

Crosscurrents: The Third Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work

Steering a Course for Youth Work as a Growth
Profession in the Commonwealth and in Europe



The Commonwealth



PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR YOUTH,
SPORT AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Crosscurrents: The Third Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work

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in the Commonwealth and in Europe

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The Commonwealth



Author: Brian Belton

Editors: Miriam Teuma, Dharshini Seneviratne,
Stephen Sowa

Contributing editor: Tim Corney

Reviewers: Miriam Teuma, Robyn Broadbent, Tim
Corney, Ashraf Patel, Dana Fusco, Sharlene Swartz,
Shantha Abeysinghe, Tim Corney, Kelly Shaw,
Jane Melvin

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Executive Summary

Preamble

The Third Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work was held in Malta from 6 to 8 November 2018. In collaboration with Aġenzija Żgħażaġh and the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Workers' Associations (CAYWA), the Conference aimed to promote discussion, debate and exchange between practitioners, ministers and other stakeholders; to provide opportunities for CAYWA and others to engage with senior government officials in developing strategies to raise the quality of youth work in Commonwealth member countries and Europe; to build youth work partnerships between Europe and the Commonwealth where possible and appropriate; and to function as a forum for CAYWA to voice, inform and develop its offer.

This summary details the discussions that took place and (re)considerations for stakeholders to take on board to advance how the practice, education, legislation and professionalisation of youth work may be best conceived and subsequently turned into productive action.

This renewed conceptualisation of professional youth work in the Commonwealth, along with the identified good practices, can perhaps best emerge as a result of drawing on the broad range of practices currently/historically conducted in different contexts, with CAYWA - the global Commonwealth collective of existing youth work associations - well placed to collate and synthesise the varying context-specific approaches into a repository and general framework for good youth work practice, ethics and youth worker competencies. This can be used as a resource and re-contextualised in Commonwealth country contexts to enhance practice.

Following the Introduction, the main document provides a background to the Conference, followed by a detailed description, including of its aims and its main themes.

The charter of the "open space" is outlined and the details of the main speakers are provided. This section concludes with an overview of the outcomes of the four themed workshops, including a review and reflections element for each.

The penultimate section provides an overview of ideas, debates and reflections emerging from the Conference relating to youth work and professionalisation.

A conclusion includes five overarching recommendations arising out of the conference.

The Conference

The theme of the conference was: *"Crosscurrents - steering a course for youth work as a growth profession in the Commonwealth and in Europe"*.

The Conference addressed youth work across the Commonwealth and Europe, examining, connecting and looking to strengthen the status and standard of practice.

This included exploration and discussion of professionalisation, its place and the potential and actual development of its meaning and contextual relevance globally.

The programme was conducted via four themes:

- Developing and implementing policies and strategies;
- Professionalisation, education and training;
- Ethics and young people's welfare;
- Emerging issues and innovative responses.

The objective was to produce recommendations for action following discussion and exploration of these themes.

There were strong indications that, while there is a great deal in common within the Commonwealth and Europe on what good youth work practice is, there is work to be done relating to reviewing existing approaches and reinforcing an adequate understanding of professionalism.

Findings, reactions and reflections

The Conference also highlighted the need to further develop a substantive shared agreement or understanding about the character of professionalism, beyond academic definitions originating in the Global North, about what constituted professional practice. There was some focus on professional behaviour, although this was

The 5th Space approach first looks at four spaces where young people spend their time:

- At home with family;
- With friends;
- Pursuing leisure activities;
- Occupied at college or the workplace.

Traditionally, the above spaces are where most young people spend their time. In all of them, the worldview of young people is being shaped via received wisdom, institutional and/or media agendas and so on.

5th Space is yet another space that provides somewhere that allows young people to foster and create their own understanding of the world, or, as ComMutiny has it:

- To understand themselves, develop and grow;
- To look at social issues from a systemic lens, and see how they are connected to them;
- To deal with conflicts within and around them in society;
- To take action that benefits them and the surroundings.

As such, this space is where young people can generate a psychosocial worldview, which can start to answer the question "Who are we?" (rather than "Who am I?") This allows young people to understand and define their connection to the world as it is. As ComMutiny has it:

"The 5th space makes the relationships in the other four spaces count by nourishing and enriching the capacities of young people to take effective and responsible action. The 5th space believes that self-transformation is the first step towards creating change in our relationships and in society."

put in quite general terms, via allusions to the taking of responsibility and being accountable. As such, referral to the creation of instrumental tools that might help regulate conduct, such as standards and ethical codes of practice, was continually referred to.

It was clear that there is a shared, although broad, understanding of the purposes of youth work, given the very wide and varied view about potential and actual functioning, and the need for contextualisation of responses. The Commonwealth and Europe also focus on the promotion of rights-based practice. There was also a shared sense of positivity about the diversity of delivery and impact of practice, as well as its ever-evolving and thus healthily heterogeneous nature. The potential for innovation and the sharing of diverse practice, facilitating an organic growth in terms of understanding and learning about relative and related practice, was consistently reiterated and celebrated.

Thus, it appeared that the understanding of the Conference was that youth work, while demonstrating much commonality across the Commonwealth and Europe, is made up of heterogeneous elements, and comprises a precious multiplicity of distinct and related practices. This situation was understood to offer an important resource in ever-changing local, national, regional and global social, political and economic environments. As one participant had it, this potentially offers young people "flexible, relevant, adaptable and informed" responses. Thus, this indicates a need to build a more eclectic and organic response, informed by contextualisation.

Logically, the understanding the Conference facilitated would inform the generation of a fresh, more malleable, pertinent pan-Commonwealth model of the character of professional practice, which may well encompass contextualised standards and ethical codes of practice that could inform, help in the review of and renew more generalised, often ossified and mechanistic approaches to standards and ethical understanding,

conceived, written and influenced by particular and dominant cultural and social mores. It was also conceded that the safeguarding of this heterogeneity should not lose sight of the fundamental rights-based nature of youth work the Commonwealth and Europe promotes.

The impression was that youth work training might need to be thought of more in terms of reflection on practice than merely as forwarding certain forms of ungrounded theories or academic formulations, although both the latter and the former have a definite place in youth work. As such, innovative and courageous projects like Youth Futures (<http://youthfutures.org.uk/>), which looks to innovate "spontaneous, unconventional and challenging" approaches, and well-articulated practice models such as the 5th Space model, developed and promoted by ComMutiny, the Youth Collective, and India-based youth work training and practice organisation, may be more applicable worldwide, perhaps in conjunction and collaboration with institutionalised programmes. This may help avoid professional practice being set in the likeness of predominantly "Northern" models of conduct and professionalism in the absence of an adequate understanding of documented youth work practice from the Global South.

The box opposite demonstrates that the Conference produced some lively and original ideas around the approach to practice, which signalled a desire and need for a more inventive and supple approach to professionalisation. This may usefully implicate notions of civil development and education arising from widening the scope of youth work practice and the profile of potential practitioners, perhaps enhanced by the sharing of practice and basic training of volunteers.

With this in mind, the place of graduate practitioners and the design of degree programmes, which include the means to energise and skill up volunteers, becomes central. Certainly, the need for strategic thinking to be part of professional development was apparent, given the necessity to move away from merely following blanket or generalised standards and towards the generation of contextualised standards. This movement would prevent the risk of imposition of standards established outside the practice context, while putting in place the means for global standards to be a product of local and national codes of practice and/or codes of ethics.

There was agreement between participants that, with regard to developing professional qualifications, context, financial circumstances and readiness need to be considered more, with implications for the demand (and the support of any demand) for graduate-level practitioners. This would not depreciate or discourage degree-level study, but the Conference appeared to be aware that practice, standards and the amount and level of qualification might need to be articulated over several levels of engagement, with more sensitivity to local, national, cultural and regional circumstances.

The above was echoed by several participants, who had it that youth workers in particular contexts could and perhaps should set their own standards, out of which more general global principles might be drawn. This could provide organic development, reflecting and strengthening grassroots practice. Similarly, consistent review and dialogue among youth work practitioners and government foci should be encouraged alongside the constant social, political and economic changes taking place. In this way, standards of practice will evolve and transform delivery.

Again, this provides CAWYA with a new and invigorating opportunity to enhance its existing hub for gathering and disseminating innovative and proven practice and methodologies. This will make a resource of various contextual and situational examples of traditional and evolving approaches, transforming youth workers worldwide from consumers into creators.

The above indicates significant Conference support for widening the membership criteria for CAYWA to allow membership of legitimate youth work groups advancing youth work practice where associations are not yet present, and also for considering assessed membership for individuals. This would facilitate the widening of discussions and of course enhance the relevance of CAYWA. CAYWA can help exemplify inclusionary participation, using this as a means to enrich and grow our understanding of youth work as a multitude of actual and potential responses.

Although now years into the project of looking to institute youth work associations, currently there are relatively few such associations in the Commonwealth. The endeavour to build them where there are no organic roots has proved more

than challenging. Looking more to enliven than to establish associations in every case would seem to offer a fresh strategy to address this situation.

Conclusion

As can be gathered from the main document, the Conference gave rise to a huge range and depth of discussion, which generated a great many recommendations. This indicates the vibrancy of the experience. Looking to transform these ideas and conclusions into a viable strategic set of overall recommendations was always going to be demanding. Five recommendations have been produced that might collectively address the most pressing needs identified by the process of the Conference:

1. Develop further the existing CAYWA initiatives of establishing and generating an index of local and national understanding and interpretations of youth work and professional practice that has the capacity to establish a broad general outlook via these diverse contextual perspectives.

Main actors in the sector responsible for taking these recommendations forward

- CAYWA
- National associations
- Academic institutions

2. Encourage and facilitate the development of culturally knowledgeable and sensitive local and national standards for youth work that are linked to competency-based training, qualifications and pay scales, and workplace efficacy.

Actors in the sector responsible for taking these recommendations forward

- CAYWA
- National associations
- Academic institutions
- Practitioners

3. Build mechanisms and the means to create ongoing review and dissemination of 1 and 2.

Actors in the sector responsible for taking these recommendations forward

- Governments
- CAYWA
- National associations
- Academic institutions

4. Create a central hub as a global resource, which has the means to interpret and describe the common themes that evolve in terms of:

- Professional practice;
- Innovatory and effective methods and approaches;
- The nature of youth work;
- Ethical standards and practice standards.

