INSIGHT SERIES

Bridging Futures: Educational Leadership in Youth Work and Schools for the Curriculum for Wales

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Executive Summary

A Introduction

The National Academy for Educational Leadership (The Leadership Academy) commissioned a Think Piece to explore the joint roles and responsibilities of Youth Work and School Leaders (YWaSL) in delivering the Curriculum for Wales (CfW). The piece also focuses on increasing YWaSL's knowledge and understanding of each other's professions, highlighting how combining formal, non-formal, and informal educational approaches can improve outcomes for young people. Additionally, it includes making recommendations for educational leaders and policymakers on using a systems leadership approach to support the implementation of the New Curriculum for Wales. The study had three stages: a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of literature on educational leaders' roles in curriculum implementation, focus groups with Youth Work and School Leaders (YWaSL) and young people to gather perspectives, and final verification focus groups for the recommendations.

B Context

Numerous authors emphasize the critical role of leadership in shaping and implementing youth work within schools and in implementing curriculums (Kools et al., 2018; NYA, 2023; Youth Action, 2021). The four core purposes of the Curriculum for Wales align closely with youth work principles (NYA, 2023; PYO, 2020). In 2018, the Senedd established an Interim Youth Work Board, which later prioritized youth work funding, legislation, and the creation of a potential national or representative body. While there is a long tradition of youth work in Welsh schools, it remains a contested area. Williamson (2019) describes how, since the late 1990s, schools have referred some excluded and challenging students to local youth projects. Youth workers have collaborated with teachers to deliver alternative curriculum programs and provide additional support for students with special needs. However, further progress is necessary for youth work to be fully recognized as an integral part of the education system.

C Rapid Evidence Assessment

We conducted a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of national, European, and international literature on the roles of educational leaders in curriculum implementation, focusing on how youth worker and school leadership can inform policy and practice in Wales. We identified over 100 significant publications, citing 65 in this paper, with most studies being UK-based and qualitative. We distinguished between specific curriculum policy implementation papers and broader academic literature. The most cited and directly relevant research comes from Estyn and the Curriculum for Wales. Our REA covers several areas sequentially: implementing curriculum reform, studies on Curriculum for Wales (CfW) prior to its implementation, evaluations of CfW implementation, leadership in education with a focus on systems leadership, leadership in schools, and youth work. It also examines models of youth work in schools, schools' understanding of youth work in Wales, the educational focus and pedagogic approach in youth work, and the 'Hidden Knows' of youth work as a potential bridge with other tensions in delivering it within schools. Additionally, Pupil Voice and Community Schooling are highlighted as areas where youth work could make significant contributions.

D Findings from Focus Groups

Understanding of the curriculum for Wales.

Participants generally had positive views about the new curriculum and its alignment with youth work principles and practices, as well as other sectors like Health. However, youth workers felt excluded from its development, a concern supported by the NYA's Better Together Report (2023), which noted that the curriculum was developed alongside, rather than with, youth work. This exclusion is exemplified by youth work's inability to access £28m in funding for the National Professional Learning Entitlement, which supports the Curriculum for Wales rollout.

Realities of Strategic work at a National Level

Many youth workers and managers felt their strategic involvement was tokenistic and recognized the need for youth work advocates at all levels of government and decision-making. Despite this, involvement at the government level has been challenging, with youth work often excluded from forming agendas. The approach to implementation is seen as skewed towards schools, partly because youth work is a smaller sector with fewer strategic representatives, leading to marginalization. The lack of professional parity within education policy also impacts this dynamic. However, having a dedicated minister and political allies offers potential for greater strategic involvement at the governmental level.

Youth workers operating at a strategic level

While youth workers and schools need to collaborate more strategically, youth workers often prioritize face-to-face interactions with young people over strategic work, reflecting a general culture that values direct engagement over management roles. The long-term decline in youth work has also deprioritized strategic efforts, and some youth workers feel unsure about how to engage strategically. Despite these challenges, there is a consensus that youth workers must adopt a more strategic approach, with Scotland cited as a positive example. The evaluation of the Curriculum for Excellence highlights the positive impact of Youth Work (YW) in education but also points out challenges such as its unclear role, under-

appreciation, and under-resourcing, especially for marginalized youth, due to pedagogical differences, dependency on school resources, and geographical fragmentation.

Professional Learning.
Participants were concerned about the lack of professional learning opportunities for Youth Workers (YWs) compared to teachers, which affects resources and causes frustration among YW leaders. The youth work sector receives only about £200k annually for professional learning, highlighting this disparity. High-quality professional learning is crucial for educational outcomes, but YWs lack access to the national enquiry entitlement project, further exacerbating these concerns. This disparity in professional development opportunities needs to be addressed to improve youth work's impact on education.

Working at a regional and local level
Participants were skeptical about working with regional schools consortia, preferring unions for engagement, but were more positive about cross-school and cross-local authority collaborations, which help distribute accountability. Many felt schools lacked sufficient guidance, leading to hesitation and a need for permission to innovate. The Thompson report (2023) supports the idea that strong clusters of schools with effective inter-sector relationships provide better guidance. Local-level engagement with schools is crucial, despite challenges with school governing bodies. Building structured relationships with schools is important due to staff turnover affecting personal connections.

Leadership needed for implementation
Participants raised concerns about the leadership required to implement the Curriculum for Wales (CfW), highlighting challenges such as the need for cascading permission, inflexible decision-making processes, and rushed implementation. This led to a focus on compliance over strategic thinking, with collaboration often being tokenistic. Thomas et al. (2023) found that staff hesitated to move away from established frameworks, leading schools into crisis modes and reverting to authoritarian leadership. However, literature suggests that distributed and collaborative leadership is crucial in times of crisis. Participants emphasized the need for inclusive and community-focused approaches, with some leaders advocating for democratic leadership to address issues like attendance. The youth worker focus group stressed the importance of ethical learning and long-term strategies, developing a cluster model for distributed leadership and collecting long-term case studies to identify best practices.

The need for more time and deeper thinking
School leaders were concerned about their lack of awareness of local projects due to cuts and the growth of the voluntary sector, making it unclear who to involve in partnerships. This reflects a rushed approach to partnership working, rather than addressing deeper cultural changes needed for true collaboration. More time is required to develop genuine partnerships and embrace different leadership modes. Participants acknowledged that the Curriculum for Wales represents a significant cultural shift, which was underestimated. Resistance to more distributed leadership forms was also noted.

Contribution of youth work:

- *Going beyond the classroom* Youth workers saw definite areas where youth work could make a contribution to the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. This included going beyond the classroom, adding to the wider skills set and making the contribution called for in the new curriculum

- *Promoting that a youth work approach is well suited to the curriculum's implementation* Youth workers acknowledged the need to better promote their approach and how they can deliver the new curriculum. They highlighted that core elements of the curriculum, such as developing ambition, lifelong learning, creativity, ethical citizenship, and well-being, are central to youth work. Beyond activities, the experiential pedagogic approach of youth work is crucial. Young people reported engaging in arts, crafts, sports, and issue-based workshops at school and youth clubs, with a strong focus on well-being in school.

- *Contribution around leadership* Despite facing significant challenges, including up to 80% cuts in services and a shift from local authority to voluntary sector-based operations, youth work projects have avoided authoritarian leadership styles. Instead, they have embraced transformational and distributed leadership models, driven by the need for quick responses and a commitment to prioritizing young people. Youth work has a positive contribution to make in leadership models and can offer strategic insights, particularly in thriving within a precarious sector and managing diverse funding sources. Concurrently Youth work need to embrace systems leadership and strategic collaboration with other agencies.

- *Student voice* Youth work can help broaden the perspectives of student and parental voices within schools, as envisioned in the Curriculum for Wales. Some participants criticized traditional school council approaches and emphasized the importance of incorporating young people's input in addressing issues like non-school attendance. This highlights the 'hidden knowns' of youth work, recognizing that young people who have had negative experiences in education and with adults can provide valuable insights for shaping effective interventions.

Areas for Development:

Transitions and AI The transition between primary and secondary education was identified as problematic due to differing pedagogical approaches and school sizes, which can affect youth projects aimed at 13-19-year-olds, though some successful examples exist. There were also calls for better support for transitions out of secondary school. Additionally, youth workers felt that digital literacy and AI are neglected areas in the Curriculum for Wales, emphasizing the need to teach young people to use AI responsibly, as banning it is ineffective

Understanding of youth work A common issue is that schools often do not understand youth work as an educational endeavour with its own curriculum, principles, and pedagogical approach, which aligns well with the Curriculum for Wales. Many still view youth work as a leisure activity. Formal education sectors have been criticized for not prioritizing an understanding of youth work, rushing to implement the curriculum and seeking quick fixes instead. Schools often involve youth workers only with certain "problem" students, which raises concerns about labelling and stigmatization. Youth workers, however, have valuable insights into engaging disengaged youths and understanding social dynamics. There is a challenge for youth work to better articulate its role and value to formal education.

E Discussion

Overall, the curriculum is a seen as a positive good thing with real potential to be transformative.

The development of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) did not always strategically involve youth work, leading to inconsistent engagement at national, regional, and local levels. The fragmented nature of the youth work sector complicates national engagement. Youth Work services lack funding, understanding, and integration into the broader education system, limiting their impact on CfW developments. Policymakers often overlook the strategic role of youth work leaders, marginalizing their influence. Effective CfW implementation requires collaborative efforts across schools, youth sectors, and educational partners. Government and policymakers must actively engage youth work leaders and others to ensure comprehensive policy development and practice. Joint training and broader inclusion in initiatives like the NPEP could enhance professional understanding and collaborative solutions, supporting the CfW's aspirations.

At the regional level, schools often hesitate to take individual action due to a lack of guidance and fear of making mistakes. This need for reassurance from the middle tier is highlighted in the recent National Academy for Educational Leadership report, which emphasizes the importance of assessment methods supporting national discussions on student employability. Regional consortia are intended to provide guidance and foster collaboration, but they have faced criticism for their approach and support quality, leading to a review by the Welsh Government. Concerns include a top-down approach, inconsistency, and unnecessary bureaucracy. Despite these issues, school-to-school collaboration and local authority partnerships are encouraged, with recommendations for continued supra-local work.

At a local school level, Participants believe the curriculum's implementation has been rushed, leading schools to focus on compliance rather than meaningful engagement. This has resulted in schools working in silos, misaligning priorities, and reducing information flow.The "Curriculum for Wales: journey to 2022" document advises against hasty implementation, superficial approaches, and treating curriculum development as a one-time event. The National Academy for Educational Leadership report (2024) and Fullan (2020) emphasize the need for leadership at all levels, particularly at the middle and regional levels, to ensure consistent professional learning and successful educational reform. Quality assurance by the middle tier is crucial to address regional variations and provide well-informed support to school leaders.

Youth Works involvement in school level implementation of the CfW

The Principal Youth Officers' document (2023) outlines how youth work can support the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) but lacks details on involving youth services in curriculum design and planning. Guidance for CfS (2020) emphasizes the need for all stakeholders to be accountable, not just school leaders. The "Curriculum for Wales: Journey to 2022" stresses the importance of co-construction in curriculum preparation, listing principles for schools to follow. Youth workers can leverage their expertise in co-production, pupil voice, and engaging marginalized young people to assist schools. They should be involved in all phases of curriculum implementation—engagement, design, piloting, evaluation, and refinement. The document highlights the need for collaboration, understanding different pedagogic approaches, and critical engagement with expertise. Budget constraints necessitate efficient resource targeting, with leaders across the system working together to support the CfW and CfS agendas.

Appendix 2 outlines how youth work can engaged in all stages of CfW implementation in schools.

Youth Works engagement with other school policy drivers

Schools are influenced by various policies, especially Estyn inspections, which emphasize the curriculum within their framework. Estyn guidance (2024) states that inspectors will evaluate schools' curricula based on their vision, context, and adherence to the Curriculum for Wales. Inspections assess how well schools collaborate with other agencies, the community, and foster pupil voice, with a focus on marginalized groups. Youth work can support schools by providing

additional learning needs support, improving behavior and attitudes of excluded pupils, encouraging pupil leadership, and engaging the community. The guidance outlines a framework for teaching, learning, well-being, and leadership, where youth work can significantly contribute to many success indicators, such as understanding society, inspiring pupils, and fostering positive relationships

Appendix 3 outlines a model of how Youth workers can help schools meet the Estyn Inspection indicators

Engaging with the Community Schools agenda

Youth and Community Work can significantly enhance community engagement in schools by adhering to principles outlined by Estyn (2020). These include providing professional learning for all staff on family and community engagement, employing dedicated engagement staff, and collaborating with local authorities and partners to address community needs. Effective engagement staff should have community-focused experience, strong interpersonal skills, and the ability to advocate for families. They should also create supportive spaces for community building, listen to and center community voices in decision-making, and open up institutional spaces for meaningful participation, ensuring that youth work expertise is utilized.

