



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Youth work in Wales: delivering for young people (draft guidance)

Draft statutory guidance for youth work in Wales.

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Background and context

Introduction

Youth work is a key component of the education system in Wales, delivered by a wide range of organisations. As a core service for young people, youth work forms part of wider youth support services but uses a distinct educational approach based on the voluntary engagement of young people as equal partners in their own development.

This statutory guidance sets out how each local authority, working with voluntary organisations and other statutory partners ('partners'), must plan and provide a distinct youth work service as part of the wider youth support services it provides to young people.

This guidance should be read alongside the Youth Support Services (Provision of Youth Work) (Wales) Directions 2025 'the Directions'. Within the guidance document, the use of the term 'must' denotes an obligation, as set out in the Directions. The term 'should' indicates that the guidance must be followed unless there is a good reason for departure.

The Directions set out a framework for the planning, delivery and monitoring of youth work on a local level across Wales. The statutory framework, which takes a **rights-based approach**, is built around the requirement for a local authority to produce a youth work strategic plan ('the strategic plan') at five-year intervals. Each strategic plan must set out the local authority's objectives for youth work, against which they will report on progress annually. The strategic plans will also be a central focus of inspection and quality assessment arrangements.

The Directions set out a new youth work entitlement for young people. This establishes the principle that young people are entitled to youth work which is formed through engagement with them with the aim of introducing, protecting

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and strengthening activities which are accessible, responsive to their needs and wants, which provide opportunities for them to develop holistically in both Welsh and English and which is available across a range of settings.

The interpretation of this youth work entitlement on a local authority level is the local youth work offer. A rich and varied local youth work offer cannot be delivered by local authorities alone, and a collaborative multi-agency approach is fundamental to achieving this.

Audience

Local authorities must have regard to this guidance. A local authority must also ensure partners acting on its behalf in the provision of services have regard to this guidance. The guidance will be of interest to a wider audience, including: young people aged 11 to 25, voluntary youth work organisations and wider stakeholders working to improve outcomes for young people.

Our vision for youth work in Wales

As set out in the [Youth Work Strategy for Wales](#), Welsh Government want Wales to be a country where:

- young people are thriving
- youth work is accessible and inclusive
- those delivering youth work are supported throughout their careers to improve their practice
- youth work is valued and understood
- there is a sustainable model for youth work delivery

The introduction of the new Directions and this associated guidance aims to help achieve this vision by setting out mandatory planning, delivery and accountability

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arrangements for the provision of youth work.

What is youth work

The [Interim Youth Work Board's final report](#) identified the need for a clearer definition of the meaning of good quality youth work services and for that definition to be owned and applied consistently across the sector. Estyn's report, '[Youth Support Services in Wales: The Value of Youth Work](#)', similarly concluded that

“ there is a lack of clarity among service providers and policy makers about the terminology used when discussing services to support young people. The term 'youth work' is often confused with 'work with young people' ”

The Directions, for the first time within a Welsh legislative framework, defines youth work as:

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

In so doing, this definition positions youth work as a key component of wider youth support services, but fundamentally ensures its distinctiveness is better understood and protected.

Details of recognised youth worker or youth support worker qualifications are set out in the [Registration of Youth Workers, Youth Support Workers and Youth Based Learning Practitioners Order 2016](#).

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Legislative context

The Directions, and this guidance, are made using the powers within Sections 123(1), (2), (4)(b) and (c) and (5)(c) of the Learning and Skills Act 2000, which sets out the provision and support for 11 to 25 year-olds in Wales.

Strengthened planning and delivery of youth work

Partnership approach

A collaborative approach is integral to the success of this statutory framework and to the delivery of youth work more generally. A local authority must appoint a designated lead officer with suitable seniority and experience to co-ordinate early and continuous engagement with other local authorities, voluntary organisations and statutory partners. Statutory partners in this context refers to those organisations which provide essential services to communities such as local health boards and police forces.

Each local authority must set out in their strategic plan how they will work with these local, regional and national partners to plan and deliver youth work provision. These partners should include specialist organisations who support marginalised or underrepresented groups and communities. Effective collaboration between partners will form a central focus for inspection and quality assessment arrangements.