Actors in the sector responsible for taking these recommendations forward

- CAYWA
- National associations

5. Use the above as the means to enliven, by task, the more efficient and effective development of professional associations that are representative of "on-the-ground", grassroots, chalk face youth workers.

Actors in the sector responsible for taking these recommendations forward

- CAYWA
- National associations

The grid below details the Conference conclusions by theme. These are not secondary in any way to the above. Many can be encompassed by the five areas detailed above, although some are, of course, quite "free-standing".

Policy strategies	Professionalisation/ education and training	Ethics and safeguarding	Emerging trends
<p>Rethink the concept and purpose of youth work policy in a modern context as we live in a disruptive world.</p> <p>Look at the context in which we exist, but also hold in mind the results that we desire to achieve that inform the context.</p> <p>Develop new models of co-leadership and involvement of young people inside the process.</p> <p>Develop policies that are more in alignment with youth work. In the absence of a policy there are great dangers and stagnations.</p>	<p>Revisit the relevance of, and demand for, the Commonwealth degree.</p> <p>Develop a strong framework of recognition regarding prior learning.</p> <p>CAYWA to act as a disseminator of good practice and support workers through materials on the website, etc.</p> <p>Maintain and grow global networks.</p> <p>Develop a ladder of certification.</p> <p>Look to understand common competencies.</p> <p>Focus on the need for research relating to the importance of the collective voice/stories of young people but also in relation to the numbers of young people coming into contact with youth workers (as the foundation for evidence-based practice).</p> <p>Build connections between theory and practice – values, theory, practice. Understand values to build good practice.</p> <p>Support best practice.</p>	<p>Establish what good practice is in any context and build appropriate ethical responses, models or codes (perhaps most urgently in relation to electronic media).</p> <p>Recognise that power is central to ethics and that discussion and recognition of the abuse of power is central to good practice.</p> <p>Accelerate the process to develop relevant codes of ethics. Develop contextual responses and/or case studies that can inform wider, more general and global documentation of codes of ethics.</p> <p>Hear young people's voices in relation to ethical youth work practice, highlighting and ensuring their views.</p> <p>Raise awareness of the place of values and beliefs in ethical practice; make sure "rules" do not disallow care and kindness.</p> <p>Build recognition of the importance of reflective practice, to ethical practice enabling professional practice supervision</p>	<p>Address the gap between practitioner and young person's digital knowledge.</p> <p>Consider the need to empower and train young people to take up positive roles in society.</p> <p>Consider the need for the participation of youth ministries and the public sector in the development and understanding of youth work practice.</p> <p>Develop consciousness that youth work is "about power".</p> <p>Build awareness that growing inequality has coincided with the emergence of right wing movements and the dangers of not addressing the same.</p> <p>Align policies with the ethos and values of youth work.</p> <p>Determine who contributes to the process and what goes into it to ensure it does not only maintain the <i>status quo</i>.</p> <p>Ensure youth work research informs policy; young people can offer a healthily radical perspective that can be a positively disruptive force to undermine institutionalisation and control, questioning the concept and purpose of policy.</p> <p>Harness the value of the dynamism of young people via a commitment to youth participation and co-production, which can enliven static policy, motivating a rethink and reshaping of approaches to policy and the refining of methods of engagement.</p> <p>Value the impact young people can make.</p>

1. Introduction

a. The Conference

During Youth Work Week 2018 (6-8 November), the third Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work took place in Malta at DB San Antonio Hotel, Triq it-Turisti, Qawra, St Paul's Bay. The event was organised in partnership with and hosted by Aġenzija Żgħażaġh (the Maltese Government's Youth Agency), which the Commonwealth Secretariat recognises for the exemplary work it carries out with young people.

More than 100 delegates from 27 Commonwealth and European countries attended the 3-day event.

The theme of the Conference was *Crosscurrents – Steering a Course for Youth Work as a Growth Profession in the Commonwealth and in Europe*. The overall aim was to explore methods to strengthen youth work as a profession (and what this means in different contexts and more generally). Another related objective was to help achieve greater recognition of youth work on the development agenda.

The programme was designed to encourage dialogue relating to youth work between Commonwealth and European countries. This included exploring recent global policy initiatives and developments in the youth work field affecting both the Commonwealth and Europe. This provided opportunities to understand and consider:

- The training and education of youth workers;
- Salient features of youth work;
- How practice can best be organised, supporting the education and development of young people worldwide.

The Conference brought together academics, youth workers, government ministries, funders and departments responsible for youth portfolios from across the Commonwealth, and people with similar profiles from all over Europe. Representatives from more than 30 nations took part in the event, which included visits to practice locations to look at the work of Aġenzija Żgħażaġh with young people.

The focus was on policy and the means to realise it, and finding ways to raise the standard of youth work at local, national and international levels. This included exploration of how education of and training for youth workers might be enhanced. In addition, there was debate relating to innovative responses to emerging youth issues related to leadership, employability and skills.

Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, the Youth Agency of Malta, hosted the Conference as one of the few Commonwealth member countries that legally recognises youth work as a profession (the Maltese Government created legislation to underpin this). Maltese policy also recognises the role youth workers play in working with young people to develop skills and character, encouraging them to find their own direction and purpose in life. Research carried out by the Commonwealth Secretariat in its recent baseline Youth Work in the Commonwealth: A Growth Profession demonstrated that Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, backed and supported by the Maltese Government, in offering a multitude of services, constituted a high-performing pacemaker in the Commonwealth.

The Conference provided contributors and participants with the opportunity to learn from each other within the context of the Maltese experience.

The Conference agenda encompassed the following objectives:

- To promote discussion, debate and exchange between practitioners, ministers and other stakeholders;
- To provide opportunities for the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Worker Associations (CAYWA) and others to engage with senior government officials in developing strategies to professionalise youth work, raising the quality of youth work practice in Commonwealth member countries and Europe;
- To build youth work partnerships between Europe and the Commonwealth where possible and appropriate;
- To function as a forum for CAYWA to voice, inform and develop its offer.

The theme was divided into four topic areas:

- Developing and implementing policy strategies;
- Professionalisation, education and training;
- Ethics and young people's welfare;
- Emerging issues and innovative responses.

b. Conference methodology

The Conference objectives were achieved via:

- Field visits to understand strategic and operational elements of Malta's youth work policy development and practice;
- Open spaces for discussion and debate of topics generated by conference participants;
- Four workshops facilitated by international experts specifically related to the Conference themes of developing and implementing policy and strategies, professional education and training, ethics and young people's welfare, emerging issues and innovative practices;
- Presentations from prominent international speakers, to encourage and stimulate the above.

Participants were encouraged to move around the venue to share and explore innovative ideas.

Participants, including senior officials and CAYWA members, were invited to use the open spaces to organise dedicated meetings and seminars, focused on developing concrete actions to advance youth work in national contexts and globally.

In short, significant elements of the event were non-formal, participatory and voluntary. This approach would be recognisable to many as being in line with the traditions and practice of youth work.

The Conference was very much an experimental venture, looking to put forth, at least in part, environments and situations that replicated youth work contexts, which needed something of the attitudes and skills required of such circumstances: the use of conversation (dialogue); the skills needed to build relationships; thinking on one's feet (being ready and excited to respond to the unexpected and the opportunities for learning that can arise out of the same); autonomous behaviour; and the ability to take agency. These latter could also be

recognised as traits of professional conduct: the capacity to use one's own judgement and shape events rather than just expecting to be given instructions or being restricted to accepting the nature of social or institutional conditions (as might be expected when one takes on a straightforward job); and being ready to suggest, and play a part in making, alterations to organisational structures or changes in direction. This was undertaken to inform participants but also to promote more dialogue than might be found at more conventional events.

About 30 per cent of the Conference agenda was given over to more structured elements, in order to be able to do what could be done to incorporate diverse wishes, although it was understood that such an ambition was idealistic. Youth work is premised on social and individual ideals that, while not always realisable, feel well worth the effort of pursuit (if you do not reach the stars you might at least make the moon). This said, time outside the Conference venue was organised into further dialogical opportunities: visits to practice venues, walks and shared meals in venues convivial to conversation and debate. Participants were made aware of this format well in advance of the conference.

c. Report methodology

What follows is the result of a varied and thorough engagement with the Conference process and participants. It is informed by the structured and less formal aspects of the Conference and interviews with about 20 per cent of participants and contributors, as well as informal conversations with individuals and groups.

Pre- and post-Conference questionnaires were administered to understand the impact of the Conference on participants. All participants and contributors were communicated with a few weeks following the Conference with a request for their reflections on the Conference and its outcomes. The reaction to this was unprecedented, with over 90 per cent of those approached responding. Several of those who responded were contacted for further impressions and feedback.

While some participants were ready to be identified, many preferred to share their feelings anonymously (for a range of personal and professional reasons). With this in mind, in the spirit of fairness and equality, all participant responses in this document have been anonymised.

2. Background to the Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work

Previous Commonwealth Conferences on Youth Work took place in Pretoria, South Africa, in 2013 and 2016 and, over the past five years this has become the principal youth work forum embracing the entire Commonwealth. The Third Conference, bringing together youth work stakeholders from practice, academia and government, built on the work and outcome of the previous Conferences, offering perspectives on supporting youth work as an evolving profession, incorporating a range of methodologies and variations on a foundation of a generic understanding of how and what youth work looks to achieve. This broadly complies with the proposal that youth work, as a generic and eclectic practice, encompassing "all forms of rights-based youth engagement approaches that build personal awareness and support the social, political and economic empowerment of young people, delivered through non-formal learning within a matrix of care" (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017a, p.1).

Miriam Teuma, Chief Executive of Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ, said during the Conference:

"The important thing is that professionals can grow both in Europe and the Commonwealth, and the idea is that in this conference, we can come up with a timeline of how this recognition of staff who deal with young people, in diverse ways, according to their individual wants and needs, can be strengthened."

The head of Social Policy Development at the Commonwealth Secretariat, Layne Robinson, spoke of how Malta was a model for the work the Secretariat is doing with, for and alongside young people:

"Malta is an example to the rest of the Commonwealth on youth work practice and what it means for young people. The Commonwealth is pleased to be associated with the Government of Malta for hosting a meeting because it represents one of the smallest countries... Small states,

irrespective of their size and their resources, can actually do very good for their young people in terms of youth work."

