temporary school closures and reduced instruction time suggests they reduce educational participation and achievement, both in the short and long term (Eyles et al., 2020).

The long-term effects of COVID-19

- 7.22 There is also significant uncertainty as to the longer-term impacts of COVID-19. Broader evidence from other significant disruptive events and disasters suggests that the long-term impacts can be significant and more likely to affect disadvantaged young people (Williams, 2020). Together, this evidence indicates that youth work organisations may encounter greater and more pronounced issues amongst some of the young people that they support. This is an important context for the Youth

Work Strategy for Wales to take into account, and may indicate a need for more targeted work in this area in the future.

- 7.23 There is evidence to suggest that COVID-19 will have long-term negative consequences for young people in Wales (Williams, 2020). Future lockdowns may cause similar disruption to both youth work provision and educational settings, and the economic disruption is likely to have significant impacts on young people making transitions into adulthood and the world of work.
- 7.24 The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has identified that young people have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic worldwide, with more than one in six young people unemployed (ILO 2020). Since the pandemic, claimant count among 16-24 year olds in Wales has more than doubled, from 4.7% in March 2020 to 9.5% in September 2020 (Senedd Research 2020).
- 7.25 Research carried out by the National Institute for Learning & Work found that in 2012, at the employment-related peak of the last recession, 23.5% of people in the UK aged 16-24 were unemployed, over four times the unemployment rate among those over 25 (Hagendyk, & Finnegan 2020, p. 8). As coronavirus has disproportionately affected sectors where young people tend to work, such as retail, travel, tourism and leisure (Welsh Government, 2020), there may be an even starker pattern by age following coronavirus (Henehan 2020, p. 34).
- 7.26 This is particularly concerning for young people, as “the first few years of a person’s working life can be critical for their opportunities in the long term” and that “a period of sustained unemployment can have a long-term scarring impact on a young person’s employment and earnings prospects” (Hagendyk & Finnegan 2020, p. 8).
- 7.27 For a more detailed examination on the impacts of COVID-19 for youth work organisations and young people, see Annex 1 of this report.

Possible Implications

- 7.28 Overall, the evidence presents a relatively positive picture for the majority of children and young people. However, this can overlook the experiences of certain groups of young people. There is emerging evidence to suggest that the negative impacts of COVID-19 are unevenly distributed across children and young people in Wales and internationally. Across a range of measures, for example, those from more disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to see greater disruption to their lives than those who are not from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes being

less likely to have access to a full education, more likely to have been furloughed or made redundant, and more likely to have experienced negative outcomes across a range of health and wellbeing measures (Abdinasir & Glick 2020, p. 19). There is emerging evidence also, that those young people experiencing significant issues prior to lockdown are likely to have struggled. Those experiencing mental health issues going into lockdown, including anxiety, depression and eating disorders for example, are likely to have seen their conditions worsen due to disruption to support.

- 7.29 What we do know suggests that youth work organisations may find themselves operating under conditions of increased demand for services and support from young people. The types of issues young people will be presenting with may be similar to that prior to the pandemic, however they may be more pronounced, entrenched and widespread. Youth workers and organisations will play an important role in ensuring supporting young people through the negative consequences of the pandemic.

8. Findings - Sector perceptions of how the youth work strategy can overcome challenges

- 8.1 This chapter looks at sector stakeholders' aspirations for the strategy, and how stakeholders believe the aims of the high-level Youth Work Strategy for Wales should be realised.

How the sector defines youth work

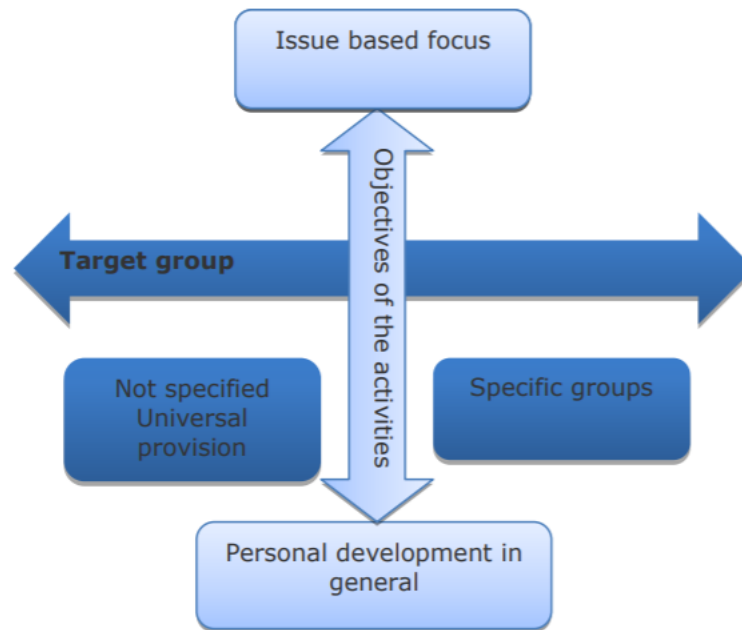
- 8.2 Youth work is a term that typically covers a broad range of activities carried out across a variety of settings. One way of making sense of the considerable heterogeneity across youth work is to consider practice along a continuum between universal, community approaches at one end of the spectrum, and on the other more targeted support aimed at groups of young people around specific issues, as shown in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1: Typology of youth work, adapted from Dunne et al. (2014)



- 8.3 Dunne et al. (2014) also suggests a more complex typology of youth work interventions, with two axes of difference, identifying whether the youth work is aimed at a particular group of young people or young people in general, and whether it is based on a specific issue, or aims for personal development in general (Figure 8.2 over page).

Figure 8.2: A typology of youth work interventions adapted from Dunne et al. (2014)



- 8.4 While youth work in Wales clearly includes activities on all parts of this matrix, there was some concern expressed by stakeholders that the difference between youth work approaches and youth support services has not always been clearly understood. Research carried out by Estyn found that “there is a lack of clarity among service providers and policy makers about the terminology used when discussing services to support young people” (Estyn 2018, p. 4). The report went on to suggest that policymakers have often had a confused understanding of what constitutes youth work, conflating youth work, which is “a professional methodology for working with young people” with any work that involves young people (Estyn 2018, p. 4-5). While youth support services clearly support the development of young people, they do not always share all the hallmarks of the youth work approach, with its priority on voluntary engagement and its focus on the holistic development of the young person as the primary objective of activity.
- 8.5 There was some frustration among stakeholders consulted during the research that the definition of youth work was still being discussed, as they felt it had already been discussed in previous research and development work. Many stakeholders pointed to the Youth Work in Wales Review Group’s Principles and Purposes (2018) document as providing a sufficient definition when it identifies youth work as “based primarily on a voluntary relationship between young people and youth workers. The Youth Service is a universal entitlement, open to all young people within the specified age range 11-25” (Youth Work in Wales Review Group (2018, p.

2). Principles and Purposes draws on the Youth Work National Occupational Standards in identifying that the 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, 2014, p. 4)

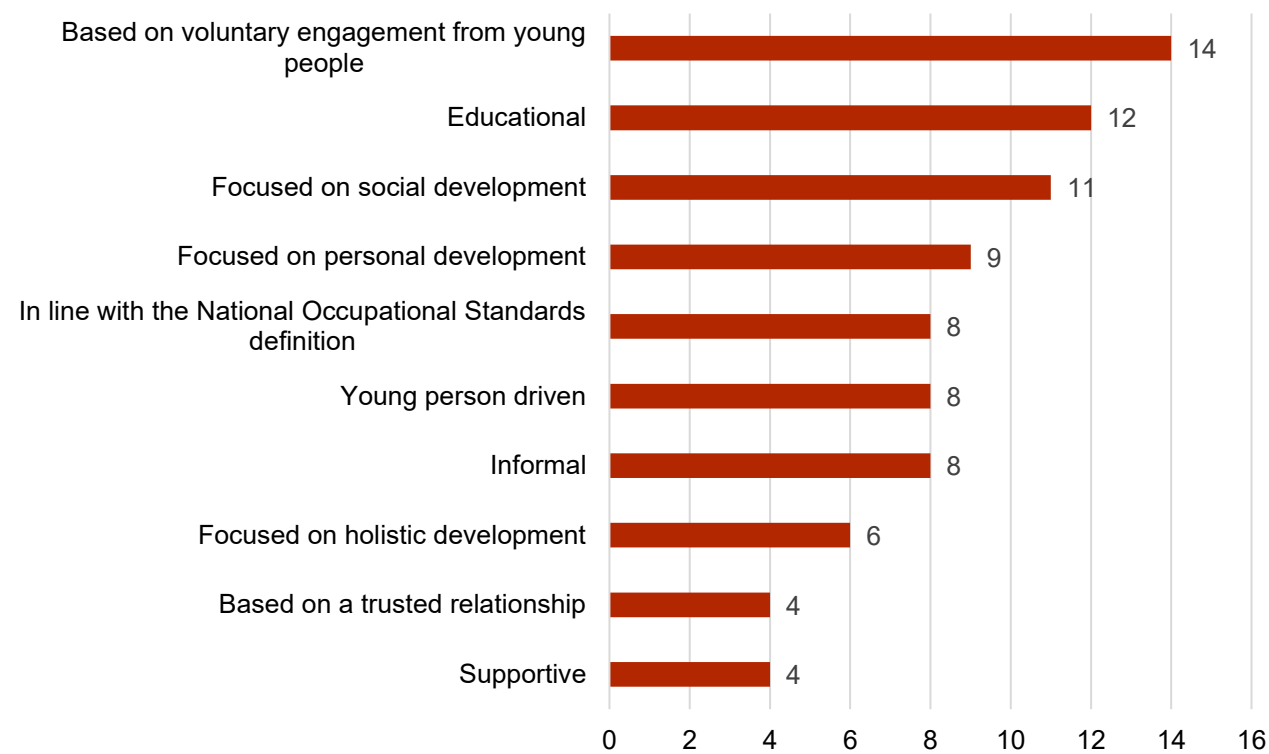
- 8.6 In practice, however, youth work has often been grouped together with other support services working with young people, or more targeted interventions that are either not voluntary or focus on particular outcomes, such as employment. While there is much synergy between youth work methodologies and these approaches, these approaches sit outside the remit of the Youth Work Strategy for Wales. Greater clarity about the relationship between youth work and youth support services would be welcomed by many of the stakeholders consulted during this research.

Stakeholder views on how youth work should be defined

- 8.7 Stakeholders were asked about how they would define youth work. The majority of those who responded in relation to this question reported that they felt that the current definitions that are being used are adequate (31/43).
- 8.8 The responses to this question were coded and are presented in Figure 8.3 but the most frequently mentioned aspects of a definition suggested by stakeholders were that youth work is voluntary (14), educational (12), and leads to young peoples’ social (11) and personal development (9).

“I think youth work is unique because it’s a voluntary engagement with young people who are actively participating in something they choose. Engagement is clear that it is about providing safe spaces, opportunities to thrive, based on education and empowerment...young people deal with various issues through youth work. It should be a right and entitlement.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

Figure 8.3: Stakeholder definitions of youth work (coded) – bar chart



Source: Stakeholder interviews (N=43)

Figure 8.4: Stakeholder definitions of youth work (coded) – word cloud



8.9 Stakeholders were also asked about whether, and in what ways, youth work is a way of working with young people that is differentiated from other ways of working with young people. Overall, stakeholders agreed with the assessment made by Estyn and identified several ways in which youth work is different than other ways of working with young people.

8.10 The relationship that young people have with youth workers through youth work as a practice is very distinct from other forms of working with young people. Aspects such as the strength of the relationship (11), the trust between both parties (7), and the balance of power between the young person and the youth worker were all mentioned.

“It’s that relationship you develop with young people and you’re looking at their strengths not just their weaknesses, its holistic development not one area. They see you as a professional colleague in this and they accept you can challenge their behaviour. Young people keep coming back to them when things get tough as they know there is no hidden agenda which I think they respect.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

8.11 The fact that youth work is largely driven by the young person was another key part of what distinguishes it from other approaches. Aspects such as the young person acting as the decision maker (9), participation being based on voluntary relationships (8), and the informality of the relationship between the young person and youth worker (3) were all suggested to be distinctions.

“The young person can choose who to be with, which is key. In more formal processes people have to be there, with youth work they can choose to be. Young people can approach the youth workers as a trusted and respected adult, but they hold the power.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

8.12 Stakeholders also reported a perception that youth work requires a specific skill set which not all people who work with young people possess (9), the fact that there is a different value set with regards to youth work compared to other services (8), and the fact that youth work is compatible with other ways of engaging with young people, meaning that it can provide additional value to other services (8).

“If youth work was too separate, it would prevent the sector adopting a partnership centred approach. There is no point in it being completely different

and outside of other things like education and youth offending services.”

(Stakeholder interview, 2020)

Aspirations for delivering the new strategy

8.13 Stakeholders were asked to consider what they see as being the steps that the sector needs to take to move forwards as well as their aspirations for what youth work can achieve in Wales.

8.14 Many stakeholders reported that they felt the sector needs to raise awareness about what youth work delivery has achieved, and what youth workers are able to do (18). Currently there is a view amongst youth work organisations that their work goes unappreciated by policymakers and colleagues in other services, and is often misconstrued as ‘dealing with naughty kids’ or ‘all about playing table tennis’.

“It is vital that youth work is recognised for the important role that it plays in young people's lives. It is currently a service that is hidden in a dark corner. No young people coming to the service knew what we were up to. We need people to be more aware of what youth work is and what it does.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“The profile of youth work needs to be raised and there needs to be sufficient funding to help all of the people that need our support. There needs to be more appreciation and a greater understanding of the work we do. People don't understand that we are professionals with a clear method.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

8.15 Another widely held view was that in order to reach its full potential youth work must be able to secure additional funding (12). As mentioned in the challenges section, there is a widely held belief amongst youth work organisations that they are frequently on the chopping block at times when cuts need to be made and they are expected to continue to operate at the same standard on a smaller budget.

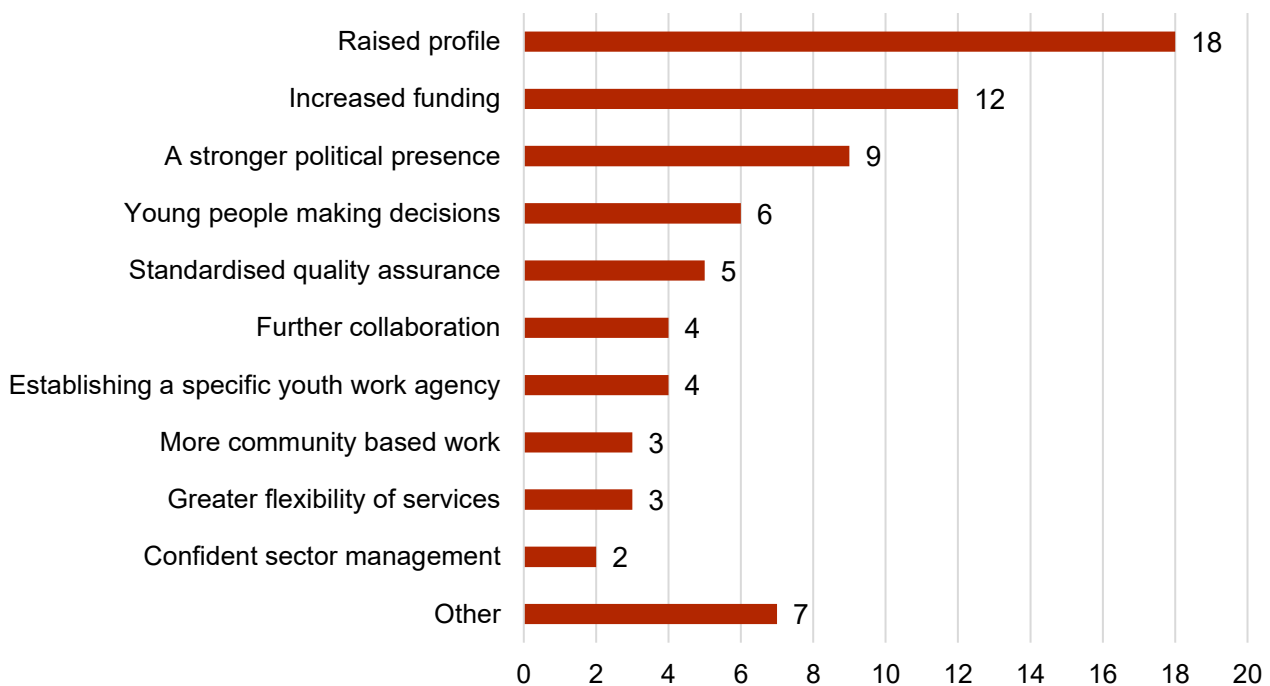
8.16 Calls for youth work to have a higher political profile were also prominent in the aspirations of stakeholders (9) (Figure 8.5 over page). Stakeholders suggested that youth work has sometimes been poorly understood by policymakers at local authority and national level, and the sector needs more active champions among policymakers. There was a belief that senior sector stakeholders needed to be more involved with wider discussions about policy to support young people and that

having a permanent youth work board or a national youth agency would help advocate youth work in these discussions (4).

“Youth work is good at talking to itself, but it needs to talk to others more. We need the board and other champions to put forward a vision for the future for us to move forward and that needs input from political champions. This also means more regional collaboration.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 8.17 Other aspirations included: giving young people the opportunity be involved in more decision making processes at all levels of the strategy (6), constructing a standardised approach to measuring and evaluating the work of youth work organisations (5), and continuing to build the sector’s capacity to collaborate with other organisations within the sector and external stakeholders (4).

Figure 8.5: Stakeholder aspirations for the delivery of the strategy (coded)



Source: Stakeholder interviews (N=32)

The focus of the strategy

The importance of open-access youth work

- 8.18 There is a perception among stakeholders that while previous strategies have had many good elements, they have permitted a shift towards an increased focus on targeted provision and youth support services, working with young people who are, or at risk of becoming, NEET, at the expense of universal, open-access youth work provision.

“The net result of austerity is drawing more providers into targeted delivery: employment, education and training was a massive part of the previous youth work strategy. The idea of a universal offer has been shrunk because of this focus.”
(Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 8.19 Establishing a stronger legislative basis for the provision of youth work is perceived as a key enabler of this shift. Many stakeholders identified the absence of clear minimum standards for the youth work being delivered by local authorities and the lack of ring-fenced funding for universal open-access provision as a key weakness within the current youth work model.

