

Executive Summary

Youth work is defined broadly by the Commonwealth Secretariat as ‘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.’ It is a relational profession built around the skills and competencies of engaging young people to enhance their self-esteem, social connectedness, economic and social productivity, emotional and intellectual maturity, and autonomy, and supporting them in their self-empowerment in caring and supportive environments. Peer youth work involves young people themselves who have built systematic skills and competencies engaging with their peers as youth workers.

The Commonwealth initiated its commitments to the profession of youth work through its support for the implementation of the Commonwealth Diploma in Youth Development Work in the 1970s. The 2007 Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting committed to the Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE), (Commonwealth of Nations, 2007) the framework which renewed and expanded this commitment to youth development work. The contributions of the Commonwealth to professionalising youth work has subsequently been endorsed by member states including at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2013 which commended ‘the Commonwealth Secretariat’s ongoing commitment to youth work education and professionalisation’ (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2013b, p. 13).

Since then, the Commonwealth has expanded its contributions to youth work education and training through establishing the emerging Youth Work Education Qualifications Consortium and to broader influencing that advances policy and practice commitments to youth work in member states and supporting/encouraging member states to establish youth workers’ associations.

Youth work, for us, is a growth profession. It is rapidly evolving and changing, just like young people. It has, throughout its varied and contextualised histories, been a constantly growing practice; varying over time and place and continuing to alter and develop. This has meant that it has been able to remain a relevant social resource. This growth is motivated and created by individuals, groups, communities, nations and societies, who deploy and call on youth workers to adapt and shape their response.

This growth has been necessary in order to respond to the evolving and shifting needs of young people, their personal growth and the requirements, hopes, ambitions and expectations that regions and nations have for their young people.

Youth work also distinctly benefits not only young people, but all of society. The profession has demonstrated great value in providing young people with support

to figure out the means of their social, political, ethical, intellectual and physical development. Youth work, when adequately funded and resourced, and when comprehensive training is provided to practitioners, is shown to have greatly contributed to shaping a productive and equitable workforce, enhancing employability skills, and responding sensitively to radicalisation and extreme behaviour – ultimately leading to equitable development outcomes and social cohesion for all. Where mainstream education has faced challenges addressing young people’s personal and social development, youth work has met those challenges.

For all this, while youth work is no single thing, neither is it everything. Youth work has core practice principles, but it has needed to be continually emergent and adaptive because the young people it serves, and the social situation they find themselves in, are also continually changing and adapting. Youth work serves no one situation or young person. It has grown and transformed because of its inherent responsiveness; like a butterfly, if you pin it down you will kill it; like the young people it serves, it is becoming more than what it is, looking to be all it might be. But also like young people, while youth work has commonalities in any given circumstance, it is necessarily shaped by local, cultural and social considerations. Youth work is as such a growth profession.

This baseline is an inquiry into the professional identity and multiple practices of youth work, a look at the way in which its professionalisation has been approached in Commonwealth member states, and a preliminary look at how it has begun shaping and benefiting young people’s autonomy, self-empowerment and productivity. In an indirect manner, the baseline has also proved a testament to the influence of the Commonwealth in this sphere.

The study was conducted in 35 Commonwealth member states that were considered by regional consultants in relation to the extent of steps taken to professionalise youth work as follows:

Commonwealth Member States included in the Baseline Survey

Region	Countries							
Africa	Ghana	Kenya	Malawi	Nigeria	South Africa	Tanzania	Uganda	Zambia
Asia	Bangladesh	India	Maldives	Malaysia	Pakistan	Singapore	Sri Lanka	
Caribbean	Barbados	Belize	Dominica	Guyana	Jamaica	Saint Lucia	St Vincent	Trinidad & Tobago
Europe and Canada	Canada	Cyprus	Malta	United Kingdom				
Pacific	Australia	Fiji	New Zealand	Papua New Guinea	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Vanuatu

It has been a collaborative effort bringing together five regional consultants, 35 country consultants and Commonwealth staff in a bid to assess progress made in ensuring quality youth work delivery for young people through its professionalisation.

While it is difficult to provide quantitative evidence of where youth work is explicitly recognised as a profession due to the varying criteria that govern its practice in

member states, not even half the number of member states in the sample had taken what we will term ‘significant steps’¹ towards the formal recognition of the profession, if the contributions of all youth sector players² are considered. In spite of this, youth work exists in many forms and shapes across the Commonwealth, and benefits the lives of young people in multiple ways.

Out of the 35 countries in the sample, 12 countries (34 per cent) had taken significant steps to professionalise the youth work sector. Only 11 (31 per cent) countries had distinct national-level policies that recognised youth work. Twelve countries (34 per cent) had youth workers’ associations that help safeguard the integrity and quality of the profession, and 25 (71 per cent) could claim at least a diploma-level qualification for youth work professionals. In Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, many of the advances have also been directly and indirectly attributed to the Commonwealth’s efforts.

The summary charts below for each regions/region groups studied elaborate on:

- a. The existence of specific policy commitments to youth work as a distinct professional category,
- b. The existence of legislative enactments for youth work in the form of Youth Work Acts,
- c. The existence of a professional association for youth workers in order to ensure the quality and integrity of the profession,
- d. The availability of qualifications above a diploma level for youth work education and training.