The Commonwealth Secretariat recognises the dedication of Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ, and how its programmes and the rich range of methodologies and responses it has developed can be helpful to other countries in achieving positive results with young people. This is not about replication, but the holding up of examples that could be adapted and contextualised.

3. Context

Recent policy initiatives and developments in the youth work field, in both the Commonwealth and Europe, demand that stakeholders discuss and consider some of the significant features of youth work, their relevance (or otherwise) and how best to promote practice. The appropriateness of professionalism and/or professionalisation requires consistent questioning, given changing social and economic considerations globally. There is also a clear requirement that youth work be understood in terms of how it works to generate learning environments and as such supports the education and development of young people worldwide.

The above raised numerous questions. For instance:

- What are the values, policies, methods, practices and priorities that we have in common?
- What is the place and relevance of professionalism?
- How can the diverse practice that youth work is be understood as a global phenomenon?
- Where are the points of difference, variation and perhaps counter-flow?
- What can we learn from each other and how do we go about sharing our knowledge and experiences to enable us to work together in the future, alongside young people, to create a better world?

At the 9th Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting in Kampala, Uganda, in 2017, Ministers reiterated their commitment to promoting youth work as a profession across sectors that work with young people, and in relation to advancing the Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017b).

These commitments to the recognition of youth work were further strengthened at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in London.

In tandem with these government commitments, the Commonwealth Secretariat published *Youth Work in the Commonwealth - A Growth Profession*

in 2017, a survey of 35 Commonwealth countries, focusing on recognition and practice of youth work. It had the aim:

"... to establish a baseline to inform planning and implementation of initiatives to professionalise youth work among Commonwealth member states."

CAYWA was established with the support of the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2016, during the 2nd Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work, to ensure the representation of practitioner voices from across the Commonwealth. Currently, CAYWA has 15 member associations and collectives.

In the European context, there has been a particular focus in recent years on the promotion and development of quality youth work. The European Commission's communication "Engaging, Connecting and Empowering Young People: A New EU Youth Strategy" (2018) includes among its aims:

"... supporting youth empowerment through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work" (p.3).

It also refers to implementing:

"... a youth work agenda to increase the recognition of non-formal learning" (p.2).

Recognising the multiplicity of practice responses and methodologies encompassed by youth work practice, the Council of Europe's "Recommendation on Youth Work" (2017) states that:

"... youth work makes an important contribution to active citizenship by providing opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes for civic engagement and social action."

As part of the strategy for the knowledge-based development of youth work in Europe, a mapping exercise on existing education/training and career paths for youth workers in member states was conducted in 2017. Alongside *A Growth Profession* (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017a), this provides an overview of education and training for youth workers across dozens of countries and contexts.

4. The Conference

a. The aims of the Conference

- The promotion of discussion, debate and exchange between practitioners, Ministers and other stakeholders;
- Provision of opportunities for CAYWA members and others to liaise/work with senior government officials in developing potential actions/strategies to raise the quality of youth work in Commonwealth member countries and Europe;
- Facilitation of the building of partnerships between European and the Commonwealth where possible/appropriate.

b. Open space discussions

The open spaces provided opportunities for participants to add their voice to proceedings, but their main purpose was to act as “warm-up” areas or as a means of “resolution” in the light of the Conference themes. As such, they were not put in place to generate recommendations and conclusions in themselves.

These spaces worked to energise conversation on, and exploration and examination of, comparative methodologies, ideas and perspectives and the sharing of practice. Some of the main areas of discussion can be seen below (participants were asked to invite others to take part via a “Post-it” wall). It was not practicable to report back on every session; indeed, much of the “meat” of the Conference was chewed over between both the formal and the informally structured sessions, certainly as part of the visits to practice locations, walks and dinner events. However, a good deal of this report’s findings was gleaned during and as a result of the open space discourse.

In the spirit of the overall ethos of the Conference, which was based on dialogical processes that facilitate dialectical discussion, the open spaces engendered and promoted non-formal (youth work-oriented) dialogue.

Areas covered:

- Outlining and exploring the role of CAYWA;
- Discussion of “European tools”;
- Presentation of and debate about global citizenship training;
- Examination of training tools for youth workers;
- What is youth/youth work?
- The uses of technology to track youth work and Sustainable Development Goal progress;
- On-line youth work;
- Consideration of the European Youth Card;
- Analysis of the Youth Development Index;
- Considering systemic supervision in youth work;
- The operation and use and purpose of Youth Parliaments;
- Creativity circles – exploration of this approach.

c. Speakers

During the Conference, the following prominent international speakers shared their work, ideas, perspectives and research:

- **Sharlene Swartz**, Executive Director, Education and Skills Development, Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, on young people, navigational capacities and the role of youth work;
- **Tomi Kiilakoski**, Senior Researcher, Finnish Youth Research Network, on “Communities of practice and practice architectures”;
- **Robyn Broadbent**, Chair, CAYWA, on the voice of the youth worker and the role of youth work associations;
- **Dana Fusco**, Professor of Youth Studies and Education, City University of New York USA, on “Illuminating professional: whose knowledge matters”;



- **Ashraf Patel** and **Arjun Shekhar**, co-founders of Pravah, an organisation that initiates young people into practical decision-making within a complex context of social problems, and ComMutiny, a collective of youth workers and youth organisations. Ashraf and Arjun presented some aspects of their work in India, including the Be a Jagrik project and the concept of 5th Space. Manak Matiyani, CEO, YP Foundation, India, and member of ComMutiny, was a co speaker in this session;
- **Howard Williamson**, Professor of European Youth Policy, University of South Wales, on maintaining a balance between the cherished values of youth work and meeting modern needs on outcome measurement, employability and so on;
- **Lloyd Russell-Moyle**, Member of Parliament, UK, on England's youth services and funding.

While the above individuals constitute an impressive collection of thought and experience, delegates noted the lack of representation from the Global South among the keynote speakers. While it is understood that efforts were made to avoid such a circumstance, this is something that clearly needs to be rectified in the future.

The first Key Note Address was delivered by Sharlene Swartz from South Africa. Sharlene is Executive Director, Education and Skills Development, Human Sciences Research Council.

"Young people, navigational capacities and the role of youth work" connected with a number of issues relating to young people dealing with a range of issues including inequality, racism and employment. Sharlene put forward six navigational capacities that contextualise youth work so that it is fit for purpose.

1. Self-manage;
2. Acquire a range of capabilities;
3. Recognise limitations of the environment;
4. Analyse and impact of policies and practice;
5. Achieve open identities;
6. Act together for each other's good.

Analysing the above, Sharlene presented a "roadmap" of emergent questions:

1. What kind of world are young people heading for?
2. What are navigational capacities and how can they help?
3. How can Southern thinking help?
4. What do youth workers (practitioners, academics and policy-makers) need to do to benefit from this thinking?

She went on to suggest particular issues that youth must navigate:

1. Inequality, hyper-capitalism - the commodification of everything – and calls for redistribution;
2. Populism and protest, political failure, migration;
3. Decolonisation of knowledge, of being;
4. Racism, sexism, intersectionality, privilege;
5. Violence of multiple forms – physical, symbolic, structural and ecological doom;
6. A world without work/with new forms of work (4IR).

Exploring how Southern thinking can help, Sharlene called on a "Theory from the South" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012):

"Western enlightenment thought has, from the first, posited itself as the wellspring of universal learning... it has regarded the non-West... the global south-primarily as a place of parochial wisdom, of antiquarian traditions, of exotic ways and means. Above all, of unprocessed data... reservoirs of raw fact: of the historical, natural, and ethnographic minutiae from which Euromodernity might fashion its testable theories and transcendent truths, its axioms and certitudes, its premises, postulates, and principles" (p.1).

She argued that the South has much to offer as it has new experience of all these issues:

"Critical concerns of the present age-concerns about personhood, identity, difference, and belonging, about the state, sovereignty, governmentality, citizenship, and borders, about law, liberalism, and democracy, about labour and the politics of life, about history and memory" (ibid., p. 19)

She suggested the following principles:

1. Lead with the new and original, that combines theory and lived reality;
2. Offer view points and vantage points from the South, for the South AND for the world;
3. Do not homogenise: understand that the South is not one place, condition, situation or context;
4. Aim to define the field of Global South Youth Studies, and offer a roadmap for Global Youth Studies;
5. Encourage contributors to the development of the nature and purpose of practice, particularly from the currently under-represented Global South or from the diaspora or aboriginal communities in the North;
6. Commit to a community of practice.



Overall, Sharlene's position reiterates that global, top-down structures are not only inapplicable in terms of generating knowledge, wisdom and organising conduct but also inherently undemocratic and ineffective.

For Sharlene, we need to establish what youth workers need to do to get on the train and this means the need to "embrace the geographical location from where you practise/make policy/research in youth work. Once more, the point here is that establishing structures and procedures and theory away from the site of practice is inherently remiss. We need to establish the means for the "chalk-face" of practice, so as myriad of locations might inform and so shape the direction and tenor of training."

For Sharlene, we are not merely part of a globalised world on an equal footing; we are in different power relations to each other. Quite simply, in terms of youth work training and the perception and shaping of what it is to be "professional, this needs to be addressed.

Sharlene's presentation was followed by a talk from Tomi Kilakoski, Senior Researcher, Finnish Youth Research Network: "Learning to become a youth worker in a different architecture of youth work". Referring to the work of Stephen Kemmis, Tomi presented the concept of Practice Architecture and his work Mapping of Educational Pathways of Youth Worker, which groups countries across Europe according to their performance on various indices. He concluded that the higher the points each context scored, the more it could be considered as being developed with regard to its commitment to youth workers politically, socially and educationally. Tomi spoke of how youth work practice was historically and socially structured.

Professor Robyn Broadbent, Chair of CAYWA, outlined the work and current state of CAYWA, which has a membership of 14 youth work professional associations from around the Commonwealth. Robyn spoke about the importance of its work supporting five emerging associations that are all diverse. CAYWA has not developed a framework for either its current membership or the emerging states in relation to its membership rules – or any other benchmark, as this must come from the membership. As a general rule, these movements are growing out of people who are working in youth work and have completed the Commonwealth Diploma. On that basis, Robyn



suggested that CAYWA would continue to consider what binds youth work as a profession and what underpins professional youth work in such diverse settings as the Commonwealth.