Youth works' contribution to leadership

Many schools, driven by funding insecurities and competing priorities, have reverted to hierarchical and authoritarian leadership styles, which are less effective in managing change in volatile environments. In contrast, Youth Services have adopted more democratic, transformative, and distributed leadership models, serving as exemplars. Both schools and youth work projects are open to distributed and transformative leadership, but their responses to crises differ. Schools tend to become more hierarchical, while youth work embraces more flexible leadership. However, Youth work also has lessons to learn around systems leadership and multi-agency strategic planning. Joint training between school and youth work leaders is advocated to enhance professional understanding. The National Academy for Educational Leadership report (2024) calls for support for all educational leaders, including those in youth work, and recommends extending professional learning program funding to youth work, highlighting the need for collaborative leadership and resource sharing.

The needs to articulate youth work

While policy recognizes youth work as educational, this understanding is not always reflected at the local level, where some schools view youth work as alternate provision or leisure activities. The National Academy for Educational Leadership report (2024) highlights the need to change the perception that youth work should focus mainly on marginalized young people. Miscommunication between youth workers and schools contributes to this issue. Youth work's unique educational approach, curriculum, and pedagogy are often not well articulated, leading to misunderstandings. Youth work also needs to articulate the 'hidden knowns that make the approach including an emphasis on agency, our different terms of engagement, our refusal to have deficit views of young people, and our aim to redress power imbalances in education. Youth workers need to agree a model of schools practice that marries 'policy expectation with liberational practice' (Youth Link, 2023). How the principles of universalism and voluntarism play out in schools needs to be resolved. A leadership discussion and clear guidance on collaboration between schools and youth workers are essential. Scotland's guide on youth work in schools could serve as a model for Wales, emphasizing the need for joint efforts to navigate power dynamics, define roles, and allocate resources effectively.

F Recommendations

For the Welsh Government

- To enhance Youth Work Sectors' involvement in the Curriculum for Wales (CfW), we recommend increased funding and strategic resource allocation to address financial, human, and material constraints including additional resources for staff release time, support, staff upskilling, and resource creation. Implementing school improvement review recommendations and ensuring strategic representation of youth work sectors at various levels is crucial.

- Regional arrangements should balance autonomy with guidance, encouraging schools to critically review CfW implementation and collaborate with leaders from different sectors. Middle tier support mechanisms like the NPEP model are suggested to enhance collaborative efforts.

- Professional learning should be supported at national levels across various educational sectors, integrating CfW and Systems leadership into ITE and Youth Work programs. Utilizing multi-sector expertise for effective action research and ongoing research commissioning into curriculum implementation is encouraged. We also recommend ensuring youth workers have access to resources like HWB and there is an avoidance of duplication in resource development.

- Guidelines for schools should recommend involving Youth Work as strategic partners, aiding schools in meeting strategic requirements and fostering positive learning experiences, particularly for marginalized students.

For training providers

- ITE (Initial Teacher Education) and Youth Work qualifying courses should include comprehensive coverage of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW), various leadership styles such as distributed, transformative, and systems leadership, and the role of Youth Workers in schools.

- These courses should also focus on effective partnership working and the drivers behind it. Additionally, the programs should address management and leadership during times of uncertainty, precariousness, and crisis, with an emphasis on transitioning from merely surviving to thriving.

For Schools leaders

- To enhance Youth Work's role in the Curriculum for Wales (CfW), it's crucial to stay updated with the latest research on school leadership and curriculum implementation, forming alliances with academics.

- Youth Work should be recognized as an educational endeavor with unique pedagogic approaches, offering value to all pupils, not just marginalized ones. It should not be seen as diversionary or behavior-changing activities.

- Youth workers, experts in co-production and working with marginalized youth, should be utilized for their contributions to effective curricula and leadership models.

- Training and knowledge exchange activities should be created to foster mutual understanding of different pedagogic approaches.

- Youth Workers should be involved in strategic planning for CfW and implementing CfS guidance, facilitating engagement with pupils, parents, and the community. Their contributions to curriculum delivery, particularly under Estyn inspection criteria, should be recognized. Additionally, strategic collaboration with Youth Work leaders to pilot out-of-hours learning based on young people's needs is essential.

For Youth Work Leaders

- To enhance Youth Work's role in the Curriculum for Wales (CfW), it's essential to stay updated with the latest research on youth work, pedagogy, and leadership, forming alliances with academics.

- Youth Work should seek strategic representation at all levels in CfW implementation and school improvement developments.

- The role of Youth Work, including its unique pedagogic approaches and emphasis on agency, should be clearly articulated, promoting a positive view of young people. Youth Workers should be encouraged to work in schools, understanding power dynamics, defining roles, and addressing resource disparities.

- Youth Workers should engage in Schools and regional consortia in planning and service delivery, recognizing their contributions to curriculum implementation and strategic planning.

- Awareness of school drivers, such as assessments and inspections, is crucial. Youth Work's contributions to Estyn expectations and improving outcomes for young people, particularly those with ALN and marginalized groups, should be highlighted, focusing on providing positive learning experiences and fostering community engagement.

1. Introduction

The Leadership Academy aims to support leaders in implementing the Curriculum for Wales (CfW). The National Academy for Educational Leadership has commissioned a study to explore the role of educational leadership in both formal and informal settings, such as youth work and schools. This study focuses on how youth work and school leaders can collaborate to implement the CfW, incorporating the perspectives of key stakeholders, including young people. The objectives of the Think Piece are to:

- Define the joint roles and responsibilities of youth work and school leaders (YWaSL) in delivering the CfW.

- Enhance the evidence base for youth work in Wales through a collaborative leadership approach.

- Improve mutual understanding between youth work and school leaders to enhance outcomes for young people.

- Provide recommendations for educational leaders and policymakers on using a systems leadership approach to support CfW implementation.

Methodology

The study was conducted in three stages:

- **Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA):** A review of national, European, and international literature on educational leadership roles in curriculum implementation, focusing on youth work and school leadership. The REA included peer-reviewed research and grey literature, prioritizing recent publications and systematic reviews.

- **Focus Groups:** Three focus groups with YWaSL were conducted to validate findings and gather views on applying leadership concepts across professional boundaries. Additionally, feedback from young people was collected through a local youth club.

- **Recommendations and Verification:** Recommendations were developed based on a systems leadership approach to CfW implementation. Verification workshops will be held with YWaSL to finalize these recommendations.

Context

The CfW's core purposes align with youth work principles. Youth workers and support workers are now required to register with the Education Workforce Council, alongside other educational staff. The Welsh Government is consulting on new criteria for accrediting initial teacher education, promoting collaboration between teaching and youth work. The Youth Work Strategy for Wales emphasizes the partnership between youth work and formal education to achieve the CfW's goals. The study highlights the importance of leadership in integrating youth work within schools and overcoming traditional dichotomies between the two sectors.

The Albemarle Report (1960) significantly advanced youth work in England and Wales by investing in facilities, including youth clubs in schools. In Scotland, the Kilbrandon Report (1961) led to the creation of 'school wings' and increased school use for youth activities. Despite similarities, differences in language, culture, and rurality were noted. In the late 1990s, the Wales Youth Agency supported various models of youth work in schools, including alternative curriculum programs and support for students with additional needs. The Welsh Government's Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy (YES) began in 2004, emphasizing participation. However, youth work still lacks access to significant funding for professional learning.

2: Rapid Evidence Assessment:

We have structured this rapid evidence assessment sequentially covering

• Implementing curriculum reform

• Studies on CfW implementation prior to implementation

• Evaluations of the implementation of the CfW

• Leadership in Education (with a particular focus on systems leadership)

• Leadership in schools

• Leadership in Youth work

• Context: Youth work in schools in Wales

• Models of youth work in schools

• Schools understanding of youth work in Wales

• The educational focus, curriculum and pedagogic approach of youth work

• Youth Works hidden knowns and their Bridge to working in schools

• Other tensions in delivering youth work in schools

• Pupil voice

• Community Schooling

Pupil Voice and Community Schooling are featured because they seem to be areas where youth work could make significant contributions.

Implementing Curriculum reform

We found three systematic reviews that were particularly relevant. Gouëdard et al (2020) systematic review 'Curriculum reform: A literature review to support effective implementation'. discusses the implementation of curriculum reform in the context of education policy Internationally. They emphasize the importance of a clear educational vision, stakeholder engagement, and contextual factors in shaping a coherent implementation strategy for curriculum reform. They also highlight the need for smart policy design, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and consideration of available resources and existing governance arrangements. They underscore the role of technology, funding strategies, and institutional support in facilitating curriculum change. They then explore the impact of curriculum reform on teaching practices, the challenges of implementing change in educational settings, and the importance of teacher involvement and professional growth in successful curriculum reform.

Gülçin Karakuş's (2020) systematic review, "Curriculum Implementation Problems," delves into the challenges encountered in implementing curricula within educational settings. It identifies specific issues related to teachers, students, curriculum content, and school infrastructure that impede effective curriculum execution. Key points include the lack of professional development for teachers, the diverse characteristics and prior knowledge of students, time constraints within the curriculum, and inadequate school resources. The review underscores the importance of addressing these problems to ensure successful curriculum implementation and enhance educational outcomes. It suggests that resolving these issues is crucial for the success of the educational process.

Additionally, the review highlights the need to align the evaluation and assessment framework with any new curriculum, provide adequate initial teacher education and professional development opportunities, and adopt a whole-of-system approach to ensure successful curriculum implementation. The main takeaway is that curriculum reform is a complex process requiring careful consideration of multiple factors, including teacher professional development, curriculum autonomy, and effective change management strategies to ensure successful implementation and positive educational outcomes.

Writing prior to implementation Sinnema, Nieveen, & Priestley's (2020) review seems most relevant, as it directly considers lessons Wales could learn on curriculum implementation. They warn against uncritical policy borrowing from different contexts, which often leads to homogenized curriculum policy that ignores the reality of enactment. However, they draw a number of important lessons. Firstly, they discuss the importance of considering curriculum as a social practice and outline the multiple layers that comprise the system. These are:

- *Macro Level:* Where the national curriculum policy and specifications are produced. An example is the National Approach to Professional Learning framework, which, while national in scope, influences practices at the meso level.

- *Meso Level:* Mid-level practices such as creating guidance to aid curriculum development, and providing leadership and support for school activities. In Wales, entities like the Pioneer Schools networks and the Regional Consortia play a crucial role in this space.

- *Micro Level:* At school level. It includes creating comprehensive school-wide approaches to ensure curricular coherence, developing detailed schemes of work, producing educational resources, and implementing these resources in classroom settings.

They then expand on a number of key ideas and transferable ideas including:

- *Curriculum Concepts:* They emphasize the importance of developing nuanced concepts to inform the development of curricular practices. It criticizes the view of curriculum as a product to be delivered, arguing for a more nuanced understanding.

- *Accountability Practices:* They highlight the potential negative impact of accountability practices that satisfy external audiences rather than meet educational criteria.

- *Professional Learning:* They argue for the need to resource high-quality professional learning to raise teacher capacity to engage with the new curriculum.

- *Social Capital:* They emphasize the role of social capital in curriculum reform and the importance of high-quality research to improve the functioning of collaborative networks.

- *Knowledge Importance:* They underscore the importance of knowledge and the need to maximize the benefits of a flexible curriculum while mitigating inherent risks.

In summary, they emphasise the importance of nuanced understanding, collaboration, accountability, professional learning, and social capital. It also highlights the need for a balanced approach to flexibility and risk in curriculum design.

Other studies prior to the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales

A study by Power et al. (2020), prior to implementation, highlighted the challenges of curriculum reform in Wales, emphasizing the demands the new curriculum will place on resources and the risks associated with increased flexibility (Power et al., 2020). They foretold that successful implementation would be a complex process that would necessitate collaboration among various stakeholders, including schools, education authorities, and the government (Power et al., 2020).

Other authors celebrate how the new curriculum integrates music, art, dance, drama, and film & digital media into an expressive arts 'Area of Learning and Experience' (AoLE) (Breeze et al., 2023). Aldous et al. (2022) delve into the negotiation and implementation of the Health and Well-Being (HWB) Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) within the new Curriculum for Wales. Kools et al.(2018) emphasise the importance of developing schools as learning organizations, seeing it as a crucial strategy to empower institutions to effectively implement the new curriculum in Wales, highlighting the need to create supportive environment within schools to facilitate the necessary innovation needed.

Evaluations of the Curriculum for Wales Implementation:

Several reports and articles have evaluated the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW), focusing on schools and teacher perspectives (Evans, 2023, Thomas et al, 2023). Key findings include:

- **Progress and Challenges:** Senior leaders reported good progress, particularly in pedagogy and collaboration, but noted slower progress due to the reforms' complexity. Implementing CfW is iterative, requiring continuous monitoring and redesign. Some staff were hesitant to move away from established frameworks, especially in assessment.

- **Collaborative Efforts:** Effective school clusters provided guidance and opportunities for collaboration. Senior leaders were in early stages of implementing Careers and Work-Related Experiences (CWRE) and welcomed the inclusion of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic Histories.

