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Feasibility Study

Youth Work Funding Review



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Feasibility Study: Youth Work Funding Review

Executive Summary

1. Background

1.1 This report presents the findings from a feasibility study of a review of youth work funding in Wales carried out on behalf of the Welsh Government, Youth Engagement Branch (WGYEB). From 2018-2021 the Interim Youth Work Board (IYWB) was tasked with developing recommendations for a sustainable model for youth work in Wales. Their final report '[Time to Deliver for young people in Wales](#)' provided the impetus for this research. The fourth of the Board's 14 recommendations was that:

“Welsh Government should [...] undertake an independent review into the sufficiency, transparency, accountability, and effectiveness of funding and expenditure on youth work services across Welsh Government, local authorities, and voluntary organisations, to assess the effective delivery of outcomes and impact for young people” (Interim Youth Work Board, 2021).

1.2 The aim of this study is to undertake a review of youth work funding across Wales with the voluntary and maintained youth work sectors to contribute to the identification of a sustainable model for youth work in Wales, which will include:

- an evaluation (both qualitative and quantitative) of how current funding mechanisms impact youth work provision across Wales and how any variations affect accessibility and rights
- a cost benefit analysis to establish the impact and economic effectiveness of youth work funding.

1.3 There are four key objectives for the funding review which comprise three phases of research to be undertaken. The objectives for the research are as follows:

Phase 1: To provide a framework for the research to be undertaken within Wales which included:

- establishment of a steering group
- a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of available literature/empirical research on relevant current practice in relation to analysis of funding and models of measuring value for money in the UK, and Republic of Ireland and research carried out on behalf of the Welsh Government
- a feasibility study to establish what data is available and to what extent it can address the scope of the proposed research for phases 2 and 3.

Phase 2: Review funding sources available for youth work in Wales within both the voluntary and maintained sectors and explore how the funding sources are allocated within the 22 local authority areas, specifically to:

- consider where funding comes from, how this is accessed, and what the money is spent on
- identify barriers and challenges to accessing funding particularly, but not limited to, the voluntary sector
- establish how the funding for youth work is utilised across the voluntary and maintained sector and how variations in usage across local authority areas impacts youth work
- identify who is making the decisions on allocated funding
- identify the extent to which young people have a say on funding decisions
- understand the accountability, governance, and leadership mechanisms and reporting processes for youth work
- explore commissioning/partnership arrangements between voluntary and maintained sectors and how this is planned, organised, and monitored
- create a framework for collecting data regarding the impact and benefits of youth work to enable the undertaking of a cost benefit analysis in phase 3.

Phase 3: Provide evidence of the impact and economic effectiveness of funding in the maintained and voluntary youth work sectors through a cost-benefit analysis; highlighting evidence of good practice.

- 1.4 The purpose of this feasibility study was to undertake an initial scoping of the available data and to what extent it could inform the proposed research for phases 2 and 3 of the funding review as recommended by the IYWB. This feasibility study therefore has explored whether the proposed aims of the review can be addressed by collecting data across four local authority areas within the voluntary and maintained youth work sectors.
- 1.5 A Rapid Evidence Assessment of published data on the economic value of youth work has been undertaken to inform this research. Evidence from across the UK and Ireland and the wider European Council/Commission and relevant Wales-specific reports have been reviewed. The studies considered the contribution of youth work across public policy. There are aspects of these studies that can help inform and shape the approach to this study. However, no one study stands as a template to be replicated for the purposes of this project. The studies reviewed do not consider

issues of the longer-term sustainability of current youth work delivery and funding models, or how they may be improved, while this study aims to address complex and diverse funding mechanisms which currently sustain youth work provision across Wales. The breadth and depth proposed for this study, and the tailoring of a particular approach to the circumstances of youth work in Wales, is governed by the situation of the diversity of young people in Wales, their needs, and including their linguistic diversity. This research takes into account that youth work is devolved, and the research and findings therefore take fully into account the national context. The approach we are taking to this research is therefore very much a Welsh way: an approach which, in the first instance, seeks to understand the current financial arrangements in relation to youth work. In doing so, it will seek to identify a funding structure which would allow youth services to securely and sustainably deliver a high-quality service to young people, in accordance with the core principles and values of youth work.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 A mixed methods approach was adopted to address the aim of the feasibility study, methods included: a questionnaire; quantitative secondary data analysis of 'Youth Work in Wales, Statistical release - annual local authority audit data', Youth Support Grant (YSG) funding, and Strategic Voluntary Youth Work Organisation (SVYWO) Grants; in addition to qualitative interviews and focus groups.
- 2.2 The feasibility study was undertaken in four local authority areas (Wrexham, Powys, Swansea, Newport) and in a sample of voluntary youth work organisations. This work covered local authority provision and voluntary sector youth work organisations, including the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services, which is the independent representative body for the voluntary youth work sector in Wales. Interviews were also carried out with a Welsh Government official and a representative from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).
- 2.3 Questionnaires were distributed to 24 organisations (response rate 33.3 per cent). Eight responses were received.
- 2.4 Descriptive, and causal data analysis has been employed on the statistical release - annual local authority audit data in the financial years between 2010-2021, and a descriptive review approach has been used for the analysis of the breakdown of the Strategic Voluntary Youth Work Organisation Grant.
- 2.5 A total of 30 interviews/focus groups were undertaken. Figure 1 presents the breakdown of the interview and focus group representation from the voluntary and maintained sectors.