“Youth work has consistently lost funding over the last 10 years. The Welsh Government will say there has been no cut, but the money they give to local authorities isn’t going strictly to youth work: it is going to other areas.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“Youth work needs a stronger statutory footing. Funding should be ring-fenced. At the moment [as a Principal Youth Officer] I feel that I have to justify the funding we receive from the local authority on a yearly basis.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“If there’s one thing I’d change about youth work, it would be to improve its legislative basis in the Learning and Skills Act.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 8.20 This is consistent with the findings of previous research, which identified that “the Learning and Skills Act is permissive and, given the absence of national expectations or defined standards, this has resulted in an inconsistency of youth provision in range, volume and quality” (Wylie, 2016).
- 8.21 There is clear demand from within the sector for open-access youth work to be the core of a sustainable model for youth work. This is because open-access youth work most clearly adheres to the youth work principles of putting young people’s needs and interests at the heart of the work.
- 8.22 Whilst universal open-access provision should be seen as the core of youth work, care should be taken to ensure that the youth work sector works closely and effectively with other sectors. As Dunne et al. (2014, p. 7) has identified, the youth work sector across Europe has had to “find a balance between:

- meeting the priorities set out in policies and funding mechanisms with an ever increasing trend for youth work practice to be more target-group based, address specific issues and be intervention based
- responding to the individual needs and interests of young people
- maintaining the core principles that form the foundation of youth work practice”

- 8.23 Reflecting this, there is value in positioning youth work as a strategic service that delivers in relation to Welsh Government priorities, such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act and Prosperity for All.
- 8.24 However, there is a perception that the value of universal youth work is poorly understood by some stakeholders and policymakers working with the sector. Building the evidence base for the value of universal youth work, and its contribution to this wider strategic vision, should be seen as a key part of the strategy going forwards. The Welsh Government and the Interim Youth Work Board should consider commissioning similar research to that [commissioned by YouthLink Scotland](#) examining the impact of community-based universal youth work in Scotland.
- 8.25 Research commissioned by YouthLink Scotland included, for example, an 11-month collaborative project which aimed to investigate the outcomes that typically result from open-access youth work (Fyfe et al. 2018). The research was carried out in three communities in Scotland and employed a Transformative Evaluation methodology. Transformative Evaluation establishes a dialogue between young people, youth workers and stakeholders, and is based on the principles of the Most Significant Change methodology (Davies & Dart, 2005).
- 8.26 Transformative Evaluation has been identified as a methodology that goes hand-in-hand with the principles of youth work and allows young people to be equal partners with practitioners and researchers. In practice, it involves collecting stories about youth work and successful youth work practice and working with young people and practitioners to identify important themes and significant impacts.
- 8.27 Commissioning similar research could strengthen the case for further investment in universal open-access youth work.

Recommendation 3: Welsh Government should consider commissioning research into the contribution made by universal open-access youth work. It should use this evidence base to justify and re-assess expenditure in this area.

- 8.28 What works in providing universal open-access youth work should also be a focus of this research. This would provide a basis for building on best practice examples and mainstreaming them more widely across Welsh youth work practice.
- 8.29 Greater clarity on what Welsh Government is funding when it funds youth work and how it is funded is required. Considering Welsh Government's commitment to a rights-based approach to youth work in the high level Youth Work Strategy for Wales (Welsh Government 2019a), it is likely that there is a need for a mechanism to be in place to ensure a consistent minimum standard of open-access youth work is available nationwide.

Recommendation 4: Welsh Government should consider measures to ensure that a consistent universal open-access youth work offer is available across the country. Measures could include ring-fencing funding for open-access youth work in the core youth work budgets provided to local authorities or establishing a duty for local authorities to make sufficient youth work provision available for young people in their area.

- 8.30 If youth work is to be understood as a strategic service, there also need to be improved links with Welsh Government's wider policies for supporting young people. It was noted in reviews of the previous strategy that there was a perceived disconnect between the Youth Work Strategy for Wales and other policies in this area.
- 8.31 Within previous iterations of the National Youth Work Strategy for Wales, there were no links to other areas of youth policy, and conversely these policy documents do not link back to the previous National Youth Work Strategy for Wales (Wrexham Glyndwr University 2018, p. 12). This has improved in the new high-level Youth Work Strategy for Wales, with Prosperity for All, the Curriculum for Wales 2022 and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework all identified as key reference points for the Youth Work Strategy for Wales (Welsh Government 2019a, p. 23).
- 8.32 More practically, there is also a need to ensure that open-access youth work dovetails neatly with other services for young people, without being subsumed by it.

While referral to other services is not required for all young people, referral into more targeted forms of youth work and close collaboration with external services is important for some, however. Nevertheless, there are still considerable knowledge gaps around how best to integrate services, and more research is needed to understand best practice in this area.

Recommendation 5: Welsh Government should consider commissioning research to understand pathways for young people from youth work into other forms of support and how youth work can work closely with more targeted forms of provision.

Improving leadership at a national level

8.33 Leadership was identified by stakeholders as an enabler of an effective Youth Work Strategy for Wales. The picture presented by sector stakeholders is one of a sector where leadership is improving, particularly through the work of the Interim Youth Work Board, but this is an area where there is still more room for improvement.

8.34 Stakeholders suggested that the perceived problems facing the sector are less a problem of previous youth work strategies than they are of their implementation. One of the factors identified in this area was a perceived lack of leadership and forward momentum, which has meant that strategic vision has not resulted in the sector being empowered to deliver better youth work opportunities to young people. Stakeholders perceive political leadership to have been inconsistent, due to turnover of Ministers and a perception that not all Ministers have understood youth work. There is also a perception that youth work suffers from being part of the education portfolio, with schools inevitably having a higher profile than youth work.

“The effectiveness of the strategy is based on the Minister you have. A good Minister that understands youth work helps, but as it comes under education, it can often suffer as schools will always take priority. At times we have had Ministers that we feel haven’t really understood youth work.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“The Minister changes every few years so there’s no set strategy: everything is very changeable.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

8.35 Another issue affecting the quality of leadership for the sector is the reduction of staff numbers and frequent turnover of staff within Welsh Government. When compared to the Wales Youth Agency, the Youth Engagement Branch of Welsh

Government is very small, and stakeholders reported the view that with more resources and consistency of staff, there would be more effective leadership and support for the sector provided by Welsh Government.

“From the first youth work strategy until now, the support provided by Welsh Government has been greatly eroded. When things were starting out, they would come to visit us constantly, they are never able to do it now. This isn’t the team’s fault: they’re a very small team, operating with insufficient resources.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“There are highly capable people working in Welsh Government, but there seems to be high turnover of officials within youth work. This makes it really hard for things to gain momentum.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“There is no stability or consistency and the youth work branch have really limited capacity. The resource and the commitment by Welsh Government has been minimal.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 8.36 There is a perception, however, that rather than asking Welsh Government to do more, finding ways to empower the sector to take leadership is key to putting the new strategic vision into practice.

“Leadership in the sector is dreadful. This is not a reflection on Welsh Government, the youth work branch is fantastic and engaged, plus they are very under-resourced and have no background in youth work: they are civil servants. The problem is that the sector is not led by specialists in youth work.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 8.37 Stakeholders perceive this to be the direction of travel with the formation of the Interim Youth Work Board, and are generally positive about the role that it plays in contributing to strategic direction and leadership within the sector. The value of the Interim Youth Work Board lies in its capacity to bring together stakeholders from across the sector, and its independence from Welsh Government is a key asset. However, there is a concern that the positive momentum the Board has generated will be lost if permanent structures that represent the sector to Welsh Government and other stakeholders are not introduced.

“The main problem has been a lack of leadership. Welsh Government tried many things, but they always lacked consistency. However, it is going in a better direction with the current role of the Interim Youth Work Board.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“The Interim Youth Work Board is a real positive and has helped provide leadership. But it does need to lead to some kind of permanent structure.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“You have the interim board now, which is good but needs to be long term, something that can hold people accountable. Youth justice have that board. Youth work needs something with the same function, integrated into the environment, but independent from government.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 8.38 There is potential value in continuing the work of the board beyond its current mandate. Doing so would maintain the closer collaborative working between Welsh Government and the sector, and ensure continuous dialogue between the two. This is important for ongoing development and delivery of the strategy. For example, the weaknesses of Extending Entitlement (The Welsh Assembly Government, 2002) were not inherent in the strategy itself. Rather, they became apparent due to the growth of ‘targeted’ ways of working with young people and changes to the wider policy context. The challenges this has caused highlight the importance of working with the sector to update the Youth Work Strategy for Wales to ensure that it reflects wider changes in policy and the changing needs of young people.

Recommendation 6: Welsh Government should consider making the role of the Board permanent or appointing it for a longer period to provide ongoing input into the development of the youth work strategy.

- 8.39 Several stakeholders pointed to the disconnect between the strategy and its operational delivery by youth work providers as the key problem that has resulted in an inconsistent youth work offer in Wales, with a lack of agencies and resources between the strategic level and the level of delivery organisations.

“To my mind, the problem is not so much the strategy as the implementation. There is no intermediate body between strategy and delivery organisations. Welsh Government [Youth Engagement Team] has no resources to deliver. So who is going to put the things in place to make the strategy happen?” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“There’s the Interim Youth Work Board, but apart from them there’s no specific body to support youth work in Wales other than the ‘Youth Work Team’ at Welsh Government. As a result, there’s a disconnect between those at the coal face and those making strategic decisions.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 8.40 Consequently, a prominent theme within the consultation was the importance of considering the structures through which the Youth Work Strategy for Wales will be implemented. Stakeholders were strongly of the view that some kind of agency is needed to put the Youth Work Strategy for Wales into practice and hold government, at local and national level, to account for the youth work that young people are provided with.

“There needs to be a recognised body for youth work, like the old Welsh Youth Agency, but building on the lessons learned from that, more cooperative and representing different parts of the sector.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“It’s good to see the government are taking a new strategy forwards, but we need some sort of body to drive it forwards. A national youth agency could be leading research and public debate on issues affecting young people, collaborating with social services and education, leading workforce development, and ensuring strategic link-ups between statutory and third sector provision.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 8.41 YouthLink Scotland was frequently cited by stakeholders as a desirable model for coordinating the sector, and has been highlighted as a potential template for an organisation to support youth work in Wales in previous reports (Fowler et al., 2015). The perceived advantages of the YouthLink Scotland model are that it brings together voluntary and statutory providers, with its independence from government meaning that it can work closely with government while at the same time independently challenging local and national government on behalf of the sector and young people.

“For us, the real absence of leadership comes back to the lack of a national youth agency. We would favour an organisation that represents both maintained and voluntary youth sector organisations at a national level. Youth Link Scotland is a model we’d be interested in exploring further.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“The key is to establish a national youth agency along the lines of the structure they have in Scotland (YouthLink) which covers a larger population than Wales and represents statutory and non-statutory provision. This has greater visibility out with the sector than currently evident in Wales.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 8.42 At the same time, it would be a mistake to adapt the Scottish model without consideration of whether it meets the precise needs of the sector in Wales. Careful consideration would be needed to understand the precise function that a national

representative body would play, and to make sure that it reflects the diversity of youth work being delivered and the needs of the sector in Wales.

8.43 Previous research carried out by Fowler et al. (2015) included an options appraisal for restructuring youth work governance in Wales. The research explored four options for restructuring:

- **Model one: An enhanced version of the current model**, including a hypothecated Welsh Government grant for youth work, Estyn inspections, and a common quality assurance process for all.
- **Model two: Restructuring as regional consortia**, reorganising statutory provision into regions, with funding provided to regional bodies responsible for planning and delivering youth work with other providers.
- **Model three: a national youth service**, with Welsh Government retaining youth work grants currently given to local authorities, using it to form a national youth service, with all statutory provision responsible only to Welsh Government.
- **Model four: the current delivery model with a national strategic body**, with the body acting as a voice for maintained and voluntary sectors, developing strategies and initiatives with Welsh Government, funded by a top-sliced Welsh Government grant, but securing additional funding not available to public bodies.

8.44 The fourth model proposed in the options appraisal is ‘the Scottish model’, and they note that in Scotland, the model has been effective in linking youth work to Scotland’s wider outcomes and performance framework (Fowler et al. 2015, p. 26). At the same time, responsibility for delivery would lie with local bodies such as local authorities and third sector providers. This would correlate well with the current structure for youth work delivery in Wales.

8.45 A national youth work body could build on synergies with organisations such as CWVYS, existing workforce development initiatives such as those currently carried out by ETS Wales and the Welsh Youth Work Quality Mark, and workforce registration functions carried out by the EWC. Other functions carried out by the body could include gathering data and providing intelligence about youth work. A potential youth work sector census or the expansion of the audit currently carried out for local authority provision could be the responsibility of this national body as well.

8.46 Key advantages of the model are that it would not require significant reorganisation of the current governance, accountability and legal arrangements surrounding youth

work in Wales, as provision would continue to be delivered by local authorities and existing voluntary organisations. YouthLink Scotland has “contributed significantly to the current high profile of ‘brand youth’ in Scotland” (Fowler et al. 2015, p. 30), something that is important for representing the sector externally, and building social capital and cohesion for individuals and organisations within it.

- 8.47 Fowler et al. (2015) concluded that while an arm’s length national body would require additional investment from Welsh Government, particularly during its inception, it would have the potential to draw funding into the sector from additional sources, including increasing the additional funding youth work receives from other government departments in relation to specific issue areas and from external funding sources. It is noted that “YouthLink Scotland costs Scottish Government £635k in core funding, an investment doubled by the matching income YouthLink Scotland levers in as an independent charitable body through income generation from other government contracts, charitable and philanthropic organisations” (Fowler et al. 2015, p. 30). The generation of additional funding for the sector would reduce the risk that top-slicing youth work funding would reduce frontline provision.
- 8.48 It is important to recognise the role of CWVYS in Wales as an umbrella organisation for national and locally based voluntary organisations. The strength of the existing representative role played by CWVYS should be recognised in the design of any similar provision, so as to build on the assets already available to the Welsh youth work sector.
- 8.49 Stakeholder consultation suggests that this options appraisal should remain the starting point for thinking about future governance arrangements for youth work in Wales. As noted above, the ‘Scottish model’ is most popular among stakeholders, and there is a strong case for supporting and enhancing the mix of statutory and third sector delivery that is currently available, it is not the only option that should be considered.

Recommendation 7: Welsh Government should use previous research to think about the future delivery model for the youth work in Wales. It should consider supporting the development of a national representative body for youth work. It should consider how statutory and voluntary providers are represented and make youth voice central to its work. It is important that whatever is developed is specific to the needs of the sector in Wales.

Improving local coordination and commissioning

- 8.50 While the precise shape of the national model will dictate the requirements of local governance, it is important that structures are in place to support local coordination of the youth work offer. Local service delivery is a key strength of youth work delivery in Wales.
- 8.51 As noted previously, friction between maintained, voluntary and third sector delivery is a significant obstacle to achieving a consistent universal youth work offer. Similarly, there is a perception that the lack of engagement with other organisations commissioning services for young people has been to the detriment of the youth work sector, and the quality of services commissioned for young people.
- 8.52 While it is noted that structures such as the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework have increased awareness of youth work in schools (Wrexham Glyndwr University 2018, p. 26), there is a strong perception among stakeholders that the coordination achieved through Public Service Boards and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework has to date not been as effective as the coordination that was achieved through the Children and Young People's Partnerships.
- 8.53 If the strategy is to remain reliant on local delivery, it is important that the effectiveness of these structures, and the role of youth work within them is reviewed. Youth work organisations are keen to work with Welsh Government and other stakeholders to "update and relaunch the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, clarifying the function of youth work in supporting its delivery" (Welsh Government 2019a, p. 25).
- 8.54 In any assessment of these structures, their accessibility to non-public sector organisations should also be considered. A key enabler of the Youth Work Strategy for Wales will be closer partnership working between sectors, and involving third and voluntary sector organisations alongside the public sector in decisions about the commissioning of youth work will be important for delivering a cohesive service cooperatively.

Recommendation 8: Welsh Government should consider how coordination of youth work provision, and coordination between youth work and other youth support services, can be best supported at a local authority level. These partnership structures should embrace the role of voluntary organisations as delivery partners working together with local authorities.

Young people's role in delivering the strategy

8.55 Throughout this research, stakeholders were unanimous in their agreement that young people should be involved in informing a new delivery model for youth work in Wales. Participation is a one of the key principles of a children's rights approach and means that "their views should be taken seriously when decisions or actions are taken that affect their lives directly or indirectly" (Children's Commissioner's Office 2017, p. 12).

8.56 Participation can take place in different forms, and there was some disagreement about how best to ensure that young people participate. There was also some disagreement about whether young people should represent themselves directly in strategy and service development, with a minority of stakeholders consulted suggesting that youth workers are best placed to assess and synthesise the views of the broad range of young people they work with.

"The focus on representation is often a bit tokenistic. As they're developing, young people will often represent themselves and not the whole cohort. We get into a tricky position when we assume that these young people represent young people as a whole. We should be engaging the communication chain to use youth workers as a conduit for representing all young people." (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

"This is difficult as any young person or group involved won't represent the diversity of young people across Wales. We've had similar challenges with structures such as Youth Parliaments which, although they undertake good work, aren't necessarily the voice of young people." (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

8.57 However, most stakeholders reported that they wanted to see greater direct involvement of young people in national and local strategy development and monitoring.

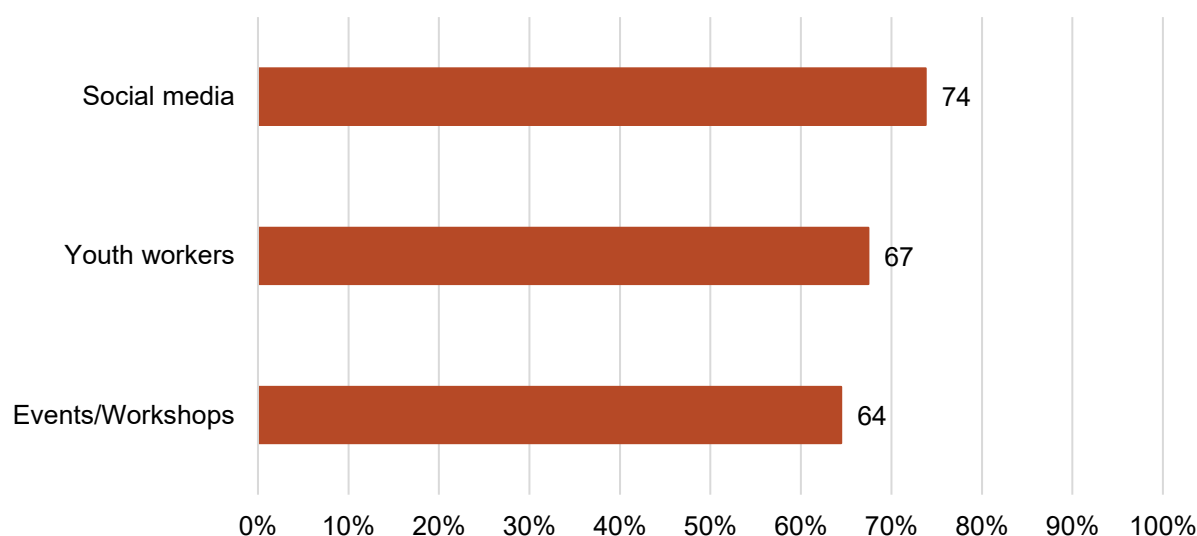
“To change what youth work looks like, we need young people influencing decisions and what youth work will be like moving forward. Coproduction needs to be taken forward.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“There needs more participation of young people and youth workers at national and local level. The voices of marginalised young people aren’t being heard meaning the support doesn’t work very well for them.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

“I think youth workers and young people need a bigger voice in terms of what is going on, the decisions about youth work can’t be made outside of youth work, it has to be internal.” (Stakeholder interview, 2020)

- 8.58 Both of these perspectives share a commitment to ensuring that the strategy recognises the voices of the diverse range of young people in Wales. Many stakeholders view wider participation of young people in youth work governance as something that will help the sector meet the range of needs of people in Wales.
- 8.59 Young people were also consulted over how they would like to be involved in shaping youth work in the future (Figure 8.6 over page). For this question they were given three options to choose from: through social media, through events and workshops, and through their youth worker.
- 8.60 The most popular of these options was social media (74%) with platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat being put forward as the preferred. The next preferred option was via youth workers (67%) this is due to them being seen as conduits for young people’s voices and opinions. Finally, 64% said they would like to be involved with events or workshops in order to get involved.