- **Equity and Learner-Centered Approaches:** Schools focused on equity and became more learner-centered in curriculum design. Various methods were used to inform parents about the curriculum. Primary school learners enjoyed topic-based learning.

- **Teacher Perspectives:** Evans (2023) highlighted the need for a well-coordinated professional learning program, trust in the profession, and clear guidance. He warned against overwhelming teachers with excessive documentation and emphasized the importance of professional support and agency.

- **Health and Well-being:** Durden-Myers et al. (2024) emphasized the need for a strategic, collaborative approach tailored to each school's context. Effective implementation requires adequate training, guidance, and time allocation.

In summary, successful CfW implementation requires continuous adaptation, collaboration, professional support, and a focus on equity and learner-centered approaches. Trust, clear guidance, and tailored strategies are essential for overcoming challenges and achieving positive educational outcomes.

Educational Leadership and Curriculum Implementation:

The literature highlights the critical role of educational leadership in successful school systems (Hallinger & Ko, 2016, Stevenson & Weiner, 2020). Effective curriculum leadership significantly impacts student development through cooperation, empowerment, and shared decision-making. Key aspects include collaborative goal setting, program development, staffing, and resource allocation.

Leadership in Wales: Marchant at al (2024) emphasize the importance of leadership in Wales for curriculum reform. Effective leadership supports school and system improvement, crucial for the Curriculum for Wales. Reynolds & McKimm (2021) note that recent developments, such as the National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales, offer hope for addressing historical neglect of management and leadership issues. They propose six strategies for developing educational leadership in Wales:

- **Within-School Variation (WSV):** Identifying good practices.

- **Pedagogical Leadership:** Emphasizing classroom teaching methods.

- **Contextual Strategies:** Adapting to diverse social and economic contexts.

- **Thought Leadership:** Recognizing leadership complexity.

- **Innovative Thinking:** Encouraging evidence-informed original thinking.

- **System Reliability:** Ensuring the educational system's reliability.

Leadership Styles: Various leadership styles, including autonomy-supportive, transformational, and participative leadership, benefit school leadership. Shared and distributive leadership, decision-making leadership, and situational leadership practices improve school quality and performance. Several authors favour systems thinking (Gurr, 2023, Shaked, H., & Schechter, C. (2016). Sources of systems thinking in school leadership. *Journal of School Leadership*, *26*(3), 468-494., known as Systems School Leadership, involves leading schools through systems-thinking concepts.

Systematic Reviews: Day, Sammons, and Gorgen (2020) emphasize that effective school leadership impacts school organization, culture, and teachers, indirectly affecting student outcomes. Key dimensions of successful leadership include defining vision and values, improving teaching and learning conditions, and building relationships within and outside the school community. Challenges include managing behavior, strategically managing resources, and ensuring staff and student well-being.

Daniëls, Hondeghem, and Dochy (2019) discuss instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership in education. Effective leadership focuses on curricula and instruction, communication, relationships, and shaping school climate and culture. They recommend integrating these leadership theories or developing a combined theory as studies often rely on principals' self-reported perceptions. There's a lack of research comparing professional development techniques, their effectiveness, and transferability. Future research should map current practices, consider stakeholder perspectives, and integrate school context. In summary, effective educational leadership is multifaceted, involving various styles and strategies to support curriculum implementation and improve school performance.

EDI and Middle Leadership:
EDI Issues in Leadership: Khalifa et al. (2018) discuss Indigenous and decolonial school leadership, highlighting that current practices often reflect colonial legacies. They identify five key strands for school leaders of Indigenous and minoritized youth:

- Prioritizing self-knowledge and self-reflection

- Enacting self-determination for community empowerment

- Centering community voices and values

- Serving through altruism and spirituality

- Approaching collectivism through inclusive communication

These strands aim to challenge colonizing practices and promote Indigenous and minoritized students' identities.

Middle Leadership: Fullan (2022) emphasizes the importance of middle leadership within the broader system, aligning with the Leadership Academy's Associate Model. Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford, and Lamanna (2021) identify four conclusions about middle leadership:

1. Difficult to define
2. Varies in positions and responsibilities
3. Impacts teacher practice, team development, school reform, and professional learning
4. Needs better professional learning to equip middle leaders

School Leadership in Wales: School leadership in Wales is seen as collaborative and transformational. Egan and Keane (2018) discuss the evolution of educational leadership in Wales, noting the increasing recognition of its importance. They call for empowering school leaders and focusing on instructional leadership and lifelong professional learning. Harris and Jones (2021) emphasize the synergy between distributed and instructional leadership, which positively impacts organizational learning and student outcomes. They highlight the need for context-specific and culturally sensitive leadership programs and stress the importance of evidence-informed decisions in leadership development. In summary, effective educational leadership in Wales involves addressing EDI issues, enhancing middle leadership, and developing context-specific leadership programs to improve school and system performance.

Leadership in Youth Work:
The literature on youth work management and leadership is limited. The most cited work is Jon Ord's 2011 book "Critical Issues in Youth Work Management," which discusses the historical and theoretical context, critical practice issues, and management in various settings. Harrison and Ord (2011) highlight the importance of understanding management theories, noting that many youth work managers lack formal training. They outline four main theoretical approaches: Classic, Humanistic, Systems, and Contingency theories, emphasizing the need for critical awareness of managerial strategies. The Wales Youth Work Strategy (2019) and its implementation plan reference systems leadership as a mechanism for empowering young people and the sector. However, these documents do not detail how youth workers are to be trained and supported as systems leaders.
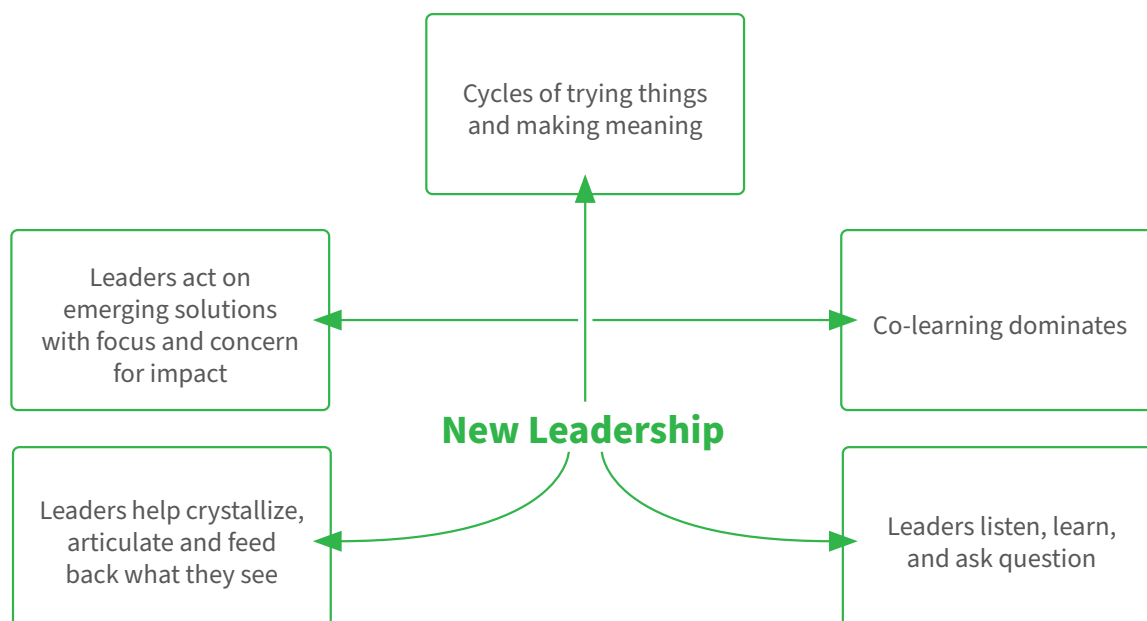
Systems Leadership Approach: Harris (2020) emphasizes the importance of clarity in defining systems leadership within educational leadership and curriculum reform in Wales. Systems leaders should possess skills in facilitation, advocacy, enhancing professional capacity, and influencing others. They should understand and manage change within and outside their context, pushing the boundaries of professional practice. A systems leader aims to improve not just their own organization but the broader system, including schools and youth work provision. The evidence is categorized into macro and micro levels:

- **Macro Level:** Solving complex problems across organizations and driving policy for system change.

- **Micro Level:** Focusing on individual system leaders' roles and responsibilities within specific contexts.

Effective systems leadership can support change and improve school and system performance. Recommendations for the Leadership Academy include focusing on the role of Associates as system leaders and capturing their impact within the Welsh education system.

Fullan (2020) is a key figure in systems leadership, influencing the Leadership Academy. He advocates for a new approach to educational reform, emphasizing moral purpose, understanding change, building relationships, sharing knowledge, and creating coherence. Fullan stresses the importance of clarity in change initiatives and warns against attempting cultural change without clear objectives. He highlights the need for leaders to address complex problems, build diverse relationships, and foster leadership in others. Fullan's model includes traits such as being a lead learner, listening, learning in context, and making oneself dispensable. His approach aims to increase the capacity of individuals and groups to make better decisions and engage in the change process.

Fullers Leadership Model (Fuller, 2020)

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Cycles of trying    │
                    │ things and making   │
                    │ meaning             │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                              ▲
┌──────────────────┐         │          ┌──────────────────┐
│ Leaders act on   │◄────────┼─────────►│ Co-learning      │
│ emerging         │         │          │ dominates        │
│ solutions with   │    New Leadership  │                  │
│ focus and        │         │          │                  │
│ concern for      │         │          │                  │
│ impact           │         │          │                  │
└──────────────────┘         │          └──────────────────┘
┌──────────────────┐        ╱ ╲         ┌──────────────────┐
│ Leaders help     │◄──────╱   ╲───────►│ Leaders listen,  │
│ crystallize,     │                    │ learn, and ask   │
│ articulate and   │                    │ question         │
│ feed back what   │                    │                  │
│ they see         │                    │                  │
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The literature on youth work in schools identifies three main models:

- **Functional Models:** Focus on project goals, often highlighting how youth work supports schools but overlooking power dynamics and operational issues.

- **Operational/Structural Models:** Detail service planning, school-youth service relationships, and their impacts. Examples include:

  - **Youth Workers in Schools:** Delivering programs, often ad hoc and funding-dependent.

  - **School-Initiated Programs:** Schools seek external agencies for supplementary programs.

  - **Youth Centers in Schools:** Youth wings offering activities during and after school.

  - **Youthreach Model:** Parallel educational experiences for at-risk youth.

- **Hybrid Models:** Combine functional and operational aspects to varying degrees of success.

Alan Rogers (2014) outlines informal education models that integrate formal and non-formal learning, address unsocial outcomes, and engage in dialogic interactions. These models emphasize the diverse roles and contributions of youth workers in schools.

Functional Models

Several reports outline various roles and contributions of youth workers in schools in terms of service provision (Rogers, 2016, Arrad, 2015, NYA, 2023, Youth Link (2023). Here's a brief summary:

Youth work contribution	Rogers (2016)	NYA (2023)	Arrad (2015)	Youth Link (2023)
Pastoral Support: Youth workers provide emotional support and teach life skills to vulnerable students, enabling them to better cope in the classroom.	✗	✗	✗	
Qualification Opportunities: They run accredited programs for underachieving students or those struggling with mainstream lessons, aiming to keep them enrolled and reintegrate them into mainstream classes where possible.	✗		✗	
Employment Skills: Youth workers run courses to develop CVs and teach skills for work, such as communication, interview skills, and job searching.	✗		✗	✗
Transition Work: They provide support for children struggling in Years 5 and 6, and additional support throughout the move to secondary school and onwards as appropriate.	✗		✗	
Drop-in Services and One-to-One Support: They offer mentoring and address specific issues or concerns, supporting emotional well-being.	✗		✗	
Family Support Work: They build relationships with parents/carers and provide a link between home and school to improve attendance and behaviour.	✗	✗	✗	✗
Delivering PSE and SRE: Personal and social education (PSE) and sex and relationship education (SRE) through small group work, skills development and well being	✗	✗	✗	✗
Welsh Language, Culture, and Citizenship Education: They contribute to this area of the curriculum, especially in Welsh speaking schools.	✗	✗	✗	
Peer Education: They create opportunities for young people to become peer educators on a range of PSE topics.	✗		✗	
Wider Access to Community Youth Work, Volunteering and Social Action; They provide links with community youth projects and volunteering opportunities.	✗	✗	✗	
Youth Councils and Forums: They support school councils and build skills to participate in youth governance structures.	✗	✗	✗	✗
Attendance - Engagement and re-engagement in education through pastoral and outreach care or detached youth work to support young people's well-being and school attendance		✗		
Behaviour - What happens at home affects behaviour in the classroom. Peer group activities and 1-2-1 mentoring can support personal and social development and help address low-level behaviour. Youth work methodologies are also used in Alternative Provision settings.		✗		
Development and Enrichment - Increased learning opportunities in and out of school. Youth work delivers planned learning through enrichment activities including arts and creativity and addressing food insecurity		✗		✗
Readiness to Learn: Youth work helps children and young people overcome barriers to learning, such as improving health and well-being, tackling food insecurity, and engaging with learning in different settings.				✗
Social and Emotional Well-being: Youth workers use a trauma-informed approach to increase the social and emotional well-being of young people, particularly those who are hardest to reach.		✗		✗

The NYA report proposes a model for high-quality youth work in schools, combining implementation strategies and national policy recommendations, emphasizing open access, safe spaces, whole-child approaches, youth participation, community engagement, and cross-sector professional development.

