

PYOG

Grŵp Prif Swyddogion Ieuenctid Cymru
Wales Principal Youth Officers' Group

National Assembly for Wales Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Inquiry into
Physical Activity of Children and Young People –
Call for Evidence

**Written evidence submitted by
The *Wales Principal Youth Officers' Group***

The *Wales Principal Youth Officers Group* (PYOG) is the representative group of officers nominated by each local authority as the professional and strategic head of the youth service. The Group has an established role in advising on the strategic development and delivery of youth services and other associated initiatives and is a sub-group of the *Association of Directors of Education in Wales* (ADEW). The PYOG also has a strategic connection with the *Welsh Local Government Association* (WLGA) via the Lifelong Learning Policy Officer (Youth).

The PYOG welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *National Assembly for Wales Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Inquiry into Physical Activity of Children and Young People*, particularly given the valued contribution which youth work makes to the emotional and physical well-being of young people aged 11-25 years via an educational approach in a variety of settings.

Introduction

1. Youth work is widely recognised as having a crucial role to play in developing **young peoples' ability to transition successfully to adulthood**, in becoming positive members of their local communities and recognising their place in and contribution to the global community. It is based on a voluntary, trusting relationship developed over time with young people between the ages of 11-25 years of all backgrounds and abilities. Youth work has a valuable contribution to make to the health and well-being of these young people, which will be described in further detail later in this submission.
2. Youth Work in Wales is now (as of 1st April, 2017) a registered profession with the Education Workforce Council (EWC) and has for some time had its own qualifications framework and National Occupational Standards, which define its key purpose 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."

Physical and emotional outcomes for young people

3. As a minimum requirement to providing strong foundations for them to thrive, young people need to be happy, healthy (physically and emotionally) and resilient. Whilst there is (quite appropriately) an intense focus currently on the emotional well-being of young people, this should not be taken in isolation of physical well-being as they are mutually important; being physically active provides a foundation for positive emotional well-being. In this respect, the PYOG encourages the Health, Social Care & Sport Committee to cross-reference with a concurrent inquiry on behalf of another Committee - the Children, Young People and Education Committee – as its members are currently running an inquiry into the mental health and well-being of children and young people (the PYOG will also be making a contribution to this and raising the same point with them).
4. Although Sport Wales, NHS Wales and Public Health Wales are the obvious bodies who have important and leading roles in encouraging physical activity, there are also a number of other organisations, including youth and community services which make a substantial contribution. Local authority Youth Services in Wales use diverse and varied engagement techniques which also achieve many positive outcomes e.g. accredited learning, progression into further education, employment and training, attitudinal change, improved citizenship, improved health choices and positive inspirational futures. Their ability to engage with young people, particularly those deemed 'hard to reach' is valued by a number of organisations as well as young people. **Much of the work is also delivered collaboratively with voluntary sector organisations and other relevant services, for example the police, health service, youth justice, leisure and cultural services.** Youth work is delivered in a variety of settings and contexts including (but not exclusively) in youth clubs, including those which are purpose built, those which meet in community centres and other community venues, and those which meet in school premises in schools, colleges and other formal educational establishments.

Barriers

5. The Youth Service is acutely aware that young people can face a number of barriers to accessing opportunities for physical activity. One reason is the **increasing influence of technology**. Whilst offering as many positive opportunities, it is essential that a balance is struck between the use of social media and other technologies and being physically active – and physical activity providers need to recognise this by being relevant, engaging and fun. For some, whilst not necessarily essential to accessing opportunities for physical activity, **access to outdoor facilities, parks, open spaces** etc. (particularly for those

living in urban areas), may be a further issue. For more structured opportunities, funding can also be an obstacle.

6. It is crucial to ensure that **young people are consulted regularly** to learn what they perceive to be barriers. Whilst their concerns, priorities and solutions can reinforce those of professionals, they can also be quite different and often more relevant e.g. transport is frequently raised as a barrier for young people, as is (lack of) **self-esteem, body image and body confidence**. A key element of Youth Work is to empower young people by developing their confidence and improving their self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Youth Work's contribution

7. There are a number of activities offered via Youth Work which involves physical activity e.g. the Duke of Edinburgh award, outdoor activity/residential trips, sports activities, street based provision and activities. These opportunities provide a sense of achievement and develop a number of skills such as **leadership, team work, taking responsibility, confidence and communication**. Being physically active can also have a positive impact on academic achievement.
8. In 2015-16, 21 local authorities in Wales reported that 93,381 young people were registered members of Youth Work provision, representing 17% of 11-25 year olds (Welsh Government Youth Service Audit, 2015-16). Many of these young people might be referred to as disengaged and not accessing other mainstream services. ***Sports and physical activity was also reported as being the most common type of provision, with over 1,600 projects delivered across the country.***
9. As access to Youth Work is via a voluntary relationship between worker and young person which is based on participation, association, personal and social education and having fun, physical fitness is not measured and there is no appetite to do so. Young people are introduced to physical activity in a fun way. Whilst not being in a position to comment on how this is measured and collated by and on behalf of other organisations, the PYOG does understand the need to do so, particularly when considering benchmarking and improving outcomes.

Opportunities

Education

10. Welsh Government and the education sector in Wales are currently developing a **new curriculum**, which is designed to better reflect the demands of 21st century learning, the needs of employers and the needs of children and young people. There are real opportunities for the education family - in its broadest sense – to work closer together. In order to develop an inclusive and effective curriculum, this also needs to involve other agencies such as health providers (particularly in relation to the Health and

Well-being Area of Learning – see below) in making a more comprehensive/holistic contribution to both its development and delivery.

11. Whilst all four of the main purposes of the new curriculum have the well-being of learners implicit throughout, one of the four is that of *Healthy, Confident Individuals*, with a specific 'area of learning' being that of *Health & Well-being*. Building Block 3 of the proposals is to 'extend and promote learners' experiences', which presents opportunities for schools and communities to work together in providing a rich menu of opportunities for learning. The aim is to make the new curriculum available by 2018, with all schools ready to deliver it by 2021 – time is of the essence.

Should you have any further queries about this submission or the work of the Youth Service generally, please do contact:

Jo Sims,
Chair of the Wales Principal Youth Officers' Group,
EVI Cultural Centre,
Ebbw Vale,
Blaenau Gwent
NP23 6BE

jo.sims@blaenau.gwent.gov.uk tel. no. 01495 357866.