Robyn went on to discuss the range of achievements to date, which included a collation of definitions of youth work adapted globally. Robyn discussed the CAYWA website that had been built and that continued to be populated, urging participants to engage in a way that would grow the material. It is envisaged that the site will also be an important resource for the emerging Commonwealth Degree Consortium on Youth Work.

Robyn concluded by reiterating how we should be advocates for young people and youth workers and that CAYWA would continue to partner in the Commonwealth to build practice knowledge.

According to Dana Fusco, Professor of Youth Studies and Education, City University of New York, professionalisation relies on specialised knowledge, but rarely does that knowledge emerge from the professionals who practise youth work. As such, qualification is only a potential part of becoming a professional. The aim of her presentation was to illuminate "professional" with a focus on the question: "Whose knowledge matters?" She argued that any discussion of professionalisation must shed light on the full occupational experience of working with young people in that community at that time. Dana questioned who produced

knowledge, why and for what purpose; what type of knowledge is produced; and what its integrity to the practice itself is.

This analysis effectively supports a bottom-up approach to understanding what being professional might be in any given context and across contexts. Thus, top-down prescriptions and characterisations are by definition incongruous.

Dana asked about the difference between the designation of "professional" and BEING professional. She suggested that professional knowledge is certain, empirical, generalisable and theoretical, yet it is also contested and thus resisted, especially when it does not emerge with those engaged in its day-to-day practice. She argued that, for knowledge to capture the "black box" of youth work, it must be deeply contextual, incorporating local knowledge of youth, families and communities.

Once more, this is an argument for gleaning theory and knowledge from the base. It is this grassroots knowledge that is "strong" enough to inform local, national, regional and global perspectives. Theory and knowledge being largely "bestowed" from "on high" is as such "weak" (unsustainable at the base).

Dana went on to explain how professionalisation is a complex process of transformation over time, with much energy and resources required before an occupation can become professional. She concluded with some recommendations for engaging practitioners as professionals and as contributors to the growth of the profession and the academic discipline.

Given this, it is clear that qualifications need to be founded within existing or advanced developing frameworks of practice. Qualifications and training are in effect trees that need appropriate soil and nutrition in order to facilitate a symbiotic or interdependent network of professionalisation.

Howard Williamson, Professor of European Youth Policy, University of South Wales, spoke on "Crosscurrents: sailing in the same directions?" He stated that, as a practice, youth work comprises authenticity, trust and relationships. He had it that the current "hook" of youth work predominantly tends to be agendas of employability, digital literacy and multicultural issues, because these areas and issues tend to attract funding and resources. He asked for more questioning of cherished values related to youth work and encouraged an analysis of

how youth workers might be able to balance trust, values, the process of targeting and the measuring of outcomes.

British MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle spoke about England's Youth Service and the Provision Bill created by an All-Party Group. Focusing quite tightly on the situation in England (Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales control youth work within their own regional contexts), Lloyd told how local authorities currently spend between £125 and £300 per head on youth services. While this does not include provision provided by churches, synagogues, mosques or the huge voluntary sector (which has always made up the majority of youth work provision in the UK), he argued that this situation needed to be addressed. Key elements of the intended Bill related to this cause include:

- Youth work perspectives being recognised as holistic and educative;
- An individual line to be inserted into the UK budgets for core youth services;
- Greater understanding of youth services.

Lloyd did not detail where the funding might come from for the proposals encompassed by the Bill, although there was some indication that funds could be diverted from the dismantling of the current National Citizenship Service.

A rewarding, interesting, entertaining and insightful "hands-on" experience was introduced 5th Space. This was provided by the ComMutiny team from Delhi, represented by Arjun Shekar and Ashraf Patel. Utilising "nano-experiences", the presentation included an inspiring video encouraging India's youth to vote. It concluded with the slogan, "Young people are not USELESS, they are just USED LESS!"

Ashraf's perspective on professionalism and training was insightful:

"We cannot have one template for youth work in India or in the youth work field, not just within or between countries. You can't just transfer practices from one context to another, not even between each young person."

Arjun gave an insight into the way his organisation operated, outlining a straightforward but nuanced approach that formal forms of academic training might not be able to accommodate or perhaps be needed for:

"We to look at how you get youth people to look at other things and realising their own potential and creating spaces for them to have interesting experiences... we need to build resource centres that focus round progressive or 'reaching potential' responses."

d. The four themed workshops

The Conference included parallel workshops on the four themes. These were facilitated by a number of participants, including Layne Robinson and Miriam Teuma on "Developing and implementing policy strategies", Robyn Broadbent and Jane Melvin on "Professionalisation, education and training", Tim Corney and Hilary Tierney on "Ethics and young people's welfare" and Tamara Mathebula and Jason Zammit on "Emerging trends".

Detailed below are the four conference themes, which were addressed via workshops. These intended to entail a 10- to 20-minute introduction, not presented as prescriptions for practice and policy. Participants and presenters were informed they should not be taken as "This is the way" sessions, but look to facilitate, encourage and motivate exploration and questioning of and discussion on the themes, with the aim of addressing the proposed outcomes and putting forward definite, clear recommendations for action.

However, some of these sessions were ultimately didactic in character, although those attending had been respectfully asked not to be passive participants but to work together to create a positively questioning debate of issues arising. Participants were free to leave these sessions at any time as they felt fit. Engagement rather than obligatory attendance was emphasised. That some sessions became comparatively formal in terms of process and delivery was both interesting and informative.

The following draws and reflects on the Conference discussions.

Developing and implementing policy and strategies

Many countries have legislation, policies and/or strategies in place aimed at or encompassing young people and their education and welfare; some include youth work. However, relatively few countries appear to have specific legislative

provisions, policies and or/strategies for youth work: few have any "legal" or agreed practice-based definition of youth work.

Professionalisation, education and training

This workshop focused initially on definitions of youth work practice from across the Commonwealth. The first half of the workshop emphasised youth work as "relational" practice and highlighted other factors that contribute to a professionalised youth work offer, such as learning, evidence-based practice, advocacy, empowerment and enabling young people to participate in society and to understand their rights. There was also an emphasis on the link between the core values of youth work, theoretical models and practice. Concluding this section was reflection on the important role of professional youth work education in ensuring young people are supported by best practice.

The second half aimed to gather information about what professional formation and training was currently taking place in different countries and posed four questions for the participants to explore in groups:

1. What is in place now?
2. What are the common features between countries?
3. What are the differences between countries?
4. What's next? What do we need to do more of?

In answer to Question 1, a wide range of university-based professional formation ranging from diploma to doctoral level was identified. Alongside this were training opportunities run at local level such as continuing professional development, as well as courses aimed at preparing to undertake a diploma or degree programme.

Question 2 uncovered a lack of understanding about youth work practice at local level that affects course design and delivery, but also common frameworks (Commonwealth Diploma) that are in use, alongside a common understanding among the practitioners present about the definition of youth work.

Question 3 highlighted a lack of youth policy guiding the aspiration to achieve a professionalised youth work offer and a lack of understanding about non-

formal or informal education, particularly outside of youth work contexts, as well as a wide range of organisations involved in the delivery of youth work.

Question 4 asked for global recognition of the value of youth work practice and for a transferable qualifications framework to enable people to work in different countries. An exploration of the different competences needed to identify and implement a system that ensures both young people's and youth workers' needs are met was also proposed.

The education and training of youth workers appears in many countries to be a mix of formal/non-formal approaches and/or accredited/non-accredited programmes/courses; the relative balance between these differs from country to country and sometimes within national contexts. The professionalisation of youth work is often seen as a contentious issue, in terms of both what it means and implies and its impact on what has often been understood traditionally as the predominantly voluntary nature and character of most youth work. There are also contextual and cultural considerations; it is potentially inconsiderate, unfair and unlikely that "handed-down" (relatively detached, remotely generated) professional strictures, occupational standards and codes of conduct will be practicable or appropriate, or equally observed regardless of community mores, social traditions, economic conditions, faith conditions and historical considerations.

Ethics and young people's welfare

This workshop was attended by participants from across the Commonwealth and Europe. Some had experience of working with established codes of ethics; others had yet to gain such experience. However, all expressed their desire to learn more about ethics and their relationship to youth work and to the concept of professionalisation. All were keen to share their experience and examples of ethical and unethical practice. A number were keen to learn how to establish a code and how to access resources that would assist them to do so.

Ethical considerations are a feature of youth work in all countries; however, addressing issues such as the protection and safeguarding of young people varies globally. What might be considered ethical practice within any profession logically needs to be established by that profession. As such, despite the clear universal relevance of human rights principles, the global applicability of a single set of principles

or uniformity of professional conduct, training and education is doubtful; the same has logically to apply to ethics.

However, there are relatively few national professional associations for youth workers. Fewer still can claim to be the voice of the majority of youth workers in their context. This means that what is ethical has, in large part, to be assumed, using guidelines from other, principally Northern global, contexts and/or through referral to sources that are, in the main, generated more from academic settings, rather than from the involvement of and consultation with grassroots practitioners. Thus, in many situations, what passes for ethical consideration is closer to expressions of personal and group morality.

It is common among most professions to attempt to apply ethical principles that can work to ensure the quality of practice and to the benefit of the client, something that is central to the very concept of youth work. It is hard to see how such considerations might not be a defining feature of professionalisation. This being the case, it seems incumbent on CAYWA, the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) and other international organisations to look to build the latter in a participative, bottom-up and collaborative way with associations or groups of youth workers. In this way, the base can inform the structure, with the whole reflecting the sum of its parts. The alternative is "top-down": a relatively exclusive group create sets of guidelines that the whole complies with. Historically, this type of response has collapsed in the long term under the weight of its obvious flaws.

Nevertheless, for youth workers, both professional and voluntary, standards of ethical practice and behaviour are essential for what they do. Thus, the continued support of the CYP and CAYWA to establish supportive processes and provide resources to enable contextualised codes of ethics based in human rights is imperative.

Recommendations of the workshop:

1. That a practical guide to establishing a code of ethics for youth workers in countries without one should be drafted by CAYWA with input from associations of youth work practitioners;
2. That the collecting and publishing of case studies of ethical scenarios from across the Commonwealth be undertaken by CYP/CAYWA, to help youth workers think through

the various and complex ethical choices they may face; as a helpful educational tool; to raise awareness of ethical issues; to assist in reflective practice; and to inform the principles and practices of youth work;

3. That CYP continue to support CAYWA to establish supportive processes and provide resources to enable the contextualisation of codes of ethics based in human rights;
4. To make the current Commonwealth Draft Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers more widely known and accessible;
5. To encourage governments to establish "safe-guarding" and "safe working with children/young people" legislation and regulatory mechanisms.

