

A sustainable future: youth work's contribution to Welsh Government's 'Wellbeing of Future Generations' policy and 'Successful Futures' review

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Welsh Government 2015) and the recommendations from Donaldson's Successful Futures review (Donaldson 2015) gives youth work in Wales a refreshed opportunity to prove its value and create for itself a sustainable future.

As a professional youth worker, my motivation along with my colleagues has always been to do the very best for the young people we are involved with and, for the most part, aligning our work with core youth work values: building relationships to engage young people in non-formal education and informal learning processes and engaging in critical dialogue with young people. (NOS 2012)

What is more, in the sector there has always been a healthy scepticism of the latest government policy, additional paperwork detracting us from our direct work with young people, and systems to track our work and our users.

Youth work has always struggled to prove itself to the policy and decision makers, even though we know that young people learn in a distinctive way with us. It has struggled to be accountable, even though we know it can have a life-changing impact. It has suffered disproportionate budget cuts (Unison 2014), even though we know it provides exceptional value for money.

In the current era of limited and ever decreasing budgets it is even more important to demonstrate the scope and impact of our work to our funders and policy makers.

The policy agenda in Wales has ensured that youth work has developed a uniqueness that sets it apart from work in other parts of the UK. This includes: young people's participation supported by Extending Entitlement (Welsh Assembly Government 2002); the rights-based approach in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Unicef 1989); The National Youth Work Strategy 2014-18 and the associated Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (Welsh Government 2014).

The response of the youth work sector to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and Successful Futures will need to advance and strengthen the work that has been carried out previously. The approach must involve all actors in the sector. This includes the local authority-run youth services, the third sector charities, small companies and community groups and also the higher education sectors.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ('the Act'):

"...is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It will make the public bodies listed in the Act think more about the long-term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach. This will help us to create a Wales that we all want to live in, now and in the future."

(Welsh Government 2015: 3)

The Act contains provisions which resonate strongly with the youth work approach. Although the duty to fulfil the Act is only for public sector bodies, it will be vital that we take a cross-sectoral approach to its implementation whether or not funding is received directly or indirectly from government sources.

It will be crucial that to demonstrate the impact of our work in the context of the Act. We could do this by aligning the goals of the youth sector with the seven wellbeing goals listed in the Act. These are: a prosperous Wales; a resilient Wales; a healthier Wales; a more equal Wales; a Wales of cohesive communities; a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language; and a globally responsible Wales.

The wellbeing goals have synergies with the provisions contained within the National Youth Work Strategy and the Youth Work Charter (Welsh Government 2016).

Youth services can deliver a programme of work that addresses key areas with young people including health topics, skills development, sustainable development and global citizenship. Several of the suggested 46 national indicators to measure the progress towards the wellbeing goals are directly relevant to activity that the youth work sector takes part in. Examples of these indicators are: the percentage of people satisfied with their ability to get to/ access the facilities and services they need; the percentage of people in education, employment or training, measured for different age groups. (Welsh Government 2016). We can use these indicators to evidence how we realise the wellbeing goals.

The Act obliges that a Public Services Board be set up in each authority area in Wales. A priority must be to engage and involve young people and youth workers in the work of the Public Services Boards and for the sector to follow the participation standards set out in 'Having a Voice, Having a Choice' (CYPPCW 2011). This will continue the work completed as part of Extending Entitlement and will ensure that youth services pursue a strategy that is joined up to other public services. Additionally, it will allow young people to have a voice.

Provisions within the Act resonate strongly with the aims of the National Occupational Standards. This includes:

- Explore with young people their well-being.
 - Influence and develop youth work strategies (youth workers).
 - Working in partnership with other agencies.
- (NOS: 2012)

Successful Futures

Donaldson's Successful Futures is a wide ranging review into curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales.

Donaldson reflects that the education system must help young people to:

"... grow as a capable, healthy, well-rounded individuals who can thrive in the face of unknown future challenges."

(Donaldson 2015: 5)

His review will give the youth work sector an opportunity to demonstrate its contribution to the education of young people in Wales. Significantly, Donaldson would like to see wider community involvement in young people's education.

Youth Work is ideally suited to work towards the vision of the 'well-educated learner' that the review describes and can punch above its weight with disengaged young people and in the delivery of alternative and non-formal education.