Figure 8.6: Young people's views of how they want to be involved in shaping the future of the youth work strategy



Source: Let's Talk Questionnaire (N=633)

- 8.61 Stakeholders reported that, in general, youth work delivery organisations are good at ensuring that young people are involved in making decisions about provision. However, there is less involvement at a strategic level, including conversations about what youth work services are commissioned for young people. Ideally, both Welsh Government and local authorities should encourage more participation from young people when developing strategies at national and local level. This was a theme echoed in interviews with representatives of young people, who were strongly of the view that young people need to be more involved in the way that youth work organisations and government plan youth work provision.

"We need more young people at the table and need to enable them to contribute meaningfully. Organisations need to incorporate young people and different groups of young people into the leadership - at the highest levels, not just for tokenistic purposes." (Interview with representative of young people, 2020)

"Children in Wales are involved in planning and strategy development and I've been involved with the board. But overall, there hasn't been enough involvement of young people from top to bottom." (Interview with representative of young people, 2020)

- 8.62 Stakeholders were also strongly in support of the principle of accountability inherent in the children's rights approach. A children's rights approach requires that "authorities should be accountable to children for decisions and actions which affect their lives" (Children's Commissioner's Office 2017, p. 13). Stakeholders suggested

that the principle of accountability to young people should be embedded at all levels of the Youth Work Strategy for Wales and delivery.

- 8.63 The work of the Interim Youth Work Board is perceived by stakeholders as positive in this area, with representatives of young people's involvement in the work of the board and their consultations with young people seen as contributing to increased participation and accountability of young people. More could be done to formalise this in future governance arrangements for youth work, however. This would include ensuring youth representation in future governance arrangements at a Wales-wide level, and incorporating youth representation within local authority governance arrangements.

Recommendation 9: Welsh Government should consider how youth voice is included in national governance structures for youth work and require local authorities to include young people's voices in local authority level governance structures. Recommendations 1-8 should be understood in the context of Recommendation 9, and youth voice should be weaved into all levels of youth work planning and delivery in Wales.

9. Findings - A Theory of Change for youth work in Wales

- 9.1 This section outlines a theory of change for youth work in Wales, building on the findings of the research collated in the previous sections. A theory of change is a conceptual map that demonstrates the assumed, or theoretical, relationships between activities and the outcomes that are anticipated to result from them (Davies 2013, Vogel 2012). As Vogel (2012) notes, theories of change vary depending upon the level they operate, particularly between high-level theories of change that concern a general policy area, and theories of change that focus on a specific policy or programme. While theories of change in the former area typically identify broad drivers and overarching ambitions, theories of change focusing on specific programmes tend to focus more specifically on the causal chain of how the intervention is anticipated to lead to outcomes.
- 9.2 The theory of change presented in this chapter is a high-level theory of change. Consequently, it tries to map out the broad policy drivers that will help the high-level strategic objectives to be met and demonstrates the relationship between youth work outcomes and broader Welsh Government policy objectives. In practice, this means that the theory of change outlined here provides a map of how the youth work sector would look if the recommendations in this report were implemented.

Considerations made in the Theory of Change

- 9.3 Several considerations have been made in developing the theory of change. It is important to recognise these as they are key assumptions that underpin the theory of change, and, if they are inaccurate, they call into question the remainder of the theory of change. These considerations include:
- A definition of youth work: the theory of change has built on the definition of youth work agreed in Principles and Purposes (Youth Work in Wales Review Group, 2018). This definition focuses on the value of youth work as the voluntary relationship between young people and a trusted adult, establishing universal open-access youth work as a core element of youth work in Wales, while recognising the importance of this youth work signposting young people into more targeted work focusing on employability, offending, and other specific policy areas.
 - Policy context: the theory of change has taken into account the policy context in which the strategy is being implemented. It has sought to establish the

relationship between youth work outcomes and Welsh Government priorities established through the Well-being of Future Generations Act, Prosperity for All and Cymraeg 2050.

- Sustainability: the theory of change is aimed at developing a sustainable model of delivery for youth work in Wales. To this end, it focuses on how delivery can be supported by a more sustainable funding model, including ring-fenced funding for open-access youth work, and a national representative body, which can leverage in additional funding to the sector.
- Collaboration: the theory of change has been developed in accordance with the principle that the youth work sector is most effective when statutory, voluntary and third sector organisations work together. It is not clear, however, the extent to which these sectors share a coherent vision of the sector and its direction of travel.
- Local commissioning and service design: the theory of change recognises the importance of local commissioning to achieving its goals. The aim of a national strategy is, therefore, to empower local organisations delivering youth work to do so in a more effective manner.
- Evidence-based strategy: the theory of change has taken into account the evidence base discussed earlier in this chapter, and identifies the links between youth work and outcomes that are supported by high-level research.
- Establishes a basis for measurement: the theory of change identifies the potential ways in which the performance of Youth Work Strategy for Wales can be measured. It establishes different measurement criteria at different stages of the theory of change, and identifies who has responsibility for measuring them, as well as why measurement is important at each stage of the theory of change.

9.4 Building on the children's rights approach taken by the high level strategy, the theory of change builds in the principle of youth work as a right to which young people in Wales are entitled, supports participation of young people at all levels of the strategy, and sees Welsh Government, local authorities, and youth work providers as accountable for the youth work they deliver.

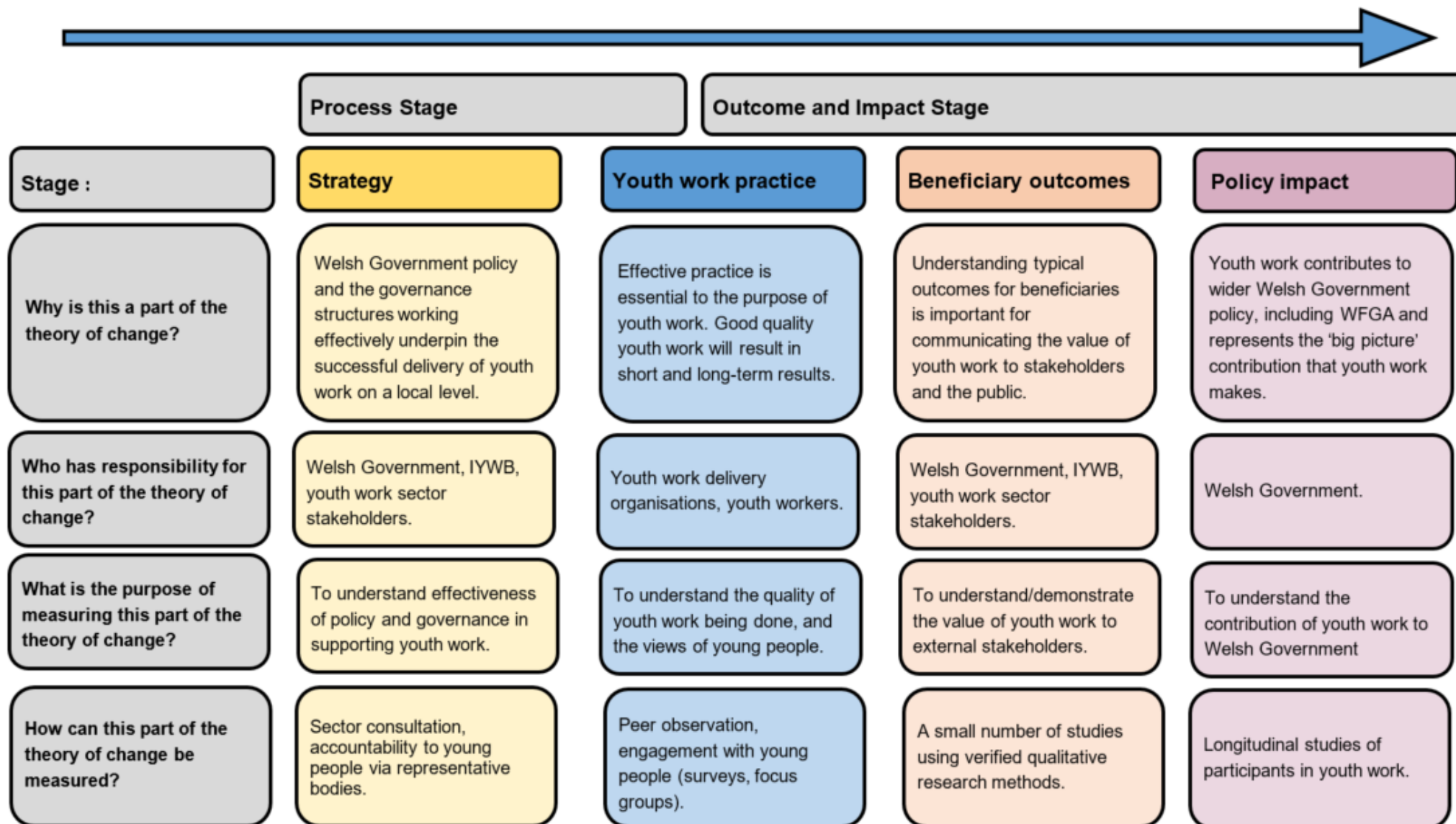
9.5 Reflecting these considerations, the theory of change centres on universal entitlement, identifying the overall goal of a Youth Work Strategy for Wales being to ensure that all young people in Wales have access to high-quality youth work opportunities, which is understood as a right to which all young people are entitled.

From this starting point, the theory of change was developed in two directions. The first was to establish the drivers and enablers that enable effective delivery of the strategy. Working in the other direction, the theory of change mapped out the outcomes resulting from effective delivery of youth work, and their relationship to broader Welsh Government objectives in the Well-being of Future Generations Act and Prosperity for All.

How the different elements of the Theory of Change fit together

- 9.6 Figure 9.1 over page, outlines how the different stages of the theory of change fit together, and where responsibility for each stage lies. The first stage of the theory of change is strategic, and shows the strategic drivers that can enable youth work to become a universal resource for young people in Wales, and is the responsibility of Welsh Government and sector stakeholders. The second stage of the theory of change is youth work practice, and refers to the delivery of youth work opportunities to young people. This stage of the theory of change is the responsibility of youth work delivery organisations and youth workers and recognises the importance of the quality of youth work that is being delivered to the strategy.

Figure 9.1: How different parts of the theory of change fit together and where responsibility lies for each stage



9.7 The third part of the theory of change relates to longer-term outcomes for young people. Building on research carried out by the Centre for Youth Impact, it identifies standard outcome domains in which outcomes will typically be observed. While achieving goals in these standardised outcome domains are not the purpose of youth work, measuring them can help to demonstrate the contribution of youth work to policymakers and external stakeholders and justify further investment in youth work. Finally, the fourth part of the theory of change explores the relationship between youth work and the long-term objectives of Welsh Government, including the Well-being of Future Generations Act and its Prosperity for All national strategy. Understanding the impact in these areas – and the extent to which youth work contributes to its overarching strategic objectives - is the responsibility of Welsh Government.

Enablers of the Youth Work Strategy for Wales

9.8 Reflecting the starting point of the Youth Work Strategy for Wales noted above, that its objectives should be to ensure a universal youth work offer, the overall objectives of the strategy have been understood as ensuring that all young people in Wales have access to high-quality youth work opportunities, which is understood as a right to which they are entitled.

9.9 Drivers of this strategy are outlined in previous sections of the report, and include the following factors:

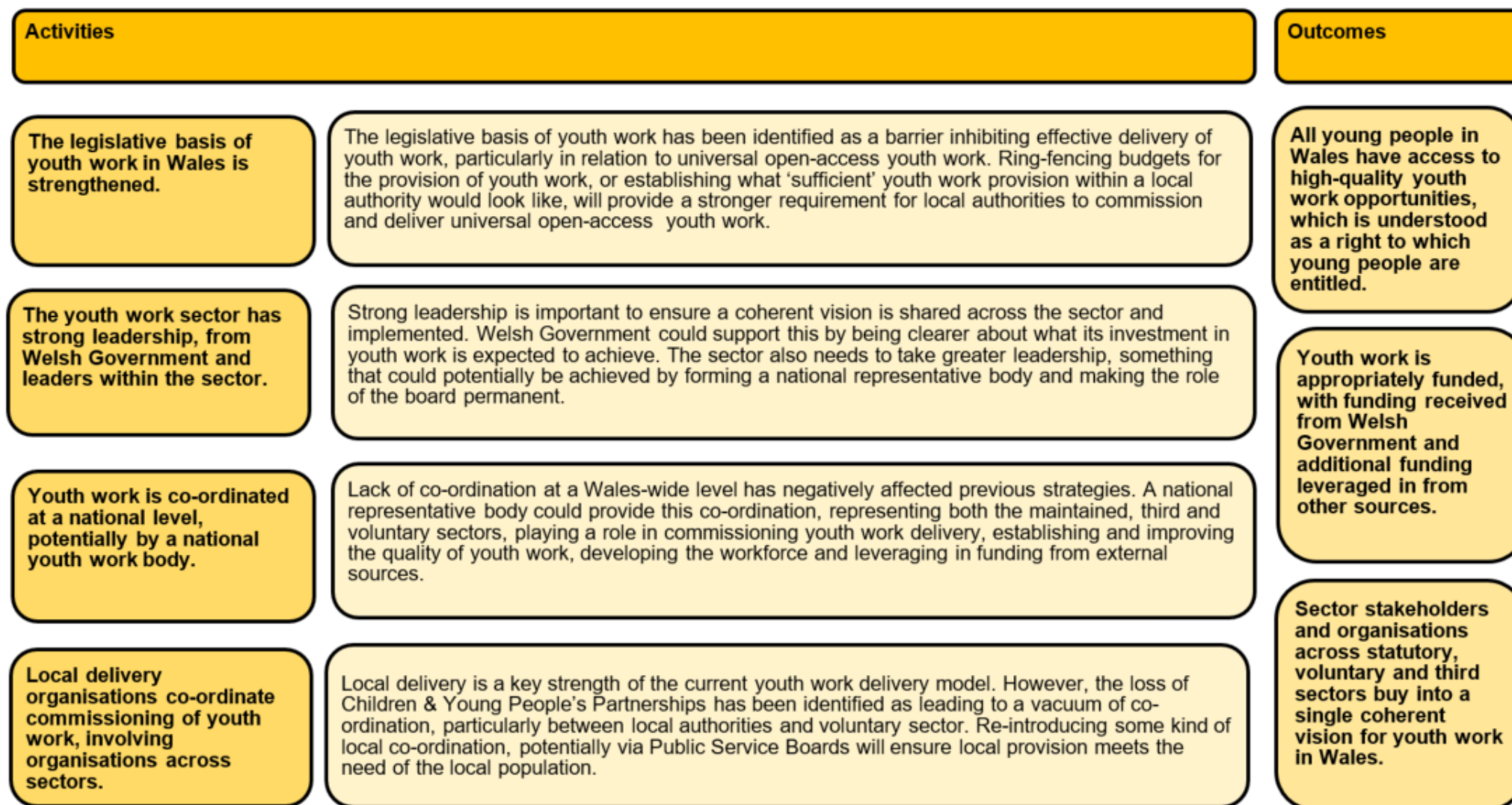
- A stronger legislative basis for youth work, establishing a requirement for local authorities to deliver a minimum standard of open-access youth work.
- Strong leadership for youth work in Wales, with Welsh Government providing a vision for its investment in youth work and sector leaders representing the sector to Welsh Government and external stakeholders.
- Greater coordination for youth work at a national level, including statutory, voluntary and third sector providers and organisations. This could potentially be provided by a national representative body.
- Local delivery organisations working together to plan and deliver youth work, with collaboration between statutory and voluntary providers, and youth work organisations working with other organisations delivering services to young people.
- Recruiting and supporting a workforce that reflects Wales' diversity will enable the workforce to do high quality youth work. This should include continued

commitment to ensuring and improving the quality of youth work in Wales, including through existing mechanisms such as workforce registration and the youth work quality mark.

- Filling data gaps regarding the volume and nature of youth work being delivered in Wales will enable resources to be allocated to ensure those who are poorly served by the existing youth work offer are also given access to youth work opportunities.
- Youth work organisations receive appropriate and sustainable funding to deliver youth work, including open-access work. This includes continued funding from Welsh Government, and additional funding leveraged in by a national representative organisation for youth work in Wales.
- Reflecting the children's rights approach taken in the high level Youth Work Strategy for Wales, embedding young people in all levels of strategy development and service design will be important for ensuring that organisations involved in funding and delivering youth work are accountable to young people for the services they provide.

9.10 These drivers are mapped out in Figure 9.2, over page.

Figure 9.2: The role of Youth Work Strategy for Wales in achieving a universal youth work offer



Activities		Outcomes
A workforce that reflects Wales' diversity is recruited.	During the research, young people said they wanted to see a youth work workforce that represented Wales' diversity. Achieving this, including a workforce capable of delivering youth work through the medium of Welsh will help youth work to be delivered beginning where young people are at.	Youth work provision is collaboratively planned and commissioned on a local level in a way that involves young people.
The workforce is effectively trained and developed to deliver high-quality youth work.	The quality of youth work delivered is largely dependent on the youth workers delivering it. A workforce that is appropriately trained (along the spectrum from volunteers to professional youth workers), empowered to develop professionally and encouraged to stay in the profession is a key enabler of this vision. Existing measures such as the quality mark and workforce registration can be strengthened to support this.	
Data gaps are filled, and data is used to tailor the youth work offer so that it is available to every young person in Wales.	Plugging data gaps is important to delivering the youth work strategy, as it will enable youth work to be planned and resources allocated to offer youth work opportunities to all young people in Wales. Understanding how available youth work is across rural/urban/coastal areas, and whether it is accessible to individuals sharing protected characteristics and through the medium of Welsh will aid planning.	There are clear lines of accountability for the youth work offer in Wales, including accountability of Welsh Government and youth work providers to young people.
Youth work organisations receive appropriate and sustainable funding to deliver youth work.	Throughout the qualitative research, funding was identified as a persistent barrier preventing the effective delivery of youth work. Ensuring sufficient funding, with time frames that allow for long-term organisational planning and a commitment to open-access universal youth work, distributed across the maintained and voluntary sectors, is key to providing a coordinated offer.	
Young people are involved in strategy development and service design.	Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states 'when adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and their opinions taken into account'. Young people's voices should feature prominently at all levels of governance.	The value of youth work is understood by policymakers, stakeholders and the public.