Human rights and codes of ethics were discussed at length in the workshop because the CYP is historically grounded in a human rights-based approach that views young people as having an equal stake in society, and sees youth development work as an outcome of achieving human rights. This view can be summed up best by young people from the Commonwealth Youth Forum:

"Give young people half a chance and we will astound you, not only with our energy, enthusiasm and idealism, but also with our maturity and willingness to engage constructively in the process of improving our communities and our world. We are often told that as young people we are the leaders of tomorrow. Behind this seemingly simple statement lies a dangerous assumption; namely that young people have no valuable place in today's world. This should not be the case" (Commonwealth of Nations, 2007, p. 5).

The implications for Commonwealth youth workers are clear: development is a human rights entitlement. As such, youth workers across the Commonwealth take on the role of advocates, facilitating access to human rights and the democratic participation of young people in all levels of decision-making, and partnering with them in the development and transformation of their societies. The CYP emphasises this view by repeating the rhetorical question posed by youth work advocate Chandu Christian: "For what are youth workers if they are not facilitators of human rights and development?" (Commonwealth of Nations, 2007, p. 4).

The work of the CYP has been and continues to be historically informed by the goals of the Commonwealth's Plan of Action on Youth Empowerment 2007-2015 (PAYE) (Commonwealth of Nations, 2007), which built on the Global Human Rights Agenda of the UN and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The CYP's goals were developed following a wide-ranging consultation with young people, governments and non-government stakeholders from across the Commonwealth. As such a human rights-based approach to youth work according to the CYP involves the following elements: "Express linkage to human rights; Accountability to all stakeholders; Empowerment; Participation; Non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups" (ibid., p. 12).

Because of the CYP's historical grounding, it has a clear aim to base youth work – as an occupational practice – on human rights through the development of agreed practice standards and codes of ethics informed by the UN's human rights declarations and covenants such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is done in order to raise the standards of youth work practice and thereby bring greater human rights outcomes to young people. The CYP through its recent and previous work has, through PAYE goal 12, point 12.3, specifically called for the youth sector to "draft codes of professional ethics with express linkage to human rights". It goes on to suggest that a critical pathway to developing and professionalising the occupation of youth work and to delivering outcomes for young people should begin with the creation of "a code of conduct to guide it, as well as structures to monitor and regulate it".

Through the work of CYP and more recently of CAYWA, the various regions of the Commonwealth have taken up this challenge and begun its implementation. To this end, the Commonwealth Asia Centre released a publication to assist youth workers and agencies to develop and establish codes of practice informed by international conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Belton, 2012). The Commonwealth Pacific Centre has developed a "road map" (Corney, 2009) that explicitly sets out the process for developing a code of ethical practice for youth work in the Pacific based on human rights. In 2014, the Commonwealth commissioned a draft international Code of Ethics based in human rights. This draft was presented at the Second Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work in South Africa 2016

and was taken up by CAYWA there. The draft code was presented to the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in Uganda in August 2017 and endorsed by CAYWA at the Colombo Meeting in 2018. It has now been offered by CYP and CAYWA to individual country-based associations of youth workers to contextualise and use as is appropriate to their particular context. A resolution of the Malta workshop was the production of a guide to assist youth workers and associations to develop and contextualise codes of ethics. A draft guide has been produced and circulated by CAYWA to its members for feedback, consultation and input (Corney, 2018).

The participants of the Malta Conference ethics workshop recommitted themselves to the goal of achieving human rights for young people through the practice of youth work as an ethical priority.

Emerging trends and innovative responses

The old geographic, cultural and economic differences that long defined the world have either vanished or are fast disappearing. These often oppressive or at least limiting structures are being replaced by new realities, new opportunities and new challenges for the youth of the world. Young people today are confronted with novel developments in the ways and means of learning; often rapid economic change, social dislocation and growing, if uneven, affluence; and increasing urbanisation and rural isolation.

Uncompromising globalisation has proved to be a force causing fragmentation and inequality with regard to general resource distribution but also in terms of access to influence, authority and power. Youth work has a role, as a means to create peace and social harmony via learning opportunities for young people. Therefore, it is evident that youth workers themselves organise practice (and themselves) so that the base (where the young are almost inevitably over-represented) can inform the whole.

At the same time, the effects of climate change and threats to the natural environment pose far-reaching and complex challenges to future populations. Political instability and the shadow of ethnic and religious conflict, increasing social and economic inequalities and forms of radicalisation, extremism and violence hang over the lives of many young people.

How youth work and youth workers respond to these new challenges and opportunities will determine the future of youth work, but this can also potentially play a positive part in addressing national, regional and global agendas and concerns.

e. Workshop summaries

Each workshop allowed the attendees to become involved in discussing and sharing the relevant issues associated with each topic. The Commonwealth perspective was joined with European standpoints, and interesting similarities and differences led to widespread learning.

The following summarises the workshop discussions. Most groups reported back on the deliberations without specifically detailing recommendations. As such, relevant conversations and responses from the open spaces and other feedback are detailed, with recommendations then presented based on the sum of all these sources.

Developing and implementing policy strategies

There was discussion on the merits of developing separate youth policies as against integrating the same into other areas of social development or concern.

The importance of generating the political will to engender youth policy was emphasised.

It was felt that there should be awareness of the potential consequences of thinking of policy as an end in itself, and an effort to instead look at the framing and realisation of policy as a basis to work with and build on. In short, policy might usefully be understood as a political tool rather than merely dry statutes.

Continuous and thorough consultation with all stakeholders was seen as critical in determining the shape, direction and continuous honing of policy. This might be informed by the construction of definite but flexible (regularly reviewed) national strategic frameworks, which would allow for the rethinking and continuous contextualisation of concepts, purpose and direction as social, economic and political environments require or dictate.

All stakeholders need to be included in the consultation process, but political will HAS to there for there to be any success:

1. Rethink the purpose within the modern context;
2. Focus on the results;
3. A new model of co-leadership;
4. Policies as political instruments and enabling tools to implement strategies;
5. Creating political awareness imperative.

Review and reflections

The point was raised that there is a need for political will when commencing the policy writing/review process. In the absence of political will, projects will likely be stonewalled and/or difficulties will arise in terms of funding.

In the absence of a policy, it was recognised that the work dies gradually, as there is nothing to which workers and young people can refer.

The starting point for policy writing and formulation was questioned. Should the process begin with problem identification or the developmental framework? It was suggested that synergistic and broader development goals be presented, showing how multiple development projects can be developed and utilised. This discussion led to a consensus on changing the starting points of policy writing/strategising. This reflected a consistent theme of the Conference: the need for bottom-up responses as the drivers of policy, practice, education and training in youth work.

It was pointed out that structured dialogue is used in Europe to set the broader context; thereafter, young people can be engaged to shape policy and its implementation.

It was thought appropriate for youth to drive the policy-making process and to prevent policy from being used as a tool to contain the "disruptive" nature of youth. However, there was concern that full collaboration was lengthy and, unless issues raised can be changed quickly, policy can become irrelevant even before it is adopted.

It was recognised that most investment in youth development is restricted to education and sports, but the Cypriot strategy, to set legislation that gives youth power to advise parliament by mandating consultation, was highlighted. It was argued that this had presented a safeguard from policy instability

when administrations change. Yet again, the clear emphasis here is on attention to the base in the youth work space.

It was mooted that, while national frameworks are needed more than detailed policies, policy can and perhaps should arise out of these. There was some agreement that it would be sensitive and useful to build contextual frameworks that can inform global frameworks (rather than looking for different contexts to fit a formulaic international framework).

Recommendations

1. Rethink the concept and purpose of the policy in a modern context, as we live in a disruptive world;
2. Look at the context in which we exist, but look at the results that we desire to achieve that inform the context;
3. Create a new model of co-leadership, of the involvement of young people inside of the process,
4. Utilise policies as political instruments. In the absence of a policy, there are great dangers and stagnations. Hence, youth work should be embedded in policies pertaining to youth;
5. Generate the means to establish, interpret and implement policy via bottom-up consultation and inclusion of all stakeholders.

Professionalisation, education and training

The significance and consciousness of the promotion of a culture of credentialism, encompassing qualification, was mooted.

The consequences of this were seen as mixed, but growing pressure to map and recognise prior learning and bring together what is already in place is apparent.

It was argued that professionalisation incorporated considerations relating to policy, ethics, education and young people's welfare

It was suggested that governments take the lead in terms of establishing priorities with regard to the well-being of young people, but there needs to be awareness of how ethical and moral arguments are used and discussed in relation to power structures in any society and across societies. The question of how young people's voices might

be heard within this dynamic was seen as crucial, as was how the power relationship between young people and youth workers might be understood. This of course has a corollary with regard to youth worker representation within national and international associations.

Values, such as care and kindness, were discussed, as was the concept that codes of practice do not straightforwardly translate to "rules", although, as they logically should have a place in regulating practice, they need, if they are to be of any utility at all, to be regulatory. This contradiction needs to be addressed. The most likely response seems to be that each context/nation develop its own codes of conduct and that these inform the broader/global perspective. Thus, codes of practice need to be constructed within particular national and cultural contexts. How this relates to principles such as human rights and ideas about participation (voluntary or otherwise) needs to be thought through.

Related to the above, the place of reflective practice and the means to review direction were seen as critical (the need to implement and understand the purpose and nature of supervision).

Ongoing importance was attached to developing a process wherein the spotlight focuses on the learning of young people, relating to their strengths but also the barriers they face both in their personal lives and in relation to their wider place in society.

Review and reflections

Isabelle Mallia stated:

"I know there are some youth workers who argue that professionalisation might fit them too much into a square box while they would rather be outside of that square box and would rather work inside a triangle. But weighing the pros and cons, I think once youth workers are professionalised and they sit on the table with other professionals, the value of what they say is stronger. After all, youth work is usually legalised, there is youth policy and there are associations of youth workers seeing as now this work, that has been going on for quite a while, and there are movements from around Europe and from within the Commonwealth to join together what has been done in the past 40 to 50 years, I think the time has come to really professionalise youth work."

"There should be something to youth work which is generalisable to youth work wherever it is happening around the world even if it might take a different stand, depending on which country you are in and which young people you are working with. We have started building but we need to build some more."