A local authority must bring together representatives from the local authority, voluntary organisations and statutory partners to develop the strategic plan as well as co-ordinate and monitor its delivery. In its work with the voluntary sector,

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a local authority should pay due regard to the **Third Sector Scheme** and the Code of Practice for Funding the Third Sector in particular.

Established multi-agency partnerships and networks may already exist in many local authorities, enabling partners to address gaps in provision, respond to emerging needs, identify opportunities to add value to existing provision and ensure young people benefit from joined-up services. Where pre-existing structures do not exist, each local authority must establish a suitable arrangement to achieve this requirement.

Key principles to build and support effective partnerships

Make the best use of information available to get a clear picture of current provision across all providers and work collaboratively to create a map or community profile of local youth work provision.

Invite community groups, businesses and wider organisations active in the local area to provide ideas for collaboration, share issues and barriers, and discuss opportunities to enable young people to participate in any initiatives.

Provide opportunities for representatives from employers, schools and FE and HE institutions to explore emerging issues such as transitional support for children and young people throughout their education and beyond.

Young people's participation

As set out in the **Wellbeing of Future Generations Wales Act 2015**, local

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authorities have a duty to promote and facilitate children and young people's participation and involvement in decisions that affect them. Each local authority must therefore ensure clear pathways are in place to help young people participate and be involved in decisions made regarding the design and delivery of the youth work offer in their area. We expect local authorities to raise awareness of these pathways so that young people can take up these opportunities in line with their rights.

A local authority should make every effort to reach as wide a range of young people as possible, including those who are not currently engaged with youth work. Frequent engagement should take place in an efficient and meaningful way, ensuring that young people regardless of background, ability or any personal circumstance, can be heard in an accessible environment, placing a particular focus on underrepresented groups.

Potential participation models can vary significantly but local authorities should ensure that the **Children and Young People's National Participation Standards** underpin the structures that are put in place to meet this requirement.

Effective and impactful youth participation require time and resources. This includes ensuring all young people involved in participation structures receive ongoing training and support. The effectiveness of the local authority's participation structures will be evaluated as part of wider inspection and quality assessment arrangements.

Producing the strategic plan

Each local authority is required to produce a five-year strategic plan. The primary purpose of the strategic plan is to set out objectives for that period, including:

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- what the local authority will offer based on what young people say they need or want in their area
- how any inequalities in current youth work provision will be addressed
- identifying action that may need to be taken within the period of the plan to address future demands

Local authorities should refer to **The Right Way: a children's rights approach in Wales** for details of five principles which should underpin the development, delivery and monitoring of the strategic plan.

In recognition of the role of youth work as a preventative service, the breadth of opportunities it offers to all young people and its wide-ranging links to other policy areas, the objectives in the strategic plan must be structured to align with the seven well-being goals for Wales as set out in the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**, which set out our ambitions for:

- a prosperous Wales
- a resilient Wales
- a healthier Wales
- a more equal Wales
- a Wales of more cohesive communities
- a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
- a globally responsible Wales

The strategic plan must set out the evidence base for each objective. The objectives should be driven by the needs of young people rather than the source of funding or setting.

The strategic plan must also include a summary of the consultation undertaken during the development of the plan and a summary of the responses received. It must also set out how the local authority will work with partners in achieving its objectives.

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The period between April 2025 and April 2026 will be a transitional year during which we anticipate a local authority will put in place structures and processes to enable it to meet the requirements set out in this statutory framework.

The outline timeline for the first strategic plans is as follows.

April 2025: each local authority commences work on the development of its strategic plan.

September 2025: Draft strategic plans submitted to the Welsh Government for approval.

December 2025: Feedback on strategic plans provided by the Welsh Government to the local authority. If required, the local authority is invited to revise their strategic plan.

April 2026: First strategic plan commences.

March 2031: First strategic plan ends.

Assessing young people's needs

Youth work must be shaped by, and tailored to, what young people need and want. As set out in the Youth Work Strategy for Wales, realising this will be dependent on meaningful partnerships with young people. This should include a diverse range of voices, including those not currently engaging with youth work.

Each local authority should work with statutory partners and voluntary organisations to analyse existing evidence, as well as to gather additional evidence, to help shape provision.

