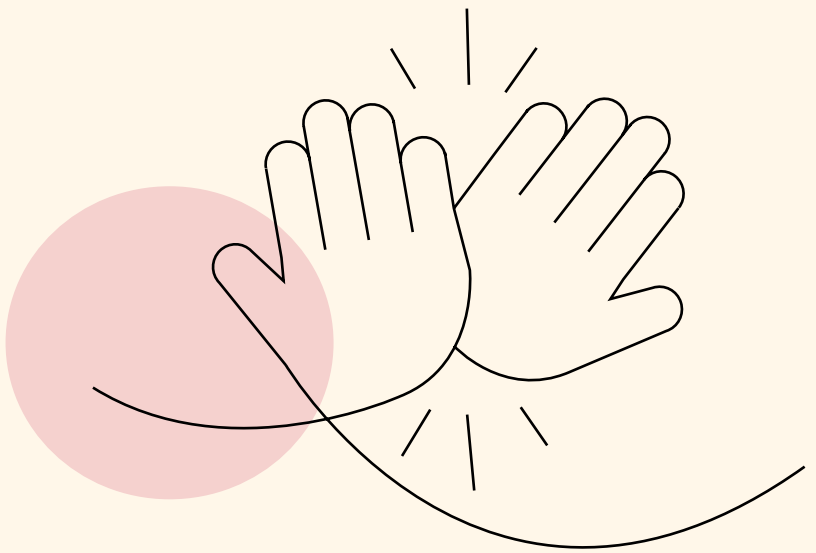
Professionalisation of youth work in Estonia, Australia and Iceland: Building an evidence base



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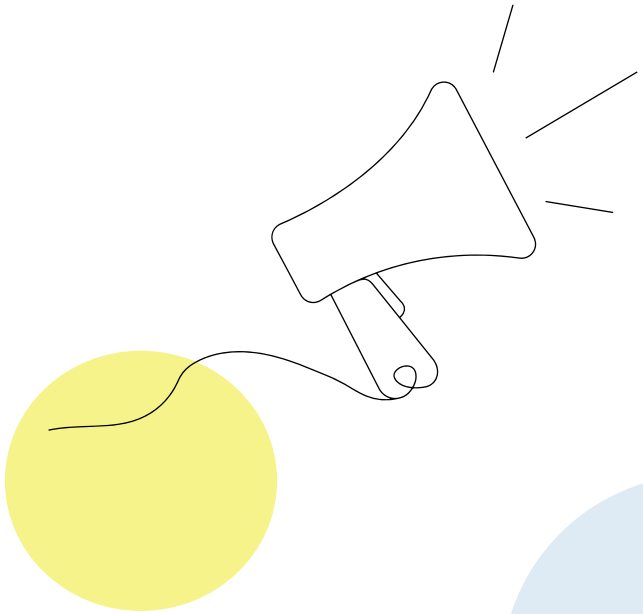

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YWA YOUTH WORKERS' ASSOCIATION

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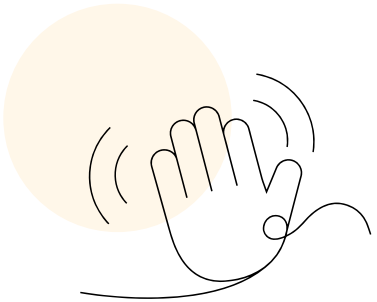


Introduction

This report is a part of the Erasmus+ project "Strengthening the Professionalisation of Youth Work through Codes of Ethical Practice". The aim of the project was to establish a strategic partnership between Estonia, Iceland and Australia to strengthen youth workers' professional associations and provide an impetus for the greater application of Youth Work Codes of Ethics.

