



# How Youth Provision Supports Young People in Building Assets for a Healthy Life

A working paper by the Centre for Youth Impact, on behalf of the Health Foundation, for the Young People's Future Health Inquiry.

The Centre for Youth Impact | November 2019



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## The Centre for Youth Impact

The Centre for Youth Impact is a community of organisations that work together to progress thinking and practice around impact measurement in youth work and services for young people. Our vision is for all young people to have access to high quality programmes and services that improve their life chances, by enabling embedded approaches to impact measurement that directly inform practice. Our work, therefore, is dedicated to three objectives, together with our expanded networks and other organisations from across the youth sector: curating the debate, building the movement, and shaping the future.

**Find out more about the Centre for Youth Impact at [www.youthimpact.uk](http://www.youthimpact.uk) and follow us on @YouthImpactUK.**

## Acknowledgements

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This report makes use of a growing body of literature on the role of youth provision in supporting young people to build the assets for a healthy life. We would like to acknowledge and thank the authors of all of this material, who are listed in the references at the end of this report.



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## Executive Summary

### Background, aims and methodology

In February 2019, the Centre for Youth Impact was commissioned by the Health Foundation to produce a working paper on the role of youth provision in supporting young people to build the assets for a healthy life. This paper forms part of the *Young People's Future Health Inquiry*, which aims to build understanding of the influences affecting the future health of young people. It is informed by desk research, interviews and roundtables with a range of stakeholders, including young people who had conducted peer research on behalf of the broader Young People's Future Health Inquiry.

### Why does youth provision matter for young people's health?

Whilst a clear and consistent evidence base is lacking, research suggests that youth provision has positive outcomes related to developing skills and competencies (including a range of social, emotional and intellectual capabilities), strengthening networks and social capital, and challenging behaviour perceived as risky. These outcomes support young people in the transition to adulthood and in the longer-term, are linked to the social building blocks of health such as good education, employment, and housing.

### The context for youth provision in the UK

Despite renewed interest in funding for young people, there have been significant cuts to funding over the past 10 years, which have resulted in an overall reduction in youth work in all four nations of the UK. While the specific context differs considerably in different areas of the UK, some common themes include: closures of youth provision centres, loss of professional youth work jobs, reduction in spending power of local authorities, greater reliance on volunteers, and increased reliance on short term funding.

### Enablers and barriers to achieving 'good' youth provision

Enablers of good youth provision include the following features. Good youth provision:

- is based on the National Occupational Standards for youth work
- is young-person centred
- supports the development of healthy relationships
- provides opportunities for young people to build relationships with trusted adults
- is co-produced in partnership with young people
- focusses on young people's personal and social development needs and outcomes
- offers a safe and welcoming environment
- is community-based and recognises the impact communities have on the development of young people
- is developed and delivered collaboratively, in partnership with other services
- balances universal with more targeted support
- focusses on evaluation and learning.

Barriers to achieving good youth provision include:

- lack of local and national leadership
- lack of clarity on what a sufficient 'youth offer' should contain
- the impact of reduced funding
- workforce challenges including a lack of workforce data, a depleted workforce, recruitment and training issues, and an increased reliance on volunteers

- not keeping up with changing demands, in particular, facilities that are out of line with the needs of young people and little progress in the development of a digital youth offer
- fragmentation as a result of the loss of local and regional infrastructure organisations.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings presented in this paper, we make the following recommendations for what is needed for the youth sector to best support young people in building assets for a healthy life.

1. Develop a high-level government strategy that recognises the important role of youth provision in enabling young people to build assets for a healthy life
2. Increase accountability for youth provision at a local level
3. Support the (re)development of infrastructure that connects policy and research with local decision making and practice
4. Actively engage young people in development of youth provision locally and nationally
5. Reverse the trend of funding reduction and reinvest in youth work services
6. Improve the balance of open access provision and targeted services
7. Invest in a professional youth sector workforce
8. Improve promotion and marketing of youth services
9. Support effective learning and quality improvement within and across youth provision

# How the Youth Sector Supports Young People in Building Assets for a Healthy Life

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## 1. Introduction

In February 2019, the Centre for Youth Impact was commissioned by the Health Foundation to produce a working paper on the role of youth provision in supporting young people to build the assets for a healthy life. This paper forms part of the *Young People's Future Health Inquiry*, which aims to build understanding of the influences affecting the future health of young people. Specific questions explored in the research include:

- How does effective youth provision contribute to young people's lives?
- What is the nature of current provision?
- What have been the trends in supply, demand and need for youth provision?
- What are the implications of these trends?
- What does good youth provision look like?
- What are the barriers to achieving good youth provision?
- Taking into account the above questions, what are the recommendations for policy and practice?

We took an iterative approach to the research which included the following stages:

1. **Desk research:** a review of literature related to the above research questions. This included academic literature, grey literature, and additional sources such as sector organisations' websites and parliamentary questions. Desk research was informed by, and refined through, stages two and three
2. **Interviews:** one-to-one interviews with youth workers and other sector stakeholders
3. **Roundtable discussions:**
  - A first roundtable was held in June 2019 with stakeholders, including representatives from local government, public health, central government, youth sector funders, and charities working with young people. Three young people who had conducted peer research also attended. Findings from the desk research related to 'youth provision and its contribution to healthy and fulfilling lives' were presented, alongside 'young people's perspectives' from the peer researchers. This was followed by a facilitated discussion to further explore findings and develop recommendations.
  - A second roundtable was held in July 2019 with young people who had conducted peer research as part of the broader *Young People's Future Health Inquiry*. Findings from the desk research were shared with participants for discussion and feedback. Young people identified priorities for policy and practice to improve youth provision.

We recognise that there is a great deal of movement in youth policy across the different countries of the UK as we write and present this working paper. All information is correct at the time of writing (until October 2019).

### 1.1 Defining youth provision

In setting the parameters for this report, we have recognised the wide range of opportunities provided for young people in commercial settings, as well as by public and voluntary bodies. We have focussed our research on provision aimed at young people aged 11-19 years that fulfils all three elements of providing ‘somewhere to go, something to do, and someone to talk to’ (Cabinet Office, 2011). Specifically, such provision can include:

- Open access youth clubs and centres based in communities and urban centres
- Activities and groups focused on young people with specific identities or needs (e.g. LGBTQI youth groups; young carers’ clubs)
- Programmes and projects that engage young people in social action and volunteering
- Initiatives aimed at enabling young people to have a voice in issues that affect their lives (e.g. local youth councils)
- Detached and outreach youth provision which aims to engage young people who may not take part in more organised activities
- Uniformed and faith-based youth organisations that provide activities, support, and challenge to young people (e.g. Girlguiding, Scouting)
- Projects that use sports, art, and music to engage young people in creative and physical activity.

In addition, we recognise the following defining features, which are central to the values and ethics of provision for young people:

- It takes place outside the regular school day, in young people’s ‘leisure time’
- Young people engage with it voluntarily (i.e. they have chosen to get involved and stay engaged)
- It encourages young people to work together and develop collectively, focusing less on gaining individual excellence and more on the experience of working collaboratively as a group
- It encourages young people to identify and challenge structural and individual discrimination and inequality
- It supports young people to be active citizens in their neighbourhoods and beyond
- It is undertaken by staff (paid and voluntary) who understand the concepts of informal education, youth and community development, and use their skills and knowledge to both support and challenge young people.

The term ‘youth provision’, defined according to the values above, is used throughout this report, and we refer collectively to those delivering youth provision as ‘the youth sector’. Where referencing the work of others, we use the terms employed by the original authors, which include:

- ‘Youth work’ - a particular type of practice in working with young people as outlined by the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work (National Youth Agency 2014).
- ‘Youth services’ – services for young people that are funded (and historically provided directly) by a local authority.



