



The Professional Association of Lecturers  
in Youth and Community Work

## **Professional Association of Lecturers in Youth and Community Work**

### **Submission APPG Call for evidence**

This submission has been developed by The Professional Association of Lecturers in Youth and Community Work (PALYCW). Our Association Aim is to promote research, education and training in youth and community work in higher education for the public benefit. We are a member led association and our membership is predominately made up of lecturers and researchers associated with youth and community programmes at BA and MA Level located in Universities across England and Wales. In 2016-17, PALYCW had 247 individual members drawn from 44 Universities across the UK. The Association works collaboratively across the four nations of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland and is described by the English Training Standards Board as a critical friend. We have provided text-based responses to all four questions. The APPG has invited expressions of interest for visits. PALYCW would like to express an interest in members of the APPG to visit Universities involved in youth work training and members associated with our work.

#### **A) What is the role of youth work in addressing the needs and opportunities for young people?**

The role of youth work has bedrock of history and tradition which shapes broad understanding of how it has been developed to address the needs and opportunities for young people. Since the post war period for example there have been several government policy reports which have referred to the role and value of youth work in a civil society. These include Albermarle (1960), Milson Fairbairn (1969), Thompson (1982), Transforming Youth Work, Resourcing Excellent Youth Services (2002), Youth Matters (2005), Aiming High for Young People (2007) and Positive for Youth (2010). In 2018 a broadly accepted definition of the role and purpose of youth work is set out in the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for youth work (NYA 2012). The NOS have been developed to provide an agreed definition of youth work that is recognisable in the sector across a

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range of employment contexts and settings. The NOS define youth work as 'Enabl[ing] 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' (NYA, 2012:4). Therefore, youth work is concerned with the holistic development of young people and is based on a common set of values that places an emphasis on active involvement, equity, diversity, inclusion and partnership. It seeks to empower young people through engagement in activities, campaigns, work and play that is of their design and choosing. In doing so, youth work contributes to the formation of young people as active citizens in ways that more formal activities struggle to achieve

Youth Work is often referred to as youth and community work. The Subject Benchmark statement provides an extended definition which integrates the role of community within youth work and states that it is

a practice of informal and community education that involves the development of democratic and associational approaches which promote learning and development in the communities or individuals who choose to take part in the programmes that youth and community workers facilitate and support. It is focused on work with adolescents and adults, with groups as well as individuals, and with personal development in the context of the development of wider social networks and collective engagement with issues of social justice (QAA, 5: 2017).

It is recognised that the role of youth work is contested within communities not least because of the role of community development in enabling sustainable youth work processes; the balance between youth and community-based approaches; the struggle for young people to be recognised as part of communities; and their relationship to communities. The role of Youth and Community Work 'is a diverse field with a range of definitions, participation, inclusion, empowerment, partnership and learning are shared values and fundamental principles of practice' (QAA 2: 2017).

The role of Youth Work is and its presence in communities is informed by a range of overlapping and competing traditions which historically have developed in a range of different contexts locally, regionally and nationally. The point being that the role of youth work whilst holding core

characteristics can at the same time be geographically and contextually distinct. Youth work emphasises personal, social and political development. At a personal level youth workers engage young people in a professional relationship, acting in the role of trusted adult. Through conversation and dialogue youth workers are able to develop mutual trust and respect as the basis for identifying needs and issues that are relevant to young people from their own perspective. At a cultural level youth workers can engage and develop with young people a range of activities and opportunities that contribute to more cohesive communities inherent in a civil society and at a structural level youth workers can engage young people in democratic practices and facilitate political literacy, voice and influence as well as contributing in the longer term to strategies that promote greater equality and social justice.

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HM Treasury (2007) Aiming high for young people: A ten year strategy for positive activities. London: HM Treasury/Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Department for Education (2011) Positive for Youth: The Statement. HM Government.