Hybrid Models of Youth Work in Schools:

Arrad (2015) outlines various roles for youth workers in schools, including:

- **Pastoral Support:** Providing emotional support and life skills.

- **Qualification Opportunities:** Running accredited programs for underachieving students.

- **Employment Skills:** Teaching job-related skills.

- **Transition Work:** Supporting students during school transitions.

- **Drop-in Services and One-to-One Support:** Offering mentoring and addressing specific issues.

- **Family Support Work:** Linking home and school to improve attendance and behavior.

- **Delivering PSE and SRE:** Teaching personal and social education and sex and relationship education.

- **Welsh Language, Culture, and Citizenship Education:** Contributing to these curriculum areas.

- **Peer Education:** Facilitating peer education on various topics.

- **Wider Access to Community Youth Work and Volunteering:** Connecting with community projects.

- **Youth Councils and Forums:** Supporting school councils and youth governance.

- **Partnership Work:** Collaborating with agencies to evaluate support effectiveness.

Funding models impact the implementation of youth work in schools, with approaches including core funding, combined funding, school contributions, and European Social Fund (ESF) support.

The Principal Youth Officers' document (2020) emphasizes mutual understanding between teaching and youth work for successful partnerships, highlighting the complementary nature of both approaches.

Youth Work Provision Examples:

- After School Clubs

- Arts & Drama projects

- One-to-One projects

- Sports and physical activity projects

- Accreditation projects

- Information Service projects

- Health & Well-being projects

- Alternative Curriculum projects

- Participation/Forum/Council projects

- Welsh Language projects

- Holiday Schemes

- Projects for young people not in education, employment, or training

- Citizenship projects

- Disabilities projects

- Black and Ethnic minorities projects

- Duke of Edinburgh projects

Youth Link (2024) in Scotland: Youth work supports readiness to learn, social and emotional well-being, learning out of school, addressing food insecurity, parental engagement, youth participation, personal learning and achievement, and skills development. The document "Developing Youth Work and School Partnerships" outlines the necessity of partnership working with youth under the "Curriculum for Excellence."

The document outlines how the "Curriculum for Excellence" and other policies encourage partnerships between schools and youth work. It details the phases of implementation and the entitlements youth work can help deliver:

- **Broad Phase:** Enhancing formal curriculum areas, personal learning and achievement opportunities, developing skills, and providing transition support.
- **Senior Phase:** Developing skills, recognizing achievements, supporting transitions to positive destinations, and offering tailored progression pathways.

Added Value of Partnership Working:

- Improved outcomes for children and young people through collective knowledge, skills, and expertise.
- Better coordination of services, optimal use of resources, increased practitioner skills, stronger relationships, and enhanced opportunities for young people.

Characteristics of Good Partnership Working:

- Mutual trust and respect, clear purpose and aims, shared understanding of roles, common professional language, joint planning and evaluation, open communication, and valuing youth voice.

Schools' Understanding of Youth Work: Key documents shaping school leaders' understanding include:

- **Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes (2018):** Emphasizes youth work as a universal entitlement.
- **Youth Work in Schools in Wales (2016):** Highlights benefits of youth work in schools.
- **Youth Work Strategy (2019):** Aims to understand effective youth work interventions.
- **Understanding the Value of Youth Work and Youth Workers (2018):** Recommends recognizing youth workers' skills.
- **Curriculum for Wales - What Contribution Can Youth Work Make? (2023):** Emphasizes extending learners' experiences.

Challenges:

- Confusion over terminology and the educational focus of youth work.
- Need for clearer articulation of youth work's educational role, curriculum, and pedagogy.

Youth Work's Educational Focus:
Youth work pedagogy is often described as informal or non-formal education. Informal learning, which occurs continuously and often unconsciously, significantly shapes knowledge and values. It blends with formal elements, contributing to the 'hidden curriculum.' Recognizing informal learning's role is crucial for understanding the educational process. Formal learning is structured and institutionalized, non-formal learning is organized but flexible, and informal learning is incidental and pervasive. The Welsh Youth Work Strategy (2019) defines these types similarly but emphasizes their impact on pedagogy and outcomes.

Youth Work Curriculum:
The National Youth Work Curriculum (NYA, 2022) focuses on personal and social development through voluntary participation. Key elements include participation, equality, education, and empowerment. Ord (2018) argues that youth work should prioritize process over content, highlighting empowerment, participation, choice, group work, experiential learning, and relationship building as essential aspects. These elements help develop youth work practice and articulate its value.

Youth Work Pedagogy
Youth work's educational philosophy is diverse and contested, with creative, critical, and social pedagogies being the most commonly advocated approaches (Seal, 2019).

Creative pedagogies harness the arts to engage youth through self-expression and innovation (Kristen et al., 2021). This approach includes creative teaching, teaching for creativity, and creative learning, enhancing students' imagination, problem-solving skills, and motivation (Alldred & Howard, 2022). Creative pedagogies create transformative learning experiences, helping young individuals overcome barriers and develop essential skills like artistic critique and self-expression (Hickling-Hudson, 2013; Duval et al., 2023). Key features include generating ideas, encouraging autonomy, and fostering collaboration (Cremin & Chappell, 2019). Arts-based approaches impact personal, social, and educational outcomes, including improved education, skills, and mental health (SQW & University of Warwick, 2024).

Critical pedagogies encourage young people to engage reflectively and analytically with the world, questioning societal norms and power structures (Seal & Smith, 2021). This approach fosters a sense of agency and the ability to advocate for social justice (Achilleos et al., 2021). Key characteristics include democracy and equality in learning environments, a co-created flexible curriculum, generative themes, teachable moments, and cultivating hope and enacting change (Seal & Smith, 2021). Critical pedagogies enhance personal and academic growth, significantly impacting students' behavior, fostering democratic engagement, and nurturing informed and socially aware individuals (Hunaepi et al., 2024). They also integrate well with digital technologies, addressing the impact of AI in education.

Social pedagogies emphasize nurturing personal, academic, and professional growth while instilling values of social responsibility and civic engagement (Eden, 2024). This approach supports young people to grow as individuals and as part of a collective, recognizing and challenging social injustices, fostering recognition, and empowering young individuals to envision alternative futures (DeJaeghere, 2019). Social pedagogy aids social and emotional development, well-being, and citizenship, addressing issues like bullying, poverty, and racism (Pantazis & Styler, 2020). Core processes include animating, caring, and educating, helping young people find motivation, engage in social issues, and enact change (Smith, 2016, 2019).

These pedagogical approaches often overlap and complement each other in practice. For instance, a youth work program might use creative activities to engage young people, encourage critical thinking about their societal roles, and foster a sense of community and shared responsibility. This integrated approach can address societal challenges and empower young individuals to become active agents of change (Thomas, 2016; Kristen et al., 2021).

Youth Work, Pedagogic Approach, Services and their relationship to Estyn Inspection Criteria
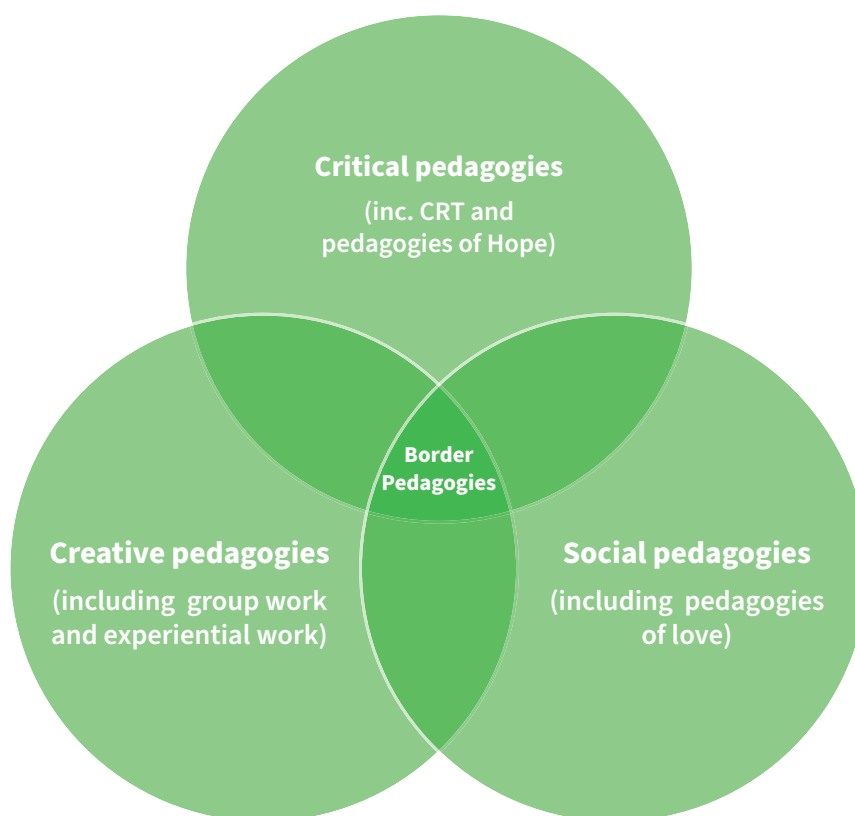
At the centre is Border Pedagogies, as they draw on all these traditions while focusing on the boundaries and challenges faced by young people in schools.

The delivery of youth work in schools faces several tensions, primarily due to the intersection of formal education systems and informal youth work practices (Gormally et al., 2015; Johnson & Majewska, 2022; Rogers, 2014). Formal learning institutions often overlook the importance of informal and everyday learning that occurs outside structured curricula (Rogers, 2014). This oversight can lead to a devaluation of informal education, which is not always seen as "real learning" worthy of integration into the formal curriculum. The pressures of standardized testing, national curricula, and increased teacher workloads further narrow the focus on formal education (Johnson & Majewska, 2022).

Youth work brings "hidden knowns"—tacit knowledge and routine practices that are often unrecognized within schools (Gormally et al., 2015, 2019). These include:

- **Emphasis on Agency**: Youth workers help young people understand their power and choices, creating spaces for them to articulate their views and be heard (Spence, Devanney & Noonan, 2006).

- **Analysis of Power Imbalances**: Youth work aims to mitigate power imbalances, advocating for young people and helping them advocate for themselves (Gormally, Coburn & Bright, 2015; Alinsky, 1974).

- **Non-deficit Views of Young People**: Youth workers challenge deficit discourses and help young people explore and change unjust labels (Corney, 2024).

- **Different Terms of Engagement**: Building rapport with young people, especially those distrustful of adults, through continual negotiation of engagement terms (Harris & Seal, 2016; Davies, 2005).

- **Social and Community Engagement**: Encouraging young people to be critically aware of social situations and act t owards a more just society.

Specific tensions include:

- **Withering of the Voluntary Principle**: Youth work traditionally relies on voluntary participation, which is challenged in formal education where choices are limited (Davies, 2005; Jeff & Smith, 1999; Estyn, 2020).

- **Targeted vs. Universal Approach**: Schools often view youth work instrumentally, focusing on behavior management rather than educational value (Gormally et al., 2015; Estyn, 2020).

- **Changing Nature of Relationships**: The informal, personal relationships youth workers build can be altered in structured school environments, leading to role ambiguity and stress (Morgan, Morgan & O'Kelly, 2008; Bloomer et al., 2022).

- **Measuring Outcomes**: Youth work outcomes, often qualitative and based on personal growth, are challenging to measure within a school system focused on quantitative results (de St Croix & Doherty, 2024).

- **Power Dynamics**: Navigating power dynamics within schools can impact youth workers' ability to build rapport with institutionally labeled young people.

- **Recognition of Informal Education**: The value of informal education is often unrecognized within formal schooling systems, leading to tensions between youth work goals and formal education methods.

- **Resource Allocation**: Disparities in resource allocation for youth work in schools can create tensions, with some areas experiencing constraints while others have more support.

These tensions highlight the challenges and complexities of integrating youth work into formal education settings. In summary, the tensions in youth work in schools stem from the need to reconcile competing methodologies, navigate power dynamics, recognize the value of informal education, define the role of youth workers, and address disparities in resource allocation. Understanding and addressing these tensions is crucial for the effective integration of youth work within formal educational settings.

