

BA Youth and Community Work
SJYW6010 Applied Research Project
Proposal Form
2017/2018

Name	Ken O'Grady
Title of Applied Research Project	How Can Youth Work Support Young People Through the Transition Between Further and Higher Education?
Submission Date	26 th October 2017
Supervisor Name	Darrel Williams
Research Ethics Form Completed and attached	Yes

Note below your ideas for your research: Choose something that you find interesting

- Is youth work uniquely placed and equipped to support young people as they transition between further and higher education?
- Why is the FE-HE transition currently overlooked in youth work practice?
- What are the characteristics of the FE-HE transition and how does this impact on young people?
- How might young people's needs during this experience justify youth work interventions?

(How can youth work support young people to better realise their potential as they transition between FE and HE?)

- Is the nature of the FE-HE transition currently changing compared to previous years? How/why?

How practical will this idea be: e.g. what resources do you require? How much time do you have?

- This research requires access to young people on each side of the transition experience (FE and HE students). This can be arranged via the U2 project at UWTSD (and FE partner colleges).
- Required resources include stationary (paper/pens, notebooks), basic art supplies for poster designs and printing, and transport to FE locations.
- In terms of time, research will be integrated into existing fieldwork placement activities.

Outline the overall aim, and separate research questions you may want to explore

This research project seeks to answer the question, ‘How Can Youth Work Support Young People Through the Transition Between Further and Higher Education?’

This will be achieved by exploring how young people perceive the transition experience prior to and following their entry to higher education. Young people will also be asked what type of support they feel could help them in the process.

Research will be supported by literature review considering questions included in the notes section above. This will question primarily:

- (a) Whether there is demand (or necessity) for youth work during this transition phase.**
- (b) What type of support does youth work offer young people in terms of key transitions and the issues raised by the question above?**

Overall, these activities will help inform how youth work might respond to expressed/actual needs of young people throughout the transition between FE and HE.

Applied Research Project Proposal

When writing your proposal please think about the following (up to 1000 words):

- 1. Aim of study/your topic area/issue for research;**
- 2. Research Objectives/questions;**
- 3. Reflect upon why you are going to explore the topic you have chosen;**
- 4. Literature you are going to explore;**
- 5. Methodology/methods of data collection you intend to use;**
- 6. What Ethical considerations do you need to be mindful of?**
- 7. What would be the positive outcomes of engaging in this research? Who will benefit? How does it relate to Youth and Community work practice?**
- 8. How will you disseminate your research?**

Research Proposal

The aim of the proposed study is to explore the adolescent transition between further and higher education and how youth work may benefit young people as they progress through this key stage in their personal, social and educational development. This does not presume that this transition is an obstacle to be overcome – rather a challenge to be experienced. This study adopts the view that all young people have the potential to grow, thrive and transform in the process and youth work can be a means to facilitate the experience for groups and individuals.

Youth work as a profession concerns itself with adolescent transitions at both a policy level and in terms of the underlying principles and values driving the work. For instance, focus in the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work (Learning and Skills Improvement Service, 2012: 04) to “Enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, implies transitional support through various dimensions or stages of young people’s development. Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes (Youth Work Wales Review Group, 2013)

explicitly states that youth work, "...can support [young people] through significant developments in their lives" (YWWRG, 2013: 2). Furthermore, professional training – such as the current course of study here at UWTSD - attends to the psychological, biological and socio-cultural dynamics of young people's progression through the lifecourse intersecting with various life transitions (UWTSD, 2017). However, in terms of current practice, support for transitions between further and higher education often appears to have been overlooked, despite positive work in primary-to-secondary transitions.

Instead of supporting all young people to aspire, progress and achieve as engendered by Extending Entitlement (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002: 10), there appears to be a deficit bias in applied policy: the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (Welsh Government, 2013) focuses more on catchment of the disengaged leaving secondary education than supporting the engaged to progress further in the long-term; a point that is reinforced by comparative government spending. Furthermore, a wider view of the situation suggests that disengagement at HE poses a greater threat where young people may become NEET (not in education, employment or training) with the added burden of student debt and the psychological, social and cultural impact of perceived failure versus high aspirations. If the social and economic climate is also changing, then so is the nature of the transition to HE as the achievement of a higher qualification no longer guarantees future employment, the cost of living is at an all-time high and advancements in technology and social media add greater risks to mental health and wellbeing. This situation poses a compelling set of questions for policy makers and post-compulsory education. The greater question is how we might respond, and is there a ready-made solution in the traditional practice of youth work if it can be applied to this setting?