## 2. Why youth provision matters for young people's health

### 2.1 The importance of dedicated provision for young people

A defining part of adolescence is the transition experienced by young people as they develop into adulthood. Types of transition include:

- Physical development, such as changes associated with puberty
- Cognitive development, including development of moral and political thinking and controlling impulses
- Emotional development through which young people develop their sense of personal identity and begin to seek more independence as they become more responsible for their own choices
- Social development including the increasing importance and influence of peer groups and the development of more intimate relationships, balanced with larger peer networks.
- Behavioural development such as seeking out novel experiences and risk-taking alongside the development of health behaviours that may continue into adulthood.

(Hagell, Shah, Viner, Hargreaves, Varnes and Heys, 2018)

These intrinsic changes influence how young people experience important transitions related to longer-term health and wellbeing, including: education, work, health, family and citizenship (Hagell et al, 2018). These experiences and transitions are unique to young people and therefore require provision that takes account of these needs. Young people who took part in our roundtable reinforced this message, expressing the need for age appropriate youth services based on an understanding of what young people are going through at different ages, including contextual factors such as exam stress.

Despite a strong rationale supporting the need for tailored provision for young people, a clear and consistent evidence-base related to how youth provision contributes to the lives of young people is lacking. A 2013 systematic map of the research literature related to youth work (Dickson, Vigurs and Newman, 2013) found that a wide range of research designs has been used across the body of literature. However, many studies employed case study or cross-sectional designs, commonly collecting data at one point in time, making it difficult to generalise from the evidence base. This, in part is due to the nature of the sector, including a lack of investment in large scale and collective research, and the challenges associated with researching provision that is diverse, universal, light touch, community based and upstream. The review concluded that '*better evidence*' is needed to underpin the design and delivery of youth work.

A critical review of the literature related to universal youth work (Edinburgh Youth Work Consortium and The University of Edinburgh, 2015) reinforced this message, stating that the review, '*illuminated many gaps in the peer reviewed evidence base, and the need for the wider engagement of young people and youth workers in contributing to such work in the future.*' The review did, however, conclude that there is international evidence that youth work provision has positive outcomes related to: developing skills and competencies (including self-efficacy, resilience, communication, confidence, and social and interpersonal skills); strengthening networks and social capital; and challenging behaviours perceived as 'risky'. They also reported that universal youth work can have positive longer-term outcomes related to educational attainment, employability, and health and wellbeing.



More recently, a study using data from the 1958 birth cohort National Child Development Study (Dibben, Playford and Mitchell, 2016), found that participation in Guides or Scouts was associated with better mental health, alongside narrower mental health inequalities, at age 50. The researchers concluded that elements of the Guide and Scout approach (e.g. exercise, being outdoors, positive social relationships, and development of non-cognitive skills such as confidence and motivation) may be protective of mental health in adulthood.

## 2.2 Youth provision and the social determinants of health

*“Adolescence is a key period for establishing life-long health behaviours and these develop in the context of the family, school and community. These contexts can be structural, such as national wealth, income inequality, and educational opportunities, or proximal, including family factors, availability of social support, and quality of the neighbourhood and school environment. Without equal access to resources and support across all these contexts, some young people are put at a disadvantage”* (Hagell, Coleman, & Brooks, 2015).

There is close alignment between the theory and practice of youth provision and approaches to supporting young people’s health. Youth provision is concerned with the holistic development of young people, focusing on their personal and social learning. Youth organisations do not work with young people because of their ‘problems or issues’: rather, they help them to develop key capabilities to have agency in their lives and reach their full potential. This includes developing the assets that are linked to improvements in the social building blocks of good health (e.g. emotional support, financial and practical support, skills and qualifications, and personal connections) (The Health Foundation, 2018).

Guidance from Public Health England (PHE) is aligned with this perspective. PHE has argued that taking a separate ‘treatment’ approach to health issues will not improve the overall wellbeing of young people, and consequently we need to think about young people’s health holistically (Public Health England, 2015). PHE’s call for an asset-based perspective that focuses on wellbeing and resilience shares the values and ethics of youth organisations, and their core focus on young people’s personal and social development. Below are PHE’s six core principles for improving young people’s health, and a description of how they align with approaches in youth provision, in particular those outlined in the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for youth work, discussed further in section 4.1.

- 1. Relationships and a sense of belonging are central to young people’s health and wellbeing:** youth services support young people to recognise healthy (and unhealthy) relationships and to develop them with peers, youth workers, and the wider community
- 2. A positive focus on what makes young people feel well and able to cope:** youth provision provides safe spaces in which young people can develop their social and emotional skills alongside access to emotional support and practical resources
- 3. Reduce health inequalities for those most in need:** youth provision is a mixture of targeted services for those identified (or self-identified) as requiring specific support, and open access services. Open access provision can provide a route to targeted support for young people who may be less likely to access it directly, for example, because of the perceived stigma attached to some targeted support

4. **Integrated services that meet young people's needs holistically and are centred on young people:** youth providers work closely with other partners in the community to offer the holistic support driven by the young person's own agenda
5. **Understanding young people's changing health needs as they develop:** youth provision is 'young-person centred', led by the needs and interests of those using the services. A core part of youth provision is co-producing services in partnership with young people in line with their changing needs.
6. **Accessing young-people-friendly services:** as outlined above, youth provision provides safe spaces designed with and for young people.

In summary, youth provision supports young people to develop emotional, social, and intellectual capabilities (McNeil, Millar, Fernandez, 2019) which, in the longer-term, are linked to the social building blocks of health such as good education, employment, and housing (The Health Foundation, 2018). Sections 4 and 5 demonstrate enablers of good youth provision and barriers that the youth sector is facing in supporting the future health of young people.



### 3. The context for youth provision in the UK

Responsibility for youth provision at the national level lies with the Education Departments of the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England, the Department for Digital, Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS) has responsibility for youth policy within the Westminster government. As a result, the context for youth provision differs considerably across the UK.

Across the UK, local authorities are expected to take leadership for ensuring that youth provision is available in their areas, often working with local and national partners. Alongside provision made directly available by local authorities, opportunities and support for young people have traditionally been offered by a wide range of voluntary organisations and charities, including that which is commissioned by local authorities and by grant funding and donations. These range from hyper-local groups to long-established national and international charities such as Scouting UK and YMCA. Faith groups also have a long history of youth provision.

Youth provision takes place in many different settings, from purpose-built youth hubs that are run through community centres and church halls, to mobile buses and direct work on the streets and in parks. Youth workers (and other similar roles) are increasingly found working in various public agencies' buildings, including hospitals, housing offices, schools, colleges, and multi-agency hubs such as Wellbeing Centres. The diverse nature of the youth sector brings challenges for the organisations that aim to provide co-ordination and support to the sector at national, regional, and local levels.

In recent years, a range of inquiries and reviews have been held across the youth sector in the UK, and corresponding strategies have been developed. The Scottish and Welsh Governments have both developed and implemented National Youth Work Strategies, which provide a focus on enhancing the quality of youth provision. Similarly, the Northern Ireland Assembly identified priorities for youth work and developed a Regional Youth Development Plan. In England, the Local Government Association (LGA) produced a strategy for young people's services, an APPG Inquiry into Youth Work has been held, and discussions have begun on creating a cross-departmental Youth Charter. Further information about the context for youth provision within each of the countries of the UK is presented in appendices A to D.

#### 3.1 Youth Provision: Current provision and trends in the UK

Presenting a clear picture of youth provision in the UK is challenging due to a lack of available and comparable data, and variation in provision both within and across countries. This section draws together what is currently known about funding, staffing, and levels of youth provision across the different countries of the UK, and reflects the amount of information available about youth provision in each country.