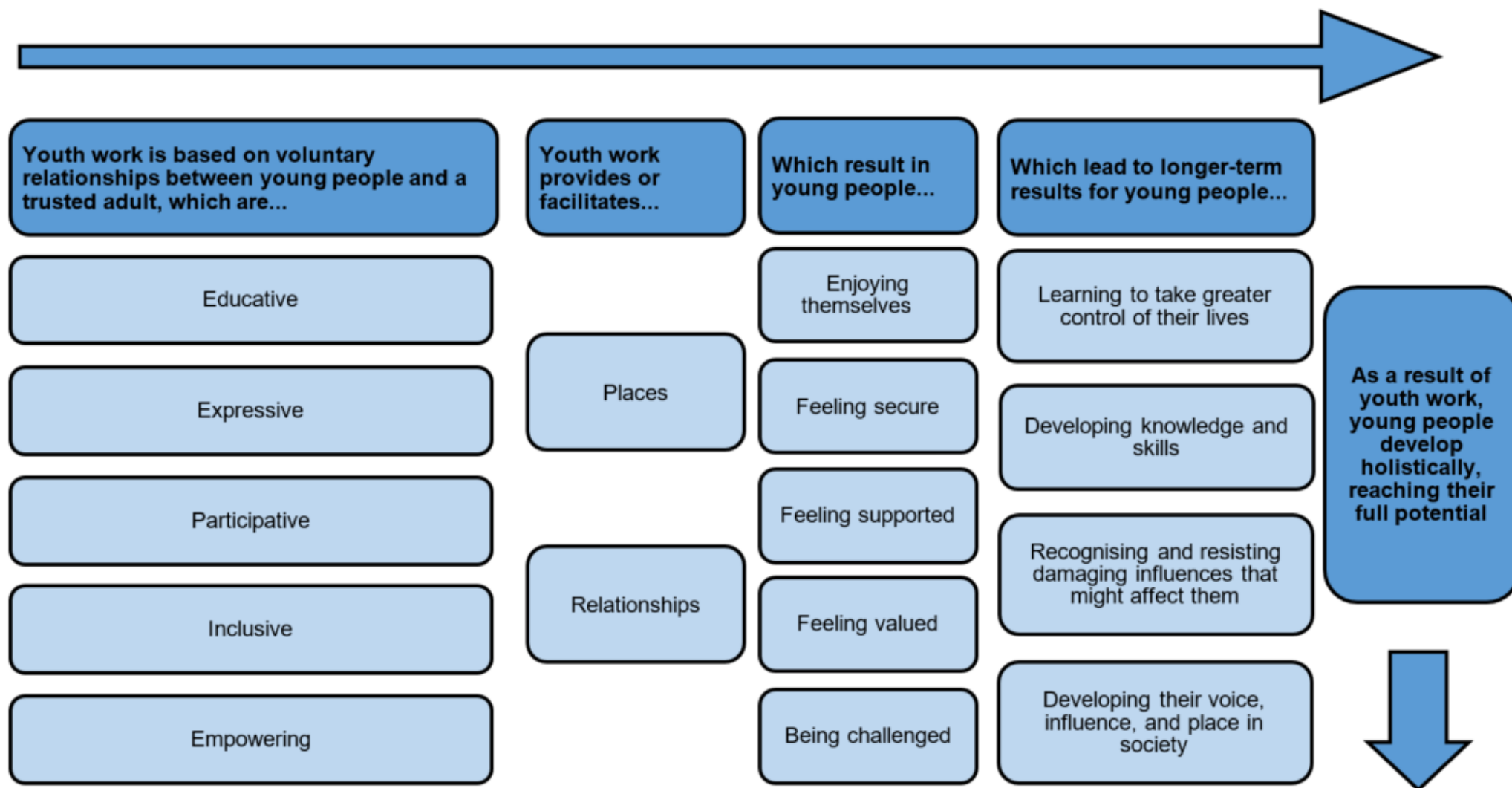
Youth work practice and outcomes resulting from youth work

- 9.11 Figure 9.3, over page, outlines the youth work relationship and outcomes resulting from it. These components are discussed in turn, below.

Youth work practice

- 9.12 The theory of change then explores the nature of youth work practice and the short-term outcomes for young people that result from it. This part of the theory of change is based on the definition of youth work provided in the Principles and Purposes document. It recognises that youth work is based on the voluntary relationship between young people and a trusted adult, which are educative, expressive, participative, inclusive, and empowering. The purpose of this work is to enable young people to develop holistically, reaching their full potential, and the endpoint of the journey is driven by young people themselves. At the same time, the theory of change recognises that Principles and Purposes identifies a number of outcomes for young people, including learning to take greater control of their lives, developing knowledge and skills, recognising and resisting damaging influences that might affect them, and developing their voice, influence and place in society.
- 9.13 The quality of this youth work, and whether these outcomes are happening, should be measured as part of youth workers' and youth work organisations' reflective practice. Other outcome measures and ways of assessing how effective youth work practice is should be developed depending on the nature of the activities undertaken.

Figure 9.3: Youth work practice and anticipated outcomes and impacts





Based on what we know about youth work in Wales and other settings, it is reasonable to assume that social and emotional learning (SEL) resulting from youth work includes the following outcome domains...

Responsibility

Empathy

Problem Solving

Initiative

Teamwork

Emotion Management



Youth work outcomes for young people lead to positive outcomes in public policy areas, including contributing to the key themes of Welsh Government's Prosperity for All national strategy...

Prosperous and secure

Healthy and Active

Ambitious and Learning

United and Connected

And contributes to the seven Well-being Goals outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

A prosperous
Wales

A resilient Wales

A more equal
Wales

A healthier Wales

A Wales of
cohesive
communities

A Wales of
vibrant culture &
thriving Welsh
language

A globally
responsible
Wales

Outcomes for beneficiaries

- 9.14 The next stage of the theory of change, again represented in Figure 9.3, covers typical longer-term outcomes resulting from youth work. These outcomes are not the purpose of youth work, and do not need to be measured by every youth work organisation and for every young person supported. However, it is reasonable to assume that all youth work activities produce outcomes in these areas. Being able to present effective evidence in this area is important because it enables stakeholders within the sector to represent youth work externally, contributing to meeting one of the objectives of the strategy, to raise the profile and understanding of the contribution that youth work makes. This research need could be met by commissioning a small number of high quality studies about the long-term impact of youth work on young people who benefit from it, or drawing on existing literature carried out about youth work in other contexts.
- 9.15 Within this theory of change, social and emotional learning (SEL) outcomes have been drawn from research carried out by the Centre for Youth Impact on behalf of the Local Government Association (McNeil et al. 2020). This research drew on and updated previous research, published as the Catalyst Framework, which identified outcomes for young people in a single conceptual framework (McNeil et al. 2020). These outcomes have been incorporated into the theory of change because they represent an established body of evidence. However, these can be modified depending on future research carried out in a Welsh context.

Long-term policy impact

- 9.16 The theory of change ties the outcomes of youth work interventions to Welsh Government's long-term policy objectives. Monitoring how youth work contributes to these objectives is something that Welsh Government may wish to review as it assesses its investment, but this should not be a standard part of youth workers or youth work delivery organisations measuring the quality of their youth work.

Assumptions, enablers, and barriers

- 9.17 Finally, Figure 9.4 over page outlines a series of assumptions, enablers and barriers that are included in this theory of change.

Figure 9.4: Assumptions, enablers, and barriers in the theory of change

Assumptions:

- Welsh Government retains a long-term commitment to funding youth work as a way of working with young people and values universal open-access youth work.
- Welsh Government, sector stakeholders across sectors and external agencies share the same vision for youth work in Wales and are willing to commit to delivering it.
- Local delivery organisations are best placed to commission and deliver youth work that reflects the needs of their local communities.
- Youth work delivery organisations are willing to work together to commission youth work provision collaboratively.
- Welsh Government and other sector stakeholders will be willing to support the development of a formal leadership role for the IYWB and provide funding to support the development of a national representative organisation.
- It will be possible to leverage in external funding for the sector to complement existing funding sources from the Welsh Government.
- Welsh Government, local authorities and youth work delivery organisations will be sufficiently flexible to fully implement a children's rights approach.

Enablers:

- A strong vision of the contribution that youth work is anticipated to make to Wales articulated by Welsh Government and sector stakeholders.
- Commitment to a shared vision for youth work in Wales by Welsh Government, sector stakeholders across statutory, voluntary and third sector organisations as well as from relevant external stakeholders.
- Existing initiatives (such as the quality mark, and workforce registration initiatives) being willing to work collaboratively with a national youth work representative body.
- Commitment from sector stakeholders about the importance of developing a robust evidence base demonstrating the value of youth work.
- Learning from youth work interventions, and evidence from effective youth work interventions being collated and shared with relevant stakeholders.
- Buy in to a children's rights approach from Welsh Government, local authorities and youth work delivery organisations.

Barriers:

- A potential lack of a shared sector vision between organisations in receipt of Welsh Government funding and those who don't may inhibit partnership working.
- Data gaps relating to key information about youth work in Wales may prevent adjustments being made to ensure that youth work is available to all.
- A tendency for organisations to look to secure their own funding may make cross-sector and cross-organisation commissioning unfeasible.
- Scepticism about the relevance of 'outcomes' to youth work may lead to some individuals and some organisations not contributing to a shared evidence strategy.
- COVID-19 may lead to funding being diverted from funding youth work into other policy areas.

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 10.1 This research was commissioned to consolidate what is known about youth work in Wales and produce a theory of change to underpin the Interim Youth Work Board's work in developing recommendations for the new strategy for Welsh Government. Reflecting these objectives, the report has drawn on previous research reports and primary research with stakeholders involved in the work of the board or identified as having a relevant perspective on the strategy by Welsh Government. Given that the qualitative research was not based on a systematic sample of the sector, caution should be taken in interpreting the findings drawn from the interviews carried out.

What published evidence says about the benefits of the Youth Work Approach

- 10.2 This research has sought to identify what research generated about Wales, the UK and internationally tells us about the benefits of youth work as an approach, including for young people. The literature review has revealed that the evidence base for the benefits of youth work is not particularly strong, particularly those aspects of the research that have been conducted in a Welsh context.
- 10.3 Despite this weakness in the evidence base, there is a growing range of research and evidence in this area. The evidence base is strongest in highlighting the potential benefits of engagement with youth work and mostly relates to soft outcomes. The literature identifies a considerable range of soft outcomes, including positive inter-personal relationships, self-confidence and other soft outcomes which contribute to longer-term outcomes, including improving educational participation and attainment.
- 10.4 Evidence produced in Irish and Scottish contexts have demonstrated that universal youth work produces a financial return on investment that is considerably greater than the initial investment. In this context, there is good evidence that investment in open-access youth work produces a positive return on investment for governments in Scotland and Ireland.
- 10.5 A range of research methods have been adopted by previous studies. These include Transformative Evaluation methodologies that use extensive qualitative methodologies to build an evidence base for the outcomes resulting from youth work. These methodologies are participative and in line with the principles of youth

work methodology and could be a basis for future work to understand the impact of youth work in Wales.

Good Practice Models for evaluating partnership approaches to youth work and assessing the value of youth work

- 10.6 This research has reviewed the available literature around partnership approaches to delivering youth work. Partnership approaches can include a wide range of organisational arrangements and ways of working, from informal networking between individuals across organisations, through to more formal arrangements. There are various examples of partnership approaches to delivering youth work in the international literature. Many youth work models involve some level of partnership, including various degrees of cross-sector working between statutory youth work organisations and voluntary sector delivery organisations.

What is known about youth work in Wales?

What is known about the scale and scope of youth work in Wales

- 10.7 The research has found that there is an inconsistent and incomplete picture of youth work provision in Wales. Due to the reporting requirements facing statutory youth work provision, there is a good picture of statutory provision in Wales. Information about statutory provision is provided by local authorities and collated by Welsh Government annually, providing detail on the range of funding related to youth work services taking place within local authority settings. However, considerably less is known about the range and volume of voluntary and third sector provision.
- 10.8 The data available indicates that funding has decreased for local authority youth services between 2013-14 and 2018-19, from £40.2m to £31.4m. During this period, the number of young people known to be actively participating in local authority youth work participation has also decreased, from 20% of the eligible population in 2013-14, to 15% of the eligible population in 2018-19.
- 10.9 There is considerable variation, in both real and per capita terms, within local authority youth work budgets. Local authority spend per head of the eligible population ranges from £113 per person in Blaenau Gwent, to £25 per person in Cardiff. Qualitative data collected through stakeholder interviews also indicates a perception that there has been a shift in the types of youth work delivered. In particular, there is a perception that youth work provision has increasingly moved towards targeted forms of provision, at the expense of universal open-access

provision. An important issue here is the legislative basis of youth work in Wales, with the Learning and Skills Act being seen as too permissive, resulting in an inconsistency of youth provision in range, volume and quality (Wylie, 2016).

- 10.10 In this context, and given the key data gaps facing the sector, it is not possible to conclude the extent to which youth work in Wales is a universally accessible service or delivers on young people's right to access high quality youth work opportunities.

Recommendation 1: Reflecting the lack of systematic information about youth work in Wales, particularly that which relates to non-statutory provision, Welsh Government should consider expanding the scope of the data it collects about youth work provision in Wales to include all youth work organisations in Wales, including voluntary youth work delivery. This would extend beyond existing information provided by local authorities to Welsh Government and would enable Welsh Government to establish the extent to which a universal entitlement to youth work provision has been met.

What is known about the extent of youth work delivered through the medium of Welsh

- 10.11 As with youth work more generally, the evidence base about Welsh medium youth work is incomplete, with more known about statutory provision than provision delivered by the voluntary and third sectors. Welsh Government statistics indicate that around 17% of statutory provision is delivered primarily or entirely through the medium of Welsh. There is also considerable regional variation in this provision, for example all the youth work in Gwynedd is delivered primarily or entirely through the medium of Welsh, but in Flintshire no provision is delivered primarily or entirely through the medium of Welsh.
- 10.12 Qualitative data collected during this research indicated a perception among sector stakeholders that the Welsh language is of importance to providing a comprehensive universal youth work offer in Wales. However, stakeholders perceive that there are gaps within Welsh medium youth work provision at present. With some exceptions, notably in Gwynedd, in most areas only some youth work opportunities are available through the medium of Welsh. In other areas, youth

services are mainly, or wholly, reliant on provision from external providers such as the Urdd and Young Farmers.

- 10.13 Factors such as the difficulty of finding Welsh speaking staff, challenges associated with sourcing training materials and materials to support the delivery of youth work, and encouraging Welsh speakers to use the language in a professional setting were identified as barriers preventing more effective Welsh medium youth work delivery.
- 10.14 In this context, it appears that more could be done to ensure that every young person has the opportunity to engage with youth work through the medium of Welsh if they wish to. However, in the short term, the main challenge in this area appears to be the availability of information about how comprehensive the Welsh medium youth work offer is in each local authority area. While statistics are available for local authority youth work provision, local authority youth work is only part of the provision available in each local authority area. A more comprehensive audit of Welsh medium youth work provision, and demand for it, is required, so that resources can be allocated to any areas in which need is currently unmet.

Recommendation 2: The extent to which youth work provision is available through the medium of Welsh should be a key component of the data collection process recommended in Recommendation 1. Understanding what provision is available and where there are gaps is crucial to establishing what support is required to enable all young people who want to access youth work through the medium of Welsh to do so.

Challenges and opportunities facing youth work in Wales

Funding of youth work in Wales

- 10.15 The availability of funding to support youth work in Wales was identified by stakeholders as the main challenge facing the sector. Across statutory, voluntary and third sector stakeholders, there is a perception that youth work organisations are being asked to do more with less.
- 10.16 Recent changes to youth work funding have focused youth work delivery on more targeted forms of provision, reducing the funding available for open-access provision, which many stakeholders perceive should be the core of the youth work offer. This shift, and broader inconsistencies about what youth work opportunities are available in different areas, is seen to stem from the permissive nature of the Learning and Skills Act (Wylie, 2016).
- 10.17 Stakeholders also suggested that more could be done to ensure that statutory providers share funding with partners in the third and voluntary sectors and include them in the commissioning process. While there are many good practice examples, this is not perceived to be universally the case across Wales. Conflict over funding between different parts of the sector, which should be working together towards a shared goal, is a key challenge that the strategy needs to overcome.
- 10.18 Funding structures for youth work in Wales have been identified as weaker than would ideally be the case. Research exploring the previous National Youth Work Strategy for Wales has found that funding mechanisms within Welsh youth work are weak (Wylie 2016) and do not sufficiently support the delivery of open-access youth work as a universal service (Wrexham Glyndwr University 2018).
- 10.19 Another issue is the ability of the sector to leverage in funding from external, non-government sources. It is currently perceived to be poor at doing so and, because of this, it is over-reliant on grant funding (Wylie 2016, Fowler et al. 2015). Finding a long-term funding model that diversifies the funding available to the sector while maintaining core funding for open-access youth work will be central to the strategy achieving its overall objectives.

Raising the profile of the sector

- 10.20 Another challenge for the sector identified by stakeholders was ensuring that youth work, and its value, is recognised by policymakers, external stakeholders, and the public. There is a perception among the stakeholders consulted that youth work is often misunderstood by policymakers, who do not always recognise the professional skills involved in youth work or how youth work differs from other ways of working with young people.
- 10.21 Longer-term aspirations for stakeholders consulted during this research are for youth work to receive greater recognition, standing alongside teaching as a skilled and professionalised way of working with young people.

How COVID-19 has affected youth work in Wales

- 10.22 Like many other sectors in Wales, youth work has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The evidence available suggests that youth work has adapted well to the challenges posed by COVID-19, but that COVID-19 and the resulting economic disruption is likely to exacerbate many of the issues that young people present with.

Operational implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- 10.23 Operationally, many youth work organisations in Wales have had to reconfigure the support they are able to offer young people, providing online support due to government social distancing requirements. In addition, youth work delivery has been disrupted by staff being furloughed, or by youth workers and officials at local authority and Welsh Government level being redeployed into other areas of work. Despite this, several stakeholders identified this as an important opportunity for the sector, to demonstrate to other stakeholders the value of youth work as a 'cross cutting theme' across different areas of service delivery.
- 10.24 The digital youth work that youth work organisations have introduced during the pandemic is thought to have been successful, and the majority of stakeholders reported a view that this should become a more important part of youth work delivery in the future. Digital youth work can engage young people already involved in youth work in a different way, involve some young people who are not currently engaged in youth work, and adds value to other ways of working with young people. However, stakeholders were generally of a consensus that there is a danger if the new delivery model places too much emphasis on this. While stakeholders were

positive about the added value of digital youth work, there was a strong feeling expressed that it cannot replace face-to-face delivery.

Evidence about the impact of COVID-19 on young people

- 10.25 Stakeholders also expressed concern about the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people. Evidence has been produced that shows that the pandemic has negatively impacted the mental health of young people. Moreover, there is evidence that these negative consequences have been unevenly distributed across the population, with, for example, those from more disadvantaged backgrounds more likely to see greater disruption to their lives. There is emerging evidence also, that those young people experiencing significant mental health issues prior to lockdown are likely to have struggled during the pandemic.
- 10.26 These effects of the pandemic and associated economic disruption are likely to be long-term, with the scarring effects of the pandemic likely to follow young people back into education, as well as negatively affecting young people's transitions into further stages of education and employment. For many young people who have left education, the pandemic is likely to affect employment prospects.
- 10.27 In addition to exacerbating underlying issues for young people, COVID-19 has also negatively affected the way that young people engage with youth work and other services that support them. Stakeholders reported that a number of young people previously in regular contact with youth services have disengaged since the start of the pandemic. When taken in conjunction with the closure of schools, this is likely to have significant negative consequences for them.

Sector perceptions of how the Youth Work Strategy for Wales can be delivered

The definition of youth work and the ambit of the strategy

- 10.28 On the whole, stakeholders consulted during this research reported that they support the way that youth work has been defined previously, including in the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work and Principles and Purposes. One area where stakeholders dissented slightly from these definitions, was in highlighting the importance of 'political education' and 'active citizenship' to youth work, something that a number of stakeholders and young people suggested is missing from the strategy.

- 10.29 Another area in which stakeholders suggested the definition needed a change in emphasis, was in the way that youth work has been linked to more targeted interventions. Stressing the importance of the voluntary relationship between young people and youth workers, and the youth-centred nature of the youth work methodology, several stakeholders questioned whether youth work should be governed by the same strategy as more targeted ways of working.

Increase the Strategy's focus on open-access youth work

- 10.30 As noted above, the legislative basis of youth work in Wales is perceived to be a significant weakness in the current strategy. It is viewed by stakeholders as a permissive cause of the shift towards targeted youth work and a reduction in the availability of open-access youth work.
- 10.31 While the sector is strongly of the view that universal open-access youth work should be the cornerstone of the Youth Work Strategy for Wales, there is a lack of evidence about the contribution that youth work makes in Wales. The Welsh Government and the Interim Youth Work Board should work to develop this evidence base, as well as using research to identify and build on good practice within youth work provision.

Recommendation 3: Welsh Government should consider commissioning research into the contribution made by universal open-access youth work. It should use this evidence base to justify and re-assess expenditure in this area.