Tasks undertaken within the project:

- to establish a long-term strategic partnership between youth work professional associations and universities training youth workers in Estonia, Iceland and Australia for the purpose of furthering a youth work agenda of professionalisation through ethical practice using peer learning and utilisation of an international experience;
- to strengthen the evidence base by undertaking research and comparative analysis and mapping of the application of Youth Work Codes of Ethics and the professionalisation of youth work in the three countries;
- to increase the level of knowledge and understanding among youth workers on the importance of ethical practice in youth work and how it relates to the professionalisation of the sector;
- to provide guidance and collate practical examples for the use of youth workers to support the application of the Codes of Ethics in their youth work practice.

This research report, (Intellectual Output No. 1), is the first of three outputs that the Erasmus+ project will produce and aims to answer the research question

"What are the main challenges related to the professionalisation of youth work in Estonia, Iceland and Australia?"

Firstly, the report will introduce the project team and co-authors of this report and then give a short insight into the history and background of youth work in the three countries, including the development of ethical codes and youth workers' associations. A theoretical framework for understanding the concepts of *professional* youth work and the *professionalisation* process is provided, followed by the presentation of the survey results from all three countries.

Project team

Australia

Associate Professor Tim Corney PhD (Melb), MA (RMIT), BA (Deakin), BA (Youth Work) is trained as a youth and community worker and worked in face-to-face youth work with at-risk and disadvantaged young people for many years. Before moving into academia, he worked in industry and the not-for-profit sector at senior management levels. Tim has worked as a consultant and adviser on youth affairs to governments, community agencies, and peak bodies across Australia and internationally. His academic research and his work with young people in the youth and community sectors in Australia are highly valued. Tim is currently undertaking applied research funded by the Victorian government investigating a range of public health issues faced by young people, including projects focused on gendered violence, homelessness, drug and alcohol use, and mental health and wellbeing. He has published widely on youth affairs and professional youth work and lectured in the youth work degree programs at RMIT University, the Australian Catholic University and Victoria University. He is currently an Associate Professor in the College of Education at Victoria University and Principal Research Fellow and Discipline Leader of Youth and Community Research. He was a board member of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) and a Director of Youth Development Australia and an advisor to the National Youth Commission into Youth Transitions. He is the current Deputy Chair and a founding member of the professional association Youth Workers Australia and Chair of the Australian Professional Association of Lecturers and Researchers in Youth and Community Work. Tim co-authored the Victorian Youth Sector's Code of Ethical Practice launched by the Child Safety Commissioner and Minister for Youth Affairs. He was a member of the panel that authored the AYAC national definition of youth work and has been a long-term advisor to the Commonwealth Youth Development Programme, recently drafting the International Code of Ethics for Youth Work in the 54 countries of the Commonwealth of Nations and authoring a code implementation guide for the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Work Associations.

Martti Martinson is an Honorary Fellow at Victoria University in Australia, a member of Youth Workers' Australia and currently the Head of Youth Monitoring at the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. Martti has worked as a lecturer in youth work, as well as in two local governments, youth sector umbrella organisations and a Europe-wide SALTO-Youth Participation and Information resource centre. His Master of Applied Research thesis looked at the enabling environment for local-level youth councils in Estonia and Australia and his professional interests include youth participation in decision-making processes, youth monitoring, quality and impact assessment of youth work and human rights-based youth work.

Project team

Estonia

Dr Ilona-Evelyn Rannala works at Tallinn University as a Head of the Youth Work Management MA program and Youth Work Lecturer. Her background is in social work, with her PhD dissertation (2014) focused on the topic of at-risk young people. Recently she has been more involved in research about non-formal learning in youth work and professional development of youth workers, but also on youth guarantee programs and youth participation forms in Estonia. Between 2004–2018 she worked at Tallinn City Government Sports and Youth Department, leading the Youth Department and being responsible for planning, developing and coordinating youth policy and youth work in the capital of Estonia. She has been involved in the lead and expert groups developing both the previous (2020) and current (2021–2035) Estonian national Youth Field Strategy. She has published on youth work issues both in Estonia and at an international level. Ilona is also a Board Member of the Estonian Association of Youth Workers, a selected member of the Pool of European Youth Researchers and an Adjunct Fellow at Victoria University, Australia between 2021–2023.