Pupil Voice in Wales: Context

Pupil voice in Wales has gained significant attention, especially in the context of children's rights and active involvement in decision-making processes. Since devolution, the Welsh Government has emphasized child participation through initiatives like the Funky Dragon assembly, the Young Wales consultation platform, and the establishment of the Children's Commissioner for Wales (Roberts, 2023). The Welsh Youth Parliament, endorsed by the Senedd since 2018, allows youth aged 11 to 17 to participate in governance. Local governments are mandated to involve children in decision-making, and schools are required to have councils to facilitate this engagement (Roberts, 2023).

The Welsh Government defines pupil voice as arrangements that encourage and enable learners to participate in decision-making within educational settings (Roberts, 2023). Motivations for promoting pupil voice include learning citizenship skills (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2002; Crick Report, 1998), enhancing learning and well-being (Fielding & Ruddock, 2002; Demetriou, 2019), practicing democracy (Flutter, 2007; Huddleston, 2007), and realizing children's rights (Noyes, 2005; Lundy, 2007).

Despite these efforts, pupil voice remains a contested area in policy and practice (Seal, 2009). Murphy et al. (2024) found that while the Welsh Government has supported embedding children's rights in policy, there is limited evidence of changes in educational curricula and practice. Estyn has identified good practices in student engagement, but the Children's Commissioner for Wales and the Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group have raised concerns about the uniformity of implementation.

The move away from single elected school councils during COVID-19 increased participation, highlighting the need for more representative structures (Huddleston, 2007; Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2022). The availability of resources on student participation is scattered, but the integration of children's rights into the new Curriculum for Wales presents an opportunity to consolidate and create new resources to support comprehensive student participation (Roberts, 2023).

The wider literature on Pupil Voice

The concept of pupil voice has evolved significantly, influenced by various policies and strategies. Hall (2017) highlights two competing narratives: one viewing pupil voice as democratic and transformative, and another seeing it as a strategic action framed within consumerist logic. Ngussa & Makewa (2014) argue that a transformational model of pupil voice requires fundamental changes in how teachers engage with students and perceive their practices. Müller-Kuhn et al. (2021) identify five contexts for developing pupil voice: democratic education, children's rights, well-being, learning, and school practice. They note that pupil voice is often formalized through mechanisms like school councils, which can be restrictive and controlled by teachers. Using Hart's model of participation, they found that pupil voice is often tokenistic or manipulative, with power imbalances typically favoring teachers. The effectiveness of pupil voice mechanisms is often judged by whether they lead to actual change, which is frequently not the case, fostering cynicism among students.

Holquist et al. (2023) developed a framework for pupil voice practices, focusing on structures (setting, focus, and intent) and relationships (access, representativeness, roles, and responsiveness). This framework aims to address power dynamics and ensure that pupil voice practices lead to meaningful change.Pearce & Wood (2016) propose an evaluative framework for transformative pupil voice initiatives, emphasizing dialogue, inclusivity, and challenging the status quo. They note that teachers and schools face significant constraints in implementing such initiatives due to coercive forces that prioritize performative goals (Ball, 2003).

Jones & Bubb (2021) found that while there is recognition of the importance of pupil voice in enacting democracy in schools, its implementation is often limited to student councils, with time constraints and doubts about competence hindering broader application. Baraoutsis et al. (2016) argue that high-stakes educational systems limit teachers' ability to modify their practices and collaborate with students. Youth Link (2023) suggests that youth workers can play a crucial role in developing pupil voice by engaging young people in decision-making processes and informing educational frameworks about their perspectives and needs.

Community Schools

Community-focused schools in Wales have been extensively researched and developed, with a well-developed community school approach shown to improve attendance, behavior, attainment, and aspirations of children and young people (Welsh Government, 2022; Rand, 2020). This approach also positively impacts the lives of family and community members, fostering thriving, empowered, and connected communities. Schools as learning organizations are key to bringing the new curriculum to life in Wales (Kools et al., 2018). Studies have explored various approaches to community engagement and their effects on social cohesion (Hemming, 2018). Community participation significantly shapes school culture and is linked to student achievement (Hofman et al., 2002). A shared vision and alignment of teaching and learning with this vision positively influence student outcomes in Wales ("Executive summary", 2018).

The concept of learning organizations and communities has been studied, identifying barriers to their creation in traditional schools and the leadership required for successful transformation (Voulalas & Sharpe, 2005). Progress towards education transformation in Wales emphasizes system-level change and leadership (Harris, 2010). The School Effectiveness Framework is central to Wales' tri-level reform process, addressing the 'long tail' of performance in disadvantaged communities (Egan & Marshall, 2007).The Welsh Government (2022) identifies three key elements of a Community-Focused School:

1. **Family engagement**: Involving families in school life and decision-making.

2. **Community engagement**: Utilizing links with community groups and offering support to community members.

3. **Multi-agency engagement**: Partnering with services to remove barriers to learning.

Four key enablers support these elements: collective vision, collaborative leadership, trusting relationships, and connected learning. Estyn (2020) outlines eight characteristics of Community-Focused Schools, including a focus on social, emotional, and health needs, family and community engagement, integrated provision, and multi-disciplinary training. Leadership in community schools involves a strong vision, understanding of community challenges, and collaboration with families and communities to improve life chances for children and young people (Estyn, 2020). Different interpretations of community engagement mean developments are often driven by individual leaders with a strong moral purpose (Estyn, 2020).

Youth work literature highlights cynicism towards participation and engagement initiatives among young people and communities, often due to past experiences where their voices were excluded or ignored (Seal, 2019; Smith, 1999). Despite this, meaningful community and youth participation are central to youth and community work. Traditional parent engagement in schools has been criticized for privileging middle-class values and failing to account for diversity, often focusing on individual children or existing community leaders rather than broader school transformation linked to community revitalization (Campbell et al., 2016; Shiffman, 2018; Pappas, 2012). Love (2019) poses critical questions for community schools to consider in engaging with historically marginalized groups, emphasizing the need to address systemic oppression and ensure that the voices and expertise of youth, families, and communities are genuinely considered in decision-making.

Additional guidance since the original Community-Focused Schools (CfS) guidance (WG 2022a) links CfS with broader policy directives, including the Curriculum for Wales, and emphasizes its role in tackling poverty's impact on educational attainment (WG 2022b). A discussion paper by the Leadership Academy Associates (2023) focuses on the role of educational leadership in achieving CfS's vision, highlighting the need for strategic planning, funding, and a collaborative approach to leadership.The Associates recommend that CfS should involve all services and stakeholders, not just school leaders, to ensure a community-focused approach. They emphasize the importance of collaborative leadership and collective responsibility for implementation, centered on the best outcomes for children and young people. This approach should engage parents and carers outside traditional school hours to reduce poverty's impact and increase attainment. The concluding recommendation reiterates the importance of school leadership in CfS policy as an integral approach to school improvement, applicable to all schools, not just those in high-deprivation areas. It aligns with Fullan's (2020) and Harris' (2020) approaches to educational change and leadership, emphasizing the roles of other leaders in increasing outcomes (National Academy for Educational Leadership, 2022).

3. Findings

Understanding of the Curriculum for Wales

Managers generally had positive views about the new curriculum, appreciating its modern, adaptive approach. One manager noted it is

> **"something that is actually much more fitting into the modern world, more adaptive, creative thinking, working together, thinking about their role in society."**

Another highlighted its balance, saying,

> **"It's a greater balance in education, it's not just being taught a lesson to pass an exam, it's being taught a lesson that you can use to explore the world more greatly.'**

Some valued its challenge to traditional methods, with one stating,

> **"I think it is a very open way of looking at stuff. And in many ways, it's saying to teachers, actually, have you thought about your work?"**

Youth work managers felt the curriculum aligned well with youth work principles, such as being educative, participative, inclusive, empowering, and expressive. However, they felt excluded from its development, as one manager noted,

> **"So, although the principles and the content of it are very Youth Work oriented, youth work was not party to those conversations of developing it."**

This sentiment is supported by the Better Together Report by the NYA (2023), which stated the curriculum was "developed alongside, rather than with, youth work."

Realities of Strategic Work at a National Level

Many youth workers and managers felt their strategic involvement was tokenistic. One participant remarked,

> **"I think there's a nice notion that we're all in it together. But the practicalities and the realities of that is that that's not the case."**

Another highlighted the struggle for recognition, stating,

> *"Youth work was conspicuous by its absence, so again we had to bang the door and say, hang on a second youth work as a positive.***"**

Participants also noted the skewed implementation focus on schools, with one saying,

> *"We need to look at education in the round, not just about schools and how schools deliver it."*

They emphasized the need for youth work advocates at all levels of government, recognizing the sector's small size and limited strategic presence. One participant explained,

> **"We're trying to punch above our weight as a sector to get involved in those conversations."**

A lack of professional parity within education policy and practice was also noted, with youth work struggling to access funding and support available to teaching staff. One manager pointed out,

> **"We've been trying to get hold of some support through the professional learning entitlement from Welsh Government… youth work doesn't get anything."**

Youth Workers Operating at a Strategic Level

While youth workers and schools need to collaborate more strategically, there is recognition that youth workers do not always prioritize strategic work. One participant noted,

> **"Everything starts with collaboration and we're not very good at doing that. It's like you silo into the stream that you work in and are qualified with, but we can never seem to join it up."**

Youth workers often prioritize face-to-face interactions with young people. As one participant explained,

> **"We're doing that work on a day-to-day basis, you know, and because they haven't got the time or they're too modest to say otherwise, it's up to people like me to pay tribute to them at every opportunity."**

This focus on direct work with youth is reflected in a general reluctance to move into management roles, as another participant noted,

> **"There aren't many champions of youth work at the highest levels. One reason why not is because we want to work with young people and by going up to strategic level you don't work with young people."**

Some participants felt that the term "leadership" is more fitting for youth work, emphasizing distributed leadership across the organization.

> **"Not necessarily leadership, because if leadership is distributed, then it's across an organization, making sure others in the organization can take on roles, take on management, take on anything really."**

The long period of youth work's decline has also impacted strategic prioritization.

> **"The sector here has battened down the hatches because it's been through exceptionally difficult times, but we've still got a sector."**

There is also a sense of not knowing how to get involved strategically.

> **"Where do other organizations like youth work get involved in our delivery, because we've been told the door's open, but you know, just can't find the door still."**

Positively, having a minister with specific responsibility and political allies offers potential.

> **"We're lucky here in that we've got a minister of education, Welsh language, who has youth work policy on his portfolio."**

Scotland is often cited as an example where youth services are better positioned politically.

> **"In Scotland, they are much more politically positioned. Youth Services have positioned themselves much more politically and collectively than we have in Wales."**

Evaluation of the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland shows many positives, with youth work playing a multifaceted role and being valued for empowering young people. However, youth work's role can be unclear and sometimes relegated to a secondary position, leading to under-appreciation and under-resourcing (Gormally et al., 2019; Gallea, 2021; Still, 2024).

Professional Learning

Participants expressed concerns about the lack of professional parity in professional learning opportunities for youth workers (YWs) compared to teachers. This disparity impacts the resources available for youth work and its leaders. One participant highlighted:

> **"We've been trying to get hold of some support through professional learning entitlement from Welsh Government in terms of the amount of money that goes into teaching staff to support their learning and development, and well-being, which amounts to about 27 million quid a year, youth work doesn't get anything."**

The youth work sector receives only approximately £200k per year for professional learning, reinforcing the lack of parity and contributing to frustrations among YW leaders. They felt this issue should be addressed:

> **"We're lucky that we have a minister of education and Welsh language, who has youth work in his portfolio. And so we've got a starting point there. But that's where the frustration comes from, because it's on the list, but doesn't get the spotlight that it deserves."**

Access to high-quality professional learning is crucial for improving educational outcomes (Jones 2020). However, youth workers do not have access to the national enquiry entitlement project, which is a key factor in school improvement and implementing the Curriculum for Wales (CfW).

Working at a Regional and Local Level

Participants were skeptical about working with regional schools consortia due to past experiences:

> **"With the outcome of the current Welsh Government review of the middle tier in education I've suggested to the Youth Work Board that we don't focus on regional consortia at all because we've done that in the past and their remit is about school improvement and they always say we don't want to get interested in youth because our remit is school improvement."**

Some participants felt that unions might be a better avenue for engagement:

> **"We could look at head teachers groups and unions, maybe we want to engage with the NUT, because the unions are going to be around in spite of what happens with the consortia. We don't get invited into the formal education arena for discussions."**

The consensus was to work at a local level with schools, as the curriculum is written locally. However, engaging with school governing bodies posed challenges:

> **"I think governing bodies are, from my experience, possibly too cosy with schools, not as effective as they might be. So I think the default would be to think about, you know, the head teachers, the pastoral support heads, the directors of schools."**

Building but Not Relying on Individual Relationships

Youth work values building relationships with young people and professionally (Jeffs and Smith, 1999). Participants believed that youth workers should build relationships with schools, as it pays dividends:

> **"Going in with the second largest comprehensive in Wales takes some skills, doesn't it? You know, and you or as well and your team make building those personal relationships and then proving your worth. That's the next phase of it and then sustaining that over a long period of time, I think it saves a heck of a lot of time and effort."**

However, reliance on individual relationships can be problematic if people move on. There is a need for more structural and systematic relationships:

> **"Collaborative work between youth work and schools, rather than relying on relationships because what we've got at the moment is a relationship model, and if one of those people from that relationship moves on quite often, it'll just come to an end. So, you know, we need some kind of system and process in place for that."**

This is supported by literature, as Fullan (2020) and Harris (2020) emphasize the importance of building relationships for leaders delivering and informing change. They advocate for a strategic approach, working outside traditional boundaries to effectively lead change, adopting both micro and macro approaches to developing relationships (Harris 2020).

