



## Youth volunteering and Welsh schools

This report is based on a wider review of youth volunteering which will be published soon.

### BACKGROUND

Youth volunteering in Wales has been explicitly supported by the Welsh Government since 2007 in response to the report on youth volunteering in the UK by Ian Russell (2005) which recognised the potential for engaging young people as volunteers.

In Wales, young people have long contributed to positive change in their communities in a wide range of ways. Young people play their part in a country that is built on community spirit, contributing as campaigners for the rights of others (i.e. Children in Wales), activists, that advocate for the protection of the environment (i.e. Keep Wales Tidy) and the Welsh language (i.e. Mentrau Iaith, the Urdd), and as community leaders and fundraisers for events and causes, such as the Cardiff Half Marathon or the Mumbles Raft Race. Many young people in Wales, contribute to causes they care about as part of school initiatives, whether through courses, such as the Welsh Baccaulaureate or through specific extra-curricular activities, such as Eco-Clubs or School Councils. The voluntary youth work sector in Wales supports young people to volunteer within their communities and provides young leadership opportunities (e.g. Johns, Scouts Cymru, Girlguiding Cymru etc)

There was a rapid surge in interest in volunteering between March and June 2020, when an additional **7706 young people aged 14-25** registered an interest in volunteering in Wales, demonstrating young people in Wales to be just as likely as in pre pandemic times to offer their support to the voluntary efforts across the nation (Volunteering Wales data showed that 1 in 4 of the volunteer sign ups were 14-25).

Young people have identified the following issues as challenges that volunteering can help address:

- Mental ill-health
- Unemployment
- Inequalities
- Education attainment
- Life skills

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Specifically in relation to educational attainment, they told us that they were acutely aware of the impact of young people's experience of education over the past six months, including challenges to accessing education via home learning, upset and frustration around examinations uncertainty and a reduction in the ability to access career and work related experience and other CV building activities.

Volunteering was advocated as an opportunity for young people to learn in real life scenarios and to contribute to the delivery of the curriculum and career education as young people get the chance to apply themselves in more creative and practical ways.

Examples of this exist where voluntary organisations offer valuable learning experiences that make a difference as part of the [Welsh Baccalaureate](#).

Education is also a space in which the voluntary sector provides support to the learning of others, such as through the provision of Homework Clubs, training on children's rights or peer support for children facing bullying.

Recent research on the impact of the Welsh Government funded Youth Led Grants in Wales, demonstrated that by enabling young people to volunteer as young grant makers and leaders of their own youth social action project, young people self-reported improvements in their skills and employability and better mental health. One of hundreds of such youth volunteering projects which show potential to contribute to developing healthy, confident individuals that are ethical and informed citizens of Wales and the world

Other research on volunteering and/or social action cites findings relevant to formal and informal education

- The **National Youth Social Action Survey** ([Ipsos Mori, 2020](#)) highlighted self – reported benefits of social action as improving individuals self-confidence, self-esteem, communication and social skills, and the ability to work as a team.
- Research commissioned by the **Duke of Edinburgh Award** ([2019](#)) highlighted that 1 in 3 UK employers value soft skills (such as those developed by volunteering) as more important than academic achievements
- The **Careers and Education Enterprise Company** ([2017](#)) found that volunteering is a comparably low cost intervention for skill development (personal development and employability skills) and career readiness amongst students. A key point raised within the report was that 'effective volunteering requires careful attention to quality.'
- A report by **Education and Employers Charity** ([2020](#)) found adults that volunteered with education settings, benefitted positively in scores of wellbeing.

## Challenges and solutions

We are concerned about a three-fold threat to young peoples access to volunteering: firstly a decline of opportunities during the pandemic, secondly a reduced focus on youth engagement and youth volunteering, and thirdly a reduction in youth volunteering infrastructure.

To improve the future of volunteering for young people in Wales, volunteer involving organisations, CVC's and young people suggested five key aspects of volunteering that the Welsh Government, TSSW and the Volunteering Wales Youth Network should focus on in the short and medium term. These are:

- **Promotion of volunteering** - High quality and effective promotion of volunteering opportunities to a wide and diverse audience. Development and focus on a cross-sector ongoing youth volunteering campaign delivered in partnership with young people, which breaks down challenges of volunteering related terminology.
- **Entry points and access to volunteering** - Utilising the opportunities of the new curriculum and Welsh Baccalaureate to provide positive introductions and experiences of volunteering. Support to ensure young people are ready and able to become volunteers, without barriers. Ensuring volunteering is welcome to all young people.
- **Availability of opportunities** - Growth (and investment) in meaningful, accessible, and high-quality volunteering opportunities that best suit young people's interest's, aspirations, and availability, to include improving the confidence and commitment of organisations to involve young people as volunteers.
- **Influencing future developments in volunteering** - accessible mechanisms for young people to share their story and influence the development of youth volunteering, nationally, regionally, and locally.
- **Harnessing cross sectoral support** for youth volunteering in Wales, recognizing the value of utilizing the strengths of the sectors in driving forward and creating a sustainable future for youth volunteering.

Education in Wales: our national mission October 2020, acknowledges the contribution of youth work to the wellbeing of young people and addressing inequality. Through the National Youth Work Strategy for Wales, sustainable support for the voluntary youth work sector will strengthen its infrastructure to support more young people, volunteering and young leaders provision.

Our report identifies a number of specific proposals which can increase the uptake of volunteering. Some of these are specifically through the school system and include:

- The potential of the opportunities within the **new curriculum and the refreshed Welsh Baccalaureate** should be fully realized through improved working and communication between educational institutions and the voluntary sector. Young people should be involved in the communication of these relationships and opportunities at a school, college, or university level.

- Support the **creation and sustainable development of meaningful, accessible, and high-quality volunteering opportunities** with and for young people within existing and emerging organisations.
- Develop and deliver a Wales wide **cross sectorial volunteering promotional campaign** in partnership with young people, to increase awareness of volunteering (it's terminology), the benefits and how to become a volunteer. This should include promotion (and continued improvement) of the Volunteering Wales website.