This assessment of need should not be undertaken in isolation but should take into account evidence from other plans, including, but not limited to:

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- **Play Sufficiency Assessments** and Action Plans
- **Youth Justice Plans**
- arrangements linked to the planning and delivery of the **NEST framework**
- arrangements linked to the planning and delivery of the **Youth Engagement and Progression Framework**
- **Welsh in Education Strategic Plans**
- Strategic Equality Plans
- Public Service Board local well-being plans

Local authorities, working with partners, should consider a holistic approach to gathering and sharing data, information and intelligence, where lawful and appropriate. Partners are encouraged to utilise their organisational knowledge and networks to ensure a rich assessment of need. This will ensure a joined-up approach for partners to better support young people in their communities and identify where early action can prevent the need for more intensive support at a later date.

In assessing young people's needs, a local authority should determine the range of provision and facilities available to young people, and how barriers that they may encounter can be overcome to ensure services are easily accessible to all. Local authorities are reminded of their responsibilities as set out in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** and the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**.

Setting objectives for the Strategic Plan

The objectives in the strategic plan should be based on evidence of what young people need and want. Each local authority, working with its partners, should determine which sources of evidence will be used to inform the setting of objectives and how gaps in evidence will be addressed in order to provide a rich perspective of these needs and wants.

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Potential evidence should include, but is not limited to:

- evidence gathered by local authority youth councils, forums or other groups
- evidence gathered by voluntary organisation youth councils, forums or other groups
- surveys with young people, gathering both qualitative and quantitative information
- academic research
- data on population and migration, community safety and inclusion, education and skills, equality and diversity, poverty and experience of poverty, housing, health and social care, transport, wellbeing, cultural wellbeing, and the Welsh language
- data on cultural, artistic and sports participation
- police and crime statistics
- public health data
- socio-economic data

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 outlines five ways of working. Its sustainable development principle, namely: thinking for the long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration, and involvement, should be applied when determining objectives for the strategic plan.

Key questions to consider when setting objectives

- Is there evidence of increased demand for certain types of provision?
- How can current barriers to accessing provision be minimised?
- Are all options for delivering and facilitating provision, including digital routes, being fully utilised, and where can these approaches be most effectively applied?
- How does the workforce need to be supported and developed? And

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what specialist skills and knowledge do practitioners need?

- Are there sufficient facilities and resources in place to meet the needs of young people?
- Can a greater focus on opportunities rather than problems help develop more impactful objectives?
- How can the sustainability of provision be assured?

Regional working

The strategic plan must set out how a local authority and its partners will collaborate to develop provision for communities of interest that transcend local authority borders, to achieve economies of scale in the provision of services or to share innovative practice. This could be with neighbouring local authorities or other regional and national partners.

Approving the strategic plan

A local authority should put effective arrangements in place to consult with local partners and young people on the contents of the strategic plan. The strategic plan must also be presented to the local authority's overview and scrutiny committee to align with wider accountability arrangements.

The strategic plan must be submitted to the Welsh Government for approval. A strategic plan may be approved as submitted, require modifications, approved with modifications, or rejected.

The approved strategic plan must be published by the local authority. The local authority should also consider how the strategic plan is communicated to young people in an effective way to support their participation and in order to empower

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them to hold partners to account in the delivery of youth work services in line with the UNCRC.

A strategic plan may be revised as a result of an identified need which may include an emerging issue caused by a significant event or trend experienced by young people. A local authority should discuss the need for revising its strategic plan with Welsh Government at the earliest opportunity.

Reporting on progress and evaluation

A local authority must put arrangements in place for monitoring of progress against the objectives set out in the strategic plan. This must include consulting with young people on the extent to which they consider the local authority is meeting its objectives.

A local authority must publish a progress report at least once in each financial year to communicate the results of this assessment of progress.

In addition to these reporting requirements, local authorities should also work with partners to utilise existing mechanisms to evaluate their youth work offer as well as making best use of evidence gathered during inspection and quality assessment processes.

Key principles for evaluating the youth work offer

A local authority and its partners should use a variety of methods such as questionnaires, focus groups, data insights, video diaries and interviews to ascertain whether the youth work offer is working for young people and to better understand its impact.

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Partners should aim to support the local authority to review existing evaluation arrangements to identify areas that are important to young people and which may be positively and negatively impacting them. This may include the effectiveness of participation structures, variety of activities and awareness of the range of opportunities available to young people.

Reflective practice is vital to help local authorities and partners to evaluate the quality of youth work provision. This could include opportunities to visit or shadow other organisations, services and settings to help enrich practice and inform future evaluation processes.