Implementation

Many participants felt that while the curriculum's vision was positive, there was insufficient guidance. They believed the balance between guidance and local interpretation was not right:

> **"The curriculum is obviously written by someone with big ideas. And then the problem is, there's a type of person who writes that kind of policy. And there's a lot of people that need more guidance, more permission, more blueprints, to be able to put these things into effect. And those things are not really there."**

As a result, many felt they needed permission to try new things and take risks:

> **"I noticed it in some of the debates around the curriculum and how the curriculum goes forward, people need permission. You know, there's a lot of people waiting for permission."**

While youth workers and schools questioned engagement with regional consortiums, school leaders spoke positively about cross-school and cross-local authority working. Such arrangements could be beneficial, especially when involving all parties, as it means accountability is not solely on the school level. The Thompson report (2023) supports this, noting that strong clusters of schools with effective relationships provided guidance, reassurance, and collaborative opportunities.

Leadership Needed for Implementation

Participants raised concerns about the leadership required to implement the Curriculum for Wales (CfW). Fullan (2020) describes this as leading during 'messy' conditions, emphasizing the importance of leaders fostering leadership in others. Some participants found this challenging, viewing permission as a leadership issue that needed to be cascaded down:

> **"I think that there's a lot of people a bit scared and worried about it. And I think part of the leadership approach is to give the permission, give the permission to everybody. I think that level of understanding needed cascading down to other people in the organization—they have got the permission to take risks to try new things."**

Existing decision-making processes were seen as too bureaucratic to meet the needed nimbleness. Formal education often had set annual planning mechanisms that Youth Work had to fit into, even when their cycles differed:

> **"An annual problem has always been we don't fit their management structures and because we are the unique sector, it's something we have to manage every time, and who wants to be part of that."**

This aligns with Fullan's (2020) concept of being 'contextually literate' and understanding organizational culture as 'lead learners' during implementation. Previous change management models were considered outdated, requiring new approaches with middle leadership increasing connections across the system. De-Noble (2018) developed a theoretical model to support this middle leadership approach, addressing issues typically associated with implementation.

The Rushed Process of Implementation and Competing Priorities

The rushed implementation process and competing priorities have affected leadership approaches. Some school leaders felt they lacked the time and space to embrace the new vision:

> **"Teachers were trying to create and get session plans together that would align with the new curriculum, but they haven't got the capacity or time. It's not the lack of willingness, just the added pressure."**

This lack of thinking space meant some fundamental changes implied by the curriculum were lost:

> **"Asking schools to create their own curriculum was empowering but also came with immense pressures, leading them to follow set models."**

At the local level, while people embraced the curriculum's vision, the concern was compliance:

> **"The ideas are great, but at the local level, it translates into what schools have to do to be compliant, with clearer expectations in areas like attendance and achievement taking priority."**

Some saw the curriculum as another pressure among many:

> **"There's a lot of pressure all around. Teachers were trying to align session plans with the new curriculum but lacked the capacity and time."**

This echoes Nieveen and Priestley's (2020) discussion on 'Accountability Practices,' where schools sought quick fixes rather than strategic thinking:

> **"Teachers and authorities were scrambling to find solutions and feel they have permission to take on the new curriculum."**

Collaboration pressure could become tokenistic, with schools bringing in familiar parties rather than embracing new ways of thinking:

> **"They are under real pressure to collaborate, but thinking about youth work is another thing altogether for them."**

Leadership was also linked to performative pressure, leading to a fallback on old ways:

> **"The curriculum promotes distributed leadership, but experience shows a slip back into hierarchical or authoritarian school management."**

Thomas et al. (2023) found staff reluctant to move away from established frameworks, especially in assessment. Complex pressures led schools into crisis and survival modes, reverting to authoritarian leadership styles:

> **"In areas with bigger pressures, schools slip back into survival models."**

Ironically, literature suggests that distributed and collaborative leadership is crucial in crisis, emphasizing responsive strategy, shared responsibility, and collegial networking (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023). One participant noted young people's negative response to authoritarian styles, calling for more inclusivity and community ties:

> **"Many schools are hierarchical and authoritarian, which young people do not respond to positively. Schools need to be welcoming, exciting, and empowering."**

Leaders found that addressing attendance required democratic and distributed leadership:

> **"Schools with better attendance involve parents and the community, being more socially active and engaging."**

Young people had negative experiences with schools involving their parents and community:

> **"They tell my parents everything, making my mental health worse. They rarely tell them something positive."**

Newport was cited as a positive example of effective local authority engagement. Striepe & Cunningham (2021) recognize the need for theories and models to address volatility, uncertainty, and ambiguity in educational leadership.

The Need to Get Out of Crisis Mode

One leader emphasized the importance of proactive engagement:

> "We talked very much in our approach of catching young people and children and parents and our stakeholders whilst they're upstream as opposed to when they've hit the rapids or when they've gone over the edge of the waterfall, and they're in that crisis."

The youth work focus group discussed a cycle of crisis response in schools, leading to short-term interventions. They developed a cluster model with distributed leadership, focusing on progression steps for young people. Staff highlighted the importance of reflection and planning:

> "Staff become familiar with progression steps, highlight how the children are doing, look at policies for each area, secondary school links, shared practice and learning possibilities."

One worker described the long-term nature of this project:

> "The cluster that I'm working in, we are developing this. It's ongoing, but with buy-in from the high school, they will benefit. It's quite positive. We have a long way to go."

Challenges included proving the effectiveness of interventions without resorting to short-term measures:

> "We need to embed these things, but we are not always ethical learners. Tracking progression is a challenge, yet we still feel the need to evidence that we are doing it."

The group emphasized being ethical learners and avoiding quick fixes. They collected long-term case studies to identify trends and best practices.

The Need for More Time and Deeper Thinking

A major concern was the lack of awareness about local projects due to cuts and the growth of the voluntary sector. More time was needed for true partnership working:

> "You have to give really deep-rooted support that allows the service to work with everybody to be able to think these things through."

This involves deeper cultural changes and embracing different leadership modes. The Curriculum for Wales represents a significant culture change:

> "It's challenging what education could look like in the future. That's a massive challenge to teachers, to teach in an open way involving young people or revert back to old ways."

Resistance to distributed leadership was noted:

> "At a leadership day, the 'compass for life' model was introduced, focusing on personal abilities and achievement. There was some resistance, but the idea was to support C&YP in achieving their goals."

Unlocking Leadership Potential

The Youth Work Leadership and Management Programme, endorsed by the National Academy for Educational Leadership, was valued for empowering youth workers:

> "Things such as the Youth Work Leadership and Management Programme and the National Academy for Educational Leadership's professional learning exchanges play a huge role in empowering youth workers."

Contribution of Youth Work: Going Beyond the Classroom

Youth workers saw areas where they could contribute to the Curriculum for Wales, including going beyond the classroom:

> "Whilst teachers are very good at understanding the young people in front of them, they can be focused in one set area. The youth sector can specialize and go in different directions."

They can add to the skill set called for in the new curriculum:

> "We have a knowledge base and an ability to explore in certain areas, providing and adding to the skill set that kids get in schools, meeting those four purposes."

Recognising that the Youth Work Approach is Well Suited to the Curriculum's Implementation

The youth work focus group recognized the need to better promote their approach and how they can deliver the new curriculum. Core elements such as developing ambition, lifelong learning, creativity, ethical citizenship, and confidence are central to youth work. The experiential approach of youth work is crucial:

> **"It's around experiential learning, health and well-being, expressive arts, PSC, all of those areas, which is meat and drink to youth work, some of which many teachers find uncomfortable delivering."**

Young people engaged in arts, crafts, sports, and issue-based workshops in both school and youth clubs, with a focus on well-being. One young person noted:

> **"Schools are very cold towards male mental health."**

Youth workers suggested giving young people experiences they wouldn't normally have.

Contribution Around Funding

Youth work can contribute strategically, especially in securing multiple funding sources:

> **"We are constantly working out different ways of getting money from 40 different sources and tying it together with bits of string. I don't think that's well perceived by the school sector."**

Contribution Around Leadership

Youth work offers valuable leadership models, embracing transformational and distributed leadership despite sector challenges:

> **"We have transformational leaders in strategic positions, a strong sense of delegative leadership, enabling youth workers to be reactive and responsive."**

Small organizations benefit from distributed leadership due to the need for quick responses:

> **"In small organizations, distributed leadership opportunities are greater because you have to respond in the third sector."**

Youth work leadership focuses on young people:

> **"Youth work leadership needs to start and finish with young people at the heart of it. Passion and resilience are key."**

Student Voice

Youth work can help expand student and parental voices, challenging traditional school council approaches:

> **"School councils give young people a platform, but how much is this a true reflection of all young people?"**

Young people felt their voices were not valued:

> **"We have a school council, but nothing comes of it. Peers who don't like you make it harder to voice our opinion."**

Youth workers emphasized the importance of understanding why young people don't attend school and addressing issues like bullying first. Participants noted lessons from the private sector:

> **"Any private sector organization wouldn't ignore the people it's there to work for and not ask them what they thought of the provision."**

Youth work recognizes that young people who have had bad experiences in education are often cynical:

> **"Young people respond to respect and empowerment. If we're still subjugating them to traditional, authoritarian settings, why are we surprised they're pushing back?"**

Young people felt youth workers treated them differently:

> **"Youth workers treat young people as individuals with their own thoughts and feelings."**

Areas for Development
Working at Primary and Secondary Transitions

The disconnect between primary and secondary education was identified as an issue:

> **"Where we tend to go wrong is that disconnect between primary and secondary."**

Different pedagogic approaches and the size of secondary schools were also factors:

> **"Primary schools are much more nurturing spaces. The disconnect and the size of secondary schools make them less nurturing."**

This may cause issues for youth projects traditionally serving the 13-19 age range, but there were successful examples:

> **"We did a project with a primary school involving the new curriculum, and it worked because the head teacher was interested."**

There were also calls for better transitions out of secondary school:

> **"There's no robust system for young people not moving on to college or university, directing them to youth work organizations."**

Need to Work Around Digital Literacy and AI

Youth workers felt digital literacies and AI are neglected areas in the Curriculum for Wales. Teaching responsible AI use is necessary as banning it won't work.

Tensions of Youth Work in Schools at a Strategic Level

A common issue was that schools do not always understand what youth work is:

> **"Youth work is education, but it's often sidelined as something else."**

Many felt schools saw youth work as leisure or diversionary activity:

> **"People quickly conjure up images of table tennis or pool tables, not understanding what youth work actually means."**

Perceptions varied among schools:

> **"Some schools are welcoming, others don't understand the process."**

Formal education was seen as particularly problematic:

> **"Other sectors understand youth work more quickly, but within formal education, it's a constant source of frustration."**

There was criticism that formal education had not prioritized understanding youth work, instead looking for quick fixes:

> **"Instead of working with youth workers who understand this, they try to transform into working like youth workers."**

One participant challenged youth work to better articulate its value to formal education:

> **"Are you asking head teachers what they see as youth work and if they are engaging with it? People from the sector might clarify what youth work actually does."**

Who Does Youth Work engage with and What Is Its Approach

Many participants thought schools only brought in youth workers to work with certain young people, often those seen as problematic:

> **"There's also a perception that youth work is only there for a 'certain type of young person' - which is untrue but also sometimes difficult to articulate/change those perceptions."**

This reflects a tension in youth work (Davies, 2003) between being a universal or targeted service. While targeting can stigmatize, all young people need and have a right to youth work services. Youth workers have insights into disengaged youth, developing a deep understanding of social dynamics (Gormally). One participant noted:

> **"Many young people who are perhaps on the fringes and have experienced discrimination and disengagement are quite skeptical of anyone representing a local authority."**

Young people highlighted differences between youth workers and teachers:

> **"Teachers are there to teach, while a youth worker is primarily there to safeguard young people and act as another adult in their life that they can trust."**

> **"Youth workers are there to listen to us and try to understand us. I don't get chucked out of youth club for stupid reasons like wearing earrings."**

> **"Both should take a leaf out of each other's book, youth workers should teach more and teachers should try and be more human."**

When asked about changes youth workers would make in schools, they suggested:

> **"More freedom - topics, more confidence, take the learning where the pupils and they want it to go."**

One participant talked about expanding information hubs:

> **"Online hub for all teachers. Parents, not so much parents, but teachers, kids. I do a lot of work around information."**

4. Discussion and Analysis

Views on the New Curriculum

Overall, the curriculum is seen as positive with potential to be transformative. The National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales report (2024) found:

> **"The curriculum is a pivotal step towards positive educational reform, with a collective anticipation for its ability to improve educational outcomes for all."**

Implementation of the Curriculum

Engaging at a National Level

At the government level, the CfW development did not strategically involve youth work, and their involvement remains patchy, especially regionally. The National Academy for Educational Leadership (2024) report states:

> **"Youth Work services are not funded, well understood or integrated into the wider education sphere to have any impact on CfW developments."**

There is a lack of strategic recognition for the role youth work leaders can play in developing and implementing the CfW. Policymakers need to ensure all leaders within the educational sector are considered and fully engaged in policy development:

> **"The importance of collaborative efforts between schools, the youth sector, FE, HE, support, and educational partners at all levels is a key lever to develop and support leaders in fully realizing the CfW reforms" (National Academy for Educational Leadership, 2024).**

Actions are needed from both government and policymakers to engage with key strategic partners, including youth work leaders. The Leadership Academy's Associate model and the recent school improvement review (WG 2024) are viable options for implementation, but representation of leaders in discussions is crucial. Fullan (2020) emphasizes the need for inclusive discussions to achieve the CfW's aspirations. Joint training for leaders across the education sector (Estyn 2024) and a broader remit for the NPEP, including the Youth Work and FE sectors, would improve understanding and collaboration. This would allow teachers and youth workers to develop their enquiry outside of the school day and implement aspects of the CfW within the community. Overall, more support is needed at a policy and strategic level, with different departments of WG considering youth work and young people in key policy reforms.