Recommendations

1. Give thought to the Commonwealth degree and its the ongoing relevance and credentials;
2. Incorporate practitioners and young people systematically into decision-making, certainly via CAYWA, but more generally in the development of education and training, the establishment of national or even local standards and ethical codes of conduct and the establishment and consistent review of the nature of practice and the definition and place of professionalism;
3. Develop a strong framework of recognition regarding prior learning;
4. CAYWA to support workers through materials on the website, etc.;
5. Maintain and grow global networks;
6. Develop a ladder of certification;
7. Look to understand common competences;
8. Focus on the need for research on the importance of the collective voice/stories of young people but also on the numbers of young people coming into contact with youth workers (as the foundation for evidence-based practice);
9. Connect theory and practice – values, theory, practice – and understand values to build good practice;
10. Support best practice.

Ethics and young people's welfare

The role of the sector and workers to codify against their practice was discussed; this was seen to include decision-making in relation to ethics.

The role of government was explored in relation to generating a code of ethics and frameworks. However, it was thought the latter should be more the role of practitioners, working with ministries for support and ratification.

Some concern was expressed about the confusion between ethical conduct and personal codes of morality. The need to steer away from a personal behaviour focus to relevant and appropriate professional conduct informed by ethical principles was highlighted.

It was agreed that safeguarding and child protection processes were useful for youth work practice. Associated legislation recognises the benefits of past, current and future progress.

Review and reflections

While cultural competency was discussed, there was a sense that criteria for definitions, and even the efficacy and ethical connotations, of ideas about cultural competency needed unpacking. In this regard, while some argued for shared codes of ethical practice, a consistent and significant strand of feeling was concerned about the utility of overarching forms of regulation not informed by the myriad of cultural contexts that the Commonwealth and Europe represent. Once again, while "recognition" of youth work was discussed, there was some questioning as to what this meant, and of the need for evidence of the impact of youth work, if we are to make claims about the profession, that went beyond the anecdotal success stories that risk the accusation of bias.

This said, the measurement of impact would mean establishing impact baselines to facilitate analysis of "ground covered". Common criteria for measuring impact would need to be established, which would be an exacting task, particularly given the diverse nature of contexts and cultures involved. Comparative analysis (control groups) would strengthen any findings, but again this would be a challenge. Identifying such comparators, certainly with regard to the necessary longitudinal character that any robust evaluation would require (several years), would present complex issues.

With the latter in mind, research might be better focused on sample groups: single or small groups of projects/communities.

Recommendations

1. Establish what good practice is in any context and build appropriate ethical models that promote rights-based practice;

2. Facilitate a means by which these models inform wider national and international ethical codes (bottom-up);
3. Recognise that power is central to ethics and the discussion about ethics, and recognise abuse;
4. Accelerate the process to develop relevant codes;
5. Hear and act on the voices of practitioners and young people in relation to youth work practice;
6. Build awareness of the place of values; rules should not replace care, kindness, cultural and contextual sensitivity;
7. Build recognition of the importance of reflective practice;
8. Collate and disseminate ethics case studies;
9. Promote safeguarding legislation.

Emerging trends

There was an awareness that both challenges and opportunities exist. Growing consciousness of the importance of mental health, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) and social media and the need to rigorously safeguard the same, in light of international grooming and trafficking issues, was highlighted.

It was thought that the place of freedom of opportunity and how this might affect levels of trust between young people and the rest of society required youth workers and related stakeholders to use available but socially/culturally sensitive tools (such as social media) to better effect.

The link between preventative work and engagement with young people was made, and how youth work can facilitate the bridges that are, and can be, built in this respect was discussed. However, practitioners need to remain vigilant in respect of how prevention can disguise attempts to extend surveillance and control of young people.

There was awareness of the enormous challenges related to the environment and employment but social media seemed to be a "never-ending deluge of negativity". It was thought that in the digital arena young people and youth workers were often at opposite ends of the spectrum of use and understanding. Young people really innovate digital

responses through use and demand while youth workers are generally responding to the same. This means youth workers rely on young people to educate them in matters digital. The resulting dynamic often results in practitioner responses looking dated and more responsive to practitioner concerns than youth interest.

The importance of trusting young people and working alongside them was noted (rather than looking to lead or instruct them). The practitioner's role in working with young people in their choice-making was mooted. It was agreed that there was a need to identify and work with challenges and alternatives.

It was stated that policy should be not just an administrative process but an instrument of power and that there is a need to think about 'what agency' young people have; 'who decides' – who dictates the nature and direction of policy and if this is framed to uphold the status-quo or to transform the character of any particular society.

It was noted that policies can be used as political instruments of power and that in the absence of a policy there are great dangers, which include the risk of practice stagnation.

Review and reflections

Concerns were raised over certain dominant narratives about youth in the language of research. It was thought that there was a need to prioritise showcasing young people as agents (having agency and capacity to build and take control of their own destiny, being experts in their own lives) and actors, and experts in their own lives, rather than consistently showcasing them as problems.

Miriam Teuma suggested that, "Social media presents opportunities for youth work, reaching young people via our particular approaches."

Recommendations

1. Address the gap between practitioners' and young persons' digital knowledge;
2. Ensure appropriate safeguarding of young people in the development of digital responses;
3. Consider the need to empower and train young people so they can take up positive roles in society, but be prepared to learn from them about their needs;

4. Address the need for ministerial participation;
5. Develop consciousness that youth work is "about power";
6. Build awareness that growing inequality has coincided with the emergence of right wing movements and consider the dangers of not addressing this;
7. Align policies more with the ethos and values of youth work;
8. Focus on who contributes to the process and what goes into it to ensure it does not merely maintain the *status quo*. This is about listening to young people and grassroots practitioners;
9. Ensure that youth work research informs policy; young people can offer a healthily radical perspective that can be a positively disruptive force to undermine institutionalisation and control, questioning the concept and purpose of policy;
10. Harness the dynamism of young people via a commitment to youth participation and co-production, which can act to enliven static policy, motivating the rethinking and reshaping of approaches to policy and the refining of methods of engagement;
11. Value the impact young people can make.

5. Youth Work and Professionalisation

The process outside of the formal structures of the Conference gave rise to a clear set of contradictions relating to the nature of youth work and definitions and ideas about the nature of professionalism.

While the Commonwealth and CAYWA have done much in an effort to clarify both youth work and the character of professional practice, the evidence from the Conference as a whole indicates that there remains a range of understandings and, some might say, misunderstandings of both what youth work might be and what it means to undertake through professional training and practice.

This demands some analysis. The following is based on feedback from those who attended and contributed to the Conference. These responses were gathered via interviews carried out throughout the Conference, pre- and post-Conference surveys and requests for written feedback from every attendee between two and six weeks after the Conference.

The outcome demonstrates there is a deal of work to be done, certainly perhaps via CAYWA, to continue to establish:

- The nature of what might be understood to be professional practice across the broad horizon of the Commonwealth;
- The dividing line between the development of general safe and responsible practice and professional status;
- The character of youth work, which, rather than being a specific practice, appears to be a range of responses set within a shared set of values and principles.

These outcomes justify the proceedings of the Conference in that there appears previously to have been a number of assumptions about the understanding of youth work and what professionalisation might mean or require. While the Commonwealth Secretariat and CAYWA have certainly worked to establish and communicate the parameters of practice and what its professional incarnation might be, the evidence drawn from the Conference proceedings indicates that

there remain differences in what youth work is taken to be and variations of interpretation as to what might constitute professional practice and professionalisation.

There were quite significant indications of a misunderstanding and/or lack of clarity about the nature or character of professionalism and what professionalisation might mean (literally and for youth work specifically). As Jennifer Brooker had it, the whole issue was "a tad fractured".

For Howard Williamson, the definition seems pretty straightforward: "Being professional is about doing the job properly whatever the job is."

While the simplicity of this is appealing, it begs questions such as, who might define what "properly" is and how might it be enforced?

Robyn Broadbent (for whom youth work globally "is a defined profession") provided one basic premise, generally agreed in the broad understanding of what defines professional competence – qualification:

"It speaks to quality and speaks to us defining what youth work is, because it is a profession; it is a degreed, qualified credentialed profession. We need to keep to that definition; we need to shout it out!"

Alphonse Omolo was equally committed to advanced-level training and education of youth workers. He argued that:

"Youth is a very critical time in the life of an individual. There's a lot of things going on in their minds. It is important that this time in their life that they get professional accompaniment by people who are properly trained and qualified, with the skills to help them structure their thinking so that they can improve their own living conditions. This is why it is really important that the individuals that are working with young people have the appropriate technical skills to deliver outcomes that are valuable for improving the lives of young people."

Isabelle Mallia confirmed this view and that what is expected is more than training but serious study: "If you are a professional, it tells me that you've studied."

The Commonwealth Secretariat's understanding of the background and character of professional status and approach has been outlined (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017a, pp. 15-23), but professionalism, in everyday parlance and consciousness, is associated with (in addition to the expectation of graduate level education):

- Practice autonomy;
- Flexible/adaptive practice;
- An evolving body of knowledge;
- Policy awareness/understanding;
- Peer evaluation;
- Public accountability;
- Ethical frameworks, responsive to changing contexts, interpreted and enacted via agreed and reviewed principles.

Isabelle Mallia outlined much of the above when asked about her expectations of professional status:

"... it tells me there is a body that is governing your behaviour, your ethics, your standards, your values...If I was a parent I would want to ensure that my son or my daughter would be working with a youth worker who is professional. I would know that standards were being adhered to...not just for youth workers themselves, it isn't about giving a standing to youth workers, with regards to other professions, how about young people themselves? Do they get a better deal if a youth worker is a professional?"

As such, those involved in the professions are not just "doing a job". They do not turn up at work and follow prescribed instructions; they are regulated (by professional bodies) but are not confined within hard borders of delivery/response, albeit maintaining a consistent (agreed) code of conduct (arising out of ethical frameworks). Thus, what marks out those who are members of a profession is the capacity to take all of the above into account and make professional judgements. A judgement is more or less "good" (or fair) according to the quality and/or quantity of evidence it is based on. So a professional (to act professionally) needs to be able to suspend prejudice and bias and act on the basis of experience, knowledge and evidence (fair and considered action).