Heili Griffith, **MA** works as a managing director at the Estonian Association of Youth Workers. She has nearly 20 years of experience in working with young people and in the field of youth work. Her Masters thesis from Tallinn University was “Constructing the role of a youth worker. Estonian youth workers’ opinions”. Heili has also trained youth workers and taught youth work students at Tallinn University on human rights and human rights education. Her previous working experience involves working with young people both in Estonia and the UK and refugees in the UK.

Kristi Jüristo, **MA** has been involved in the youth field since 1994, which has allowed her to see it through very different roles, starting with working as a camp leader and finishing as the programme consultant for the EU YOUTH Programme. For the last 20 years, her main focus has been on training young people and youth workers both at home and abroad. Providing training on issues such as diversity, youth participation and inclusion has been a special passion for her. In addition to training, Kristi has contributed to the development of a number of programs, seminars and conferences as well as been involved in the production of various educational materials and manuals aimed at supporting the quality of youth work. Over the last seven years she has had the pleasure to teach youth work students at Tallinn University.

Salome Šakarašvili, **MA** works as an external evaluator of Erasmus+ projects in Estonia as well as developing youth work through the non-governmental organisation Praxis4Change in Georgia. Her first step into the youth work field was through European Voluntary Service in Georgia. Salome has obtained both Bachelor and Masters degrees in Youth Work at Tallinn University. Her previous work experience in Estonian and Georgian youth agencies were connected to strengthening youth organisations mainly through funding organisations and offering youth workers learning possibilities on a national and international level.

Project team

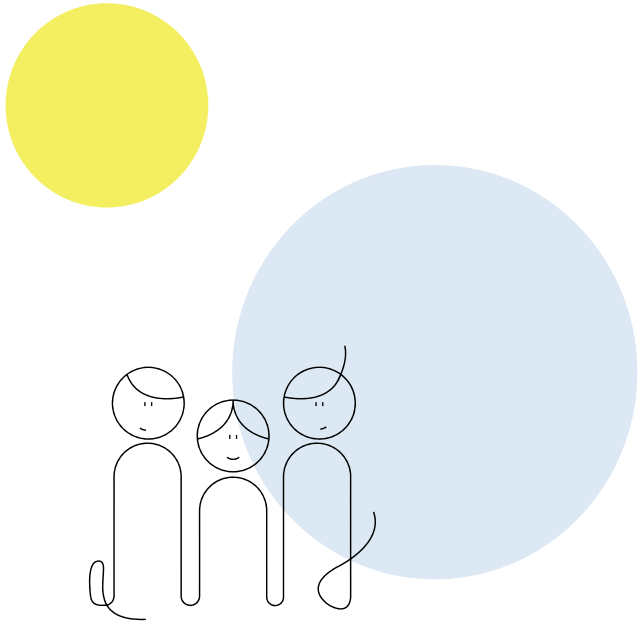
Iceland

Arni Guðmundsson, MA is a lecturer and youth researcher in the Faculty of Sport, Leisure Studies and Social Education and in The Centre for Research in Childhood and Youth at the University of Iceland. Árni's research area is social pedagogy, mainly in the field of youth work, open youth work, youth clubs and youth centres, professionalisation in youth work, group work methods in youth work and youth work in the historical context. Arni was CEO of the Youth Department in Hafnarfjordur city for several years. Arni is one of the founders of SAMFÉS Association of Youth Clubs in Iceland and was chairman of UFN Association of Youth Clubs in The Nordic countries. Arni is educated in Social pedagogy from Fritidledarskola in Göteborg Sweden, MA in Pedagogy from the University of Education in Reykjavík and MA in Pedagogy from the University of Iceland. Arni is working on a PhD in Social Pedagogy on the topic of profession and professionalism in open youth work.