Engaging at a Regional Level

Part of the gap seems to be at a regional level. Schools, lacking guidance, may be reluctant to take individual action for fear of getting things wrong. The recent National Academy for Educational Leadership report calls for reassurance at a middle tier level:

> **"School leaders need reassurance from the middle tier that the design and methods of assessment being developed as part of CfW are supporting the national dialogue surrounding students' destinations to accommodate future employability needs."**

Regional consortia are seen as the place for guidance and joint working, but they have been questioned by schools (Dylan, 2024) and are under review (WG 2024). Concerns include a culture of 'done to' rather than 'done with', variability in support quality, and unnecessary bureaucracy. However, school-to-school working and local-authority-based partnerships are supported, with the minister recommending supra-local collaboration (WG 2024).

Engaging at a Local Level

Participants felt the curriculum implementation has been rushed, leading schools to focus on compliance and use youth services to fill gaps rather than engage in deeper thinking. The National Academy for Educational Leadership report (2024) corroborates this:

> **"Schools are working in silos that are misaligning priorities, reducing the flow of information between schools and sectors resulting in disjointed decision making" (National Academy for Educational Leadership, 2024, p5).**

This approach contradicts the spirit of the curriculum. The document 'Curriculum for Wales: Journey to 2022' (2020) lists things not to do, such as moving too quickly towards implementation and using superficial thematic approaches. Fullan (2020) reinforces the need for leadership at all levels, including middle and regional.

Contribution of Youth Work to Strategic Planning for the Curriculum in Schools

The Principal Youth Officers (2023) document details how youth work can help fulfill the four purposes but does not specify how youth services should be involved in curriculum design and planning. Guidance for CfS (2020) emphasizes the importance of all services and stakeholders being accountable for implementation, not just school leaders (National Academy for Educational Leadership, 2022). The Curriculum for Wales: Journey to 2022 (2020) states:

> "The way schools approach curriculum preparation and design will be as important as what they do. In developing their approaches, co-construction will be critical."

Youth workers can engage with schools around principles such as:

- Development through co-construction: Sharing problems and jointly developing solutions across traditional boundaries. Youth work has expertise in co-production and pupil voice.

- Equity in co-construction: Ensuring every voice within the process brings a valid contribution. Youth work has a history of engaging marginalized young people (Estyn 2024).

- Space and time to think and engage: Developing high-quality thinking, solutions, and relationships over time.

- Clear understanding of 'why' things are learned : Articulating the importance of specific learning.

- Critical engagement with expertise: Engaging with quality research and expert input. Youth workers can position themselves as experts in critical, social, and creative pedagogies (Estyn, 2020, p43).

The Estyn document outlines phases of implementation: engagement, design, piloting, evaluation, and ongoing refinement. At each stage, schools should:

- Engage parents, carers, other professions, and the wider community.

- Develop common understandings across stakeholders.

- Explore different forms of pedagogy.

- Understand the range of learner needs, capacities, identities, and values.

- Develop pupil voice, including with marginalized young people.

- Engage in wider educational networks and professional learning.

Youth work should be engaged at all these phases, facilitating engagement of others, including marginalized young people and the local community, and offering different pedagogies and approaches. The key points raised by Estyn (2020) are reinforced by the CfS guidance (2020). Youth work and schools should collaborate to target resources effectively (WG 2024).

Contribution Around Leadership

Many schools and youth work projects are open to distributed, systems, and transformative leadership models. However, while schools often revert to hierarchical and authoritarian models in crisis, youth work projects embrace devolved, distributive, and transformational leadership. This contrast is notable given the literature on effective change and education reform (Fullan 2019, 2020; Harris 2020). Youth work's approach is particularly vital in times of uncertainty, and both sectors could learn from each other, especially around systems leadership and understanding different professions. Estyn (2024) advocates for joint training to increase professional understanding of formal and informal learning.

The National Academy for Educational Leadership report (2024) calls for the National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales to support all leaders, including those in FE, HE, Special, and Youth sectors. This includes dedicated programs with a strategic focus on CfW, using the National Academy for Educational Leadership endorsement model. The report also suggests that CfW should inform Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs and calls for extending professional learning program funding to youth work, which currently receives about £200k from the Welsh Government, a fraction of the schools' budget.

Issues of Concern
Understanding of Youth Work

While policy recognizes youth work as educational, this is not always understood locally. Some schools view youth work as alternate provision, diversionary activities, or containment for problematic young people, conflicting with key policy acknowledgments and Estyn inspection frameworks (Estyn 2024). The National Academy for Educational Leadership report (2024) highlights the need to overturn the perception that youth work should focus mainly on marginalized young people.

The WPYOG (2023) document, citing a 2013 NYA report, notes miscommunication on both sides:

"Youth workers can often struggle to articulate the value of their profession. However, schools can also fail to communicate adequately how they want to work with youth workers to support their students."

Youth work's unique educational approach needs better articulation. Simply stating that youth work is person-centered or empowering is insufficient, as many teachers believe they do the same. Youth work must clearly define its pedagogic approach and "hidden knows."

Youth workers need to discuss how to work effectively in schools, balancing the voluntary principle and whether to offer universal or targeted services. Emphasizing young people's agency and negotiating power and choices can help navigate these dilemmas. Additionally, there is a need for leadership discussions and guidance on collaborative work in schools, addressing power dynamics, defining roles, and working ethically with targets and outcomes (CfS 2020). Scotland's guides on involving youth work in schools and curriculum planning could serve as models for Wales.

5. Recommendations

For Government

- Providing realistic increased funding and strategic resource allocation to address the financial, human, and material constraints for Youth Work Sectors for meaningful engagement in National Implementation of the CfW.
- Providing resources to respond for additional release time for staff for continued curriculum design, increased Teaching Assistant, (TA) support, upskilling of staff and resource creation
- To implement the recomendations of the school improvement review, and ensure that the youth work sector has strategic representation at the national, supra-local and local levels to be a key educational partner in informing change. iEnsuring that regional arrangement include clear guidance that strike the balance between autonomy and giving permission to schools. Ensure schools critically review and reflect upon the implementation of the CfW, and identify opportunities to work with leaders from across different settings and sectors.
- Ensuring that new regional arrangements include youth work as strategic partners systematically and that any collaborative network function effectively to leverage curriculum expertise.
- Establishing Middle tier support mechanisms, such as the NPEP model to enable school and other readers to share good practice, pool resources and enhance collaborative efforts to upskill staff to provide scope to improve pedagogy and leadership.
- Supporting Professional Learning at a national level in schools, FE, HE, Youth Work Sector and Work Based Learning, responding to the International literature and findings in CfW thematic reports and other publications around professional learning.
- Building CfW and Systems leadership into the curriculum requirements of ITE and Qualifying Youth Work and Masters Programmes.
- Utilise expertise of several sectors, including universities, to guide schools on effective action research in collaboration with schools and Youth workers, recognising youth workers expertise in facilitating peer work.
- Continuing the active commissioning and undertaking of research into the implementation of the curriculum, including: crisis and survival management, enacting systems, distributed and transformational leadership, different pedagogic approaches, working with those marginalised in the education system, including issues of diversity and its intersections and facilitating effective pupil, community and parent/ carer voice.
- Ensuring guidelines for the implementation of the curriculum make explicit reference to the involvement of Youth Work as strategic partners as well as deliverers, and recommend engaging them as enablers of engaging parents/ carers, other professions and the wider community and developing pupil voice, including with marginalised young people and community schooling.
- Ensuring Eystn guidelines make explicit reference to how youth work can aid schools meet their overall strategic requirement to provide a positive learning experience to all, in particular those with ALN and those marginalised in the educational system, and in facilitating dialogue with parent/ carers and the wider community, developing Pupil Voice and in becoming community schools.
- Ensuring Estyn guidelines recognise the contribution that Youth work can make to school curriculum delivery including pupils: understanding society, being inspired, seeing their strengths, shaping their learning, taking social responsibility, understanding diversity and difference, taking leadership opportunities, working collaboratively and independently, building positive relationships with peers and adults, feeling respected and being treated fairly.
- Ensuring YWs also have full limited access to HWB,
- Ensuring there is not duplication in development of resources, particularly around personal and social education (PSE) resources that YWs could deliver and vice versa.

For Training Providers

- That ITE and Youth Work qualifying course's cover the CfW, distributed, transformative and systems leadership and Youth Worker contribution to schools, how to Youth Work can work effectively in schools, and effective partnership working and drivers.
- That programmes cover management and leadership in times of uncertainly, precariousness and crisis, and how to move from surviving to thriving

For School Leaders

- To keep abreast and find mechanisms to disseminate the latest research and theoretical thinking around schools' leadership, curriculum implementation and different pedagogic approaches and leadership, making alliances with educational and other academics.

- To recognise Youth Work as an educational endeavor with its own unique pedagogic approach and aims, and that is has something to offer all pupils including, but not exclusive to those marginalised in the education system.
- To not see or use youth work as diversionary activities, containment or as behaviour changers.
- To recognise and utlise youth workers as experts in co-production, working with marginalised young people in a non-deficit way and in the areas of critical, social, creative and border pedagogies, and the contribution this can make to an effective curriculum.
- To recognise and utilise the contribution youth work has to make in terms of enacting distributive and transformative leadership models in times of uncertainty.
- To actively create training and knowledge exchange activities with youth workers to develop a mutual understanding of different pedagogic approaches and roles.
- To recognise and involve Youth Workers in the process of strategically planning for the CfW and implementing the CfS guidance (WG 2022) in particular facilitating pupil, parent and community engagement, community schooling, conducting peer research and evaluation of initiatives, facilitating inter-professional dialogue and foregrounding new pedagogic thinking.
- To recognise the contribution Youth Work can make strategically in the Estyn requirement to create a positive learning experience to all, in particular those with ALN and those marginalised in mainstream education, and in facilitating dialogue with parent/ carers and the wider community, including developing Pupil Voice and Community Schooling.
- To recognise the contribution Youth Work can make in terms of curriculum delivery, particularly under the Estyn inspection criteria of pupils: understanding society, being inspired, seeing their strengths, shaping their learning, taking social responsibility, understanding diversity and difference, taking leadership opportunities, working collaboratively and independently, building positive relationships with peers and adults, feeling respected and being treated fairly.
- To work strategically with yw leaders to pilot out of hours learning for young people as an integral element of CfS (2022) approaches, based upon the needs of young people

For Youth Work Leaders
- To keep abreast and find mechanisms to disseminate the latest research and theoretical thinking on youth work, pedagogy and leadership, including systems leadership. Making alliances with youth work and other educational academics, as part of the NPEP (as and when possible)
- To ensure strategic representation at a local, intra-local and national level in the implementation of the CfW, and contributing to developments in the the school improvement arrangements as they develop
- To articulate the role of youth work including their different pedagogic approach and hidden knows including YW's emphasis on agency, our analysis of the balance of power in schools, our different terms of engagement, whilst promoting a positive view of young people, and reducing the deficit perspective, and focusing upon social and community engagement, that aligns with key policies. A communications strategy would help here, perhaps the PYO group taking responsibility.
- To promote to other Youth Workers the value of working in schools, including debates around universalism and targeting and the voluntary principle, but also how to navigate power dynamics, clearly define the role of youth workers, working with targets and outcomes ethically, and address disparities in resource allocation.
- To ask schools and regional consortiums to be involved in planning stages as well as deliverers of services, articulating how they can make a positive contribution to Curriculum Implementation and strategic planning for it. A guide on why and how to be involved may aid here.
- To make themselves aware of the driver of schools, including assessment and progression and Estyn Inspections
- To articulate the contribution Youth Work can make in terms of Estyn expectations and increasing outcomes for young people
  - Strategically in terms of providing a positive learning experience to all, particularly for those with ALN and marginalised young people, and in facilitating dialogue with parent/ carers and the wider community including community schooling
  - In terms of curriculum delivery in for pupils for the inspection criteria of: understanding society, being inspired, seeing their strengths, shaping their learning, taking social responsibility, understanding diversity and difference, taking leadership opportunities, working collaboratively and independently, building positive relationships with peers and adults, feeling respected and being treated fairly.