- 10.32 If, as the high level Youth Work Strategy for Wales suggests, youth work is to be seen as a universal entitlement for young people, Welsh Government should work to establish a youth service that is accessible to all young people in Wales. The majority of stakeholders consulted were of the view that ring-fencing funding for open-access youth work or establishing minimum standards for what local authorities must provide, either via local authority youth services or external providers, would help to meet these objectives.

Recommendation 4: Welsh Government should consider measures to ensure that a consistent universal open-access youth work offer is available across the country. Measures could include ring-fencing funding for open-access youth work in the core youth work budgets provided to local authorities or establishing a duty

for local authorities to make sufficient youth work provision available for young people in their area.

- 10.33 Although there is a desire for ensuring greater commitment to open-access youth work as a universal entitlement, this provision needs to be integrated with other provision, including both targeted youth work and other support services for young people. More evidence is needed to develop a better understanding of pathways into other provision from open-access youth work, and how best to integrate youth work into other services available to young people.

Recommendation 5: Welsh Government should consider commissioning research to understand pathways for young people from youth work into other forms of support and how youth work can work closely with more targeted forms of provision.

Improving leadership within the youth work sector

- 10.34 While stakeholders are positive about the progress that the Interim Youth Work Board has made, there was also a suggestion that the more negative aspects of previous strategies have stemmed less from faults with the strategies than they have from implementation of these strategies. Inconsistent leadership for youth work was identified as a significant problem in strategy implementation. This is largely thought to have stemmed from high turnover of staff and a lack of resources available to Welsh Government.
- 10.35 However, stakeholders were also of the view that this is something that has improved in recent years, with the work of the Interim Youth Work Board perceived positively. A fear was expressed, however, that the momentum gained would be lost if appropriate structures were not put in place to continue this relationship between Welsh Government and the sector.

Recommendation 6: Welsh Government should consider making the role of the Board permanent or appointing it for a longer period to provide ongoing input into the development of the youth work strategy.

A sustainable national delivery model

- 10.36 Better coordination of the sector at a national level was identified as another important feature of the future strategy. The lack of joined-up working, due to a lack of Welsh Government resource, and a perception from parts of the sector that they are in competition with one another for scarce funding opportunities, is a key enabler of improving the youth work that is offered in Wales.
- 10.37 This research has found that previous research exploring a national approach to youth work delivery in Wales remains relevant to the current circumstances. The models developed by Fowler et al. (2015) remain the main options for supporting youth work in Wales:
- Enhancing the existing structure with better quality assurance and greater statutory requirements
 - Moving to regional commissioning consortia planning and organising youth work in line with regional school improvement consortia
 - Developing a national youth service delivering youth work directly to young people across Wales
 - Developing an independent national strategic body to support existing the local delivery model
- 10.38 Stakeholders consulted during this research generally supported the development of an independent national strategic body to support the delivery of youth work. Support was expressed in particular for a youth work body similar to YouthLink in Scotland. The development of a national youth work representative organisation would have the potential to:
- represent the sector externally, to Welsh Government, other sectors and the public
 - promote advice, support, advocacy and funding for voluntary and statutory youth work organisations
 - host the endorsement of professional youth work qualifications- in conjunction with ETS
 - gather data about youth work services, replacing the national youth work audit carried out by Welsh Government with something that covers statutory, voluntary and third sector provision

- work with Welsh Government to assess the sufficiency of youth work provision in each area
- secure additional funding from outside the sector to fund youth work provision

10.39 While this would require initial funding from Welsh Government in the first instance, it could be funded by top-slicing existing youth work funding, with any shortfall this causes made up by additional funding drawn into the sector by the youth work representative organisation.

Recommendation 7: Welsh Government should use previous research to think about the future delivery model for the youth work in Wales. It should consider supporting the development of a national representative body for youth work. It should consider how statutory and voluntary providers are represented and make youth voice central to its work. It is important that whatever is developed is specific to the needs of the sector in Wales.

Supporting more coordinated local delivery

- 10.40 In addition to supporting more coordination at a national level, it is important that the strategy also supports more effective coordination of youth work commissioning and delivery at a local authority level.
- 10.41 Stakeholders reported that the loss of Children's and Young People's partnerships had negatively affected strategic planning on a local level, and Public Service Boards and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework had been less successful in coordinating services to support young people than the previous structures.
- 10.42 If the strategy is to support more effective local delivery, local commissioning structures should be reviewed to assess how effectively youth work organisations work together across sectors, and in conjunction with organisations outside the sector, to plan and design services.

Recommendation 8: Welsh Government should consider how coordination of youth work provision, and coordination between youth work and other youth support services, can be best supported at a local authority level. These partnership structures should embrace the role of voluntary organisations as delivery partners working together with local authorities.

Young people's role in delivering the Strategy

- 10.43 In line with the children's rights approach to youth work, there was a consensus among stakeholders that it is important for young people's voice to be prominent in delivering the Youth Work Strategy for Wales. The principles of participation and accountability are important parts of the children's rights approach, and stakeholders are generally of the view that more could be done to ensure that policymakers and stakeholders are accountable to young people and include them in decisions about how youth work is designed and delivered.

Recommendation 9: Welsh Government should consider how youth voice is included in national governance structures for youth work and require local authorities to include young people's voices in local authority level governance structures. Recommendations 1-8 should be understood in the context of Recommendation 9, and youth voice should be weaved into all levels of youth work planning and delivery in Wales.

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Annex A: Literature Review

This section provides more detailed outline of the literature reviews that fed into the development of our analysis. It includes three sections that summarise:

- What published evidence says about the benefits of youth work as an approach for engaging with young people.
- Good practice models for evaluating partnership approaches to youth work and assessing the value of youth work.
- What is known about how the youth work sector has been affected by and responded to COVID-19.

Benefits of youth work

This section outlines research that supports our understanding of the benefits of youth work. It maps the range of potential outcomes associated with engaging young people, before critically assessing the evidence base. The section concludes by outlining gaps in our understanding.

Understanding impact

The potential benefits of youth work are clear. We know, for example, that those who hold a strong sense of belonging to a community or a group tend to be happier and healthier than those who do not. Communities that are active and engaged tend to be safer and economically more vibrant. We also know that relational welfare – the relationships and connections that youth workers form with young people – can be effective in supporting change and development (Jeffs and Smith, 2010). Further research suggests that these relationships can be more effective than other forms of formal support, including through mentoring (Hirsch, 2005).

A key consideration in understanding impact is the considerable diversity of approaches to youth work in practice across Wales and internationally. There is considerable variation, for example, in the precise objectives, settings, methods of engagement, populations, content, and in the underlying concepts and theories that frame and inform youth work services and support (Davies and Batsleer, 2010).

This diversity stems, in part, from the contrasting traditions that have made lasting contributions to the ways we think about, and support, young people. Youth work itself emerged from a patchwork of community groups and voluntary organisations that each sought to foster association, relationships and a sense of community amongst young people (Davies, 1999). Whilst the precise composition, objectives and funding of youth work organisations may have changed over time, there remains considerable variation in specific approaches across youth work to this day (Baldrige, 2020).

One way of making sense of the considerable heterogeneity across youth work is to consider practice along a continuum between universal, community approaches at one end of the spectrum, and on the other more targeted support aimed at groups of young people around specific issues:



Typology of youth work, adapted from Dunne et al. (2014)

Universal approaches include practices and support that are openly available to all children and young adults within a community. The stated purpose of support is not necessarily pre-determined or aimed at addressing specific issues or problems a young person is navigating. The key mechanism for supporting change across universal approaches is the principle of relational welfare. The voluntary and open nature of universal approaches creates space for dialogue and trust between a young person and a youth worker. Within this space, youth workers can support a young person to build confidence and other strengths that can help them flourish (Smith, 2013).

Targeted approaches, on the other hand, tend to focus on specific issues facing a young person. This can include engagement across a wide range of issues, including supporting them to make successful transitions into further education or employment. The substantive methods of engagement and content of provision is often focused on building confidence and skills that are deemed to be important to support the development of positive outcomes. They also tend to engage specific young people in the community, including 'at-risk' or 'socially excluded' groups (Smith, 2013).

In reality, much provision lies somewhere along the continuum. Universal youth work provision can simultaneously provide open-access elements with more focused content and support around specific issues or outcomes. Similarly, provision that is universal in principle may target specific groups, whether this targeting is tacit or implicit within a particular approach. Engagement through targeted interventions can act as routes into more open and universal provision (Smith, 2013).

Mapping outcomes

Outcomes are a helpful way of understanding the benefits of youth work. Outcomes of interest are determined, in large part, by the precise focus or objectives of provision. Within and across different approaches and settings, there may be a specific set of potential outcomes that a service or support is working towards. Whilst the objectives and focus may vary across settings and youth work organisations, there are common trends across provision in the outcomes that they seek.

These can include both proximal (primary) outcomes that are the focus of support, and subsequent distal (secondary) outcomes that occur over time. Proximal outcomes are often the direct focus of support and can be important in their own right. They can include outcomes such as building confidence or increasing physical activity levels. Proximal outcomes of often considered protective factors that can also lead to other important distal outcomes in the future. Self-confidence, for example, can be responsive to support, and is an important predictor of other distal outcomes, including educational participation and attainment (Kendall et al., 2008). Educational attainment may not directly be the focus of support but is a consequence of the growth and development a youth worker may have brought about in a young person.

Another important distinction in understanding and mapping outcomes is that they range from the outcomes for young people as a result of participation or engagement, through to broader benefits that accrue to the community or wider society.

Individual level outcomes can themselves include a diverse range of factors. These include outcomes which are valued by and relate primarily to individuals, such as happiness, self-esteem and confidence. These are sometimes understood as soft, or intrinsic outcomes. Much youth work practices itself focuses on the social and emotional development of young people.

Enhancing personal capabilities, such as improved self-awareness, confidence and self-esteem, resilience and emotional regulation, can be responsive to support delivered by youth workers, and is a key objective across much provision (McNeil et al., 2012).

There are also a diverse range of instrumental or extrinsic outcomes associated with youth work, including improved educational engagement and achievement, literacy and numeracy, or improved health and well-being. As previously described, intrinsic and instrumental outcomes are often connected, including over time. More motivated and confident children and young people are more likely to engage in school and achieve better outcomes (Kendall et al., 2008).

There are also broader community level outcomes or benefits that can accrue from youth work activities. These may include the broader community benefits (distal outcomes) of cumulative improvements to individual level outcomes (proximal) that may be the precise focus of an initiative. For example, if a youth work initiative successfully supports young people away from engaging in criminal activity, then over time there are broader benefits to be accrued by the community as a whole. There may be a reduced incidence of crime and its emotional impacts, for example, as well as subsequent cost and time savings accrued to the criminal justice system that may be directed to other issues or initiatives.

Community level outcomes also refer to the ways in which people relate to each other.

Participation in the youth work offers young people opportunities to engage in constructive social activities that providing an avenue for collective efficacy and civic engagement.

Participation can increase the collective sense of connection to place and community and expand the scope and strength of a community's social connections. Youth work initiatives therefore offer the potential to make meaningful contributions to pressing social questions such as building community cohesion and breaking down social isolation.

There are also more focused outcomes relating to more targeted work with young people.

These can be specific to the activity or content that is covered with young people. Outcomes may include, but are not limited to:

- **Self-efficacy:** Self-efficacy is a person's belief that they are able to perform a specific task successfully. A person's sense of their own capability can influence their perception, motivation and performance towards that activity. For support aimed at helping young people transition into work, for example, self-efficacy can influence the goals and career objectives that people set for themselves, the effort

they exert in finding work, and their ability to overcome adversity or setbacks (Kluwer et al., 2017). The more confident a person is in their own abilities, in this example, the more likely they are to take steps towards finding employment and to be persistent in their actions. Self-efficacy is an important predictor of a range of outcomes, including healthy behaviours, educational and social participation, and in successful transitions into adulthood.

- **Specific and Applied Skills or Behaviours:** This can include a diverse range of skills associated with the objectives and focus of support. These can include a diverse range of proximal and distal outcomes, including for example around healthy behaviours and broader wellbeing. It can include a diverse range of applied skills and expertise, from financial literacy through to repairing a bike.

Existing summaries of the evidence

There are several reviews that seek to bring together existing research studies that explore the benefits of youth work provision. These can provide a useful starting point in understanding the benefits of youth work, as well as highlighting the apparent strengths and limitations of the evidence base.

McGregor (2015), for example, developed a detailed and engaging summary of the evidence supporting universal approaches to youth work. Drawing on narrative analysis of existing reviews of the evidence, the study found that universal youth work supports the development of positive outcomes across a range of domains. McGregor found emerging evidence, for example, that universal youth work can support positive health and wellbeing outcomes, make a positive contribution to improving formal educational outcomes, and some impact on employability. Universal provision can also provide safe yet challenging spaces for personal and social development and learning.

There are also broader reviews that can support our understanding of the benefits of youth work. There are reviews, for example, that focus on more targeted approaches that include structured content and support in reaching their objectives. A systematic review of reviews found that programmes designed to address antisocial behaviours amongst young people were effective, for example, both in improving pro-social interaction and more distal outcomes including educational participation and attainment (Farrington et al., 2017). Similarly, community programmes that support young people into employment tended to

improve the labour market outcomes of young people (Kluver et al., 2017). A review of youth social action approaches – those which seek to give young people opportunities to make a positive difference in their communities – found evidence to support their effectiveness across a range of outcomes, including improved self-efficacy and social and emotional skills (Barry et al., 2018).

There are further pockets of research that focus on promoting specific outcomes amongst young people. This research may serve to highlight the role and potential of more focused support within youth work settings. Systematic reviews found that community delivered support aimed at young people were found to be effective in developing social and emotional skills (Clarke et al., 2015), addressing obesity (Moore et al., 2018), addressing substance misuse (Das et al., 2016), improving mental health and wellbeing (Ahlen et al., 2015). This is by no means an exhaustive list of potentially relevant reviews however it serves to highlight the range of potential impacts that youth work provision could support.

Broader evidence

Individual studies also offer a range of insights and perspectives that help us to understand the potential benefits of youth work, as well as potential areas of effective practice. These include individual studies that have examined particular youth work approaches, contexts or communities. YouthLink Scotland, for example, commissioned three substantive studies that sought to build the evidence base in Scotland. This included the critical review of universal approaches conducted by McGregor in 2015, which found emerging evidence and also considerable gaps and limitations in our understanding. As a result of the findings, YouthLink Scotland commissioned further studies that were designed to address these gaps and limitations.

This included, for example, an 11-month collaborative project which aimed to investigate the outcomes that typically result from open-access youth work (Fyfe et al., 2018). The research was carried out in three communities in Scotland and employed a Transformative Evaluation methodology. Transformative Evaluation offers a methodology which establishes a dialogue between young people, youth workers and stakeholders, and is based on the principles of the Most Significant Change methodology (Cooper, 2012).

Transformative Evaluation was identified as a methodology that goes hand-in-hand with the principles of youth work and allows young people to be equal partners with practitioners and

researchers. In practice, it involves collecting stories about youth work and successful youth work practice and working with young people and practitioners to identify important themes and significant impacts.

The research found that youth work plays a central role in supporting and nurturing personal and social development for young people engaged in the provision. Impact was identified in the following thematic areas:

- Confidence
- Skills for life
- Equal and included
- Friendship
- Safe and well
- Able to lead and help others
- Get on well with others

In addition to identifying what the outcomes of universal youth work are, the research also identified mechanisms by which they happened. These ways of working were grouped into the following themes:

- Trusted adult
- Providing a space to be heard
- Giving praise and encouragement
- Working effectively alongside others
- Practitioners as role models
- Long term relationship
- Negotiated learning
- Inclusive practice

A further international comparison study drawing on participatory approaches and transformative evaluation was conducted by Ord et al. (2018). The study collected young people's own accounts of the impact of youth work on their lives across 5 European countries. The data was analysed independently and then compared and contrasted to explore trends across countries. Operationally, the study found common challenges across contexts in balancing and promoting autonomy and freedom on the one hand, with the importance of protecting and risk minimisation on the other. The study also found that young people across different contexts understood and expressed the benefits of youth work in common terms, including 'friendship' and 'confidence', enabling them to 'relate to others', develop a 'sense of self', and in improving their transition through school and into employment (Ord et al., 2018).

In addition to the review and evaluation, Youth Link Scotland commissioned a Social Return on Investment (SROI) study to estimate the value of youth work across Scotland. The aims of the analysis were to communicate the benefits of youth work, including so that:

- allocations of resources to youth work are made recognising its true impact relative to other public and voluntary interventions;
- volunteer and professional workers receive feedback on the value of their work;
- further steps can be taken to identify what particular youth work practices lead to long-term impact – so that impact can gradually be improved” (Hall Aitken 2016, p. 4).

Headline findings from the report included that youth work has made a ‘major’ difference to the lives of over 450,000 people in Scotland, more than 13% of the Scottish population (Hall Aitken 2016, p. 3). The report also found that “for every £1 of effort invested in youth work, there is a return of *at least* £3 of value” and “the total value of youth work in Scotland is probably *at least* £656 million – a return of £7 for every £1 of public cash”. (Hall Aitken 2016, p. 6). Significantly, the research indicates that there is value in viewing youth work as an investment with long-term potential benefits.

A further cost-benefit analysis of youth work in Ireland compared the direct and indirect benefits of youth work with the costs of running state-maintained provision (National Youth Council of Ireland, 2012). The study estimated the potential outcomes associated with engagement across a range of measures, including justice, health, welfare and education. The study also estimated the economic value of volunteering and paid employment, alongside the multiplier impacts of youth organisation expenditures. These were then considered within an economic Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) framework.

CBA is a best practice appraisal technique which enables costs and benefits that occur across different points in time to be aggregated and compared in present value terms (using appropriate discounting), with the objective of ascertaining whether a programme or project yields a net return. The analysis found that comparing the estimated benefits of youth programmes with the costs to the Exchequer indicated an overall net economic return of €1.21 billion, or a Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) of 2.22:1 – for every €1 invested, youth work organisations generate €2.22 worth of benefits.

There are individual studies that support our understanding of specific provision. Rogers (2016) for example, examined the perspective of teachers and young people towards youth work provision delivered in schools across Wales. Drawing on a number of engagement tools and methods, the study brought together a diverse range of information, including the views and perspectives of teachers and young people towards the impact of provision.

Rogers found that youth work in schools offered valuable support to young people across a range of domains. School-based youth work provides a vital link between young people, families, communities and a school. Youth work can be successfully developed and embedded in schools without compromising the professional ethics of voluntary engagement.

Further, early intervention and the additional support that youth workers were able to offer during key transition periods enabled vulnerable pupils to remain engaged with education, increasing attendance levels and reducing the number and frequency of exclusions. Whilst anecdotal in nature, the study does offer insights into how partnerships between schools and youth workers and organisations operate, and the potential benefits of collaboration. The study identified several factors that lead to more effective partnerships, including proactive and supportive leadership (Rogers, 2016).

Gaps and limitations in existing research

Whilst the evidence base offers a range of insights, there are a number of limitations that serve to undermine the confidence and utility of existing research. A consistent finding across reviews of research surrounding youth work is the limited extent of the much of the evidence base. Many areas of youth work practice appear to have a limited number of studies that explore the relationships between specific activities or approaches and outcomes (e.g. McGregor, 2015, and Barry et al., 2018).

This contributes, in part, to a number of gaps in our understanding. Existing studies tend to focus on exploring the short-term benefits of young people's engagement for example. Across both universal and targeted youth work provision, there are significant gaps around the medium and long-term impact of provision.

