

Chapter 11

Professional Validation of Youth Work Education and Training

11.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the concept of professional validation and trends in the professional validation of education and training for the youth work profession.

Across the Commonwealth, the validation and professional recognition for degree-level youth work qualifications are usually left in the hands of national governmental and extra-governmental bodies generically responsible for higher education standards and/or individual institutions. Exceptions include Australia and Malta, where youth worker associations have some influence.

Professional validation is important as it connects qualification with the field, which provides the means to keep training and education up to date, aware of changes in and pressure on practice, and so relevant.

11.2 A model of the professional accreditation of youth work

A model of accreditation can be drawn from the practice of the National Youth Agency (NYA) England. It is not put forward as something to copy or emulate; however, it is a thoroughly articulated process that demonstrates the complexity of professional accreditation, as indicated in Box 11.1.

11.3 Replicability of professional accreditation

The procedure described above represents a complex process (relative to the processes involved in non-professional qualifications). Should a Commonwealth member state wish to set up the necessary structures and processes for professional validation of youth work, it is probable that it will take considerable time, effort and meaningful partnerships with institutions carrying expertise for professional accreditation to ensure quality of the process.

11.4 Professional accreditation in Commonwealth regions

Professional accreditation of youth work education and training were only available in the UK and Australia. Other courses only underwent general university certification.

11.4.1 Africa

Overall, findings from Africa indicate that there is no youth work-specific professional accreditation in most countries surveyed except in Kenya. At university

Box 11.1 Professional accreditation process – National Youth Agency, UK

The following provides a brief introduction to the professional validation criteria and processes that are applied by the NYA and the Training Standards Committee (TSC) in its scrutiny of submissions and which form the basis on which all submissions will be judged. The NYA publication 'Professional Validation and Curriculum Requirements 2015' (National Youth Agency, UK, 2015) presents the process through which Higher Education Institutions in England can seek formal professional validation of their programme of education and training in youth work.

The role of the NYS is broadly that which would be adopted by an active and influential professional body in other professions, though it is not itself such a representative body.

In their own words, the NYA is a 'youth intermediary charity', that is it acts as broker (or 'go-between') between the field and institutions such as universities. The NYA's stated turnover of £10 million is, in part, raised by fees paid by these institutions for the NYA to recruit and deploy people from the youth work field as and when required.

On the basis of this role, it identifies itself as 'the national expert on youth policy and youth work' and is responsible for the professional validation of youth work programmes in England only. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own professionally validating ETS bodies and requirements.

The NYA argues that it has the responsibility to ensure that youth workers are properly trained and prepared. This might be understood to be effectively translated via the NYA's role in ensuring the fitness for purpose of youth work programmes that develop the knowledge, skills and values of practice. The Requirements cover the management, staffing and resourcing, teaching and learning, professional practice and the quality assurance of programmes. Professional practice is a key element of what makes the professional programmes distinct, putting the students' ability to apply academic theory to the direct work with young people and organisations as crucial to their achievement of professional status.

The position of the NYA and ETS is that the professional validation process is first and foremost designed and run to promote and secure the profession of youth work as a distinct and different approach to working with young people. The requirements expect programmes to be in line with current policy and delivery contexts so that newly qualified youth workers are able to contribute effectively to services for young people and work within multidisciplinary teams. In this regard, programmes should demonstrate how they equip learners to meet the requirements of the subject benchmarks and National Occupational Standards for Youth Work (National Youth Agency, UK (n.d.)).

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Therefore, the programmes eligible for professional validation are those that have a clear youth work pathway throughout all levels of learning and cover curriculum requirements. The NYA does not accept requests for validation from combined programmes where youth work is only part of the learning. However, the NYA does consider programmes that have a specialised approach to youth work or are contextualised, if in line with NYA guidelines (National Youth Agency, UK, 2016, p. 6).

level, all the courses are approved by the Senate but accredited by the Commission for University Education (CUE). Information as to how such accreditation is arranged and actualised was not accessible.

This suggests that there are minimal measures being put in place to align youth work courses with the current social realities and development challenges affecting the lives of young people. The lack of course lecturers qualified in youth work exemplified a discipline which is 'starved' of adequate competencies – those required to drive it towards achieving its social goals.

This situation can also affect the development of effective, visionary practitioners and policy-makers in the youth sector; the emergence of individuals and groups able to evaluate and anticipate the social changes in the practice environment and make timely strategic adjustments to improve the practice.