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Appendix 1:

An Insight piece into the role of educational leadership across the Youth Work and School sectors in implementing the Curriculum for Wales: Methodology

Methodology
There were three stages to the development of the think piece.

1. Rapid Evidence Assessment

We conducted a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of National, European and International literature on the roles of educational leaders in the implementation of curriculum, and in particular how youth worker and school's leadership which could inform policy and leadership practice in Wales. The search terms of the assessment will be negotiated with educational leaders (YWaSL) and other stakeholder representatives including young people. It is generally accepted that Rapid evidence assessments provide a more structured and rigorous search and quality assessment of the evidence than a literature review but are not as exhaustive as a systematic review (Gov, 2017). However, they are also critiqued for their lack of definition and agreed criteria (Kangura et al, 2012, Tricco et al, 2015, Kelly et al, 2016). With this in mind we followed Hamel et al, (2021) recommended approach. Individually and then collaboratively, we followed the suggested process:
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- *Systematic Search:* Conducting a comprehensive and structured search of the literature to identify relevant studies
- *Inclusion Criteria:* Clearly defining criteria for including studies to ensure relevance and quality
- *Critical Appraisal: Assessing the quality and trustworthiness of the included studies*
- *Data Extraction:* Systematically extracting relevant data from the studies
- *Synthesis of Findings:* Integrating the findings from the studies to provide a coherent answer to the research question
- Transparency: Documenting the entire process to ensure that it is reproducible and transparent.
- *Timeliness:* Balancing thoroughness with the need for a timely review, often by making concessions in the breadth and depth of the search.

Search term parameters
The aim was to undertake a comprehensive search, but concurrently to assess a manageable amount of, literature. We did some preliminary searches (not to assess the literature, but to assess criteria by which we make a structured search). Below are agreed primary and secondary terms and inclusions/ exclusion criteria. Primary terms will be searched for in multiple combinations using terms from all three and pairs (but not on their own) secondary terms will be used to narrow down searches depending on number of relevant searches gained. If minimal or patchy literature was found we will use some single primary terms with secondary terms eg youth work, informal education.

For academic research priority will be given to systematic analyses and other RAEs, then empirical research, both qualitative and qualitative. We examined both theoretically grounded works and opinion pieces, particularly those written by leading scholars and experts, as they served as valuable sources of reference. We also mined the references list of particularly pertinent pieces of research. Part of the assessment of pieces was their methodological approach, but we did not privilege quantitative pieces, or random control trials.

- *Primary Terms 1*: Leadership, Leaders, Educational Leadership,
- *Primary Terms 2*: Youth Work, Schools, formal education, informal education, youth development (in the States)
- *Primary terms 3:* Curriculum, Curriculum for Wales, Curriculum Implementation.
- *Secondary terms 1*: systems leadership, distributive leadership, Management styles.
- *Secondary term 2:* UK, England, empirical, research, qualitative, quantitative
- *Secondary terms 3:* systematic review, Rapid Evidence Assessments, Literature review.

Academic Data bases
We cross referenced between academic meta databases, Google Scholar, Sage and Taylor and Francis.

Grey Literature
In terms of grey literature searches will take place (with similar criteria to the above) on education research databases (EBSCO, National teacher Database) and youth work databases and knowledge repositories eg (Youth and Policy, Infed). We prioritised firstly literature reviews and empirically based research (as many of these pieces of research will not be peer reviewed this will include an assessment of the methodological approach.). Tool kits and good practice guides will only be used when based on empirical research. Report with little empirical base will be used primarily for mining the references. We will not use non-empirical research, blogs or other social media-based reports

In summary, we found 100+ publications of most significance, 65 of which are cited in this paper. Most of the studies are based in the UK and most are qualitative. We have made a distinction between specific Curriculum policy implementation papers and wider academic literature. The Estyn and Curriculum for Wales research is the most cited, and is the most directly relevant. While grey literature, it is nevertheless robust, unless otherwise stated and, in the case of the evaluations, are based in empirical work. They are generally not theoretically or conceptually driven.

2. Focus Groups

We conducted three focus group with small sample of YWaSL from across the sector, not in terms of empirical data, but to sense check our findings and to capture their views on applying key leadership concepts across professional boundaries to develop innovative approaches, to the delivery of the four purposes of the New Curriculum for Wales. Questions included:

- What is your understanding of the New Curriculum for Wales?
- What other leaders have you involved in implementing this?
- What have been the strengths and challenges of the curriculum and the Four Purposes
- What leadership model do you have/ see in schools What models of leadership do YW leaders utilise?
- Have you and Leaders from other sectors strategically worked together? Can you explain what you did, What level were you involved in, and what levels of staff were involved? CEO, middle leader and front-line worker levels?
- How have leaders within informal/non-formal and formal education involved each other strategically at a regional and national level?
- Can you give examples of projects you have been involved in, with other educational leaders how were they managed? Is there anything you'd like to tell us?

We also worked with a local youth club to gain some views from young people, particularly around the differences between schools and youth clubs, and which of their needs they met respectively. Questions asked included

- In what ways do you and don't you have a voice in schools? And has anything changed?
- What is the difference between a youth worker and a teacher and how do they/ could they work together?
- How does your schools involve your parents, carers and community?
- What youth work activities are you involved in? do any of them happen in schools?
- Anything else to add about youth work and schools?

Analysis was a combination of thematic and grounded. The researchers read the scripts separately and then agreed broad themes we saw emerging. We then coded under these, but iteratively developed more sub-themes, and in one case major theme, through the coding process. We then consolidated these themes. In our analysis, we remained as close as possible to the original texts while also considering the broader literature, identifying areas of agreement, divergence, or enhancement of existing research.

3. Production and verification of recommendations

We produced recommendation on developing the role of leadership, based on taking a systems leadership approach to implement the New Curriculum for Wales, and determine how they can complement and collaborate within formal, non-formal and informal education to deliver key elements of educational reform and increase outcomes for young people. The final stage of our approach was to hold verification workshops on the recommendations, membership negotiated with YWaSL from across the stakeholder group. These workshops enabled us to:

- Check our interpretation of the evidence.
- Assess the extent of agreement on findings and recommendations.
- Explore and seek to understand any differences in findings across projects.
- Gather additional views on findings which are complex, unexpected or uncertain.
- Discuss ideas for recommendations.
- Discuss ideas for helpfully communicating the findings including good practice.

Ethical Considerations in the Research Process

Working within Government Social Research (GSR) ethical guidelines and managing data in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the following considerations applied to this research to reduce risk:

- Informed consent to participate was sought from all participants. Participants were given an information sheet outlining the project and asked to complete a consent form.
- Participants were informed before taking part of confidentiality procedures and in what circumstances confidentiality might be broken. We anonymised all participants data and all information was processed and stored in line with GDPR. recognised and upheld the right of participants to withdraw from the study.
- We detailed our positions and potential influence on the research process.

Appendix 2:

Youth Work, Pedagogic Approach, Services and their relationship to Estyn Inspection Criteria

Critical Pedagogy (eg alternate provision, project work, PSE, peer education & research)

Moves learning along at an appropriate pace with appropriate level of challenge and support

Provides pupils with opportunities to influence how and what they learn and where appropriate

Enables pupils to develop an understanding of the complex nature of societies

Develops pupils' awareness and understanding of different identities, views and values, the diversity of relationships, gender and sexuality

Helps pupils to understand their own strengths and areas for improvement

Develops an understanding of history, cultural heritage, diversity, identities and perspectives

Border Pedagogy

Creative Pedagogy (eg arts, drama, group discussion, residentials)

Makes the learning environment stimulating and engaging

Provides pupils with opportunities to work independently and collaboratively

Supports pupils' creative and artistic development

Inspires pupils and raises their aspirations

Social Pedagogy (eg PSE, community work, volunteering, project work)

Suports pupils' spiritual, moralm social and cultural awareness

Fosters positive and respectful attitudes to diversity. (RSE)

Supports pupils' personal, social development including healthy relationships

Helps pupils to make healthy lifestyle choices and understand the impact of these choices

Have the physical, social and emotional skills to prepare the for later life

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Border Pedagogy (eg. meditation, pastoral support, pupil voice)

- Develop positive attitudes to learning
- Are respected and fairly treated
- Develop leadership skills and take on responsibility
- Support pupils to develop positive attitudes towards learning, so that they are:
  - Behave well and participate positively in learning activities
  - Persevere or look for new solutions when they face difficulties
  - Foster positive working relationships with adults and their peers

Appendix 3:

Potential for Youth Work to be involved in the Strategic Planning of the Implementation of the Curriculum for Wales in Schools.

Phase	Leverage point for youth work to be involved strategically	Youth Work ask/ contribution
Engagement (1-2 Terms)	• engaging with **academic literature** and **evidence-based research** • **starting conversations with learners, parents/carers and stakeholders** about what is changing and how they can be involved, and establishing mechanisms for ongoing co-construction with them • considering **how pedagogy can support the realisation of a curriculum and** starting to identify which approaches will best serve learners at that school • engaging in **professional learning,** to develop the capability of all professionals, and using the feedback from the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) survey to help develop an environment supportive of ongoing professional learning • capturing **understanding of the range of learner needs, capacities, identities and values of learners** to help establish what the four purposes mean for them and the school context • working **collaboratively in networks**	• Share academic knowledge with schools, including validity of different approaches and pedagogies • Facilitate discussion between teachers and youth workers on pedagogy and the curriculum • Facilitate discussion with pupils, parents/ carers and the local community • Engage in joint training and a local and national level • Set up peer research projects around learner needs, capacities, identities and values • To be a part of new regional consortium arrangement / inter schools clusters
Design, planning and trialling (3 terms)	• **begin the design process involving all stakeholders** – including learners, all practitioners and governors – and **involving parents/carers and the local community** • Engagement with **professional learning** that supports the development of teaching • **continuing to work collaboratively in networks** and through this build further relationships with higher education partners to design based on a rich evidence basis. • **further developing practitioners' understanding of the importance of pedagogy** in supporting the realisation of the curriculum and continuing to identify the approaches they propose to adopt • **considering a range of approaches (e.g. disciplinary, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary)** • to curriculum design and determine which approach(es) to test and evaluate in the context of the school and different areas of learning and experience **ensuring all learner needs are considered in an inclusive context**	• To be a part of the design phase • Share academic knowledge with schools, on design of different initiatives with youth work approaches and pedagogies and research • Facilitate continuing engagement of pupils, parents/ carers and the local community in the design phase • Set up peer evaluation processes of initiatives and support them • To be a part of new regional consortium arrangement / inter schools clusters • Develop joint training and a local and national level

Evaluating and preparing for first teaching (2-3 terms)	**ensuring that all practitioners understand the importance of pedagogy** in supporting the realisation of the curriculum - continuing to **engage parents/carers and the wider community** in realising the vision and the process of curriculum design - continuing to **work collaboratively in networks,** sharing approaches to curriculum design and development - extending short- and medium-term planning and trialing, **ensuring that these approaches are inclusive of all learners** **developing effective processes for engaging and communicating with parents/carers** throughout the school year in order to support learner progression developing school-level action research models to help facilitate ongoing curriculum design and making.	- To be a part of the evaluation phase - Share academic knowledge on different approaches to evaluation and research - Facilitate continuing engagement of pupils, parents/ carers and the local community in evaluation and development phase - Set up peer evaluation processes of initiatives and support them - To be a part of new regional consortium arrangement / inter schools clusters - Develop joint training and a local and national level including sharing best practice
First teaching and ongoing refinement (from Sept 2023)	- ensuring the four purposes, and their key characteristics, guide curriculum realisation, the approach to assessment, and **pedagogy** - deepening understanding of **what the purposes mean for learners,** including engagement with academic expertise, and using this insight to inform practice - collaborating with other schools and settings to deepen understanding, capacity and capability to support realisation of the curriculum, **effective pedagogies** and assessment for learner progression **continuing co-construction** in realising the curriculum in school, with **appropriate involvement of all staff, learners, parents/ carers and the wider community.**	- To be a part of the ongoing refinement phase - Co-create academic knowledge with schools of learning around new approaches. - Facilitate continuing engagement of pupils, parents/ carers and the local community - Set up ongoing peer research and evaluation processes and support them - To be a part of new regional consortium arrangement / inter schools clusters - Develop joint training and a local and national level