Hulda Valdis Valdimarsdottir, **MA**. Hulda works as a project manager in the Department of Education and Youth in the municipality of Reykjavik and has for the last 25 years worked in youth work and youth centres in Reykjavik. Hulda´s Masters thesis from the University of Iceland was a qualitative research study with the aim to collect information on the profession of those who work in youth centres, to study and analyse the competencies that are thought to be important for this profession, and to put forward ideas and suggestions for improving organisational socialisation of new employees. Hulda was the chairman of the Organisation for Professional Youth and Leisure Workers in Iceland for three years and participates in terminology work regarding leisure and recreation for the same organisation in cooperation with the University of Iceland and the Arni Magnusson Institute for Icelandic Studies.

Guðmundur Ari Sigurjónsson is a Masters student in leisure studies and youth work. He has worked in a municipal youth centre for 12 years. Guðmundur Ari has written in Icelandic the book "9 Steps of Youth Work" and chapters in other publications about youth work. Guðmundur Ari is a member of the committee of youth work in the Ministry of Culture and Education in Iceland. He has also been a member and Chairman of the Icelandic Association of Youth and Leisure Workers and directed the Icelandic web journal *Frítíminn* which specialises in youth and leisure work.

Background: Organisation and ethical frameworks of youth work in Australia, Estonia and Iceland



Australia

Youth work in Australia is informed by human rights with the Australian federal government having ratified the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, as such, children and young people have access to human rights in law. In the Australian state of Victoria, the terms 'young person' and 'child' are legally interchangeable. Indeed, those Acts pertaining to children and young people define a child as 'a person who is under the age of 18 years' (the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* & the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012*). (An exception to this definition comes regarding those considered 'vulnerable' under the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012*, where a vulnerable child or young person includes 'a person under the age of 21 years who is leaving, or who has left, the custody or guardianship of the Secretary [of the state government Department of Human Services] to live independently').

Youth Workers' Association and Code of Ethics

While the youth sector in Victoria, Australia has had a long history of professionalisation, it did not have a code of ethical practice for youth work until 2007 (Irving, Maunders & Sherington 1995; Grogan 2004; Corney 2021). Following the Victorian State Government enactment of new pieces of important youth-related legislation, (such as the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*; the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*; the *Working with Children Act 2005* and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*,) there were calls for the sector to establishment a code of ethical practice for youth work based on human rights (Corney & Hoiles 2006, 2007; Corney 2021). The further development of the professionalisation of youth work and the establishing of a code of practice was enabled by the appointment of Victoria's Child Safety Commissioner under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*.

In 2006, the Child Safety Commissioner, Bernie Geary, addressed the Annual General Meeting of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, and called for a code of ethical practice for youth workers. The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) convened a working group Chaired by Dr Tim Corney to

facilitate the development of a sector-wide code of practice for youth work based in human rights (Corney & Hoiles 2006). The code was focused on safe practice in youth work, particularly the safety of young people and workers, as well as the human rights of young people. In 2007 the *Code of Ethical Practice* was launched jointly by the Victorian Government Minister for Youth Affairs and the Victorian Child Safety Commissioner.

Following the launch of the Code of Ethical Practice the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria established a working group to re-form a professional association for youth workers. The original Youth Workers Association (YWA) was first established in 1968, its success was enabled by the early work of a number of forerunner associations, the earliest established at the close of the Second World War in 1945 (Corney 2021). The current iteration of the YWA was established in 2008 following the launch of the Victorian Youth Sector Code of Ethics (Corney & Hoiles 2007) and following the urgings from the then Child Safety Commissioner Bernie Geary for youth work to "come out of the shadow of allied professions" (2006).

In 2020 the YWA undertook a national accreditation process for degrees in youth work enabling existing university degree-level training courses in youth work to be recognised by the Australian Federal Government as a professional pathway qualification eligible for student subsidy (DESE 2020). In recognition of the national role that the YWA is playing in accrediting and recognising professional youth workers across Australia, the board of the YWA decided to change the name of the association to Youth Workers' Australia. This historic change was put to a vote of members at an extraordinary general meeting held on 22 July 2021 and was unanimously endorsed (Corney 2021).