#### England

Youth provision in England has been particularly hard hit by reductions in local authority spending. The figures presented below draw primarily on a 2019 APPG Inquiry by the National

Youth Agency, but the cuts have been further supported by various other analyses such as recent research by the YMCA (2019), the Labour Party (2019), and the House of Commons (2019)

- In 2011/12, top tier local authorities in England spent £788 million on services for young people, of which 55.5% was on universal services. By 2018/19, the total spend had dropped to £332 million, of which 43.4% goes to universal services (National Youth Agency, 2019).
- Over the same period, the spend per head for 11-19 year olds dropped from £136 to £65 (National Youth Agency, 2019).
- Significantly, the decline in spending on universal services has been even steeper in rural areas than in urban areas. Rural authorities have traditionally spent less overall on open-access youth services, and dropped from 48.2% of total net spend in 2011/12 to 34.5% in 2017/18 (National Youth Agency, 2019).
- Urban authorities on the other hand show a decline from 59% of total net spend on open access services to 49%. Given that rural areas are known to have fewer alternative private or independent opportunities for young people than urban areas, and that public transport in rural areas is considerably sparser, it is likely that the position of young people in rural areas is particularly adversely affected (National Youth Agency, 2019).
- Whilst there are no official statistics on the current make-up of the youth sector workforce across the UK, UK Youth's *State of the Membership (2018)* report offers an insight into the workforce in England. They report that the youth sector has seen an increase in provision from the voluntary sector in the wake of cuts to statutory provision. Based on their membership data, they find that for every full-time paid member of staff there are two volunteers (within the 16,000 individuals in UK Youth's direct membership workforce).
- The increase in volunteers delivering youth services tallies with reports of significant job losses in the sector. Unison reported that approximately 3660 youth work jobs were lost between 2012 - 2016 (Unison, 2019).

Further evidence submitted to the recent APPG Inquiry into Youth Work (National Youth Agency, 2019) also highlighted a reduction in youth services across England. Key concerns included:

- A large overall reduction in youth work, with much regional variation both in terms of the scale of cuts and the remaining provision. This is because local authorities are having to balance ever-tightening budgets, with youth services having no clear statutory protection
- The voluntary and community sectors extending their role to fill some of the gaps left by the loss of local authority services
- A strong trend moving away from open-access youth provision
- A loss of qualified and experienced youth workers
- Increasing reliance on short-term funding, sometimes limited in focus.

### **Central government**

Central government have created funding streams to support the delivery of its youth strategy in England. In contrast to the cuts at a Local Authority level, this funding has increased from an annual allocation of £128,070,000 in 2014/15 to £191,000,000 in 2017/18. In 2017/18 this funding was spent as follows (House of Commons, 2019):

- £180.5 million on National Citizen Service (NCS)
- £5 million on the #iwill Fund
- £5 million on the Youth Investment Fund
- £250,000 on the British Youth Council's Youth Voice programme
- £250,000 to the Centre for Youth Impact

The most significant beneficiary of central government funding is the National Citizen Service, on which the government spent £634 million between 2014/15 - 2017/18, with a continued commitment increasing to £1.2 billion. This programme has accounted for around 95% of central government investment in youth provision since 2014.

In September 2019, the Government pledged funds of £500 million over five years for a new Youth Investment Fund. The investment is intended to build new youth centres, refurbish existing facilities and provide mobile facilities. The funds will also contribute to youth provision and an investment in the youth workforce.

## Wales

- Between 2011/12 - 2017/18, expenditure on youth services fell by 34% in real terms (House of Commons, 2019). In cash value, spending reduced from £44 million (£48 million in real terms) to £32 million over this time period
- An inquiry into youth work found that Welsh local authorities had lost 25% of their funding for youth work between 2012 - 2016, resulting in closures of youth provision and the loss of 148 full-time professional youth work jobs in 2015/16 alone. The inquiry also found that 30% of voluntary youth organisations did not believe they would survive beyond the next financial year (Children Young People and Education Committee, 2016).

## Scotland

Overall, spending by Scottish councils reduced by 11% in real terms from 2010-2016, which has led to some local youth work service facing cuts (Youthlink Scotland, 2017). Hall Aitken (2016) estimated that in Scotland in 2015:

- Approximately £40 million was spent on youth services by Local Authorities
- There were 3,850 paid staff in voluntary organisations – with 2,000 estimated FTE and an average salary and employment cost of £25,000, equating to a total of £50 million
- A total spend therefore of £90 million
- Over 75,000 volunteers, delivering over 13 million volunteering hours a year.

Furthermore, 83% of Scottish youth workers have stated that they suffered “cuts or severe cuts” over the last five years, which can be associated with the reduction in spending power of local authorities in Scotland (UNISON Scotland, 2016).

## Northern Ireland

A recent Funding Watch survey for the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (Nicva, 2017) revealed that, of the VCS organisations surveyed (which included but were not exclusively youth organisations), 88% had received cuts or were at risk of funding cuts. Almost one in 10 also reported that funding cuts for the next financial year had already been confirmed, while 52% estimated that between one in five jobs were at risk. A 2017 review by the Education Authority reported:

- Approximately 140,000 memberships were registered across the Youth Service in 16/17. This equates to over 30% of young people
- There were over 1,600 registered youth service providers staffed by a workforce of 20,881 and over 90% of the workforce were volunteers.



## 4. Enablers of good youth provision

### 4.1 National Occupational Standards

Across the UK, the youth work profession operates within a set of National Occupational Standards (NOS), initially developed in 2008 and updated in 2014, with a further review ongoing at the time of writing (National Youth Agency, 2014). The NOS describes the key 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”.*

The NOS identifies five aspects of youth work in which youth workers should be competent, each of which has a set of standards of expected practice attached to them. These aspects are:

- Work with young people and others
- Facilitate the personal, social, and educational development of young people
- Promote inclusion, equity, and young people’s interests and wellbeing
- Develop youth work strategy and practice
- Develop, lead, and manage self and others.

The NOS also includes the values and principles that underpin youth work as:

- Participation and active involvement
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Partnership with young people and others
- Personal, social, and political development.

Good practice within the UK should be based on these standards, and most quality assurance frameworks in the sector take them as their starting point. These standards also underpin qualifications in youth work at all levels.

### 4.2 Features of ‘good’ provision

Alongside the core principles outlined in Section 4.1, research and practice experience has fairly consistently highlighted features of ‘good’ youth provision as experienced by young people, which were often cited in our roundtable discussions. These are outlined below.

#### Young people-centred

Work with young people starts ‘where they’re at’, focused on their personal and social development needs. Young people set the agenda, and the provision is needs- and interest-led. It is an asset-based approach that helps young people develop their key skills and understanding within the context of their lives. Young people who attended our roundtable described how services need to be delivered ‘with, and not to,’ them to be truly young-person centred.

#### Relationships

At its heart, youth provision helps young people develop healthy relationships, with their peers, their communities, and with themselves (Knott, 2018). It provides opportunities for young people to develop social networks, communications skills, cooperation, and understanding. It helps

young people to develop an understanding of the importance of healthy relationships and how to identify those that are harmful or potentially harmful. Its primary purpose is to build trusting relationships with young people through which they can develop and grow. Young people who attended our roundtable described how, for them, youth provision has a strong link with emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

### Trusted adults

Youth provision offers young people an opportunity to build relationships with trusted adults. For many young people, this is valuable for providing ‘someone to talk to outside of the family’, and for others it may be the only significant adult they have in their lives. This relationship offers young people the opportunity to feel safe and respected, to explore issues that are important to them, to receive help and guidance with regards to their future lives, and to have a positive role model. The APPG Inquiry found that, whilst many young people are able to navigate their youth and the transition to adulthood by themselves and with the support of family, friends and their school or college, for many others, local youth services play a critical role (National Youth Agency, 2019). A theme to come out of the roundtable with young people was that, for young people who do not get support from their families, there ‘are not many other options’ and the support they receive from trusted adults at youth provision fills a unique and important need.

### Co-production

Youth organisations and practitioners work in partnership with young people in the design and delivery of provision. Young people help set the agenda, the design features, and the framework for delivery, ensuring provision remains responsive to their needs. Successful youth provision frequently leads to young people developing their knowledge and confidence in considering key issues that affect their lives, and finding ways in which they can influence local and national policies and decisions that affect them. Youth workers support young people to establish ways of having a voice locally – through youth forums, local youth parliaments and specific issue groups. Young people who attended our roundtable discussion highlighted the importance of hearing voices that can often be missed in the coproduction process e.g. people from the LGBTQ community or refugees.