Furthermore, there is minimal planning and investment in securing relevant field practice opportunities. This is particularly difficult given that some states do not refer to youth workers' training institutions for graduates when employing youth workers.

11.4.2 Asia

In general, no youth work-specific professional accreditation processes were identified. In the past, quality measures set up by the Commonwealth Diploma in Youth Development were in use, but there is no evidence of the current use of these criteria.

11.4.3 Caribbean

While professional accreditation is said to be delivered by UWI, there is no clarity on how this accreditation works. The Diploma quality assurance guidance is of course available to the UWI.

11.4.4 Europe and Canada

Table 11.1 Professional validation of youth work qualifications – Europe

Country	Nature of professional accreditation of youth work qualifications
Canada	While accreditation is in its infancy in Canada (see Child and Youth Care Educational Accreditation Board of Canada (CYCEA), n.d.), the commitment to child and youth care likely disallows comparative analysis with other contexts. However, it is thought that there are too many processes that have been identified for institutions to work through an accreditation process. First, the focus is on self-study where the programme looks at its various components and discusses them in relation to the field, accounting for the choices they've made, with the assumption that there needs to be an internship component(s) and applied focus. The second process is an emphasis on quality improvement where reviewers appointed by the accreditation board review and assess the programme. As there is no licensing in Canada or regulatory body for youth work/child and youth care, the motivation is to promote the idea that staff from accredited programmes are more competent and have 'higher' qualifications. This has created some tensions in the field in geographic locations where youth work qualifications are obtained via private colleges (e.g., Newfoundland).
Cyprus	There are no accredited courses or accreditation processes relating to youth work practice in Cyprus.
Malta	The Youth Work Profession Act, 2014, gives formal professional recognition and status to youth workers, as well as regulating the profession and determining the qualifications and conditions under which youth workers can acquire such recognition. No specific professional validation of academic courses exist.
The United Kingdom	In the UK, over the last 20 years or so, this generally speaking has required a degree qualification, which is of course academically underwritten by universities. However various agencies, such as the NYA (claiming some degree of representation of youth work as a practice) have been used to provide a professional kitemark for such programmes mostly by way of advice and recommendation. Usually, to gain professional recognition, programmes need to evidence ongoing assessment of practice.

11.4.5 The Pacific

Table 11.2 Professional validation of youth work qualifications – the Pacific

Country	Nature of professional accreditation of youth work qualifications
Australia	Youth Workers Association – Victoria Eligible Qualifications and professional validation process for training courses. Western Australian Association of Youth Workers – Western Australia Eligible Qualifications and Practitioner Experience
Fiji	No information
New Zealand	No evidence of youth work-related professional validation.
Papua New Guinea	No information
Samoa	No information
Solomon Islands	No information
Tonga	No information
Vanuatu	No information

In Australia, the Youth Workers Association – Victoria has a degree course validation process. At this stage, only the degree course at Victoria University has gone through the YWA validation process. The Western Australian Association of Youth Workers plays a significant role in the assessment of practitioner experience, but has no formal course validation process.

11.5 Justifying the professional label

Decisions about professionally qualifying individuals in any profession will usually include ongoing assessment of practice in the field (throughout the programme of studies) by senior and/or experienced peers (supervisors and/or line managers) in appropriate settings. It is hard to see how programmes that do not include this might justify the fitness of a candidate to practice.

Professional qualifications will also commonly be generated, assured and quality maintained calling on advice and input from representatives from the professional field that the qualification serves. Such oversight might most beneficially be facilitated by the appropriate professional association, the membership of which may likely be more objective and representative of the field than say a ‘hired hand’ brought in by a qualifying institution.

Unless there is this type of assurance it is difficult to understand how prospective employers, students and clients might be convinced that programmes and qualifications (including study content, materials, study tasks, required reading, practice placements, teaching and teacher experience) are ‘safe’ and relevant (appropriately informed and up to date, etc.).

It seems, to an extent, that the gatekeepers to professional practice throughout most of the Commonwealth are academics located in educational institutions. This is quite contrary to what might be understood by most professions as advisable, desirable or 'safe'.

11.6 Conclusion

The findings above on professional validation highlight the need for the Commonwealth to advance validation processes and support the development of robust professional youth worker associations, with influence and authority in the field, which might correctly and desirably include shared oversight of the conferment of professional status.