The youth work entitlement and youth work offer

The youth work entitlement

Each local authority must provide youth work for its young people in line with the Youth Work Entitlement. The youth work entitlement means youth work that:

- is developed through engagement with young people
- is based on what young people say they need or want and which aims to introduce, protect and strengthen activities delivered in both Welsh and English
- provides opportunities across a wide range of educational and community settings, which may include digital provision
- facilitates universal and targeted opportunities for young people to improve their physical, emotional and mental well-being in a range of activities
- is delivered in ways which are easily accessible for young people, individually or with their peers

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In fulfilling the requirement to provide youth work, the local authorities should consider best practice in enabling young people to exercise their rights. **The Right Way: A Children's Human Rights Approach to Education in Wales** sets out an approach to help education settings to develop a children's human rights approach. Each local authority should have clear arrangements in place to show how it enables young people to exercise their rights.

The youth work offer

The youth work offer is how a local authority translates the youth work entitlement into action in its area. This youth work offer will vary from one area to another, dependent on its characteristics and population and will also vary over time in response to the changing needs and interests of young people.

As set out in the Youth Work Strategy for Wales, youth work provides opportunities for learning that are educative, expressive, participative, inclusive and empowering. In forming their youth work offer, a local authority should focus on creating opportunities and positive pathways for young people as they transition into adulthood. This aims to move away from a perception of youth work as a service that solves problems after they have occurred towards a focus on creating safe spaces in which young people can be supported to fulfil their potential.

As with the development of the strategic plan, collaboration will be vital in delivering the youth work offer. A local authority must work closely with voluntary organisations, statutory partners and other organisations supporting young people to achieve this. Local authorities and their partners are encouraged to maximise existing resources and relationships, identify opportunities for strengthened partnership working and develop innovative approaches aimed at providing an impactful youth work offer for their young people.

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Workforce

The delivery of a rich and varied youth work offer is reliant on the contribution of a wide range of practitioners.

Qualified youth workers and youth support workers are at the core of the workforce. Qualified youth workers or those working towards a youth worker qualification, paid to undertake their role, **must register with the Education Workforce Council**. Likewise, qualified youth support workers or those working towards a youth support worker qualification, paid to undertake their role, must also register with the Education Workforce Council.

Other professionals will work closely with qualified youth workers and youth support workers in the delivery of youth support services.

The realisation of the youth work offer will be supported by a wide community of allied professionals alongside paid, qualified youth workers and youth support workers.

Volunteers play a pivotal role in the youth work sector and will contribute to how the youth work offer is shaped and realised.

A local authority, working with its partners, should consider wider workforce development needs in setting the objectives for its strategic plan. This should include the continuous development of the existing workforce. A local authority should also work with partners to develop the capacity of the workforce and the skills required to respond to the future demands upon the youth work service. This should include a focus on specialist skills, ability and confidence to work through the medium of Welsh, and leadership and management skills. It should also consider the need to ensure the workforce is properly appraised of the lived experiences of young people.

Safeguarding

As set out in [Working Together to Safeguard People: Code of Safeguarding Practice](#), safeguarding is everybody's responsibility. The Welsh Government expects those delivering youth work to follow the advice set out in the Code, and to ensure that the workforce has the appropriate skills and knowledge to keep young people and the workforce itself safe. This includes ensuring appropriate and up to date Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are in place.

Welsh language and youth work

One of the main objectives of [Cymraeg 2050](#), the Welsh Government's long-term approach to achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050, is to ensure that fewer young people lose their Welsh skills when moving onwards from statutory education, and that more of them reach their mid-twenties with a command of the language.

The range of ages supported by youth work and the breadth of opportunities and experiences it offers means it has a vital role to play in enabling all young people, whatever their Welsh language ability or background, to use their Welsh with their peers in the community and online, building young people's confidence in using more of their Welsh. The Welsh language is also integral in developing a young person's voice, influence and place in society and helping them realise their full potential.

Supporting and expanding a community of practitioners who are confident to use their Welsh as part of youth work provision is a key part of the planning and delivery of services, and a local authority should work with partners to embed this into the objectives of the strategic plan.