Youth projects can enable young people to express their views consistently and coherently and build relationships with key decision makers in local areas and beyond. ‘Good’ youth projects understand the need to build partnerships and alliances with others with similar views and agendas, and work hard to involve young people in such partnerships. This can often mean engaging with local and national politicians. Examples of where young people have made a difference to policy and its implementation abound, including the Youth Select Committee (facilitated by British Youth Council and UK Youth Parliament) which has produced important reports on issues from young people’s mental health (British Youth Council, 2015) to young people’s access to public transport (British Youth Council, 2012). These forums benefit not just the young people who engage directly, who generally gain hugely in terms of development of confidence and communication skills, but also wider groups of young people whose lives are affected by the issues they campaign on, and outcomes they achieve.

Good youth work will also encourage and facilitate co-production with young people as designers and creators of provision rather than simply consumers of services. There are many good examples of young people taking on leadership and organisational roles in their youth projects,

and being supported to undertake peer-research and evaluation. Many youth organisations have a strong track record of supporting peer-assessors and inspectors of provision. [Youth Focus North West](#)<sup>1</sup> provides an excellent example of engaging young people in the development of provision.

### Outcomes-focused

Youth provision has a focus on young people's personal and social development needs/outcomes (McNeil, Millar, Fernandez, 2019). For some youth provision, this is represented by pre-defined outcomes relating to young people's health and development; for others, it is embodied through providing a safe and welcoming space in which young people can explore different aspects of their lives and themselves. Although approaches vary across different types of provision, there is a core focus on working with young people to develop key assets for a healthy life. In our roundtable with young people, a prominent theme was that youth work '*catches the people falling through the gaps*' at early stages of their lives and helps them to develop their understanding, knowledge, and behaviours for their pathway into healthy adulthood.

### Safe environments

Youth provision offers safe, welcoming, and challenging spaces for young people to develop their social and emotional learning, along with new and creative learning experiences outside of school life. Youth provision is important for providing a space where young people can be away from families, but while their parents can trust that they are safe. Young people can then work with their peers to build confidence and 'skills for life'. The importance of such an environment can be seen from the 'Safer Lives Survey', an interim report from Youth Violence Commission (2018), which asked: 'If there was one thing you could change that you think would make young people safer, what would it be?'. Of the 2,200 young people who responded, 'the provision of more youth centres, sports clubs and other youth activities in their local areas' was selected as the most popular option. A theme that emerged from the roundtable with young people was that young people feel they are left with 'nowhere to go' due to the closing of youth centres, and without positive activities to engage in, young people are more likely to 'do dangerous things'. Equally, they highlighted that youth provision offers a 'non-discriminatory space' where young people are able to be themselves and where their needs are understood.

### Community-based

Most youth provision takes place in community settings. It takes account of young people's lives and the communities of which they are a part. It recognises the key impact communities have on the development of young people's behaviours and lives, providing opportunities for young people to engage proactively with their communities. This enables young people to become active citizens in the places they live and to help create safe, healthy communities around them. This focus on community has formed a key part of the [#iwill Campaign](#)<sup>2</sup>, which is supported by over 1,000 organisations from across the UK and aims to make participation in social action the norm for young people aged 10 to 20. Practically, being based in community settings means that young people can easily access provision. Young people who participated in our roundtable described how, in some areas, provision had moved into city centres meaning that the cost of travel prevented some from taking part.

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<sup>1</sup> Youth Focus North West Website, 'Youthforia'. [www.youthfocusnw.org.uk/what-we-do/youthforia/](http://www.youthfocusnw.org.uk/what-we-do/youthforia/)

<sup>2</sup> #iwill Campaign Website, 'About #iwill'. <https://www.iwill.org.uk/about-us/about-iwill-campaign>



### **Partnership, collaboration, and collective approaches**

Youth organisations work closely with other partners in community settings, developing shared intelligence and bringing services together around the holistic needs of young people. These partnerships develop a shared approach to helping young people access provision designed to meet their needs, creating a safety net for all young people to not ‘fall through the gaps’. The reports on child sexual abuse scandals in Rotherham, Rochdale and other towns and cities (Jay, 2014) highlight the worst-case scenario of when youth work projects are not fully integrated into community settings. In contrast, Glasgow’s improving employment figures in young people have been attributed to a new approach that emphasises “improving the entire ecology of interventions available and joining these up” (OECD, 2013).

### **Balancing universal with more targeted support**

Youth provision is particularly powerful in its ability to create spaces for open, universal provision alongside opportunities for more targeted and specialist support. A social determinants of health model recognises the inter-relationship between the assets for health and wellbeing and other domains of young people’s lives. Many young people will only seek support for health and wellbeing in the context of more open provision, and it is often the case that practitioners are able to identify and approach young people in need of more support as a result of building trusting relationships. Furthermore, both stakeholders and young people who attended our roundtable discussions highlighted the foundational nature of open access provision, with young people describing it as ‘where we get our help.’

### **Evaluation and learning**

Youth provision is largely unregulated, and the quality of provision can vary considerably. Good youth provision should have a focus on evaluation and continuous improvement. Monitoring and evaluation helps youth organisations to learn about the change that is created through their work, and why and how it happens. This can be framed by six questions (Centre for Youth Impact, 2018):

1. What do you do and why do you do it?
2. What exactly are you doing?
3. Are you doing it consistently well?
4. Are you true to your premises?
5. What do young people think about what you do?
6. Are you achieving your aims?

The Centre for Youth Impact is currently piloting the Youth Programme Quality Intervention (YPQI), developed by the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, and designed and tested in the USA as a way of assessing and improving the quality of youth programmes (addressing question three above). Through extensive research, use of the YPQI has been shown to improve outcomes for young people, to create a sustainable and supportive culture of organisational reflection and improvement, and to refocus evaluation on the quality of relationships and settings. The YPQI digs deeply into the quality of relationships between staff and young people, and how these relationships are used to create environments that support young people to develop crucial skills, confidence, and experience that lead to positive outcomes across the different areas of their lives.

Young people who participated in our roundtable described how '*stats*' should be used to demonstrate value and impact, to allocate funding and to tailor provision. They also felt that services should be accountable for demonstrating their impact.

## 5. Barriers to achieving good youth provision

### 5.1 Lack of local and national leadership

Wales and Scotland have retained country-wide sector leadership through national organisations, and have developed partnership approaches to leading youth services that involve local authorities, voluntary organisations and national government. Northern Ireland and England, however, have seen distinct declines in national leadership, with an impact on leadership arrangements at a local level. In Northern Ireland, this is in large part a result of the current stasis with the NI Assembly, and is likely to be resolved when that Assembly can resume. The larger scale of England, combined with the much more significant budget reductions for local authorities in the past decade, mean that in many parts of the country there is no leadership strategy for the youth sector. This contributes to, and potentially worsens, the impact of funding reductions and fragmentation.

Central government funding has been withdrawn from national youth organisations in England that provide leadership for the sector over the past decade (at the time of writing there is some evidence that DCMS is beginning to reverse this trend, by working with partners on the [development of an England-wide Youth Charter](#)<sup>3</sup>). As a result, those organisations have been less able to provide credible guidance to local authorities and other sector providers. Governments since 2010 have reduced the importance of regional coordination for the youth sector through removing bodies such as Government Offices for the regions, breaking links between local provision and civil servants, and making it harder for positive development in one area to have an impact on overall strategic direction.

Local authorities have also seen significant resource reductions and in many cases have lost the senior officer posts that previously provided leadership for the local youth sector. As a result, the potential role of the youth sector in contributing to partnership approaches, which worked well in multi-agency strategies for combatting drugs and alcohol misuse and teenage pregnancies in previous decades, has been lost in many parts of the country.

There are examples of local authorities in England leading more strategic approaches to the provision of youth work, engaging statutory agencies, young people, and local delivery partners to agree key priorities and build approaches to provision that draw in resources from a range of sources (e.g. Bristol, Tower Hamlets), and these examples could be built on across the country. There is also potential for England to learn from recent developments in Wales of a nation-wide youth work strategy.