2.6 Figure 1: Number of interviews and focus groups.

	Number held (n)	Voluntary sector participants (n)	Maintained sector participants (n)
Interviews	22	10	10
Focus groups	8	6	14

3. Key Findings

3.1 The findings summarised here are indicative, recognising the limited scope of the feasibility study, and will be further corroborated and triangulated in subsequent phases of the research on a national basis.

3.2 **Quantitative findings:** The key points identified from our sample are as follows:

- for every £1 cut in youth work funding, expenditure is reduced by £1.33. As income reduces, organisational expenditure reduces by a greater amount
- the amount of core funding (the total level of support that local authorities make available for the youth service) income fell between 2010 and 2021 by 8.77 per cent
- as reported in the annual statistical release, maintained youth services have indicated that ‘police’ and ‘substance misuse’ bodies have provided 66.6 per cent of the total other source income funding for three of the four local authorities reviewed in this study between 2019 and 2021 (the annual statistical release indicates that ‘other’ sources are local sources outside of the local authority)
- one local authority has large variances in expenditure which may indicate a structural change in their expenditure processing, or other factors impacting their expenditure
- full-time staffing numbers reduced between 2010-2016 however, a shift towards fewer part-time staff and more full-time staff recruitment is seen from 2017 onwards.
- 43 per cent of the questionnaire respondents believe access to funding is currently unstable/ unpredictable
- training and development expenses reduced by 17.4 per cent between 2010 and 2018 and increased by 8.1 per cent between 2019 and 2021
- 88 per cent of youth work organisations surveyed offer some form of bilingual services.

3.3 **Qualitative Findings:** The findings from the qualitative data highlight several key complex and interlinked issues which were identified in the feasibility phase research. These are summarised as follows:

- There are numerous sources of external funding, e.g. from charitable sources, local government, and Welsh Government grants being used to fund youth work.
- The concept of core funding is important within both the voluntary and maintained sectors. All interviews with participants in the voluntary sector identified the difficulty of achieving a sustainable position. This suggests there is a lack of specific core funding within the current funding system.
- It is evident that there are differing perspectives amongst respondents as to whether the youth work funding element of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) - a non-hypothecated grant provided to local authorities to spend in line with their priorities - should be hypothecated. This is a complex area which raises issues of local control of resources and identification of need.
- Fiscal austerity has had a substantial impact on the amount of funding available for the youth service in both the voluntary and maintained sector.
- The lack of availability of long-term (over two years) sustainable and consistent funding is a challenge.
- There are challenges for some national voluntary organisations working with multiple local authorities having to separately apply for, and report on funding received through the local authorities YSG allocations.
- National voluntary organisations report receiving recurring block grants from national bodies including Sports Wales on a four year cycle which is regarded as predictable and dependable, unlike some other grant schemes which operate on shorter cycles. In addition, the direct links to national bodies of this kind are viewed as effective ways of working.
- Representatives from the voluntary sector interviewed as part of this phase emphasised the importance of collaborating with organisations such as CWVYS, as well as local authorities.
- Longer-term strategic planning between the voluntary sector, local authorities and the Welsh Government would be valued in terms of making grants available, so that organisations have advance notice and are prepared for funding opportunities.

4. Conclusions

4.1 The aim of this feasibility study was to undertake an **initial scoping** of what data is available, and to what extent it can address the proposed research for phases 2 and 3. The feasibility study demonstrates that it has been possible to collect a wide range

of evidence through adopting both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Thus, providing the evidence that there is a strong rationale to effectively address the full scope of the proposed research.

- 4.2 The strength of the approach has been the adoption of qualitative and quantitative techniques to establish how the funding for youth work is utilised across the voluntary and maintained sectors and how this varies between and across both sectors. This research has begun to highlight evidence of the economic effectiveness of youth work to help guide the subsequent phases of the project—recognising the need to tailor the approach to the circumstances of youth work in Wales as highlighted in the Rapid Evidence Assessment, and through engagement with stakeholders.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Three recommendations are proposed, reflecting the aim of the feasibility study. These recommendations will influence subsequent phases of the research and it is anticipated that further recommendations will be forthcoming.
- 5.2 **Recommendation 1:** The research team believe it is evident from the research undertaken that there is sufficient data available to address the requirements of subsequent phases of the research. Therefore, we recommend that the Welsh Government agree to continue with Phases 2 and 3 of the research.
- 5.3 **Recommendation 2:** To continue with further data collection as outlined in the agreed phases of the research with voluntary sector organisations and local authorities across Wales to be able to corroborate and triangulate the indicative evidence gathered in this feasibility study. This will include further work on findings from phase 1 and any new findings which may emerge from across Wales.
- 5.4 **Recommendation 3:** For the research team, to work with Welsh Government officials and the research steering group to further identify appropriate data collection approaches and sampling strategy for subsequent phases of the research.
- 5.5 We would like to recognise the support and encouragement of the organisations and individuals taking part in this research and extend a note of thanks. We have engaged with the sector at a busy time yet gathered important and relevant data from interviews and focus groups, through our questionnaire, and data from the literature, we are confident we have a rich range of evidence to inform our recommendations outlined above.

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