When developing its youth work offer, a local authority should consider the

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linguistic profile of the population as well as young people's needs and interests in relation to Welsh-medium and bilingual provision. They should also consider creating new opportunities for those who are not currently engaging with Welsh-medium and bilingual youth work as a way of encouraging more young people to use and enjoy the language and its cultural offering.

Opportunities should be explored to align the objectives in the strategic plan with those in other relevant plans, for example local authority **Welsh in Education Strategic Plans** (Outcome 5).

Digital youth work

The use of digital technology is central to the way young people live their lives and can provide an additional community for young people to connect with their peers. Within youth work, this could include:

- helping young people to understand how to navigate their online lives in a safe, respectful way
- using technology to connect young people with their peers and create content
- using technology as a method to enable young people to develop their voice, influence and place in society
- providing trusted information to young people
- helping young people to access and exchange reliable and comprehensive information and think critically about online content
- projects focused on developing their digital skills

A local authority should consider how digital technology can enrich its youth work offer whilst considering inequity of digital access and how such barriers can be mitigated.

A local authority should consider how it can work with partners to support and

develop the skills and capacity of the workforce to deliver impactful provision that makes full use of the opportunities offered by technology.

International youth work

Youth work provides a unique platform for young people to reflect on personal experiences, better understand others' perspectives as well as explore what unites them and their peers. The experiences offered by international youth work are particularly valuable in developing young people's self-confidence, independence and establishing links and networks with other young people across the world.

A local authority, working with its partners, should consider how international youth work can complement its youth work offer, whilst actively addressing barriers to participation.

Innovation

Alongside inspection and quality assessment arrangements, a local authority and its partners should identify best practice, share findings with others, learn from academic studies and evaluation reports by others both in Wales and beyond, and consider how these can inform and improve the youth work offer for their young people. As noted in the Youth Work Strategy for Wales, it is vital that youth work organisations are also supported to develop and implement innovative and collaborative ventures with a wide range of partners, to ensure that youth work is always valued and understood.

Innovation can help identify different ways of working, share ideas to strengthen existing provision and build its sustainability, support transformation as well as drive the creation of new opportunities for young people. A local authority should work with its partners to ensure innovation is embedded in the development,

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delivery and monitoring of the strategic plan as well as the realisation of its youth work offer.

Glossary

Partners

Local authority services beyond youth work, statutory services such as health and social care, and voluntary organisations, which are those organisations whose activities are carried out otherwise for profit and directly or indirectly benefit the whole or any part of the local authority area.

Statutory partners

Statutory partners refers to those organisations which provide essential services to communities such as local health boards and police forces.

Targeted opportunities

Targeted provision entails provision for vulnerable young people, including neighbourhood and street work outreach teams, youth advice and guidance services, youth justice teams, drug and alcohol misuse services, sexual health services and homelessness support.

Universal opportunities

Universal, or open-access provision, is youth work provision that is open to all young people to attend voluntarily. It can include a range of leisure, cultural,

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sporting and enrichment activities, often based around youth centres and generally provided in partnership with local communities.

Volunteer

A person whose activities are carried out otherwise for profit and directly or indirectly benefit the whole or any part of the local authority area.

Young person

For the context of this guidance, a young person is a person who has attained the age of 11 but not the age of 26 years.

Youth support services

Services which encourage, enable or assist young persons directly or indirectly to participate effectively in education or training, to take advantage of opportunities for employment and to participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.

Youth support worker

A person falling within the category of youth support worker in Table 1 in paragraph 1 of Schedule 2 to the Education (Wales) Act 2014.

Youth work

Services provided within the youth support service using a distinct educational

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approach based on voluntary engagement of young people delivered by persons holding a youth worker or youth support worker qualification.

Youth work entitlement

A national expectation in terms of how youth work is designed and delivered. This is youth work that:

- must be developed through engagement with young people, to ensure its relevance to their needs and wants
- aims to introduce, protect and strengthen activities delivered in both Welsh and English
- must provide opportunities across a wide range of settings, which may include digital provision
- should place a particular focus on developing a young persons' physical, emotional and mental well-being
- must be delivered in ways which are easily accessible for young people, individually or with their peers

Youth work offer

How the youth work entitlement is translated into action by each local authority, based on evidence of what young persons in the area need or want.

Youth work strategic plan

A plan that has been developed by a local authority with partners and young people that sets out how youth work will be delivered over a five-year period.

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Youth worker

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