### 5.2 Defining the ‘Youth Offer’

Across the UK there is little consistency in determining what a ‘sufficient’ offer to young people should contain. The Welsh Government has begun a process of defining this, and in England DCMS

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<sup>3</sup> UK Government Press Release, ‘New Youth Charter to support young people across the country’.  
[www.gov.uk/government/news/new-youth-charter-to-support-young-people-across-the-country](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-youth-charter-to-support-young-people-across-the-country)

has launched a [review of the statutory guidance to local authorities](#)<sup>4</sup>. Clearer definitions of what is deemed to be appropriate as an offer to young people, in terms of meeting their demands for ‘somewhere to go, something to do and someone to listen’ could help reverse the decline in prioritising youth services and associated funding for provision. It would also enable young people and local communities to hold local authorities and government to account if the offer in their area falls below levels recommended in statutory guidance.

### 5.3 The impact of reduced funding

As referenced in Section 3.1, there is a challenging landscape across the UK when it comes to funding for youth provision. The reduction in funding has led to an increased focus on provision for young people most in need of support, and a move away from open access provision. Infrastructure organisations have been lost (see Section 5.6), funding is increasingly competitive, and the workforce is depleted (see Section 5.4). Young people who participated in our roundtable felt strongly that cuts have had a significant impact on youth provision. They described a ‘domino effect’ of youth centres being shut down leaving young people with nowhere to go. They explained how turnover of staff can negatively impact relationship building and that young people become disengaged when provision is cut.

### 5.4 Workforce challenges

#### Lack of workforce data

Gathering workforce information for the youth sector has always been challenging, due to the distributed nature of the workforce across thousands of voluntary organisations and local authorities. However, there is now a serious lack of reliable workforce (paid and voluntary) information, with current numbers of people working in the youth sector across the UK largely unknown, though Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are better able to make informed estimates. In England, between 1999 and 2009, central government commissioned the National Youth Agency to conduct an annual audit of youth work in local authorities, but this was not continued from 2010. The Welsh Government currently commissions an annual survey of youth work posts in local authorities. The Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for Youth & Community Workers, the body which determines pay and conditions in the sector in England and Wales, conducts a biennial survey of employers using JNC conditions, (mainly local authorities) and this shows a continued and serious decline in full-time professional youth work posts.

Reports from YMCA England, UK Youth and UNISON have provided snapshots of parts of the youth sector. The National Youth Agency publishes an Annual Monitoring Report on the provision of professional youth work qualifications in Higher Education. Our investigation of workforce issues also draws on descriptions of local recruitment issues shared with the NYA’s Education Training Standards Committee, and its counterparts in the other devolved administrations.

#### Impact of cuts on the workforce

It is clear that reductions in funding have severely depleted the workforce (Unison, 2019; UK Youth, 2018). Interestingly, ongoing challenges in recruiting to available roles suggest that

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<sup>4</sup> UK Government News Story, ‘Review launched into statutory guidance for Local Authorities on providing youth services’. [www.gov.uk/government/news/review-launched-into-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-providing-youth-services](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/review-launched-into-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-providing-youth-services)

practitioners whose posts were lost through cutbacks are reluctant to return to the youth work sector (National Youth Agency, 2019). In addition, the youth sector is currently struggling to meet the training and development needs for a workforce that is fragmented in thousands of small-scale projects, and in many cases is working on a voluntary or part-time basis. Furthermore, the sector faces a challenge in ensuring consistent, high quality provision with a depleted qualified workforce and an increased reliance on volunteers. Whilst there is some cause for optimism – the new Youth Work Induction Checklist in Scotland for example, or the National Youth Agency’s focus in England on strengthening professional development pathways – it is likely to take many years to reverse the decline of the workforce.

### 5.5 Changing demands

The basic demand for ‘somewhere to go, something to do, and someone to talk to’ has been a consistent feature of local and national consultations with young people over many decades. The nature of what that looks like, where it is located, and what young people want to do, however, will vary from one young person to another and will be affected by other local amenities, transport, accessibility, and other features of the local context. Also, as socio-economic and geopolitical influences shift, youth provision needs to be able to respond to these changes and their effects on the lives of young people. Two particular areas demonstrate how a failure to keep up with the pace of change can create barriers to ‘good’ youth provision:

- **Buildings are not always ideal for the activities and programmes they contain:** often they are shared use, so it is difficult for young people to truly make them their own. Space can be limited, or not designed for the activities young people want, and making changes takes time and resources. Even ‘purpose-built’ youth spaces were often designed many years ago, based on the needs of a group of young people who have now moved on and been replaced by others with different needs and desires.
- **A lack of knowledge of investment and of digital opportunities has meant there has been very little development of a digital youth offer:** there are few youth organisations that have developed a significant online offer - beyond using social media - as a way to communicate with young people and other stakeholders. Better resourced youth sectors, in other countries, have put more design creativity into how to use digital opportunities as a way of engaging young people on a regular basis. Finland, for example, has a national [Digital Youth Work Centre](#)<sup>5</sup> which has worked with young people to design and operate a digital youth club along with wider facilities.

### 5.6 Fragmentation

In England particularly, the loss of local and regional infrastructure organisations in many areas, such as Councils for Voluntary Youth Service and Regional Youth Work Units, has led to a decline in support for youth sector organisations. The impact of this loss of support is still emerging on issues such as developing policy frameworks, governance arrangements, innovative forms of practice, quality assurance, and impact evaluation. The demise of infrastructure support organisations has coincided with increasing fragmentation of delivery, with isolated youth

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<sup>5</sup> Verke, The National Centre of Expertise for Digital Youth Work in Finland. [www.verke.org/verke/?lang=en](http://www.verke.org/verke/?lang=en)

workers based in organisations with very different overall remits. This disconnect makes it more difficult for practitioners and managers to identify and access sources of support. This fragmentation has also meant that those involved in working with young people are not at the table when *local* policies and strategies are developed and implemented, meaning valuable opportunities for youth work to contribute to the work of statutory agencies (e.g. through social prescribing) may be missed. Finally, infrastructure organisations rely on income from paying member organisations, but many have such tight budgets now that paying membership fees is no longer possible. Consequently, there are concerns about a potential further decline in the support available to the sector.

The APPG Inquiry into Youth Work highlighted the impact of this fragmentation on young people: there was common recognition that “investment in infrastructure is needed to support youth work in a range of organisations including voluntary sector bodies, housing associations, and community groups, to help ‘join up’ and distribute services”. In line with this, young people told us they do not know how to find youth provision in their area. Such provision is rarely well-advertised, and often takes place in buildings that are not badged as youth provision, and which may not be ‘young people-friendly’ on the outside. Word of mouth tends to be the main way of promoting youth facilities, and while this can be effective, it can also put some young people off, as they may feel intimidated by the particular group of young people who currently use the provision. Young people described how ‘who you know’ (and what services they know about) is a significant factor in accessing provision. Attempts have been made to provide up to date online directories of youth provision in some local authority areas in England, some of which also sought to give information about the quality and safety of the provision. However, few of these initiatives have survived successive rounds of budget cuts and lack of awareness of provision amongst young people remains a significant challenge.

The APPG Inquiry also argued that if youth work and services are to secure investment, “there needs to be a greater understanding of their role and impact, to provide much-needed clarity for policy makers, funders, practitioners, and young people” (National Youth Agency, 2019). Supporting young people to build the assets needed to support health and wellbeing calls for support and services to be joined up across localities and sectors, and for provision to take a long-term, consistent approach. The fragmentation of both infrastructure and provision is a direct threat here.



## 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings presented in this working paper, we make the following recommendations for what is needed for the youth sector to best support young people in building assets for a healthy life.