National Youth Agency (2012) Youth Work National Occupational Standards. Available online; <http://www.learningso/uthwest.org.uk/wp-/content/uploads/2014/11/National-Occupation-//Standards-for-Youth-Work.pdf> [accessed on 25.6.18]

**b) Are the key issues and challenges faced by young people being addressed by current youth service provisions?**

Youth services are formed in response to the complex needs of all young people but are most frequently shaped by those young people who face the biggest challenge to become socially included, and notably those struggling with the impact of poverty. 30% of children (after housing costs) were categorised as living in poverty in the UK and the Institute for Fiscal Studies projects that the share of children in relative low income will increase sharply up until 2021/22 (Guinness 2018). The New Policy Institute produced a report in 2015 stating that of the 9.0 million young people aged 14-24 living in the UK, approximately 2.7 million, or 30%, are living in poverty. This includes 1.9 million young people with an income considerably below the poverty threshold (below 50% of median income). A further 740,000 young people had incomes just above the poverty threshold (above the 60% of median income but below 70%) (Born et.al 2015). The link between income inequality and health and social problems has been well documented see for example Wilson and Pickett, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2011). Transitions from childhood to adulthood are made more complex and barriers to successful transitions are compounded by poverty, inequality and associated challenges including domestic abuse, CSE, mental health, teenage pregnancy, antisocial behaviour.

Historically youth work has played an important role in ameliorating the key issues and challenges faced by young people in these circumstances. However, at a time when poverty, inequality and associated health and social problems are rising investment into youth work has been incrementally cut. This has significantly reduced the capacity for youth services to meet the needs of young people. A recent YMCA report Youth and Consequences (2018) has identified that in six years, Local Authorities have cut their expenditure on youth services in England and Wales by more than £750m. This report also highlights that cuts to youth services mean that many young people are no longer able to access opportunities outside the school that support their learning and development.

A key question is the extent to which youth service provisions are able to meaningfully address the key challenges and issues that young people face when the resources available for youth work have been severely reduced. Youth workers express concern at the number of young

people who are falling through the gaps through the closure of universal services and the implications of this in the longer term. This challenge requires youth services re-evaluate delivery models for youth work and the capacity and scope for collaboration with other providers to address key issues and challenges young people face over the next 30 years and beyond. What we have seen is that youth service capacity has been substantially reduced through incremental cuts and dilution of resources. An NYA report produced in 2012 highlighted incremental cuts in youth work and the refocusing of funding from universal to targeted youth work which has continued to the present date (NYA 2012). The significant collapse of universal youth work opportunities in some parts of the country has increased the pressure on other services as issues have escalated – for example in the rise in mental health services and responses to violent crimes; areas where youth services have traditionally offered early intervention and diversion. Alongside this we are entering a fourth revolution where the role of technology and social media will significantly impact how we understand work, leisure and the role of education. Youth Work has an important role in working with young people to address these challenges and to support young people to flourish in a changing global economy. Youth work plays an important advocacy role for young people, enabling them to speak into a radically changing environment and influence decisions that are being taken, such as post-Brexit policy that will leave a legacy for their generation.

### **References:**

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New Policy Institute. (2015) Poverty among young people. [online]

[https://www.npi.org.uk/files/7114/2892/2456/Poverty\\_among\\_young\\_people\\_in\\_the\\_UK\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.npi.org.uk/files/7114/2892/2456/Poverty_among_young_people_in_the_UK_FINAL.pdf) [Accessed on line 25.6.2018]

NYA (2012) Youth Services in England. The state of the Nation. [online]

<http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Youth-Services-in-England-The-State-of-the-Nation.pdf> [Accessed on line 25.6.2018]

YMCA. (2018) Youth and Consequences. [online] <https://www.ymca.org.uk/research/youth-and-consequences> [accessed on line 25.6.2018]

**c) Are there sufficient youth workers to support youth services and other delivery models for good quality youth work?**

This is an ambiguous question as who defines what is meant by sufficient? A more useful question might be: is there a sufficient workforce strategy to meet the demands of good quality youth work? A workforce requires careful management, organisation, distribution and evaluation in the context of youth services across a range of agencies and settings. To achieve this, we believe there needs to be greater investment in sector (workforce) leadership and that good quality youth work has to be led by professionally qualified youth work staff.