For all this, the need for standardisation was a point reiterated throughout the Conference, and professionalisation, via professional associations, was seen as a means of achieving this, as stated by Tamara Mathebula:

"This sector is very important to professionalise so we have a standard way of doing things, that we are coordinated and belong to a body of youth workers. So professionalisation is something that needs to be strengthened and is quite key for the associations and youth workers in general."

The professional is defined by their ability to align their response to individual and group needs and not to be corralled by a "one-size-fit-all" approach. Adam Muirhead emphasised this interpretation:

"Being professional to me means having an understanding of the values, the principles, the ethics, the philosophy of a discipline so that you can gain professional autonomy. A really powerful concept is how we can empower people not to have 'out-of-the-box' solutions which would restrict youth work practice but be able to be adaptable to contexts and apply those principles wherever they go."

However, for Adam, the educational gateway might not be a degree:

"I think the professionalisation of youth work is quite crucial because it represents how we achieve the greatest outcomes for young people. It needs to be done in such a way that it is inclusive of all the people who may not want to come on a journey all the way to being a degree qualified youth worker. It can be hugely supportive to create the ground so that people can receive the training and qualifications the quality assurances and aspire to safe practice as a basis, but go beyond that if they want to and be supported in that. The awareness of how to professionalise would be very supportive. Then, what we can achieve for young people, the potential there is fantastic."

Adam's last point (or question) here seems to be seminal. If not degree, what would be the acceptable benchmark of professional status? He clearly wants training that assures standards and safeguarding, but to what extent; what would be the educational/training baseline and who might set it?

The professional places the interests of their clients at the fore; legality, the requirements of the state, family and funders are taken into consideration, but the professional, by definition, acts in the interests of their client.

The above behaviour and attitudes do not come naturally to us. We are all subjects and thus inclined to give subjective opinions. What we know of the human mind is that, all things being equal, emotion trumps rationality. As such, it is usual for professionals not only to go through extensive periods of education and training (usually to at least degree level) but also to be in a place to change and develop personal, group and social attitudes.

Given all this, achieving and maintaining professionalism is usually a full-time vocation. Even to partially meet the above criteria, asking someone to meet these, say on top of their family and employment responsibilities, would be not only setting someone up to fail but also not tenable socially. Someone who has only a couple of hours a week to devote to not only the function but also the maintenance of the professional role is predictably not going to be as professional (or seen to be such) as someone who can devote their whole working life to such a commitment. This is what separates an amateur from a professional footballer or boxer, and that few amateur sportspersons are able to match their professional counterparts in terms of performance illustrates and evidences this gap. It is highly doubtful, for instance, that someone will choose an enthusiastic amateur dentist (who does a couple of hours of dentistry a week) over someone who dedicates the majority of their time to practising root canal procedures.

Given these very exacting demands of professional recognition, it is understandable why gaining entry to a profession is considered as attaining "status" (professional status). This status arises because of the comparative rarity of people willing and able to take the exacting path demanded in the process of acquiring professional status. The simple laws of supply and demand tend to mean that relatively high salaries are offered to those elevated to professional ranks. As Isabelle Mallia had it, professional status works "... to give it a standing which is more respectable with regards to other professions."

Bob Singha also saw respect as a consideration:

"It also means respecting our profession: that having a profession we know where to go to when we have challenges; we also know where to go when we need support. So becoming a professional, for me it actually grounds down to when a young person is growing up are they saying 'I want to become a youth worker' and then we'll know what kind of professionals we are."

However, Howard Williamson had it that professional status should not necessarily be linked to salaries: "Professional is often contrasted to amateur, but we should not be thinking of professional as being paid."

This raises the question of the basis on which payment should be expected. The idea of a mixed economy of professional reward, wherein some are paid and others are not, does not feel logical and as such workable. One might think that natural justice would have it that either all those designated as professional should be paid, or else no one should receive payment and they should look elsewhere for the means to feed themselves and their families while pursuing professional competence/excellence.

Howard continued:

"So if the job is youth work, you're doing it with a set of values, a set of reference points, a particular approach to young people that is consistent with some idea of youth work. We can talk about codes of ethics, we can talk about frameworks of principles and purposes, but one would hope that everyone who is engaged in that type of practice complies with that sort of framework of principles – that is what being professional is."

The implications for continual learning, self-awareness and a knowledge base are clear here. Supervision might be a vital part of such an endeavour as well – that is, disciplined and focused review of and reflection on practice that encourage the questioning and reformation of practice and its motivations, ethics, purpose and outcomes. However, the central question is, what are the means by which we might motivate people to find the time to take on such a level of responsibility and accountability without reward (especially while others in other contexts have the time and are being well rewarded for their efforts)?

Discussions about professionalism and professionalisation have been ongoing for some years globally within the Commonwealth. The conversations about professionalism and professionalisation at the Conference seemed to conflate the ambition to strive for youth workers to deliver straightforward "safe" practice and be informed, responsible and accountable practitioners with the blanket definition "professional". We could argue such demands make

workers a "bit" or "partially" professional, but that would be like saying a paramedic is a "doctor light": why would one do that?

Dana Fusco's presentation provoked a great deal of thinking and healthy argument, presenting as it did something of a development of some of what might have become "taken for granted" assumptions and consequences of professionalisation. It is perhaps no surprise that aspects of this, including challenging current perspectives, cause a deal of consternation and perhaps defensiveness, particularly among academics perhaps more wedded to what has become the conventional thinking about this process.

However, once more, there was a somewhat contradictory reaction from those more closely involved with on-the-ground practice.

Cez James, who has relatively recently left the field after long experience working in East London, saw Dana as focusing on the broad horizon of practice, suggesting extending practice standards and quality to all youth workers, full-time and part-time paid as well as young leaders and volunteers.

Miriam Teuma stated: "I found myself agreeing with everything Dana said. It reflects much of the kind of ideas we have been building in Malta for many years."

Nat Sargent welcomed the opportunity given by Dana's position: "Dana's presentation left me reflecting on my stand point on youth work and professionalisation and my intention behind my drive to professionalisation."

One would hope new and/or different perspectives might be welcomed and sometimes accommodated into existing paradigms. Indeed, this is at the root of youth work practice: the need for practitioners and practices to be ready to constantly change and adapt to new conditions, contexts and generations.

The hope and perhaps expectation that the academy might embrace the world of ideas around any subject is far from new, but what is also crucial is the way we think about them. As far back as first and second century, Epictetus had it:

"What really frightens and dismays us is not external events themselves, but the way in which we think about them. It is not things that disturb us, but our interpretation of their significance."

If we receive ideas openly, it stands the test of reason that we might have more of an opportunity to draw off the positives (different and new understanding/perspectives) they might offer.

Hanna Holborn Gray, President of the University of Chicago from 1978 to 1993, offered this principle in 2012:

"Education should not be intended to make people comfortable; it is meant to make them think" (p. 86).

Again, this is nothing new. Socrates described himself as the "gadfly" of the Athenian people, seeing it as his role to disturb and question and thereby provoke people to think through their current beliefs and change the ones they could not defend. While the Conference debates only touched on supervision in youth work, it is worth making the point that, as a recognised facet of professional practice and conduct in a range of fields (including youth work), it is partially based on the same sort of process as the means to explore, reflect on and improve practice. Just repeating the canon will not do this, but neither will the refusal to consider revisions of former debates in light of changing circumstances. Should we not encourage a young person who once talked about what they wanted to do with their life, if they want to, to go over or review that ground again after the passing of time? We are allowed to think about things more than once hopefully. In reality, we never go over the same ground as the context of discussion constantly changes over time and place and from person to person.

Conference outcomes also indicated that further work is required to corral the concept or a grasp on why the promotion of professional status might be desirable. More discussion is also required on how discussions around professionalism embraces issues such as contextual interpretations of youth work, the promotion of volunteer training and the sharing and exchange of practice.

For all this, we have defined and can continue to define professionalism, but it does seem that, when we talk about this notion, we start to refer to quite fundamental things: standards, safeguarding, training, attitude review and so on. Are we actually, in any substantive sense, talking about the blanket professionalisation of youth workers or are we referring more to the need for increased

dialogue and support, more association than professionalism? Bob Singha might be understood to have touched on this when he said:

I think in various parts of the world, I come from the UK, I live and work out of London and we're going through austerity measures. We're going through some of the biggest cuts to budgets that we've ever seen in our life time, so having a profession, becoming more professionalised, helps us join together, to have a shared voice about the benefits of youth work so we can get the funding and draw down the support from the governments and the communities that we serve, so that we can serve better and serve for longer and help our fellow youth workers do the work that they love.

For Ashraf Patel, 5th Space perhaps offers a "third way" to think about what we want of youth workers. While she described this in terms of a definition of what "professional" meant for her, something more fundamental might be being suggested here:

"For me, being a professional means essentially being someone who has the attitudes, the knowledge and the competencies to undertake their role well, whatever that may be. For youth work it is all the competences you need, but it is also love and care, and that's a lot of what we talked about at the conference, being professional is also to bring your commitment, love and care and to do your work with excellence

"Certainly going forward what we should be discussing how we can deepen the conversation about what is professionalisation and continue to bring academics and practitioners together to look beyond the black and white solutions but to look at the grey, the many shades in between, in this field of youth work. I think that is one big conversation that must continue.

"We really want to talk about the role of empathy, love, care in youth work, which cannot be measured, which cannot be evaluated it's just got to be there."

As Bob Singha pointed out, there is little agreement about what being professional might be. Professionalisation also has potential risks, among them the ossifying of practice by way of legislation:

"Being professional means different things to different people. Professionalisation comes with a context of standards. Rather than legislation that prevents people from doing stuff I think minimum standards and quality standards are inherent in what professionalisation means."

The extent that we want to trade off political and social advantages of non-professionalisation (or "de-professionalisation", (Illich, et al, 1977)) needs consideration. In Malta, as elsewhere, youth work is still not widely understood as it is (compared with, for instance, teaching or social work) a relatively new profession. Chris Mizzi reflected on this situation:

"We have professional recognition by the government but we are not generally seen as professionals, but recognition is power, so we need to keep on taking every opportunity to let people know about the trust the government has put in us.

"Youth work is flexible and dynamic. I'm in favour of professionalisation but I'm also worried it will put youth work in a corner. If it is standardised too much most of work what people who we see as youth workers are doing around the world will need to change or people might just stop doing things the way they are doing them. The danger is that professionalisation will prescribe ways of doing things and things that we might have done at one time, we will see as not part of our job.