Barry et al. (2018), for example, highlight that limitations in the evidence base and the paucity of longitudinal research can serve to limit the claims of some youth work approaches around effectively promoting distal outcomes, including educational participation and attainment. Lack of longitudinal research also limits our ability to explore the relationships between benefits and costs. Research studies reporting information that compare the costs of a service or programme with estimations of any subsequent cost savings or economic impacts are limited (National Youth Council of Ireland, 2012).

There are also significant gaps in understanding which approaches and methods of engagement are the most suitable and effective for different groups of young people (e.g. Clarke et al., 2015). This creates uncertainty around the equity impacts of certain youth work provision. This undermines certain approaches ability to demonstrate and communicate, beyond anecdotal evidence, that provision is effectively supporting all groups of young people, including the most vulnerable.

Another limitation consistently highlighted across reviews is the quality of the studies that make up the evidence base. McGregor (2015), for example, highlighted that research on universal approaches is predominantly made up of qualitative case studies or cross-sectional research. Whilst providing important and valuable insights, these approaches are limited in their ability to accurately isolate and understand the benefits of support. The apparent small samples across many studies undermines the precision with which studies are able to determine benefits, including for example across different groups of young people. Clarke et al. (2015) also found a strong focus on process orientated research which tended to document service outputs rather than outcomes. The review recommended the greater use of control groups, standardised and comparable outcome measures and larger samples of young people.

In order to accurately determine the benefits of certain approaches or provision, research must be sensitive to the relationships between what it is trying to achieve (objectives), the ways in which it engages and supports young people (activities), and the change that it wishes to bring about (outcomes). Our reading of the youth work literature highlighted that there is often a lack of clarity about the precise objectives and composition of much activity under investigation. In some instances, this extends to a lack of coherence between activities, the outcomes explored, and the generalised claims of efficacy. Together, this

limits the ability of youth work to define the nature of their contribution to policy agendas and funding priorities.

A further observation drawn from our reading of the evidence base is around the reporting standards, including across both academic and applied outputs. Research outputs, including papers and reports, are key to supporting learning and dissemination. The reporting standards across much of the evidence base was found to be generally poor. Many studies did not sufficiently report even basic contextual information, including the precise demographics of young people included in the investigation. Few studies provided outlines of logic models, theories of change, or broader concepts and theories underpinning approaches or support. Reporting often provided very limited information on the focus, content and delivery of support, including referrals processes and the extent of support.

Understanding factors such as the qualifications and experience of youth workers delivering the support under investigation, for example, can be important in understanding the implications and suitability of the approach for other organisations. Other areas where reporting standards could be improved include greater information on study design and more discussion on inherent limitations and their potential influence on findings. Poor reporting can limit the replicability of research, and importantly in understanding their generalisability and utility to the sector as a whole.

Alongside reporting standards is the issue of how youth work is described across research. This issue is linked to the fact that the nature and purpose of youth work is historically diverse and subject to a variety of working definitions (McGregor, 2015). Much youth work practice is, for example, not necessarily defined as such. 'Positive youth development', 'youth services', 'outreach', 'youth opportunities' and 'community programmes' have all been used to describe approaches that could be considered as youth work. The lack of a consistent vocabulary across time and space in turn creates difficulties for identifying research that explores the benefits and outcomes of youth work (Dickson et al., 2013).

Implications and future research directions

There is substantial and growing evidence that developing the social and emotional capabilities that influence personal change supports the achievement of positive life outcomes, including educational attainment, employment and health. Emerging evidence suggests that approaches which focus on building social and emotional capabilities can lead

to other longer-term impact than ones that focus on directly seeking to reduce the symptoms of poor outcomes for young people.

There are a number of potential implications for youth work emanating from existing research. This includes supporting the identification of potential principles and effective practices that can inform the design and conduct of provision across different settings and communities. Based on their review of the evidence, for example, Dunne et al. (2014) identified factors that may support positive outcomes across provision, including:

- Factors that reflect the value-based approach and philosophy of youth work, which can be also called 'attitudes'.
- Factors that reflect the knowledge base, organisation and strategic and tactical approach of youth work, which can be called 'methods'.

Attitudes include youth workers' commitment to individual development and the best interests of young people and their right to participate in society. From this perspective, differing attitudes and values between a youth worker and a young person can create barriers to the success of youth work. Engaging with young people as equal partners and having their best interests as a priority seems to be a crucial feature of the majority of successful youth work initiatives across studies.

Methods include aspects of professional approaches to youth work. This can include methods and activities for engaging young people, the ability to strike the balance between support and autonomy, the ability of a youth worker to build sustainable relationships, and providing frameworks and opportunities for goal setting and learning opportunities. Another way of understanding the factors that contribute to effective youth work was presented by Williamson (2008). He identified five criteria for effectively supporting young people, including:

- Youth workers' relationships and close contact with young people;
- Sustainability and partnerships with other actors (e.g. formal education, social work);
- Enabling young people to experience life, to make mistakes and to participate with their peers in leisure time activities;

- 'Standing on their feet': allowing young people to drive their own learning and development and to have autonomy;
- Commitment from young people, youth workers and the community.

From this perspective successful trajectories within youth work practice support young people from support and guidance through to autonomy and self-reliance (Williamson, 2008).

The themes presented by Dunne et al. (2014) and Williamson (2008) recur across the literature. Research appears to consistently highlight the importance of prolonged and stable engagement over time; the centrality of the voluntary relationship between young people and youth workers; engagement focusing on the lived experiences of young people; and providing structured opportunities to problematise and reflect on that lived experience in order to explore potential solutions.

Whilst the content and nature of support is important in shaping experiences and outcomes, other factors can influence the effectiveness of youth work provision. The ways in which support is organised, the systems that support youth workers, and the consciousness of youth workers themselves all contribute to the effectiveness of provision. A well-implemented non-evidence-based approach or programme may be more effective than a poorly executed evidence-based programme (Fraser et al., 2009). This suggests that there are broader factors at play that contribute to the success of a programme other than the nature and focus of provision.

Where there are gaps in our knowledge, these are most apparent in understanding the extent to which the potential benefits of certain provision are translated into actual outcomes. Youth work provision is itself a change strategy which, through engaging with young people, seeks certain objectives and outcomes. Across youth work the precise objectives, methods of engagement and content of support are many and varied.

There is, however, limited research that is able to accurately identify and explain the change brought about by certain approaches and practices applied in youth work settings. This is especially apparent in understanding the longer-term benefits of provision (McGregor, 2015). Overall, the limited breadth, scope, and quality of much of the evidence base presents a number of challenges in understanding and communicating the benefits of youth work.

An absence of evidence does not suggest that certain approaches are not effective or potentially beneficial. An absence of robust body of research does, however, limit the claims that can be made around the benefits of a particular approach. Understanding and researching the change brought about by youth work is valuable. It can support the identification and recognition of good practice and can help to build broader support for and confidence in youth work provision. Importantly, it can lead to more sensitive provision, identifying and delivering support that would be most suitable and effective for different young people engaged with youth workers (Fraser, 2009).

In order to address these gaps in our understanding, future research could focus attention on exploring the journeys young people take beyond the support they receive. This could include improving our understanding of how youth work in partnership with other provision and support can improve the outcomes of young people. Understanding pathways may be important in helping youth work practice to embed more deeply into the ecology of services seeking to support young people. This could include applying more varied study designs, including mixed method approaches to process and outcome evaluation. This could include participatory approaches that engage young people more actively in the research process. The evidence base could be strengthened by greater longitudinal research that explores the relationships between support and longer-term outcomes, including educational participation and attainment. Greater use could be made of administrative data, including experimental datasets that combine information across a range of domains, including education and employment outcomes. For youth work provision in schools, school level administrative data could also support clustered analyses.

Future research could also benefit from seeking to explore the extent to which youth work approaches achieve change independently of other factors in a young person's life. This would require research to employ methods that are sensitive to potential counterfactuals, including experimental and quasi-experimental designs. This includes employing either statistical controls, or through random assignment at the level of the individual (Randomised Control Trials) or more appropriately at the level of the setting (Clustered Randomised Control Trials).

Good Practice Models

This section highlights potential approaches and good practice models for evaluating partnership approaches to youth work. It goes on to highlight trends and approaches to assessing the value of youth work.

Evaluating Partnership Approaches

Understanding Partnership Approaches

The idea and importance of partnership working is not new. Work with young people and communities has always involved some degree of collaboration between different organisations and community groups. There has been growing recognition that collaboration and partnership working is a viable and valuable route to ensuring that support offered to young people is coherent and effective (Harrison, 2016). This is seen as particularly important in the support offered to vulnerable children and young people, especially around safeguarding, but also in collaboration between schools and youth work organisations. The National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014–2018 itself highlighted the importance of partnership and collaboration between different organisations providing services for young people, including strengthening of the strategic relationship between youth work organisations and formal education.

The term partnerships can be used to describe a wide range of organisational arrangements and ways of working, from informal networking between individuals across organisations, through to more formal partnership arrangements and structures. One way of understanding the variation in arrangements surrounding partnership working was developed by Himmelman (1996). From this perspective, partnership working is founded on relationships, commitment, and shared interests and objectives. Himmelman understood partnerships to operate along a continuum:

in partnership working, including time (how much is available), trust (how well the people involved know and trust each other) and turf (how high is the potential for turf wars, based on different values and purposes, readiness for power sharing, cultural differences, and so on).

Challenges surrounding partnership working

There are, however, significant organisational and logistical challenges to effective partnership working. Research has highlighted a number of barriers or challenges that many partnerships supporting young people experience.

Differences across organisations: Different organisations may have different aims, values and cultures. Some of these will be openly stated, others may be more subtle or hidden. Differences can lead to disagreements about what the partnership should be aiming to achieve, what success looks like, and how this can be evidenced and evaluated. Key for organisations supporting young people is that they may be working within different legislative frameworks which define their powers, their duties, and the targets and outcomes that they are expected to meet (Harrison, 2016).

Accountability: Processes of accountability can be particularly complicated in partnership working. Different organisations within a partnership may have different degrees of autonomy and discretion in the activities they can undertake. This can serve to limit engagement from some partners, or the speed with which they can act on behalf of the partnership (Huxham, 1996).

Differences in culture: Different professional groups also have different ways of working – including ways in which they perceive and relate to young people. This can include the practice language that different groups use to communicate with each other, as the ways in which they engage with young people. Some professionals may also hold preconceived ideas or views about other professions, which can act as a barrier to communication (Harrison et al., 2003).

Qualitative research also suggests that ideological differences and entrenched professional identities remain a significant barrier to successful partnership working, particularly if it is to be a partnership of equals (e.g. Deuchar & Ellis, 2013).

Costs of partnership: While there may be financial savings from a partnership, there may also be added costs. It takes resources and sustained efforts to establish, develop and maintain partnerships, whether these resources are in the form of money, time, skills, facilities or equipment. Networking and relationship building take time, for example. Different organisations will have different levels of resources and capacity to engage in partnerships. These sorts of pressures can act as strong disincentives to collaboration (Chauhan, 2007).

Conflicts and differences in power: Discussions around the value of partnership working often emphasises sharing, cooperation and collaboration. However, partnerships can also involve conflicts and struggles for power – particularly when there are significant differences in the partners' size, the resources they have available and their culture. Gilchrist (2007) points out that some agencies or organisations may have greater control over a partnership. What appears to be consensus may, in reality, reflect the dominance of the most powerful agency. For Balloch and Taylor (2001), issues of power present the greatest challenge for effective partnership working.

Effective partnership working

Despite the challenges, partnership working is viewed as valuable in improving the support offered to young people. In youth work, partnerships are considered important in ensuring that support offered to young people from the range of organisations working within a community is coherent and effective. Dunne et al. (2014), for example, identifies partnerships between youth work organisations and other groups and organisations, including schools, social services, media, police, and the local community, as key factors underpinning successful youth work practice across Europe. Broader research from the United States of America found that organisations within effective and more formal partnerships were able to secure more grants and offer greater levels of support (Rieker, 2011).

In terms of encouraging and facilitating partnership working, there are a range of practical and organisational arrangements in practice internationally. This includes the organisations involved in organising and supporting partnerships, and the expectations placed upon them.

Scotland

In Scotland, local authorities are provided with funding to manage and govern youth work, but they are supported in doing so by YouthLink Scotland. They support youth work delivery

by both the voluntary and statutory sectors, providing support, advice, programme management and funding for youth work organisations. Its role includes intelligence and data gathering, supporting networking and sharing of best practice for youth work organisations across statutory and voluntary sector delivery. YouthLink Scotland is funded directly by Scottish Government but draws in additional funding from other sources to support its work (Fowler et al., 2015). Its overall performance is tied to outcomes on the Scottish national performance framework.

Finland

Youth work in Finland is very well resourced, something which makes comparisons with provisions in other countries difficult. It receives roughly 14 times the amount of funding per capita that youth work receives in Wales, with significant funding from municipal sources (the equivalent of local authorities in Wales). As a model, it has moved towards a children and young people's approach that links funding to clearly defined outcomes relating to employment and education (Williamson 2015). The approach aims to ensure close collaboration between universal open-access and targeted youth work, seeing open-access as a method of engagement and leading to more targeted support for those most in need (Fowler et al., 2015). It attempts to reduce the stigma that can become apparent when youth work policy and practice is only open to certain 'types' of young people.

Germany

Youth work in Germany is primarily governed at the 'Lande' (provincial) level (Fowler et al., 2015). The statutory basis for children and young people's work establishes that youth work applies to all children and young people, not only socially disadvantaged young people. However, youth work in Germany has also seen significant funding cuts and has moved towards more targeted forms of support for young people. There is no particularly close partnership working between voluntary and municipal delivery in Germany, however (Fowler et al., 2015). Youth work delivered by municipalities are typically supplemental to educational provision, while volunteers typically deliver club-based youth work, relating to specific activities or competitions.

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, youth work is coordinated nationally, but responsibility is devolved downwards to regional and local government, with each municipality making youth policy and funding provision (Fowler et al., 2015). At a national level, activities involve data

gathering, networking and sharing of good practice. Since 2010, youth work has moved away from a problem orientation (focusing on specific problem behaviours) to take a 'wellbeing' approach but remains largely focused on young people deemed 'at risk'.

Evaluating partnership approaches

Understanding the effectiveness of partnership working and identifying elements that could be improved represents an important question. There are a broad range of practical tools, models, frameworks and resources available to help guide the evaluation of partnership arrangements. Working in partnership does however cover a wide range of professional practice and organisational arrangements which means that there can be no single blueprint or definitive approach. Broadly, across different tools and frameworks there are three substantive issues that are important in understanding the effectiveness of a partnership:

- **Relationships**, the types, strength, and maturity of relationships between organisations making up a partnership. This could include exploring the extent to which a partnership is informal or formal. These approaches tend to explore more qualitative aspects such as identifying common goals or perceived barriers to the partnership.
- **Processes** and procedures that surround a partnership, including any governance structures, terms of reference, coordination and delivery of support offered through the partnership. This approach is more relevant to more formal partnership arrangements.
- **Outcomes**, including the understanding of the difference a partnership makes as a whole, including for children and young people. This may include, for example, exploring young people's experiences and coherence of support delivered through a partnership, as well as understanding the broader outcomes the partnership may have generated.

Across these issues, there may be a range of potential approaches and models for exploring specific aspects of a partnership. Some approaches are highly structured and offer organisations tools to support the process of gathering information. The Nuffield Institute, for example, developed an assessment tool, including a questionnaire, that can be shared with partners and can generate a quick snapshot of partnership with relatively little investment in time and resources (Hardy et al., 2003).

Other approaches offer broad frameworks that enable partnerships to identify and explore aspects which they feel are important, including the intended outcomes. This can include

approaches that bring partners together to discuss and agree outcomes as the basis for determining the effectiveness of the partnership (Evaluation Support Scotland, 2020). These approaches offer greater level of depth and understanding and can support the overall development of the partnership itself. These approaches may be more time consuming however and require commitment and openness from the partnership as a whole to be effective.

The precise processes and models used to evaluate partnerships, as well as the focus of any investigation may depend on the maturity, extent and priorities of the partnership. It may not be appropriate, for example, to explore outcomes of a relatively new and informal partnership, where exploring aspects of the relationships and working processes may be more appropriate in the short term to formalise arrangements. Similarly, if the capabilities, resources and time are limited within and across a partnership, then more structured tools could be more appropriate in exploring the partnership.

Whilst the precise approach and focus of inquiry may depend on the nature of partnership itself, there are a number of principles and good practices that may lead more valuable and insightful partnership evaluation. A key consideration before engaging in any assessment is to establish its purpose, including how it would support the strategic and delivery aims of the organisations involved. This could inform the focus and extent of investigations, as well as providing a more coherent and clear link between the objectives of the process and any information requirements.

There are a number of frameworks, models, tools and guides that help organisations and partnerships assess and strengthen their engagement and collaboration. These include tools developed for the youth work sector itself, and insights and approaches from other sectors that may be valuable to youth work organisations. These also include approaches that require independent organisations to undertake evaluation work, through to approaches that rely on partner inputs only. Further resources and frameworks include, but are not limited to:

- [Fundamentals of Evaluating Partnerships](#)
- [Taking an outcomes-based approach to evaluating your partnership](#)
- [Social Network Analysis \(Paywall\)](#)
- [Evaluating Partnership Effectiveness \(OECD\)](#)

- [The Partnership Self-Assessment Tool](#) (National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools)

Partnership working in Wales

There is an existing body of research that has explored the options available to Wales to further develop partnership approaches to youth work. The four models developed in Fowler et al. (2015) may be a starting point for thinking about the options available for formalising partnerships as part of the delivery structure. The research involved developing an options appraisal for restructuring youth work delivery in Wales, and explored four options:

- **Model one: An enhanced version of the current model**, including a hypothecated Welsh Government Grant for youth work, Estyn inspections, and a common quality assurance process for all.
- **Model two: Restructuring as regional consortia**, reorganising statutory provision into regions, with funding provided to regional bodies responsible for planning and delivering youth work with other providers.
- **Model three: a national youth service**, with Welsh Government retaining youth work grants currently given to local authorities, using it to form a national youth service, with all statutory provision responsible only to Welsh Government.
- **Model four: the current delivery model with a national strategic body**, with the body acting as a voice for maintained and voluntary sectors, developing strategies and initiatives with Welsh Government, funded by a top-sliced Welsh Government grant, but securing additional funding not available to public bodies.

The options appraisal mapped out these models in relation to a series of factors, including ease of implementation, longer term running costs, its impact on bilingualism, its alignment with the UNCRC, likely support within the field, and its potential to generate additional public-funding. Each proposal was then given a RAG rating for each of these areas. While each of the models developed is viable, the fourth model scored highest across the categories (Fowler et al., 2015, p. 31).

Assessing the value of youth work

Measuring value

Understanding and measuring the benefits of youth work, including both universal and more targeted provision, has become increasingly important within the youth sector across Wales and internationally. This has been driven, in part, by the reformulation of public policy accountability in the 1980s. A shift of approach emerged in the way public funds were distributed which embraced targets, data management and measurement. New Public Management as an approach sought to modernise public sector management by setting targets, monitoring outputs, and auditing performance (Fraser, 2003).

Another factor informing and driving value measurement across youth work are developments and innovations from other sectors and policy fields. Methodological advances in the medical and social sciences, for example, have offered new approaches and frameworks for understanding and measuring the benefits of services and support. These developments have subsequently shaped and increased the use of evidence in decision making, both in formulating policy and in shaping funding trends (Head, 2010).

In health and social care, for example, the use of impact evidence is very well embedded. There are significant institutional structures and research organisations devoted to understanding and communicating impact. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), for example, appraises impact evidence to ensure that only services and interventions that are found to be effective across a robust and expansive evidence-base are funded by commissioners.