In 2010, the sector endorsed a shift in quality, requiring a degree as the minimum qualification for a professional youth worker. However, we have witnessed a significant decline in recruits to and graduates from professional qualifications in youth and community work (approaching 50% over 5 years (NYA, 2017)). This decline in recruitment can be aligned to the perceived fear of job insecurity resulting from public-sector cuts to youth work referred to in question 2; and are indicators that there is a declining supply of professionally qualified youth workers. Given that it takes at least three years to professionally qualify there needs to be a long term plan to redress this overall incremental decline and protect the degree title as a mark of quality and substance for leaders in the youth sector.

Furthermore, the infrastructure to support entry and progression pathways in youth and community work has been significantly impacted by the cuts to youth services described in B above. Increasingly funders will not support core/infrastructure costs including training and workforce development. Over the long term this has had an unintended consequence in that it has impacted on the supply of youth workers with evidence of highly skilled workers leaving the sector due to unstable employment and the emergence of an unqualified 'gig economy' for short-term and/or part-time youth work contracts. There needs to be resource available for managing workforce needs at a sector level and a greater incentive to enter into the profession of youth and community work as a career choice. Longer term, there also needs to be greater assurance that substantive posts will provide workers with security including a liveable wage and career progression.

In sum, there is an urgent need to re-assess the current workforce conditions for youth work at a national level and to ensure that every locality has a workforce plan to address workforce needs. This will require greater support for national bodies and local authorities who have had to cut back in these areas, contributing to workforce decline. Despite this, one encouraging move has been the independent creation of the Institute for Youth Work (IYW) that, as a membership body for youth workers, can speak with authority on behalf of youth workers. IYW have proposed a register for youth workers and are working with the NYA on an implementation plan. A register, if successful, would contribute to more intelligent monitoring and profiling of the youth work workforce; and contribute to securing the greater consistency in quality and identity for the profession.

#### **References:**

NYA (2017) Annual Monitoring of Youth and Community Programmes 2015/16. [online]  
[https://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/NYA\\_Annual\\_Monitoring\\_Report-15-16.pdf](https://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/NYA_Annual_Monitoring_Report-15-16.pdf) [Accessed 25.6.2018]

#### **d) What are the training and workforce development needs to secure and sustain youth work?**

In 2010 a degree became the minimum qualification required to become a professional youth worker. Currently people can become professionally qualified by undertaking an undergraduate or post graduate qualification. The development of degree apprenticeships will provide an alternative pathway for people who want to professionally qualify but who do not want to go to university full time. For this initiative to succeed there will need to be investment to ensure that employers sufficiently understand the qualification requirements of the profession and can see how these fit with service design. This is equally the case for entry level qualifications to secure workers at the early stages of their workforce journey; and CPD requirements for workers adjusting to new and changing contexts for youth work practice and leadership.

Local authorities need to co-ordinate mapping workforce development needs and project supply of youth work. This needs to be the basis for joined up dialogue with universities, regional youth work units, the national youth agency, training providers and other key stakeholders in workforce planning. Education and training is significant in contributing to the overall quality of youth work

and in sustaining good practice. The NYA review of Level 2 and 3 qualifications with key providers needs to continue and a clearly understood entry and progression map needs to be produced. Urgent attention needs to be paid to how to redress the erosion of infrastructure to support the organisation, delivery and assessment of level 2 and 3 qualifications. Beyond this if youth work organisations and youth services are to be learning organisations and remain flexible and responsive to the changing nature of young people's needs then a system of CPD has to consider as part of a training and workforce plan. Consideration needs to be given to bespoke CPD for youth work as well as in collaboration with other youth service providers. The regular supply of CPD will contribute to the overall quality of youth work; ensure that skills, knowledge and understanding are continually refreshed; in tune with contemporary issues experienced by young people; and provide important opportunities to develop shared understanding with peers, in collaboration with other professions working with young people.

#### **Additional Note:**

As a membership Association, PALYCW connects over 200 educators that are teaching and researching youth and community work at approaching 50 Universities around the UK. The potential exists to build on this expertise and regional connections to support further workforce development. The Association initiated a seminar series for this purpose between March and June this year. We organised a series of policy and practice seminars engaging over 700 practitioners and academics across the UK in conversations about collaborations in shaping youth work policy and practice going forwards. The outcomes from these seminars are being debated to our June Annual Conference and we would welcome the opportunity to share these when they are complete. Therefore, we urge the inquiry to work with the experience that exists in practice and in the academy as it considers its findings.