### 1. **Develop a high-level government strategy that recognises the important role of youth provision in enabling young people to build assets for a healthy life**

Most policy areas affect young people, and therefore, youth policy should be embedded across all government departments. We support the creation of a Youth Charter in all nations of the UK, that brings the needs of young people into the foreground and holds decision makers to account (in development in England at the time of writing: Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, 2019). Young people's lives are affected by a complex range of services and interactions and we recommend that any analysis of these takes a systems approach to better understand the complexities and dependencies that exist within them, and their implications for young people. An approach to supporting the long-term health of young people requires the following, which should be factored into the development of Youth Charters:

- Support for all young people to thrive, not just a focus on those most 'at risk'
- Long-term commitment to building and maintaining services for young people
- A significant focus on prevention, including an understanding of the complex social determinants of health and the valuable role of youth provision in improving these
- A joined up, cross-departmental approach to understanding the healthy development of young people.

### 2. **Increase accountability for youth provision at a local level**

Firstly, we recommend clearer guidance about what constitutes a 'sufficient' local offer to young people. Consultation is about to begin on this in England and has already taken place in Wales. Secondly, delivery of a sufficient offer requires effective local strategic leadership for youth provision with clear responsibilities across statutory and voluntary sector providers. This requires reinstatement of the senior officer posts that previously provided leadership for the youth sector and enabled multi-agency approaches to supporting and engaging young people.

Young people are keen to understand and influence how funding is spent. They expressed a desire for transparency and accountability related to investment in youth services. We recommend a definition of 'accountability' that is not about 'proving' that something works, but rather a responsible focus on learning and development cycles that promote good practice (see recommendation 8).

### 3. **Support the (re)development of infrastructure that connects policy and research with local decision making and practice**

Interconnected local, regional and national infrastructure is needed across all four countries of the UK to inform, support and improve quality youth provision, and maintain dialogue with and influence on research and policy. This should focus on building understanding and consensus around the importance of effective support for young people across a range of

policy areas. It is particularly important that infrastructure is strengthened or re-ignited in weakened areas or ‘cold spots’ of youth provision across England.

#### **4. Actively engage young people in development of youth provision locally and nationally**

A statement that clearly struck a chord with young people during our roundtable was that, for young people to genuinely be part of decision-making, adults need to ‘give up some of the power’. Whilst there is recognition that being youth-led is a hallmark of good youth work, there is scope for improvement in the wider system of support. For example, young people told us they wanted to see more active engagement of young people in the development of youth provision including policy development, service design and commissioning, both locally and nationally. Proposed mechanisms for increased engagement included participatory budgeting and engaging young people in the commissioning process. Models could be built on existing good practice, for example, British Youth Council Youth Select Committees and the Greater Manchester Shadow Youth Board.

#### **5. Reverse the trend of funding reduction and reinvest in youth work services**

There is a clear pattern of funding cuts across the youth sector. Greater investment is needed if the sector is to meet the needs of young people in the longer-term. Stakeholders in our roundtable discussion described how youth provision provides the foundation of support for young people and cannot be replaced by programmatic funding. Reversing funding cuts is especially important for neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation, and areas of rural isolation, where young people are less likely to have access to the assets that support development of the building blocks of health: emotional support, financial and practical support, personal connections, and skills and qualifications.

#### **6. Improve the balance of open access provision and targeted services**

Open access provision has been disproportionately hit by spending cuts yet is a crucial part of the system of services for young people. It allows youth workers to build relationships over a longer period of time; lets young people engage voluntarily on their own terms; is not stigmatised; and can tackle potential issues ‘upstream’ before they have a negative impact.

Open access provision also contributes to the breadth and variety of assets needed to support a healthy transition into adulthood. Young people also described the importance of getting help before they reach crisis point, particularly for those who do not reach identified thresholds for more intensive targeted support. They described open access provision as a route into the wider system of support.

#### **7. Invest in a professional youth sector workforce**

Young people highlighted the importance of staff training, specifically noting the significance of values and principles. They recognised the value of skilled professionals and described how training and development builds better relationships and high-quality services. Significant numbers of qualified youth workers have been lost over recent years, yet young people have the right to expect that the adults supporting them are trained to do so. This requires a rebuilding of the workforce, alongside support and training for volunteers, all of which is essential for protecting the future health of young people. Government investment in workforce research and the infrastructure for effective workforce development for the youth sector is patchy across the UK, and UK-wide agreement on levels of investment would be beneficial.





## 8. Improve promotion and marketing of youth services

A strong theme emerging from our roundtable with young people was the need for better promotion of youth services. Young people described how it is difficult to know what is available if you are not already engaged with youth provision. Ideas to increase awareness of available youth services included:

- Having youth workers visit schools or services to build relationships with young people
- Mapping service level provision and making it available on a dedicated website with a young person in each area available to provide online support
- Sharing information about available services through social media.

## 9. Support effective learning and quality improvement within and across youth provision

Whilst it is clear that youth provision plays an active role in developing the building blocks of health, the quality and effectiveness of youth provision is variable. We recommend investment in the sectors capacity to:

- Learn about how they create impact;
- Critically and continuously learn about the quality of their work; and
- Routinely apply this learning to practice.

Furthermore, sharing learning across the sector, for example through evaluation of programmes such as the Youth Investment Fund and the YPQI pilot, will add to knowledge about the features of ‘good’ youth provision (both organisational and practice based). Improving the comparability of data through shared measurement approaches will enable improved learning at a sector level. Additionally, sector level data collection, including mapping of provision and the workforce, should be reinstated and maintained where good practice is already happening (e.g. in Northern Ireland). Stakeholders who attended our roundtable proposed the development of a community of staff, locally and nationally, to improve data collection and the use of data.

Young people described the need for a modern sector that fits with how their lives are now, which includes digital platforms, linked to face to face provision, as part of a relevant offer to young people. They believe this should build on the strong foundations that are in place (e.g. the good practice outlined in Section 4) but should be based on continuous learning and engagement with young people rather than relying on old models.



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## APPENDIX A: Context for youth provision in England

### Leadership and responsibility for youth provision

In England, since 2016, government departmental responsibility for youth policy lies with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). DCMS convenes a youth policy advisory group composed of individuals representing organisations with a national or regional voice in delivering youth provision, as well as supporting provider organisations, with advice on policy and practice, workforce development, and young people's voice and influence. Key national organisations including National Youth Agency (NYA), which takes a lead on youth policy and workforce development for the sector, the Centre for Youth Impact, the British Youth Council, uniformed youth organisations such as Scouts, and UK Youth are all key players in this forum. These organisations play important roles in lobbying and campaigning for a higher profile for youth provision in government thinking and policy/strategy development. A recent focus has been the impact of knife crime on young people, which has led to cross-departmental engagement with the youth sector, and the possibility of a government-backed Youth Charter to bring young people back into focus for policy development. These discussions are ongoing at the time of writing.

Local authorities in England have a statutory responsibility to “secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient provision of educational and recreational leisure-time activities for young people” and to make sure young people have a say in the local offer. This is often referred to as the 'youth services duty' (Section 507 B, Education Act 1996). However, local authorities acknowledge that they face real challenges in meeting the requirements of this duty due to the substantial funding reductions they have seen (LGA 'Must Know for Youth Services', 2019). The Government's 'Civil Society Strategy' (DCMS 2018) announced the intention to update the statutory duty, with a view to clarifying the definition of 'sufficiency' in the wording of the clause, and we understand that work is ongoing within DCMS to develop and consult on a revised version.

DCMS is currently co-funding the delivery and evaluation of the Youth Investment Fund, testing the impact of open-access youth provision in six targeted areas across England, and providing funding for initiatives to engage young people more fully in policy development and assessment of agencies that impact on their lives.

### Funding for youth provision

The impact of austerity budgets on youth provision in England is dramatic. Youth provision in England has been particularly hard hit by budget reductions in local authorities. Cuts of more than 60% to local authority youth sector funding since 2012 (Unison 2019) have led many local authorities to cease all their direct open access provision for young people and focus only on targeted support for young people with complex needs. It is now unusual to find a local authority which retains a fully-functioning in-house youth service, and thousands of professional youth work posts have been lost as a result.