Estonia

During the several decades that Estonia, along with the other Baltic States, was occupied by the Soviet Union, youth work was influenced ideologically and at a standstill. Many of the specific types of youth work that were practised before occupation, such as youth organisations and camps, were carried on, but were moulded to suit the communist ideology and message. As an alternative, hobby schools for young people emerged, which added some value to youth work during the Soviet era. Hobby schools, which still exist alongside schools and youth centres, were places for pursuing specific interests and had curriculums for different hobbies together with a structured learning process. However, attending hobby schools was and is voluntary, which is why today they are categorised as educational establishments in the field of youth work. Hobby activities at youth centres usually last for a shorter period, have no curriculum and are easily changed if youth express other interests (Rannala & Allekand 2018). Youth centres are mostly known as youth work institutions in Estonia, there were a total of 238 youth centres in 2022 (Association of Open Youth Centres 2022), but youth work is also carried out in other environments such as schools, museums and other cultural establishments, public spaces, and digital environments. According to the law, the main organiser of youth work is each municipality – this way youth work is close to the local community (*Local Government Organisation Act 1993*; *Youth Work Act 2010*). Most of the financing of youth work also comes from the budget and income of the local municipalities (YouthWiki 2022).

The theoretical framework for Estonian youth work could be found in the concept of positive youth development, as youth work is defined as a creation of conditions for promoting the diverse development of young people, which enables them to be active outside their families, formal education and work based on their free will (*Youth Work Act 2010*).

Occupational Standard of Youth Workers

Although the first *Youth Work Act* was passed in Estonia in 1999, it was not until April 2002 that a working group was formed at the Youth Department of the Ministry of Education to draft a description of the ethical and professional standards of the youth worker profession, to serve as a basis for public consultation. The lead working group consisted of representatives from youth organisations, state level institutions, officials responsible for local municipality youth work, and representatives of the Higher Education and Vocational Education institutions

responsible for youth work training. The draft was ready in May and was made available for public e-consultation. Additionally, five regional Youth Work Forums and the 2nd Estonian Youth Work Forum were held through September to November 2002 where around 600 youth workers participated. The Professional Standard for Youth Workers was finally officially approved on the 1st of March 2006, defining the requirements for knowledge, skills, experience, values and personal qualities required for working with young people- another part of the standard concerns occupational ethics (appendix 4). It must be mentioned that although consultations and discussions were held, they did not bring many changes into the draft prepared by the leading working group.

Discussions held in 2002 included questions like:

- What is good youth work and how to evaluate youth work?
- Who is a youth worker?
- What is the knowledge base of youth work and the competences needed?
- What is an appropriate youth work environment?

The Ethical Theses of Youth Work (official name) aims to protect youth work from low level performance and unprofessional workers (performers), but also to support practitioners in their work. Theses of Ethics were designed to describe good practice of work with youth and good youth work environments. It was assumed that *The Ethical Theses of Youth Work* would serve as the basis for ethical codes of different youth work organisations, but in general this has not happened.

A lot of effort has been put into promoting professional standards for youth workers, recognition of youth workers, quality development of youth work and youth research. This has been done on a national level by the Estonian Youth Work Centre (since August 2020 as part of The Education and Youth Board) together with partners such as the Estonian Association of Youth Workers and the Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres. The Estonian Youth Work Centre was also the recognised Awarding Body of occupational certificates for youth workers until July 2020.

Estonian Association of Youth Workers

The Estonian Association of Youth Workers (Eesti Noorsootöötajate Kogu, ENK) was established in 1999. Over the years the organisation has changed its name, and in 2016 the Estonian Youth Workers Union joined with the School Youth Workers Union. Despite the name changes and the merging of organisations, the main purpose and goals have remained the same – to support and develop youth work, to support and develop youth workers' professional development, and to represent youth workers on a national and international level. (Teder 2017; Eesti Noorsootöötajate Kogu 2021).