The overall approach of only funding initiatives that have either demonstrated impact, or have evidence to suggest they are promising, has filtered across other policy areas and to some philanthropic organisations (Ettelt, 2015). In the UK the proliferation of organisations such as the Alliance of Useful Evidence (NESTA), which actively seeks a more important role for evidence, suggest that this trend is set to continue.

Evidence of benefits of youth work is likely to play an increasingly important role in determining government and third sector priorities and funding, now and into the future. This presents a challenge to the youth sector, especially those that seek to secure public or philanthropic funding to support their work (McGregor, 2015).

There has been resistance to these trends from some traditions and viewpoints from within the youth work sector. Historically, services aimed at young people have been regarded as 'self-evidently good' (McNeil, 2012). In large part, more focused approaches to assessing or evidencing the benefits of youth work have been resisted for two reasons. Firstly, a belief that much of the change services create for young people is intangible and too difficult to measure; and secondly, an argument that the very nature of work with young people is undermined through the process of focusing on outcomes and impact; prescribing or predicting outcomes is felt to run counter to the creative and negotiated nature of working with young people, particularly within many youth work settings. These viewpoints may have contributed, in part, to some of the gaps prevalent within the evidence base emanating from the privileging on certain types of narrative information (McNeil, 2012, and McGregor, 2015).

Not all engagement with youth work may lead to positive outcomes. Some experiences or encounters may in fact be negative and undermine a young person's confidence or reduce their interest in learning and engagement. Also, positive outcomes may not be evenly distributed amongst young people engaged through youth work; some may find the experience positive and take a lot from it - others may be indifferent. Exploring the extent to which a young person's experience was positive, and if not establishing the reasons why, is invaluable in developing and improving youth work provision. Further, there is an ethical imperative to do all we can to ensure positive experiences and outcomes, especially if participants emanate from vulnerable groups. Researching the benefits of youth work offers a range of opportunities from which to explore and learn about young people's experiences, and its value to their lives.

As with other fields, within youth work there has been considerable debate surrounding the value and importance of different approaches to youth work, the relative merits of intrinsic or instrumental outcomes, as well as the different methods for understanding the benefits and impact of provision. There does appear to be an emerging consensus, including in central government and amongst funders across the UK, on the importance of improving rigour surrounding impact measurement. The latest guidance from UK Government on evaluation published in March 2020 would appear to support this view. In an apparent shift in the government's view on impact measurement, the guidance now includes commentary on theory-based and more qualitative approaches to impact evaluation alongside experimental

and quasi-experimental designs (HM Treasury, 2020). This suggests that the government increasingly views a more diverse range of rigorous evidence as important in informing decision-making.

The importance of rigour

Rigour, a complex and rather nebulous concept, is perhaps best thought of in terms of the quality of the research process. In essence, a more rigorous study will result in more trustworthy findings. In understanding the benefits of youth work, rigorous approaches are more likely to generate insights that are more accurate and insightful. Whilst different frameworks or approaches that draw on predominantly qualitative or quantitative information will operate with different criteria for rigour, overall rigour is important in building confidence in the evidence base, including from policymakers and funders.

Good, high quality research can also serve to identify and disseminate areas of good practice, strengthening provision across communities and settings (Fraser, 2009). Research itself can also encourage and promote reflection and learning. Reflective practice provides opportunities for practitioners, including youth workers, to explore and understand the contribution they make to young people's lives. It can also provide an opportunity to reflect on and challenge assumptions and established ways of working. Critical reflection and reflexivity are considered an important component underscoring ethical practice, including within some social work traditions (Huston, 2015).

Importantly, rigorous approaches can also improve the predictive power of research – that an initiative or approach that has been found to be effective in one situation or setting may be effective in another. There is evidence, for example, that focused, short engagements can be more effective in supporting young people that are closer to the labour market into employment than those who are experiencing multiple and significant barriers. For these individuals, more intensive, tailored and sustained support tends to be more effective (Kluver et al., 2017 and Liu et al., 2014). These sorts of insights can help organisations configure and tailor support, including within more universal provision, in response to the divergent needs and aspirations of the communities and young people that they serve.

Overall, there are several conceptual challenges surrounding rigorous research that explores the benefits of youth work. These relate to the epistemological, empirical and

methodological challenges and limitations of researching impact. These limitations make impact measurement vulnerable to challenge from a range of different perspectives.

Robustness: A key issue remains the robustness of impact analyses emanating from impact research. Robustness determines how confident we can be in the impact that has been described through a piece of research. Different methods and frameworks will operate with different criteria for rigour. Those that draw on qualitative information will have different criteria for determining robustness than quantitative methods, for example. The issue is the character of the knowledge and understanding that is being sought, and each approach will have its own benefits and drawbacks that need to be considered in understanding robustness. Those that employ mixed-method approaches will have different considerations again, including the relative coherence of bringing together different types of information.

Related to the issue of robustness are apparent gaps in our understanding that not all methods are well suited to address. From this perspective, some approaches and frameworks lack the level of detail to understand how outcomes are produced, how they relate to different types of provision, and under what circumstances and for which groups of young people they are most likely to occur.

Causation: a perennial issue relating to impact measurement is the question of causation. The benefits of youth work is itself a causal question, including the extent to which an activity caused improvements across certain outcomes. Many methods and approaches draw on methodological and analytical techniques that are limited in their ability to understand impact as a process. As a result, they have been subject to range of criticisms that serve to undermine confidence in social impact measurement from some quarters. Some methods and approaches, for example, do no more than establish correlations between involvement in youth work and the presence of certain outcomes. Within these approaches, the impact of support remains largely hypothetical, as they do not demonstrate empirically that engagement led to the observed outcomes. Whilst causality and youth work remains controversial, it is viewed as a central concern by certain stakeholders, including some policymakers and funders.

Conversely, there are those that challenge the idea that causation is an important focus for understanding impact. Galloway (2009), for example, has identified a tendency to emphasize methodology rather than theory as the basis of 'good evaluation'. Critical

discussion of impact measurement has tended to concentrate on technical and methodological rather than ontological or epistemological issues. From this perspective, the main issue for advancing our understanding of the impact of youth work is ontological; it is not research methods but finding the most effective 'orientation' or 'logic of enquiry'. These perspectives tend to call for greater investment in larger scale, longitudinal research and impact measurement, and for more robust, innovative and transparent methodologies and frameworks to be developed and implemented.

Sensitivity: Similar voices have also raised the importance of ensuring that impact measurement is sensitive to the full expanse of youth work practice. This relates to discussions on the relative importance of exploring both intrinsic and instrumental outcomes of participation. The apparent focus of much impact measurement on specific instrumental outcomes, whilst easier to measure, is problematic in that it overlooks full range of potential benefits of participation, including softer outcomes.

Within frameworks and approaches that focus on instrumental outcomes, the legitimacy of activities, feelings or relationships that are difficult to measure in quantitative terms are potentially overlooked. Their relative value and importance may be undermined simply because they are difficult to express using conventional systems of data collection.

Coherence between Activities and Outcomes: Linked to sensitivity is the issue of the relative coherence between activities and outcomes within impact measurement. Reviews have often found an apparent disconnect between the focus, objectives and methods of engagement surrounding a specific activity with the outcomes explored through much impact measurement of youth work. This can have profound consequences, including the under-estimation of the true potential of specific support or initiatives.

Practical challenges

Alongside the conceptual challenges, there are several practical issues and challenges that organisations must navigate in order to engage effectively research the benefits of provision.

Resources: Exploring impact is itself a process requiring organisations or individuals to devote time and attention. This requires a range of resources, including freeing people's time within an organisation to plan, collect and analyse data. Different approaches may also

require broader infrastructure, including software, to be able to collect and analyse information. There may be additional costs in training, or independently commissioning research.

Capabilities: Linked to the issue of resources is the capacity of an organisation or individual to engage with impact measurement. To varying degrees, impact measurement requires specific skills, expertise, and confidence to effectively implement. Different frameworks may require varying levels of knowledge of impact measurement, including research design skills, facilitation and data collection, and data analysis techniques. For some organisations, these types of skills and expertise may not be widely held, if at all.

The scale and capacity of an organisation may influence their ability to engage with impact measurement, especially for more process-oriented approaches that seek to embed impact measurement as a more routine operation. There are different starting points and levels of maturity in terms of measuring social impact.

Approaches to researching impact

There are several existing typologies of methods and approaches to understanding and measuring impact. These tend to differentiate methods and frameworks by the types of data that they suggest an organisation should collect, and the ways in which that subsequent information should be analysed. Crossicks and Kaszynska's (2014) comprehensive analysis, for example, delineates different approaches by the types of data used to support impact measurement, and the research designs used to collect and analyse data.

Similarly, Reeves (2002) used methodological characteristics as a broad way of mapping different frameworks and approaches to impact measurement. She identified five broad approaches that draw on a diverse range of methods for gathering relevant information, including project visits, interviews, questionnaires, case studies, focus groups, and participant observation. Most of these approaches adopt composite methodologies which combine both quantitative and qualitative information. In understanding the relevance of particular approaches or frameworks, a number of characteristics could be considered:

- **Flexibility:** The extent to which a framework can be effectively applied to different scenarios and activities. This reflects the extent to which outcomes within an approach can be adapted to different objectives, activities or settings.

- **Applicability to youth work practice:** Linked to flexibility, this explores the potential relevance of the framework to youth work activity. Some approaches and frameworks are drawn from other sectors, including social work and health.
- **Information Requirements:** This explores the amount of information organisations are required to bring together in order to complete an impact assessment, relative to other approaches. This is important as it may have resource implications for organisations and individuals.
- **Capability Requirements:** This reflects the extent of capabilities individuals or organisations are required to hold in order to successfully engage with impact research. Where an approach or framework requires relatively complex data analysis techniques, or is framed in such a way as to require specific skills and expertise in impact measurement, these approaches may place higher capability requirements on individuals or organisations.
- **Robustness:** this relates to the ability of the method or approach to deliver analyses that offer accurate reflection of the impact of an activity.
- **Confidence:** This is about confidence in the framework from a range of stakeholders, including amongst policy makers and funders.

In terms of flexibility, those approaches, methods and frameworks that are less prescriptive tend to support organisations explore the meaning and value of their work or activity in order to inform and shape impact measurement. To varying degrees, these approaches seek to provide the outline of the process that organisations could follow in reaching for their objectives surrounding impact measurement. Through techniques such as Theory of Change, Logic Modelling, or Transformational Evaluation these approaches assume and promote a process orientated approach to impact measurement. This includes facilitating discussion, both within an organisation and with beneficiaries, to explore the objectives and values of the organisation, the activities it is engaged in, and highlighting relevant outcomes that would support social impact measurement.

Importantly, these approaches offer flexibility, enabling organisations to develop more coherent approaches to impact measurement that are more aligned to the values and objectives of the organisation, and to the precise activities they support. They also include approaches such as Participatory Action Research approaches that involve young people and adults as partners in the research as well as the learning process hold promise and ensure that processes remain accountable to young people themselves.

An example of these types of process orientated approaches is the Youth Programme Quality Intervention. It is a quality improvement process designed to simultaneously understand and communicate the benefits of provision, whilst embedding learning and improving outcomes. Developed in the US, extensive research has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving outcomes for young people, promoting a sustainable and supportive culture of organisational reflection and improvement, and refocusing evaluation on the quality of relationships within different settings.

These types of approaches tend to be more complex in nature, however. They often advocate a systems approach, in which impact measurement is embedded into other aspects of an organisation's work within an iterative process. By design, these approaches also seek to achieve impact measurement through a negotiated process bringing together a range of individuals and stakeholder groups to co-design a Theory of Change and impact measurement tools. Facilitating this process can itself be a difficult task, over and above the equally complex task of impact measurement. These approaches also tend to have higher information and capability requirements than other approaches or methods. They generally require more comprehensive data collection activities, including the use of mixed method approaches to gather both qualitative and quantitative information.

This suggests that these approaches and frameworks may be more relevant for organisations that are confident in social impact measurement and/or have time to embed processes across an organisation.

Other approaches seek to provide organisations with simpler, more accessible, and structured processes for engaging with impact measurement. These tended to focus on the act of data collection itself, providing them with the research tools and guidance to gather relevant information effectively and efficiently. They often include predefined outcomes of interest, with data collection tools to help organisations gather information. This reduces the resource burden on organisations and assists in other important areas such as the comparability of research.

The Centre for Youth Impact has produced a valuable compendium of assessment tools that could support any research and evaluation activities (2020). It highlighted the UK Data

Service question bank, for example, which includes a huge range of questions exploring a diverse range of subjects from well-being to experiences of crime. The Office for National Statistics, for example, have developed four questions that give a quick snapshot of someone's wellbeing. Very easy to use, including in collecting and analysing information, organisations are able to get a sense of respondent's general wellbeing, track any changes over time, and compare the general levels of wellbeing young people with other groups. This information could simultaneously be used to demonstrate change and highlight the need for services and support amongst the community an organisation serves.

Whilst these approaches are easier to engage with, in terms of the outcomes of interest they tend to be more prescriptive in nature. This limits their flexibility and ability to respond to specific objectives or activities. This could serve to underestimate the impact of such initiatives, especially if there is a significant mismatch in the methods of engagement and the outcomes collected through such an approach.

COVID-19 impacts on youth work

This section explores emerging research that supports our understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 on the youth work sector. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated steps to contain the virus have impacted on the youth work sector in profound ways. These impacts could be broadly understood to impact on youth work organisation across two domains:

- There are a range of potential impacts that directly affect youth workers and organisations. These included organisational challenges of responding to the pandemic, reconfiguring and/or maintaining support, and broader issues such as maintaining financial sustainability. These could be considered the direct effects of COVID-19 on youth work organisations.
- Children and young people accessing or requiring support from youth workers may be experiencing and navigating new or more pronounced challenges in their lives as a result of the pandemic. This may influence demand for support from the sector both in the short, medium and long terms. These could be considered the indirect effects of COVID-19 on youth work organisations.

Impact on youth workers and organisations

The pandemic has presented a range of practical and logistical challenges to youth work organisations in delivering support. This includes impacts on organisations ability to deliver support. There is evidence, for example, to suggest that some organisations have seen a fall in income, including 64 percent of organisations responding to the UK Youth survey (2020).⁶ This typically affected third and voluntary sector youth work organisations more than statutory providers as traditional forms of revenue, including service delivery and other income generating streams. These challenges resulted in 17 percent of organisations reporting that permanent closure was likely as a result of funding concerns, particularly small or micro organisations.

There have also been significant reductions in the number of staff, either through furlough or in some cases losing staff permanently as a result of falls in income. Of those surveyed, 31 percent of organisations reported that staff redundancies were likely, with 88 percent of

⁶ The survey achieved a sample of 252 responses, representing a diverse range of organisations from across the UK. It is not possible to tell from the published report the extent of potential sampling error to a hypothesised population. This suggests that the findings should be interpreted with caution.

organisations stating that they were likely or very likely to reduce service provision over the course of the pandemic (UK Youth survey, 2020).

Operationally many youth work organisations have experienced significant disruption. A survey of youth workers, leaders and young people across Europe found that all aspects of youth work provision had been affected. This included methods of engagement, the amount of time spent with young people, and the physical spaces used to accommodate activities (RAY-COR, 2020). Many organisations have had to adapt and reconfigure the support they are able to offer young people. This was in response to lockdowns and to comply with broader government guidance and regulations. This has led to a significant, if uneven, transition to digital or blended approaches to delivering support. A study of youth work organisations across Europe, for example, found that 17 percent of organisations had transferred all support to digital platforms, whilst 7 percent reported that they had not used digital at all and were reducing the support available to young people. Many organisations across Europe fell between these two points (RAY-COR, 2020).

Impact on children and young people

Alongside challenges facing organisations, there are a range of possible impacts for children and young people, including those who access youth services and support. Understanding the nature and extent of these impacts may be important, as they may influence demand for support from the sector. They could also influence the prevalence and severity of the issues and challenges young people face.

The impacts COVID-19 on children and young people fall across a range of domains, including but not limited to:

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Mental health
- Social and emotional development
- Educational outcomes
- Longer-term impacts including transitions into adulthood.

Physical health

Subjective physical health: Despite the ongoing pandemic, children and young people have reported that their health is, on average, very good. The Children's Society surveyed children and young people in the UK from April to June 2020, the peak of restrictions during

the initial stages of the pandemic. On average, they found that children and young people's self-assessed happiness with their health (at 8.1 out of 10), was within the same range as at the same time in recent years in Great Britain (ranging from 8.1 to 8.3 out of 10 from 2016). Overall, health is one of the areas of life which children and young people are happiest with. However, poor health is a problem for some children and 6.8% of children reported low happiness with their health. (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 & 2020).

Activity levels and sedentary behaviours: Other research suggests that sedentary behaviours, a significant risk factor associated with a range of physical health issues, has increased significantly since lockdown measures were introduced. Broader evidence from the US found significant increases in sedentary behaviours and decreases in activity levels across self-reported and objective measures. The authors felt that these changes could become permanently entrenched, leading to increased risk of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease amongst children and young people (Dunton et al., 2020). In England, self-reported data suggest the majority of young people have continued to do something to stay active during lockdown, but the amount of activity has fallen significantly. Sport England (2020) estimate that the number of children and young people meeting the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines of taking part in sport or physical activity for an average of 60 minutes or more every day has dropped from 47% to 19%.

Objective physical health: there appears to be very little publicly available data and research on the impacts of issues such as service use and changes in activity levels on objective measures of health. This may be due, in part, to the time lag of implications such as increases sedentary behaviours on other markers of health. Broader research has hypothesised that other impacts affecting young people, including adverse labour market and mental health outcomes, may have a detrimental long terms impacts on the physical health of young people as they grow up (Leavey et al., 2020).

Mental health and wellbeing

Subjective Wellbeing: There is evidence to suggest that children and young people's subjective wellbeing may have decreased slightly compared to previous years, particularly in relation to their life satisfaction (The Children's Society). Broader evidence does not necessarily support this claim. The Office for National Statistic's latest assessment of young people's subjective wellbeing doesn't suggest a significant difference in life satisfaction overall in either the short or long term up to March 2020 (ONS, 2020). Other measures too,

such as happiness amongst children and young people is broadly comparable to previous years. The Children's Society (2020) found that children and young people's self-assessed happiness (at 7.2 out of 10), was only very slightly lower during this time than at the same time in recent years in Great Britain (ranging from 7.3 to 7.6 out of 10 from 2016). Comparable evidence in England would support this observation (Department for Education, 2020).

More specific areas of subjective wellbeing may present a different picture. A survey of 2,000 UK 16- to 25-year-olds also found that almost half of those in learning worried that missing out on education would set them back for the rest of their life, with more than a third feeling their education had "gone to waste" (The Prince's Trust, 2020). The proportion was significantly higher among those from poorer backgrounds. Whilst the validity and reliability of these findings is limited, it does suggest that broader disruption in young people's lives may impact on their sense of self and the opportunities available to them.

Anxiety: There is mixed evidence on the experience of non-pandemic related anxiety in children and young people. On the one hand, ImpactEd's sample of children of school-age scored their symptoms of anxiety as very mild in July 2020. There was some apparent difference between the scores of girls and boys, with girls' average anxiety score slightly higher than boys (ImpactEd, 2020). On the other hand, the COVID-19 Psychological Research Consortium (C19PRC) study reported very high levels of anxiety amongst the respondents to its non-representative survey of adolescents in April 2020. Well over half of the respondents to the C19PRC survey were scored as having abnormal levels of anxiety on the Hospital Anxiety and Depression scale (HADs) (Levita L. et al., 2020). The differences between the two assessments are unexplained but may relate to in part to the timing of the studies, the different measures used to test anxiety and unobserved differences in the groups of young people.

Evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study suggests that young women have experienced more anxiety than young men during the initial phase of the pandemic (Henderson, M. et al., 2020). The study surveyed a sample of 19 year olds in May 2020. Cohort members were asked about anxiety symptoms and 35% of young women and 19% of young men reported experiencing generalised anxiety as measured by the GAD-2 Scale.

Emotional and conduct problems: In understanding the extent to which the lockdown resulted in changes in behaviour and emotional responses from young people, the Co-SPACE study surveyed a large, if un-representative, sample of 2,890 UK parents twice in March to June 2020. Controlling for the effects of sex, ethnicity, household income, and parental employment status, the data suggested that over time young people of secondary school age were less likely to exhibit emotional problems, were just as likely to display behavioural problems, and were more likely to display restlessness or attention problems. Surveyed parents generally reported more difficulties with emotion from female children and young people. Those with pre-existing mental health conditions, or from low income households were also more likely to report greater difficulties with emotion, behaviour, and restlessness/attention over time (Pearcey et al., 2020).

More pronounced mental health issues: Broader data from England suggests that there have been sharp rises in other mental health issues, including reports of sleep problems, eating disorders and self-harm (NHS Digital, 2020a). Children and young people with probable mental health issues were more likely to say that lockdown had made their life worse (54.1% of 11 to 16 year olds, and 59.0% of 17 to 22 year olds), than those unlikely to have a mental health issue (39.2% and 37.3% respectively).

Access to mental health services: Compounding this issue, data on new referrals to NHS mental health, learning disability and autism services for young people aged 0 to 18 shows a large reduction in referrals in April and May 2020. This is the equivalent of over half the number of the total referrals in previous years (NHS Digital, 2020b). This suggests that lockdown has led to significant disruption in the clinical support young people receive from CAMS and other mental health services.

Social and emotional development

There is mixed evidence surrounding the potential impacts of the pandemic on children and young people's social and emotional development. Lockdown and other social distancing measures may have led to considerable disruption in young people's social support networks, including with peers, their family and other adults. Loneliness and social isolation can have longer-term impacts on children's mental health, and relationships with trusted adults and supportive friends can help children cope with challenges they face.

Friends: Overall, evidence suggests that children and young people across the UK may not be as happy with their relationships with their friends as they have been in previous years (The Children's Society, 2020). Broader evidence from the Opinions and Lifestyles survey (ONS) found that older young people's relationships were being affected most, throughout the pandemic restrictions. Between the period of April 2020 and September 2020, between 24.1% and 43% of 16 to 24 year olds reported their relationships had been affected by the pandemic (Office for National Statistics, 2020b).

The younger a person, the more likely they were to have had little or no contact with friends (Pearcey, S. et al., 2020). Older children and young people were more likely to remain in contact with friends online, though games platforms, social media and directly through phone, text and video. There were limited differences across different groups of young people, however those from lower income households were less likely to be reported, by surveyed parents, as having been in regular contact with friends by any means of communication throughout the period of late March to August (Pearcey, S. et al., 2020). This may be a consequence of the digital divide, in that those from poorer backgrounds are less likely to have consistent access to devices and the internet.

Family: Evidence suggests that children and young people across the UK are generally happy with their family (The Children's Society, 2020). The Life on Hold report from The Children's Society also found that over half of children were coping to some extent with not being able to see other members of their family. However, 30% reported that they were not coping so well with not being able to see other family members (The Children's Society, 2020b). Data from the UK Household Longitudinal study (collected at the end of May 2020) found that 26% of parents stated that their relationship with their children was better than before the lockdown and only 4% had reported it had become worse – although 70% reported it had stayed about the same (Benzeval, M. et al., 2020).

Self-reported constructs are, however, limited in their ability to identify family dynamics that may compromise or damage the social and emotional development of children and young people. There is broader evidence to suggest that, for some, family stressors may have increased over the course of the pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic, parents and carers may have faced financial insecurity, alterations to their routine, and the juggling of multiple responsibilities including work, full-time childcare and care for family members who

may be shielding or ill. Extensive research suggests that family stressors can lead to negative coping strategies and relationship problems. The exacerbation of existing stressors and introduction of additional ones could increase the risk of physical, emotional, and domestic abuse, neglect, as well as online harm. Social support can be a key protective factor, helping families overcome stressors (Romanou and Belton, 2020). The extent to which this is the case, if the pandemic has led to substantive increases in abuse and neglect, is still largely unknown.

Educational outcomes

There has been significant disruption to young people's participation in education. Emerging evidence from the UK suggests many children and young people have experienced a significant and sustained reduction in their education. During the first lockdown in March, just under four in ten (38 percent) pupils benefitted from full schooling during school closures (Major et al., 2020). A significant proportion of pupils missed out on education altogether. A quarter of pupils had no schooling or tutoring during lockdown – which equates to around 2.5 million children across the UK. By September/early October 2020, only six in ten (59 percent) of pupils were benefitting from full schooling. On average pupils were receiving 42 percent of normal schooling during lockdown and 85 percent of normal schooling in the autumn (Major et al., 2020). Together, the LSE-CEP Social Mobility Survey found substantial and continuing education loss, especially amongst the most disadvantaged young people. This may be due to differences in school provision, and the stark home learning divide in study space, computers and internet connectivity and access to paid tutoring.

Broader evidence from unexpected temporary school closures and reduced instruction time suggests they reduce educational participation and achievement, both in the short and long term. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be affected more than others by school closures, with fewer family resources and less access to online learning resources to offset lost instruction time (Eyles et al., 2020). This could negatively impact on overall learning and attainment.

Longer term impacts including transitions into adulthood

There is also significant uncertainty as to the longer-term impacts of COVID-19. Broader evidence from other significant disruptive events and disasters suggests that the long-term impacts can be significant and more likely to affect disadvantaged young people (Eyles et

al., 2020). Together, this evidence indicates that youth work organisations may encounter greater and more pronounced issues amongst some of the young people that they support.

This is an important context for the youth work strategy to take into account and may indicate a need for more targeted work in this area in the future. There is evidence to suggest that COVID-19 will have long-term negative consequences for young people in Wales. Future lockdowns may cause similar disruption to both youth work provision and educational settings, and the economic disruption is likely to have significant impacts on young people making transitions into adulthood and the world of work.

Employment: The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has identified that young people have been disproportionately affected by the fall out of the pandemic worldwide, with more than one in six young people unemployed (ILO 2020). Since the pandemic, claimant count among 16-24 year olds in Wales has more than doubled, from 4.7% in March 2020 to 9.5% in September 2020 (Senedd Research 2020).

Research carried out by the National Institute for Learning & Work found that in 2012, at the employment-related peak of the last recession, 23.5% of people in the UK aged 16-24 were unemployed, over four times the unemployment rate among those over 25 (Hagendyk, & Finnegan 2020, p. 8). As coronavirus has disproportionately affected sectors where young people tend to work, such as retail, travel, tourism and leisure (Welsh Government, 2020), there may be an even more stark pattern by age following coronavirus (Henehan 2020, p. 34). This is particularly concerning for young people, as “the first few years of a person’s working life can be critical for their opportunities in the long term” and that “a period of sustained unemployment can have a long-term scarring impact on a young person’s employment and earnings prospects” (Hagendyk & Finnegan 2020, p. 8).

Young people have experienced worse labour market outcomes in terms of job loss, not working and earnings losses during and after lockdown. Those aged 16-25 were over twice as likely as older employees to have suffered job loss, with over one in ten losing their job, and just under six in ten seeing their earnings fall. Labour market losses are more pronounced for women, the self-employed and those who grew up in a poor family (Major et al., 2020).

Findings from the first LSE-CEP Social Mobility Survey, studied here alongside a complementary analysis of USoc national longitudinal data, reveals stark and sustained inequalities in labour market and education outcomes for the under 25's. This is likely to exacerbate existing inequalities of opportunity and outcome across a range of measures, including in education, employment and earnings, factors that all influence social mobility. .To avoid a decline in social mobility these inequalities in both the education system and the workplace need to be addressed (Elliot Major and Machin, 2020a, 2020b).

Crime: There appears to be little publicly available data on the likelihood of being involved in crime amongst young people. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW) found 32 percent reduction in total crime, excluding fraud and computer misuse. Similar to findings from the TCSEW, police recorded crime levels during the lockdown period were much lower than respective months in 2019, with 25% less crime in April 2020 and 20% less crime in May 2020 (ONS, 2020). There is broader evidence to suggest that the risk profile for children and young people as victims of crime may have shifted significantly away from personal theft, for example, towards other forms. Evidence from the NSPCC, for example, would suggest that social isolation may have increased the prevalence and severity of abuse and neglect experienced by children and young people across the UK (Romanou and Belton, 2020).

Implications and future research directions

Overall, the evidence presents a relatively mixed picture for the majority of children and young people. However, this can overlook the experiences of certain groups of young people. There is emerging evidence to suggest that the negative impacts of COVID-19 are unevenly distributed across children and young people living in Wales and internationally. Across a range of measures, for example, those from more disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to see greater disruption to their lives than those who are not from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes being less likely to have access to a full education, more likely to have been furloughed or made redundant, and more likely to have experienced negative outcomes across a range of health and wellbeing measures (Abdinasir & Glick 2020, p. 19). There is emerging evidence also, that those young people experiencing significant issues prior to lockdown are likely to have struggled. Those experiencing mental health issues going into lockdown, including anxiety, depression and eating disorders for example, are likely to have seen their conditions worsen due to disruption to support.

A key issue in the evidence base on the impacts of Covid-19 is accurately disentangling the impact of coronavirus with broader trends. Before the pandemic, for example, younger generations were already facing widening educational inequalities and declining absolute social mobility and real wage decline (Elliot Major and Machin, 2018, 2020a). The extent to which these and other apparent inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic will remain to be seen, but broader evidence suggests that they may widen without sufficient investment and support from organisations and communities (Williams, 2020). It is too early to know how temporary the observed signs of difficulties or psychological distress in children and young people will be (Department of Education, 2020).

Given the ongoing uncertainty and changing landscape surrounding the pandemic and our collective response, continued focus on data and evidence relevant to children and young people's wellbeing will be important. It will be critical to support and inform services, the wider children and young people's sectors, families and communities in shaping responses. In particular it is of great importance to understand how wellbeing is affected, how affects differ for different groups of young people, and how they may translate into longer term negative impacts. It is especially important that we do not miss impacts of the pandemic on the wellbeing of the most vulnerable children because of a lack of data.

What we do know suggests that youth work organisations may find themselves operating under conditions of increased demand for services and support from young people. The types of issues young people will be presenting with may be similar to that prior to the pandemic, however they may be more pronounced, entrenched and widespread. Youth workers and organisations will play an important role in ensuring supporting young people through the negative consequences of the pandemic.

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Annex B: Research Tools

Scoping Interviews

Questions for discussion

1. To start the interview, could you please introduce yourself and your involvement with youth work in Wales?

Developing a Picture of Youth Work in Wales:

2. This research will review the range of different youth work models and approaches that exist across Wales. Please give us your view of the range, volume and quality of youth work carried out in Wales?
 - a) In your view, what are the models of youth work currently being delivered in Wales?
 - b) What, if anything, are the gaps in youth work provision in Wales?
3. What are your views on the effectiveness/quality of youth work carried out in Wales?
 - a) How does this vary across different areas? E.g. *In certain parts of Wales, or across rural/urban areas?*
 - b) How does this vary for different people? E.g. *For individuals sharing protected characteristics?*⁷
4. How effectively is youth work governed and led in Wales?
 - a) What are the main challenges for leading the sector?
 - b) What are the main ways in which governance and leadership of youth work could be improved?
5. Youth Work in Wales has been heavily affected by COVID-19. In this context, what are the main:
 - a) Challenges?

⁷ Protected characteristics are defined by the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#), and there are nine protected characteristics (not all of which are relevant to youth work):

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

- b) Opportunities?
- c) Risks?

6. Aside from those identified in the context of COVID-19, what are the main:
 - a) Challenges facing youth work in Wales?
 - b) Opportunities for youth work in Wales?
7. What is already known about the extent of youth work offered through the medium of Welsh?
 - a) What are the challenges of delivering youth work through the medium of Welsh?
 - b) What are the opportunities presented by Welsh medium youth work?

Developing an Understanding of effective youth work practice and how to measure it:

8. As part of this exercise, we are working towards a definition of youth work (or the youth work approach). What do you think our definition needs to include?
9. What does evidence generated in the past five years tell us about the benefits of the youth work approach? We're interested in the benefits for young people and other benefits.
 - a) How does this vary across different areas? Eg. *In certain parts of Wales, or across rural/urban areas?*
 - b) How does this vary for different people? Eg. *For individuals sharing protected characteristics?*
 - c) Is there any literature we should be looking at in our literature review?
10. What good practice models for partnership approaches to youth work are you aware of?
 - a) Are you able to provide us with links to relevant material to include in our literature review?

Informing the rest of this study:

11. What do you think is the best way to include young people's voice in the research?
12. During this research, we will be consulting with the [Interim Youth Work Board](#), the four [Strategy Participation Groups](#) and task and finish groups, as well as representatives of young people. Are there any other stakeholders/organisations you think we should consult with?

Close:

13. Is there anything else that you think is important for us to address in this research?

Stakeholder Interviews with Sector Stakeholders

Questions for discussion:

Introduction:

1. To start the interview, could you please introduce yourself and your involvement with youth work in Wales?
 - a) Do you work in a particular area or does your role involve you working nation-wide? If you work within a particular area, please could you outline its characteristics (e.g. urban/rural, deprivation, diversity).
 - b) Do you work with a specific group of young people (e.g. age, disability, faith group)? Is this in the medium of Welsh, English or bilingual?
2. As part of this exercise, we are working towards a definition of youth work (or the youth work approach).⁸ How would you define youth work?
3. Please outline your views on whether there is value in youth work being seen as something separate from other ways of working with young people? If so, why is that?

Developing a Picture of Youth Work in Your Area:

4. What is known about the range of youth work being delivered in your area?
 - a) What organisations are involved in delivering youth work in your area?
5. What, if anything, are the gaps in youth work provision in your area?
 - a) Are there any geographical gaps?
 - b) Are there gaps for particular groups of people?
6. What are your views on the effectiveness/quality of youth work carried out in your area?

⁸ At present, we have a working definition of youth work (combining information from page 5 of Youth Work National Occupational Standards and page 2 of the Youth Work Strategy for Wales: *“work to enable young people aged between 11 and 25 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.”*

- a) How (if at all) does this vary?
 - b) Do we have any evidence of the effectiveness/quality of youth work carried out in your area?
7. In your view, how effectively is youth work delivered through the medium of Welsh?
- a) Are there any challenges associated with delivering youth work through the medium of Welsh?
 - b) What are the opportunities presented by Welsh medium youth work?
8. How, if at all, has COVID-19 affected youth work in your area? Associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, are there/have there been any:
- a) Changes to the way you work?
 - b) Benefits/Opportunities?
 - c) Challenges/Risks?
 - d) What aspects of working during COVID-19 do you intend to keep after the pandemic?
9. Aside from those identified in the context of COVID-19, what are the main:
- a) Challenges facing youth work in your area?
 - b) Opportunities for youth work in your area?
10. What, if anything, are your aspirations for the future of youth work in Wales?

Governance and Leadership in Youth Work:

11. In your view, how effectively is youth work governed and led at a national (Wales-wide) level?
- a) What are the main challenges and opportunities for leading the sector?
 - b) What are the main ways in which national governance and leadership of youth work could be improved?
12. In your view, how effectively is youth work governed and led at a local level?
- a) What are the main challenges and opportunities?
 - b) What are the main ways in which local governance and leadership of youth work could be improved?

13. How effectively do different youth work organisations work together?
- a) What, if anything, could be done to improve cross-organisational working?
 - b) Are you able to provide any examples of good practice?
14. How effectively does the youth work sector work together with external stakeholders (e.g. Police and Crime Commissioners, youth justice, public health, etc.)?
- a) What, if anything, could be done to improve cross-sectoral working?
 - b) Are you able to provide any examples of good practice?

Developing an Understanding of effective youth work practice and how to measure it:

15. How should the sector be ensuring that the effectiveness/quality of youth work?
16. How should the sector be capturing the impact of youth work? *On children/young people, communities etc.*

Close:

17. Is there anything else that you think is important for us to consider in this research?

Stakeholder Interviews With 'External' Stakeholders

Questions for discussion:

Introduction:

1. To start the interview, could you please introduce yourself and your work?
 - a) In your role, what contact/involvement do you have with youth work?
2. As part of this exercise, we are working towards a definition of youth work (or the youth work approach).⁹ How would you define youth work as an external stakeholder?
 - a) Please outline your views on whether there is value in youth work being seen as something separate from other ways of working with young people.

⁹ At present, we have a working definition of youth work (combining information from page 5 of Youth Work National Occupational Standards and page 2 of the Youth Work Strategy for Wales: *"work to enable young people aged between 11 and 25 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 and External Stakeholders:

3. In your experience, what is the impact of youth work? *We're interested in its general impact on children/young people, communities etc., but also in your specific area of work.*
4. How effectively does the youth work sector work together with external stakeholders (e.g. Police and Crime Commissioners, youth justice, public health, etc.)?
 - a) Have you noticed any differences in effectiveness? *E.g. between the maintained and voluntary sectors.*
 - b) What, if anything, could be done to improve cross-sectoral working?
5. What, if anything, are your aspirations for how youth work can contribute to your area of work?
 - a) Is it already contributing to your area of work? If so, please provide details.

PROBE: What we are also trying to find out here is how stakeholders are contributing to youth work too e.g. how are they resourcing or promoting youth work? This may come out of the introductory question (1) but if not please probe here.

Governance and Leadership in Youth Work:

6. In your view, how effectively is youth work governed and led in Wales? *We're interested in both national (i.e. Wales-wide) and local leadership.*
 - c) What are the main challenges for leading the sector?
 - d) What are the main ways in which national governance and leadership of youth work could be improved?

Close:

7. Is there anything else that you think is important for us to consider in this research?

Stakeholder Interviews With 'Representatives of Young People'

Questions for discussion:

1. To start the interview, could you please introduce yourself and your involvement with youth work?

PROBE: We are keen to draw out any relevant contextual information about the services experienced – were they aimed at specific demographic groups of young people, in Welsh / English / bilingual etc. This may lead to follow-up issues to be discussed, for example

experiences of receiving services in Welsh as a Welsh speaker or English as a Welsh speaker. Or the young person is disabled, how did their experience differ from others...

2. As part of this work, we are trying to develop a definition of youth work (or the youth work approach).¹⁰ In your view, what is youth work?
 - a) Is youth work different from other ways of working with young people? If so, how is it different?
3. In your experience, how has youth work been affected by COVID-19? *We're interested in both positive and negative differences.*
4. What difference does youth work make? *We're interested in the difference it makes for children/young people, communities etc., but also the difference it has made for you. Are you able to provide any examples based on your own experience?*
5. How effectively do you think different youth work organisations work together?
 - a) What, if anything, can be done to improve partnership working between youth work organisations?
6. What, if anything, are your aspirations for the future of youth work in Wales?
7. Is there anything else that you think is important for us to consider in this research?

¹⁰ At present, we have a working definition of youth work (combining information from page 5 of Youth Work National Occupational Standards and page 2 of the Youth Work Strategy for Wales: “work to enable young people aged between 11 and 25 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.”