The recent All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into Youth Work (April 2019) provided further analysis to show the extent to which funding for open access youth provision has reduced. In 2011/12 top tier local authorities in England spent £788 million on Services for Young People, of which 55.5% was on 'universal' services. By 2018/19 the total spend had dropped to £332 million,

of which 43.4% goes to 'universal' services. Over the same period, the spend per head for 11-19 year olds dropped from £136 to £65.

The evidence produced for the APPG Inquiry, drawing on local authorities' Section 251 returns, also indicates that the decline in spending on universal services has been even steeper in rural areas than in urban areas. Rural authorities have traditionally spent less overall on open-access youth services, and dropped from 48.2% of total net spend in 2011/12 to 34.5% in 2017/18, while urban authorities show a decline from 59% of total net spend to 49%. Given that rural areas are known to have fewer alternative private or independent opportunities for young people than urban areas, and that public transport in rural areas is considerably sparser, it is likely that the position of young people in rural areas is particularly adversely affected.

### **Funding from central government**

Central government for England reduced or ended many of its funding streams to support the youth sector as austerity policies were implemented from 2011 onwards. Infrastructure support for national bodies and membership organisations were substantially reduced or cut altogether, leaving the sector with fewer national leaders to lobby government, and considerably fewer resources available for sector support, including workforce development and training. In England, several national support organisations have either ceased to exist or have merged with others, leaving a considerably reduced offer to the field in terms of support services, quality assurance, and workforce development.

Central government in England does provide a small number of tapering grants to specific national organisations for specific purposes including the Centre for Youth Impact and the British Youth Council (BYC) to convene initiatives such as the UK Youth Parliament as a means for young people's voices to inform policy. It also joint-funds the Youth Investment Fund and the #iwill Fund, to encourage young people into social action and volunteering. Dormant assets funding has established the new Youth Futures Foundation, with a focus on youth unemployment, and Home Office is supporting the £200 million Youth Endowment Fund to address serious youth violence.

### **National Citizen Service**

The most significant beneficiary of government funding is the National Citizen's Service (NCS), on which the government spent £634m between 2014/15 and 2017/18, with a continued commitment increasing to £1.2 billion. This programme has accounted for around 95% of government investment in youth provision since 2014.

NCS was adopted as a flagship project under David Cameron's premiership, as an intensive programme to encourage young people to get involved in social action in communities. It is designed as a short term 3/4-week programme during which teams of young people aged 16 to 17 take part in a week long residential experience, usually based around outdoor activities and challenges. This is followed by a further residential experience closer to home in which the team is introduced to the concept of social action and design and plan a social action project which they then carry out together in the following two weeks. Initially designed to take place in the summer holiday at the end of Year 11, there are now options to undertake a shorter version in Autumn and Spring. The ambition is that all young people will be able to complete NCS as they transition from secondary school to Sixth Form, college or employment, and that as a result, young people will be more likely to engage in volunteering and social action as they move to adulthood.

The Government established the NCS Trust as an independent body to manage the programme, and protected it in legislation through an Act of Parliament in 2017. The NCS Trust currently has contracts with regional partners who co-ordinate delivery in each area of England, using a range of local partners to actually deliver the programme. Local delivery partners include youth work organisations, football clubs, colleges, and some organisations that were created for the purpose of running NCS. NCS providers have ambitious targets for recruitment of young people (with a target of 101,000 across England in 2018) though it has been challenging to meet the targets set so far. While evaluation reports have shown that the majority of young people who complete NCS feel positive about their experience, it has proved more difficult to assess whether the investment in NCS is making a difference in its longer term aims.

NCS is viewed as controversial amongst the wider youth sector in England. While some youth sector providers are involved in the delivery of NCS and recognise it as a positive programme for young people, no discussion of youth policy takes place without noting the disparity in the significant additional resourcing for this short term intensive programme alongside the systematic decline in funding for long term community-based youth work. The LGA has recently become more vocal in its own critique of the NCS model, arguing that a proportion of funding for the programme should be directed to local authorities to support longer term provision for young people<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-national-citizen-service-funding-should-be-devolved-local-youth-services>

## APPENDIX B: Context for youth provision in Northern Ireland

### Leadership and responsibility for youth work

Policy leadership of the youth sector in Northern Ireland sits with the Department of Education (DE). DE invests in youth work to support and encourages children and young people as they mature and reach their potential as valued individuals and responsible citizens. Its responsibilities include policy development, governance, and accountability for the Education Authority Youth Service, and governance and accountability for the Youth Council of Northern Ireland (YCNI), an 'arms-length' advisory body of the DE, providing leadership and independent advice on youth work. However, at present YCNI is not able to operate, as its members' terms of office ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, and in the absence of a Minister for Education in the Northern Ireland Assembly, new members cannot be appointed.

There is a statutory basis for youth services in Northern Ireland, enshrined in the Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, which sets out the responsibilities of government, establishes the role of YCNI, and enables the government to make grants and arrange training facilities for the youth service workforce. Youth work organisations in Northern Ireland are inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

In 2013, the NI Assembly produced 'Priorities for Youth – Improving Young People's Lives through Youth Work', which recognised the contribution youth work makes to young people's wider development and identified key priorities for young people across Northern Ireland as:

- Raising standards for all
- Closing the performance gap – increasing access and equality
- Developing the non-formal education workforce
- Improving the non-formal learning environment
- Transforming governance and management of non-formal education.

Each of these priorities had a set of practical actions, many of which have been implemented since Priorities for Youth was launched. The 'Regional Youth Development Plan 2017-2020', based on a regional assessment of needs across NI, sets out the current actions and accountability measures to ensure that youth provision is equipped to support young people to achieve the best they can.

### Features of youth provision in Northern Ireland

Youth services, as elsewhere in the UK, are provided by a mix of statutory (Education Authority) and voluntary organisations including uniformed groups. Unusually for the UK, in Northern Ireland, youth work includes work with young people from the age of 4 to 25. Youth work in Northern Ireland has traditionally been one of the few sites where young people from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds can mix and make friends across divides.

The DE has a more detailed knowledge and analysis of the nature and reach of provision than can be found in any of the other UK authorities, having commissioned a detailed statistical analysis in 2017. This showed that there are approximately 140,000 members across the Youth Service. There are over 1,600 registered youth service providers, the regular running of which is reliant on a workforce of 20,881, of whom over 90% are volunteers.

Uniformed organisations make up 57% of the total number of youth units and account for 37% of the young people who participate in youth service activities on a regular basis ([Education](#)



[Authority, 2017](#)). The statistical report provides rich data on reach across the age groups and in the composition of the local youth offer across Northern Ireland. It shows that a steady decline in the availability of youth centres and clubs since 2004 (2134 in 2004: 1632 in 2017) is having a knock-on effect in the decline of young people registering as members of individual registered youth organisations. Across the whole age range the 'reach' for the sector is just over 30% with a peak at 47.1% of 9-13 year olds, 31% of 14-18s, with a steep decline in participation for young people aged 19-25 years.

### **Outcomes and quality assurance**

In 2019, Education Authority introduced the 'Engagement Framework' for youth work, asking youth work organisations to determine the outcomes for young people by attributing them to one of four categories in the project:

- Contact
- Engagement
- Active participation
- Maximising potential.

EA wants this framework to be used across all youth work providers as a way of explaining the positive outcomes young people gain from engaging in youth work.

### **Workforce development**

Workforce development is a key part of 'Priorities for Youth' and the Regional Youth Development Plan. Northern Ireland co-operates with the Republic of Ireland through North/South Education Training Standards (NSETS) to validate professional youth work programmes both in NI and in the Republic. They are also part of the UK-wide Joint ETS, meaning that professional qualification programmes across Ireland are mutually recognised across the UK. Northern Ireland also uses the National Occupational Standards for youth work and has adapted Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications to train part-time and volunteer youth workers. The Statistical Analysis in 2017 identified a total youth work workforce of 20,881, comprised of 91.7% volunteers; paid part-time staff 5.6%; 2.8% full-time professionals.

