

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee
Ymchwiliad i Waith Ieuenctid | Inquiry into Youth Work

YW 18

Ymateb gan : Connect Cymru

Response from : Connect Cymru

Question 1 – What are your views on young people’s access to youth work services, including, for example:

- levels of provision across Wales and any regional variation;
- issues relating to access for specific groups of young people e.g. language, disability, rurality, ethnicity.

The Connect Cymru Committee would like to make comments to assist this consultation. Whilst this consultation encompasses all aspects of youth work that are wider than the role of Connect Cymru, we do feel that we have some comments with regard to international youth work.

Connect Cymru was created in 1994 through a service level agreement between the Wales Youth Agency and the UK National Agency for the Youth for Europe Programme. Since this date the Connect Cymru Committee have been committed to promoting international youth work opportunities, supporting applicants and training youth workers to benefit young people within Wales.

As a committee made up of youth workers from both the local authority youth service (nominated by PYO group) and voluntary sector (nominated by CWVYS) as well as wider field practitioners and co-opted members we are keen to highlight the role of international youth work which includes youth exchanges, project work and volunteering.

Youth work delivered in an international context provides young people with opportunities for personal development and learning of use to both their ongoing involvement in an educational process and

their employment chances. In achieving this it also develops citizenship, wellbeing and social mobility, key concepts for young people and the Welsh Government.

In answer to this question from an international perspective – access to international youth work projects differ in many areas throughout Wales. Some areas have made the most of Erasmus+ funding to undertake projects and enable young people to gain new skills and experiences, however, some areas do not provide many opportunities for young people to learn through undertaking youth exchanges.

If you believe that there are particular problems, how do you think they could be resolved?

Groups / Organisations / Local authorities may not provide these opportunities due to the following reasons;

- Complexity of Erasmus+ funding applications
- Organisational capacity and being able to allow staff the sufficient time to undertake activity with their group
- Other priorities within their service
- A lack of understanding of the outcomes that can be achieved through participating in international opportunities.

To resolve the problems listed above, the Welsh Government and Connect Cymru need to continue to champion this form of youth work by continuing to promote youth exchanges, deliver training to organisations who wish to apply for Erasmus+ funding. Connect Cymru currently funding a worker from CWVYS to support applicants, however, this is a part time role and due to time constraints the worker is unable to assist with in depth writing of Erasmus+ application forms.

Question 2 – How effective do you think the Welsh Government strategy and policy on youth work is?

In considering this question you may wish to think about:

- the Welsh Government’s specific youth work policy and strategy such as ‘The Youth Work offer’; The Wales Charter for Youth Work; The National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014 to 2018;
- Welsh Government departmental responsibilities and whether there is a cross-departmental and co-ordinated approach to support youth work provision.

As a committee we were pleased to see that international work was listed within the ‘Wales Charter for Youth Work’ – It is listed as:

- Opportunities to take part in outdoor adventure and in residential and international experiences

International youth work approaches use participative and empowering methods, with the fundamental principle of its work with individuals and groups arising from mutual agreement between workers and young people. It does this by providing experiential learning opportunities for young people using a range of creative, challenging and fun activities such as, for example, sport, community aid projects, dance, theatre, visual arts, outdoor activities and music. International youth work also involves young people in a process of ‘informal learning’ through association with friends and adult youth workers, experiencing and making sense of new situations, different countries, ways of living, food, culture and values. This will often involve young people who have very limited experiences and may not have travelled outside their immediate community.

International youth work is an educational process and the learning arises from the youth worker seeing or creating learning opportunities in the everyday situations young people experience. If the main objective of youth work is to provide opportunities for young people to shape their own futures, then young people must be actively involved in the process, creators of the learning, not merely consumers, working together with youth workers to identify, plan, engage in and reflect upon what they do. It is a process that is recognised and well valued within the Erasmus+ programme.

How do you think the Welsh Government could approach its youth work strategy and policy differently / to better effect?

Hopefully the monitoring of the charter will ascertain if organisations and local authorities are providing an opportunity for young people to undertake international experiences.

Question 3 – What are your views on the funding available for youth work, including through Local Authority, Welsh Government, European Union, and Third Sector.

There is sufficient funding available for organisations to undertake youth exchanges. This funding is available from Erasmus+ and Wales does relatively well ensuring that 5% of the UK budget comes to Wales for Erasmus+ ‘Youth’ projects (this is in line with population of UK). This could easily be more if organisations felt secure in the short and medium term. Some organisations have reported to us that they don’t apply as their priorities are applying for funding to keep their staff working for them during these times of austerity.

Unfortunately, Erasmus+ funds do not cover everything for the projects so in times of austerity they may not be a priority for some managers, although the outcomes are immeasurable.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Ensuring that organisations were stable and had sufficient core funding would enable more organisations to apply for Erasmus+ funding.

Further support would be needed to apply for the somewhat complex Erasmus+ application.

Question 4 – Are there any other issues you consider relevant to the Inquiry that you think the Committee should be made aware of? (for example: workforce related issues; the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales; buildings and infrastructure; youth work in schools; transport issues; access to digital technology; Welsh Government’s consultation on proposals to register and inspect some out of school education settings).

Organisations may be reluctant to let staff undertake youth exchanges as this ultimately will cost the organisation. Youth exchanges can last for two weeks and will take up at least 14 hours work per day per youth worker. This is quite costly for workers and can often result in large amounts of Toil (time off in Lieu).

Running successful youth exchanges require experienced youth workers who have undertaken youth exchange training. There is a deficit of youth workers in Wales who have experience of international work. Within Wales we need to actively encourage young people to volunteer abroad through the EVS (European Voluntary Service) part of Erasmus+. These opportunities provide young people with a host of new skills and experiences, especially employability skills that will assist them gain employment at the end of the project.

Question 5 – If you had to make one recommendation to the Welsh Government from all the points you have made, what would that recommendation be?

Currently Wales attracts around 1 million Euros per year into the youth work sector through Erasmus+ projects. This figure is for projects hosted in Wales and is likely to be twice this sum as activity undertaken abroad is not currently recorded by the Erasmus+ UK team.

We would recommend that all local authorities undertake a youth exchange to widen the offer for young people and enable these young people to gain opportunities for personal development and learning of use to both their ongoing involvement in an educational process and their employment chances. In achieving this it also develops citizenship, wellbeing and social mobility, key concepts for young people and the Welsh Government.