Figure ES.1 demonstrates commitments identified in the survey for the five regions/region groups of the baseline: there is somewhat of a correlation between policy

Figure ES.1 Regional trends – commitments to professionalising youth work

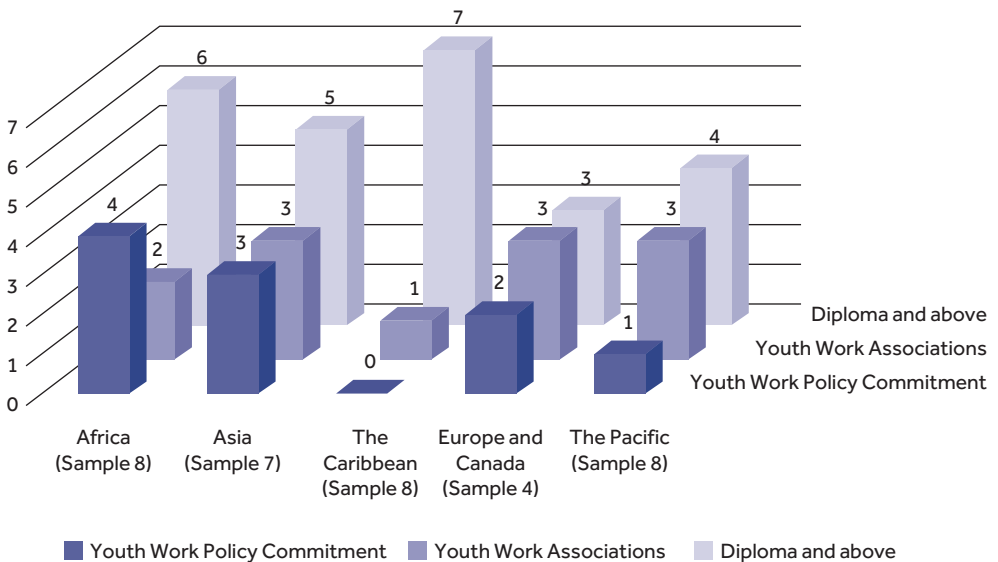


Table ES.4 Commitments to professionalising youth work – Europe and Canada

Country	Total countries	Canada	Cyprus	Malta	UK
Policy Commitments to youth work as a profession	1	0	0	✓	✓LG
Youth Work Act	1	0	0	✓	0
Professional Association	3	✓	0	✓	✓
Degree/Diploma	2	✓	0	✓	✓
Masters and PhD	3	✓	0	✓	✓

Table ES.5 Commitments to professionalising youth work – the Pacific⁶

Country	Total countries	Australia	New Zealand	Fiji	PNG	Samoa	Tonga	Vanuatu	Solomon Islands
Policy Commitments to youth work as a profession	1	✓LG	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Youth Work Act	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Professional Association	2	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0	✓
Degree/Diploma	3	✓	✓	0	✓	0	0	0	✓
Masters and PhD	1	✓	✓	0	0	0	0	0	0

The study highlighted the varied nature of youth work and its existence in diverse contexts through State and non-State delivery. Findings indicated that it was not always State legislation or policy that drives dynamic youth work. Systematic, guided and supervised asset-based youth work was often supported by practice networks, youth workers' associations and education and training institutes. Moreover, commitments to youth work in policy did not always correlate with commensurate investment and implementation of policy.

However, in countries such as Malta, youth work legislation and policies explicitly paved the way for greater investment in youth work, both for training and practice. The legislative backing for the profession in Malta is in fact broadly seen as the foundation of this cohesive education and training pathways for youth workers and youth work delivery mechanisms in the country. So, by extension, where effective youth work exists, a State's policy commitments can clearly spread and amplify the quality and impact of this good work.

The above summary findings indicate the extent of the effort that is required in order to establish youth work as a recognised professional practice across the Commonwealth. These supporting policy environments are critical to building a skilled and competent youth work cadre without whom the empowerment of young people will not be a reality.

The primary data for the survey was gathered during 2016 and is a snapshot of a particular point in time. While updates have been made as far as is possible, this report does not claim to be an accurate reflection of all current youth work policy contexts in the Commonwealth. It does, however, offer useful indicative data for further engagement across member states. Additionally, data was often difficult to gather due to non-availability or difficulty of access. Therefore, in some cases, no substantive conclusions could (or should) be made. The paucity of information is a clear indication of the need for meaningful data gathering around youth work at all levels studied in this baseline.

The study has undergone broad-based review for validation through members of the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Workers' Associations (CAYWA) and the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC). CAYWA is an Association of Commonwealth associations of the youth work profession that represents a global identity for the advancement of the profession. CYC is a youth-led global platform representing young people within the Commonwealth in order to promote sustainable development, democracy and youth mainstreaming in decision-making processes. The findings and recommendations of this study will critically inform the position of CAYWA and young people as advocates and advisers to the Commonwealth on the professionalisation of the sector in order to provide accountable and quality youth work services.

The baseline is a work in progress and designed as such. It hopes for, invites, and needs addition, further contribution and development by practitioners, researchers, young people, and perhaps you, to become what it can be; and what it can be is, like every succeeding generation of young people, never finished.

Notes

- 1 For the purposes of this study, 'significant steps' were identified as policy commitments to youth work, existence of professional associations for youth work, and the availability of at least a diploma-level qualification for youth work.
- 2 The youth sector comprises all players who have youth empowerment/development as a major strategic area of intervention and can include ministries and departments, university departments, professional associations, networks and so on.
- 3 The University of Stellenbosch has a Theology course specialising in Youth Work. Monash SA has a youth development course.
- 4 Maldives was a part of the Commonwealth during the time of the study, however has since withdrawn from the Commonwealth.
- 5 Diploma to commence in 2017 as reported.
- 6 Certificate courses which are pathways to the Diploma are offered in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu (see Table 9.5).