### **How is youth work in Northern Ireland adapting to changing circumstances?**

Youth work in Northern Ireland has had more protection from the impact of austerity than in other parts of the UK, though the statistical analysis does show a steady decline in provision. The lack of an active Northern Ireland Assembly has provided some challenges, particularly in the inability to operate the YCNI, which is an important body for co-operation across the sector, and a forum for sector voices to be heard at policy level. At ground level, however, youth organisations appear to thrive in a policy and governance framework which recognises the importance of youth provision in young people's lives.

## APPENDIX C: Context for youth provision in Scotland

### Youth work as part of community learning and development

Youth work in Scotland has traditionally been strongly linked to a wider concept of community education, part of a policy strand that focuses on building communities through community development, adult education, and youth work. This focus is fundamental to professional formation for youth workers in Scotland, making very clear the informal educational nature of the work, and connecting strongly with local communities. It impacts on the ways in which youth work projects have developed across Scotland. As in other parts of the UK, youth work in Scotland is delivered by local authorities and a wide range of voluntary organisations.

### Leadership and responsibility for youth work

The Scottish Government, in partnership with Education Scotland, has overall responsibility for the development of youth work. Local leadership lies with local authorities. The national youth sector body, Youth Link Scotland, receives funding from Government and elsewhere, and both supports youth work practice on the ground and works with government and other policy makers to guide the sector by leading and developing policy and strategic frameworks. Scotland has had a Youth Work Strategy since 2007, the latest iteration running from 2014-2019, with key objectives:

- Ensure Scotland is the best place to be young and grow up in
- Put young people at the heart of policy
- Recognise the value of youth work
- Build workforce capacity
- Ensure we measure our impact.

Youth Link Scotland has recently (2018) published a set of youth work outcomes. These are:

- Young people are confident, resilient, and optimistic for the future
- Young people manage personal, social, and formal relationships
- Young people create, describe, and apply their learning and skills
- Young people participate safely and effectively in groups
- Young people consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control
- Young people express their voice and demonstrate social commitment
- Young people broaden their perspectives through new experiences and thinking.

### Funding for youth work

In a report in 2016, Hall Aitken estimated that in 2015, expenditure on youth work in Scotland could be calculated thus:

- Approximately £40 million each year local authority spend;
- 3,850 paid staff in voluntary organisations – with 2,000 estimated FTE and an average salary and employment cost of £25,000 this would give £50 million;
- A total spend therefore of £90 million; and
- Over 75,000 volunteers, delivering over 13 million volunteering hours a year.

Hall Aitken applied a Social Return on Investment (SROI) model to estimate that for each £1 allocated to youth work the total value to society is £7.

Local authorities remain key funders of youth work in Scotland, and like authorities across the UK, they are currently having to make budget reductions. It is hard to find definitive figures on the scale of budget cuts, but the youth work field in Scotland is alarmed at the impact they will have on local youth provision.

### **Workforce development**

CLD Scotland has overall responsibility as the sector skills body to ensure the quality of training programmes including youth work, and works closely with Youth Link Scotland on this. There is a well-established network of training providers including universities providing qualifications at all levels, including Modern Apprenticeship routes. CLD Scotland also operates a process where practitioners can record their training and CPD in a systematic way. Training programmes and qualifications are designed to enable youth workers to work in community settings, and see young people as members of their wider community.

### **How is youth work in Scotland adapting to changing circumstances?**

Scottish youth work has embraced the ‘Transformative Youth Work’ methodology (Cooper 2013), and the 2018 report ‘The Impact of Community-Based Universal Youth Work in Scotland’ shows the difference that youth work has made to young people in three different youth work projects in rural and urban areas.

Youth Link Scotland has also engaged with European partners in developing good practice in digital youth work<sup>7</sup> and there is evidence of youth projects across Scotland taking up these opportunities.

Overall, Scotland has strong infrastructure and policy support for youth work across the country, and the links to Community Learning and Development assist in establishing it as an education profession. Resourcing for youth work has had more protection than in England, though it seems that local budget reductions are now becoming more concerning in terms of sustaining access to youth provision across the country.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.digitalyouthwork.eu/good-practices/>



## APPENDIX D: Context for youth provision in Wales

### Leadership and responsibility for youth provision

In December 2016, the Children, Young People and Education Committee of the National Assembly for Wales published their inquiry into youth work, entitled ‘What Type of Youth Service does Wales Want?’<sup>8</sup>

The trend they found was a reduction in open-access youth work with more emphasis on targeted work with specific groups of young people, such as those not in education, employment or training. The Inquiry Committee expressed the view that, while recognising the value of targeted work, “we are concerned that targeted provision has been prioritised at the expense of open access provision. A balance needs to be struck - the extension of targeted provision should not be at the expense of open access provision”.

The Inquiry report held a number of recommendations, many of which have been actioned by the Welsh Government. In particular, a new Youth Work Strategy for Wales was published at the end of June 2019, co-ordinated by the Interim Youth Work Board, which includes representatives from voluntary sector and local authority youth services, and works directly with the Minister for Education, a Cabinet-level politician. Young people are seen as co-producers of the revised strategy.

The Welsh Youth Parliament has been established, and from 2021, young people aged 16-17 will be able to vote in elections in Wales. The youth sector in Wales see the development of the new Strategy and associated actions as positive steps towards recognition of the role youth work plays in young people’s lives.

### Funding for youth provision

The Welsh Government commits in the region of £30-£35 million a year for youth services, largely through local authorities. The Inquiry found that Welsh local authorities had lost 25% of their funding for youth work between 2012 and 2016, resulting in closures of youth provision and the loss of 148 FTE professional youth work jobs in 2015/16 alone. It noted also that 30% of voluntary youth organisations did not believe they would survive beyond the next financial year. Another concern was the inequity of spend across Wales’ 22 local authorities, as the Revenue Support Grant funding for youth work is unhypothecated, and authorities seeking to make budget savings have chosen to spend money for youth services on other priorities. The new Youth Work Strategy should address the issue of ‘sufficiency’ in terms of youth provision, and this is seen as helping to strengthen the position of youth work within local authorities.

#### Funding from central government

In addition to the funding allocated to local authorities, the Welsh Government has made £2.5 million available for young people’s mental health (following from a further Assembly Inquiry into young people’s emotional and mental health<sup>9</sup> and £3.7 million to address youth homelessness). Both these streams recognise the importance of youth provision, and require local authorities and voluntary sector organisations to collaborate to meet local needs.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10870/cr-ld10870-e.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11522/cr-ld11522-e.pdf>

## **Workforce development**

The Education Workforce Council was established in Wales in 2015 and manages a register for education practitioners that includes youth workers. Youth workers working in local authority and registered voluntary organisations are required to be on the register, as without registration they cannot practice. This has contributed to an uplift in staff in voluntary sector enrolling for qualifications at Level 2 and 3 as well as degree level professional qualifications, leading to improved standards of practice across the sector. CWVYS estimates that the youth work workforce in the voluntary youth sector includes around 30,000 volunteers and 3,000 paid youth workers, reaching around 250,000 young people – roughly 66% of the total youth population in Wales.

There are still concerns about insufficient resourcing for qualifications and wider professional development for the sector, though there is some confidence that youth work is now being recognised as an important contributor to young people's development.

## **How has youth provision in Wales adapted to changing circumstances?**

Youth work in Wales has seen some of the same challenges as in England, in terms of loss of resources, and some fragmentation of the workforce across different organisations. The requirement to register to practice does not apply to youth workers in some organisations, including housing associations and faith-based groups. Reductions in local authority provision have led to an increase in unregulated local community organisations setting up provision in their areas. There are, however, strong infrastructure support arrangements, including Council for Welsh Voluntary Youth Service, supporting member organisations and representing the wide voluntary youth sector in national debates.

It seems that Wales is at an important milestone in the development of youth work and increasing awareness of how it can support young people to build assets for a healthy life.