"With this in mind, we need to hold on to our fundamental role of working with what the young person sees as their needs; we need to remain flexible and adapt to situations while being guided by our codes of ethics. It's very important not to be afraid to take risks – we need to always be the agent of social change."

Robin Lockhart mooted perhaps the most balanced and informed perspective:

"... with regards the often referred to paradox that exists within the discourse on the professionalisation of youth work as well as to form new connections and to strengthen existing ones too.

"The discourse of the main conference sessions left me with a few main questions in my mind:

- How much professionalisation is required?
- Who decides?
- Is there scope for a wide and varied level?

"Viewpoints on professionalisation varied widely from those who felt strongly that all youth work must be delivered by fully qualified workers who have participated in a 'standardised' training programme, to those who felt equally strongly that this approach would mark the end of true informal and community education; that the strength and impact of our work stems directly from the work not being standardised

or formulaic in any way and that youth workers must remain 'rigidly flexible' and hold on tightly to the agility and dynamism required to be able to respond to the ever changing 21st Century landscape of our work.

"In between the two extremities we might argue/hope that the possibility for both resides... that we can become more professionalised without loss of any of the flexibility and agility.

"We can offer some level of qualification, standardisation and study to youth workers throughout the Commonwealth and Europe by all means... Indeed it appeared from the conference that the appetite for this is most definitely there. Yet to 'enforce' it wholesale may be an error. It may be better to allow it to grow more organically based on demand and on a voluntary basis whereby those who wish to adopt this approach are supported fully and the impact of their 'professionalised' approach on the quality of their practice is monitored and evaluated fully to then drive further adoption of such an approach.

"To 'settle' for a 'standard' youth worker/youth work curriculum in my opinion certainly would be a mistake ... Young People deserve 'premium' services not 'standard'... I have serious doubts about whether the 'one size fits all' philosophy carries any real weight – particularly when taken in the global context where local variations and situations vary wildly. However, as long as these local variations are catered for and encouraged, we may be able to get the best of both worlds.

"One delegate spoke of his belief that 'anyone can do youth work' and was 'shot down' pretty swiftly. However, it is true that anyone can do youth work. However, the issue of whether they do it well is another matter... and is whether simply studying to a set level can teach one to be a better youth worker.

"It's a 'chicken and egg' scenario... "Young People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care"... can youth workers be taught to care; to be authentic and thereby credible to young people in their practice as well as to study a formalised, standardised curriculum?

"To my mind, someone who is practising high quality youth work without studies or having been 'professionalised' could certainly have their practice enhanced through theoretical study and would surely benefit further through exposure to other global contexts via international exchanges and knowledge transfer opportunities – and it is in this sharing in all

directions that the true strength of the grouping of nations at the conference presents its true strength – together we have it all!

"If we push through the proposed professionalisation and standardised curriculum I feel we must also ensure that students are enabled to build in their own dynamics to reflect their own particular contexts – geographic and contextual differences must also be allowed to inform practice if we are to learn from each other and provide the improved global youth work offer we are collectively striving for.

"If we limit our learning opportunities to the more formal course we may well miss out on the chance to share the benefits of so much 'non-colonial' and culturally contextual wisdom.

"We must, to my mind, pursue parallel processes whereby both the proposed formal/professionalised/ accredited learning is made available as well as and to enhance the already abundantly expert provision of wise and contextually and culturally embedded knowledge that pervades on the ground throughout the countries represented.

"If we are to roll out professionalised formal learning of youth work practice, we must surely also incorporate a sizeable element of informal practice in the curriculum and enable the voice of those local experts to be a learning tool. Whereby, learning can be shared in all directions and from all perspectives for the benefit of us all..."

Natalie Sargent, representing the New Zealand Youth Workers Association, and also Education and Youth Development Coordinator for Youthline Wellington, discussed professionalisation at some length, particularly from her own contextual standpoint. This is useful because it literally puts things in perspective. We can perhaps too easily get webbed up in pursuing all-encompassing ideals and/or the struggle to gain the moral high ground at the price of missing the practical and contextual nuances:

"I felt there was a lot of discussions around the need for education (degree) and that this seemed to be the foundation of professionalisation for youth workers. I found myself both agreeing and disagreeing with this.

"I currently manage Korowai Tupu membership (Aotearoa New Zealand's professional association for youth workers) many have been surprised by this, as typically I work outside the square and am not one to conform to the 'normal'.

I would not normally be one for professionalisation, but have strong feelings towards ensuring our young people have the best and if this happens through professionalisation then I'm all in.

"In reflection, I have questioned why I have been drawn to professionalisation of youth work and if I have shifted my perspective of professionalisation and there are a couple of reasons.

"I would normally associate professionalism to that of a Lawyer or Doctor and suits, ties and years of study. Yet I feel in Aotearoa we have adapted the concept of professional to align with youth work. We value experience and education equally and this is shown in our membership criteria. I feel that there seems to be a strong push towards the need for education - degree as a bench mark. I don't necessarily feel this is the right approach, as from my experience many youth workers fall into the position of a youth worker due to life experiences etc., and often many have not had a pleasant educational experience in their youth and the thought of going to have to get a degree may turn many amazing youth workers to other occupations. Resulting in youth work sectors losing the essence that makes youth work magic... I believe we need to create realistic and achievable pathways for youth workers into the education space.

"Regarding Korowai Tupu I agree with the Kaupapa and how it came about, we have been lucky here in Aotearoa NZ youth sector to have a voice (youth workers) and the reality is that our youth sector has been driven by youth workers. I feel that in both our Code of Ethics and Korowai Tupu have been created by youth workers for youth workers, therefore this holds plenty of mana.

"I could go on for hours discussing my thoughts, concerns, frustrations and dreams on this..."

This insight leads us to question many of the claims about professionalisation and its necessary connection with good and ethical practice.

Before the conclusion of the Conference, Miriam Teuma reminded us that youth work was reliant on the ability of youth workers to connect, engage and empower young people and that, although policy is an instrument of the state, it needs to be considered as something dynamic (rather than static), to be used to forward the understanding that young people are an asset to society, facilitating the future. She said:

"Political will is important; it has been crucial for us to promote ways of working that cause young people to empower themselves via their voice to continue moving in life. That's what youth work is all about – get people to look at the laboratory and take something away with them; adapt, adopt, but create discussion.

"Youth workers organising, making their own association, started everything in Malta. It enabled us to lobby government and help ministers understand the value of the work. This is how our Youth Work Profession Act came about.

"We have used the position for young people so that they can talk directly to politicians locally nationally and internationally. "

6. The Role of CAYWA

CAYWA has looked to place itself in a central position in relation to education and training as well as professionalisation. The Association's presentation argued that, ultimately, professionalisation is about the safety of young people and the quality of the services they receive, but also the value of professional associations, which were said to provide an identity, practice frameworks, codes of practice and quality assurance. Perhaps the relationship between these two views can be intuited, but they need to be clarified. There is also a need for broader insight across and between context and practitioners.

The CAYWA presentation also had it that strategic objectives should advance the profession of youth work and support its provision through education and training, while promoting the journey through theory to practice by respective stakeholders. It is imperative then to further elaborate on these requirements and to ensure that relevant constituencies are involved in the development of these ideas.

Delegates voiced the need to cultivate stronger co-leadership with young people and greater grassroots practitioner involvement, as a practical and ethical priority.

There was a sense that there needs to be an understanding and acceptance that the primary role of youth workers is working with young people to facilitate their future and as such they need to be part of decision-making on what is needed in terms of youth worker training. One delegate put this point quite strongly when he had it that: "Youth workers are no longer responsible for what will happen in the future; the youth are!"

There were also appeals to consider broadening CAYWA's membership. Henry Charles said: "I have been wondering whether it is time to revisit the original construct of CAYWA. Should it be an alliance of youth workers' associations or simply a Commonwealth Alliance of Youth work practitioners, researchers?"

7. The Conference and Beyond

Several observations were made on effectively utilising global platforms such as the Conference. Henry Charles had it that:

"... we should consider the feasibility of using ICT to facilitate greater access to conference proceedings. For example, we should explore the live streaming of the plenary sessions, at least. Consideration should also be given to hosting a series of Webinars leading up to the conference to allow for more grassroots input into the discourse."

Alphonse Omolo commented:

"I think the continuation is important, rather than just having a discussion in the form of a conference. There are various opportunities that can be used like online forums, but at a local level there should be continuation, that can expand to the regional and continental levels. So (for instance) if the East African countries can come together and continue the discussion on youth work instead of waiting for the next Commonwealth event."

"I would suggest we have our own meetings at country and regional level, so we continue to build on experience, knowledge and skills that can help youth workers in our own countries for our own governments to recognise youth work as a valid profession, especially for improving the lives of young people."

8. Conclusion

Looking at the Conference discussions and process, it is clear that the Commonwealth needs a new direction in providing information on subjects such as professionalism and youth work. Perhaps more than anything else, though, it needs to look at what exists within the huge range of contexts and dialogues in the Commonwealth and to become a conduit for this richness of perspectives, knowledge and skill. This is a move to an asset-based perspective, building and evolving perceptions, standards and direction and extending the boundaries of what we currently understand to be professionalism and youth work, both shaped in and, up to now, dominated by Northern, mainly deficit, assumptions. The recommended move comes from a model that has it that "we bring the knowledge and skill to you" to "we learn and evolve together".

9. Overall Recommendations

Implementing the following five recommendations can collectively address the most pressing needs identified by the process of the Conference:

1. Establish and generate an index of local and national understanding and interpretations of youth work and professional practice that has the capacity to establish a broad general outlook via these diverse contextual perspectives;
2. Encourage and facilitate the development of culturally knowledgeable and sensitive local and national standards for youth work;
3. Build mechanisms and the means to create ongoing review and dissemination of recommendations 1 and 2'
4. Create a central hub as a global resource, which has the means to interpret and describe the common themes that evolve in terms of:
 - Professional practice;
 - Innovatory and effective methods and approaches;
 - The nature of youth work;
 - Ethical and practice standards and safeguarding legislation and mechanisms.
5. Use the above as the mean to enliven, by task, the more efficient and effective development of professional associations that are representative of "on-the-ground", grassroots, chalk-face youth workers.

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Commonwealth Secretariat

Marlborough House, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom

thecommonwealth.org



The Commonwealth