The recommendations on the purposes of the curriculum located in chapter 3 of the review focus on young people leaving school with a broad education. The principles and purposes of youth work in Wales (Youth Work in Wales Review Group 2013) are not dissimilar to the recommendations below which state that young people should develop as:

- > ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- > enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- > ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- > healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

(Donaldson 2015: 29)

Importantly, the review identifies that "General social competences, life skills and personal confidence were seen by all as important things to be gained" (Donaldson 2015:17). We would all agree that this is the main focus of youth work, and this is something that as a profession we have to be promoting during the implementation of the review; the youth work National Occupational Standards demonstrate the professional and distinct practice youth work can bring to the education of young people. (NOS 2012)

A sustainable future - the Wales we want

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act is widely regarded as a world first piece of legislation with links to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2015). Through the sustainable development principle, organisations must "ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Welsh Government 2016: 7). There is enormous potential for the youth sector in Wales to promote and prove itself as a world leading sustainable option for furthering the Government's and our aspirations for young people.

It is the next generation of young people that will create the "Wales we want". We, as youth workers, are an important piece in the jigsaw of young people's education, personal and social development, with the ability and track-record to engage young people in the decision making process. Providing all young people with a wider range of non-formal education and informal learning experiences, as well as educating those young people who find it difficult in mainstream education, will create a "successful future" for all young people.

A united sector working together to strive to help the Welsh Government achieve its bold visions can only encourage decision makers to take us seriously and will surely lead to actions that will put youth work on a more sustainable footing for the future.

Priorities

1. The need to demonstrate the youth sector's unique ability to implement the recommendations from Donaldson. This includes youth work's strengths in delivering personal and social education as well as wider community engagement.
2. The focus of our work is with the next generation, therefore the sector has to formulate a clear action plan how it will contribute to the implementation of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.
3. A refresh of the principles and purposes of youth work to reflect the aspirations in the first two points and taking this opportunity to develop a new Welsh youth work curriculum.
4. The development of a coherent National Outcomes Framework for Youth Work (Welsh Government 2016) backing the new Youth Work Charter should show how youth work delivers on the recommendations within Successful Futures and helps to realise the national indicators for the wellbeing goals.
5. A streamlining of the current indicators that we use to measure young people's progress to reflect the national indicators working towards the wellbeing goals and demonstrating Donaldson's priorities.
6. Ensure that young people's and youth workers voices are heard on the Public Services Boards and throughout the implementation of Donaldson's recommendations.
7. A united cross-youth sectoral approach to addressing these new priorities is essential.

Jamie Jones-Mead, 2016

References

CCYPCW (Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales) (2011) Having a Voice, Having a Choice: Do we meet your standards (Accessed [online](#) 20/5/16)

Donaldson, G. (2015). Successful Futures. Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales. Cardiff. Welsh Government.

National Occupational Standards (NOS) (2012) Youth Work National Occupational Standards (Accessed [online](#) 23/06/16)

Unicef (1989) The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Unicef

Unison (2014) The UK's Youth Services: how cuts are removing opportunities for young people and damaging their lives. Unison: London (Accessed [online](#) 23/06/16)

United Nations (2015) Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development A / RES / 70 / 1 UN HQ New York. United Nations (Accessed [online](#) 21/05/16)

Welsh Assembly Government (2002) Extending Entitlement: Support for 11-25 year olds in Wales. Welsh Assembly Government (Accessed [online](#) 25/06/16)

Welsh Government (2010) Children and Young People's Participation in Wales. Cardiff. Welsh Government. (Accessed [online](#) 14/05/16)

Welsh Government (2014) National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014-2018. Supporting young people to reach their potential and live fulfilled lives. Cardiff. Welsh Government (Accessed [online](#) 22/05/16)

Welsh Government (2015) The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act: The Essentials. Cardiff. Welsh Government (Accessed [online](#) 14/05/16)

Welsh Government (2016) How to measure a nation's progress: National indicators for Wales. Cardiff. Welsh Government (Accessed [online](#) 14/05/16)

Welsh Government (2016) National Outcomes Framework for Youth Work: Consultation Document: A Vision for a National Outcomes Framework for Youth Work in Wales. Llandudno Junction. Welsh Government (Accessed [online](#) 21/05/16)

Youth Work in Wales Review Group (2013) Youth Work in Wales Principles and Purposes. Wales. (Accessed [online](#) 20/05/16)