Literature that will be used to support this study will include young people's access and retention at HE; student experience; discussion of holistic approaches to mental health and wellbeing such as building resilience; and

the features of youth work practice. Going further, discussion will include consideration of adolescent transitions in general and how current changes in society may be impacting – even shifting or delaying – these transitions to the HE-FE phase. This poses the question whether the point of intervention – where youth work currently targets support earlier in the lifecourse – should be reconsidered.

In order to conduct the research which follows this literature review, a mixed-methods approach will be adopted. Qualitative methodology takes into account the necessity to adopt participatory methods of research with young people for several reasons: firstly, in this context, participation is congruent with the pillars of youth work. In terms of practice that is educative, expressive, participative, inclusive and empowering (YWWRG, 2013: 6), young people are actively involved in shaping and defining the research. This will be achieved by conducting at least 2 focus groups with young people at either side of the FE-HE transition and encouraging participation in an expressive activity.

Young people will communicate words and/or pictures (with explanation) that describe how they feel/felt about the transition, in group posters, and make suggestions for support that might help young people in the same situation. This could make the activity an action research project since young people are able to advocate for others and represent themselves. Secondly, this method is an ethical consideration concerning who holds power to communicate young people's needs and feelings. Exhibiting information through art, uploading posters anonymously to social media with participants' consent and disseminating resulting findings through online portals such as Youth Work Wales, will also make the research actionable and ethically justified. Thirdly, participatory methods situate the researcher in a relationship where young people's perceptions can be best understood through interaction with young people themselves (Kumar 2014: 132-133).

However, whilst qualitative data primarily defines research from a young person's perspective, quantitative data sourced from partner institutions (equal opportunities monitoring, achievement and socio-economic background statistics) and qualitative observations can be used to triangulate and contextualise findings. Without context, correlations and causes may be confused and accuracy versus misrepresentation is equally an ethical concern as it is an academic issue. Where possible, young people participating in focus groups will also be observed during ongoing youth work as part of the U2 project at UWTSD and the researcher will keep a practice journal. A self-efficacy tool developed for the project based on the intended outcomes of youth work in Wales (Welsh Government, 2014) will also be applied as a distance-travelled measure over the course of young people's involvement in the project over a 6-week period. This will consider the impact of youth work in the FE-HE setting and during transitions work integrating the two groups.

Finally, utilising this research as described to raise awareness of young people's expressed needs during the FE-HE transition among other young people, stakeholders and professionals engaged in youth work, will directly benefit young people and youth work practice. Hopefully, ensuing practice discussions will extend to policy-makers and institutions where dialogue can be opened to discuss practical applications. As a result, youth services or institution-adopted youth work could reach into the field of FE-HE transitions in the foreseeable future.

References

Kumar, R. (2014) *Research Methodology*. 4th edn. London: Sage.

Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2012) *National Occupational Standards for Youth Work*, Coventry: LSIS.

Welsh Assembly Government (2000) *Extending Entitlement: Supporting Young People in Wales*, Cardiff: Corporate Policy Unit.

Welsh Government (2013) *Youth Engagement and Progression Framework*, Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Welsh Government (2014) *The National Youth Work Strategy for Wales (2014-2018)*, Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Youth Work Wales Review Group (2013) *Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes*, Cardiff: YWWRG.

Timeline of Activity:

Work backwards from the submission date and outline key dates for completing your Applied Research Project. Also outline the dates you will meet with your supervisor:

DATE	ACTION
Week of 30 October 2017	Ensure ethical approval. Discuss initial research preparations and access to young people/proposed dates/times for research activities and potential concerns.
Week of 13 November 2017	Consider draft INTRODUCTION.
Week of 27 November 2017	Consider draft LITERATURE REVIEW and METHODOLOGY.
Week of 04 December 2017	Consider FOCUS GROUP RESULTS and identify any potential gaps for further study.
Week of 11 December 2017	Consider PRESENTATION OF RESULTS and CRITICAL DISCUSSION.
Week of 08 January 2018	Consider RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE and CONCLUSION.
18th January 2018	Applied Research Project Submission.