Today the Estonian Association of Youth Workers is a growing professional learning community with over 300 members, which unites youth workers, school youth workers, and other professionals who are involved in the youth field, such as university lecturers, hobby school teachers, camp leaders, leaders of the youth organisations, and local government youth work officials. It provides various opportunities for self-development and learning while also providing ample opportunities for learning from each other through webinars, theme-specific workshops, training courses, working groups and by providing free mentoring, individual and group coaching sessions to its members. The organisation is a platform for collaboration and networking between different youth work professionals across Estonia and enables youth workers to discuss relevant youth work-related topics. From a long-term perspective, it will enable youth workers to become a stronger force in the youth field.

Iceland

In Iceland the development of organised leisure and youth work activities went hand-in-hand with social development at any given time. NGOs play a major role in that development and many of them can be traced back to the 19th century. In the last decades municipal youth work grew very rapidly and there are now municipal youth centres or after-school activities provided for almost every child in Iceland.

The Icelandic youth work sector plays a major role in what is called the Icelandic Model, which is a substance use prevention model for adolescents. The Icelandic Model is a theoretically grounded, evidence-based approach to community adolescent substance use prevention that has grown out of collaboration between policy makers, behavioural scientists, field-based practitioners and community residents in Iceland. The intervention focuses on reducing known risk factors for substance use, while strengthening a broad range of parental, school and community protective factors (Sigfúsdóttir et al. 2009).

The Icelandic youth work sector is mainly divided between municipal youth work and NGOs. Youth work does vary between municipalities but there are general trends that apply to most municipalities. Municipal youth work in Iceland is age divided and often linked to municipal schools. Youth workers in municipal youth work are paid workers and a mixture of full-time and part-time employees. In 2016 a new article was introduced into the Icelandic law on compulsory schools, which specified that all children in the youngest grades (6–9-years-old) should be offered the service of an after-school centre. This was an important phase in the professional development of after-school centres because the government for the first time made clear demands on municipalities regarding the afterschool centres (Kristjánsdóttir & Pálsdóttir 2017).
The infrastructure and projects within the after-school centres can vary a lot between municipalities, but they all follow the same objectives and work with free play mixed with more organised activities (Menntamálaráðuneytið 2018). Icelandic youth centres were originally only for 13–16-year-olds but in recent years they have started to offer special closed activities, events, and open houses for 10–12-year-olds to bridge the gap between the after-school centres and the youth centres. The youth centres have two main objectives: to offer preventional, developmental and educational youth work for 10–12 and 13–16-year-olds, and to offer a safe space for young people to hang out with their peers, have a good time, and facilitate projects and events for young people (Skóla- og frístundasvið 2015).

Association of Leisure and Youth Workers and Code of Ethics

The Association of Leisure and Youth Workers in Iceland (Félag fagfólks í frítímaþjónustu, FFF) is an association of professionals who work in the field of leisure on behalf of municipalities, for example, in youth centres, after-school programs, leisure centres for senior citizens and departments of youth in municipalities. The association was founded on May 28, 2005.

The need for a professional association like FFF was first formally discussed at the general meeting of Samfés (E. Association of Youth Clubs in Iceland) in 2002. However, its beginning can also be traced to a debate on establishing a union for leisure professionals. The union membership was dependent on education, and therefore only accessible to those working in youth affairs. The professional association did not make such strict requirements for their members. Thus, the professional association includes both people with an education in youth work and people who have experience in the field but other or no formal education. After this Annual General Meeting of Samfés in 2002, several individuals came together intending to found a professional association in 2005. Simultaneously, a draft for the code of ethics was made that was used until the current code of ethics was approved at the annual meeting of the organisation in May 2009. There have been discussions among youth workers about the need for a code of ethics since the 1990s but there have never been any final decisions made on what they would include until FFF was formally established.

Most people use the leisure services of the municipalities in one way or another throughout their lives. The purpose of FFF is to emphasise the importance of leisure services and expertise in the field. At the same time, its purpose is to be a leader in professional discussions and in the government to advise on youth and leisure services. FFF is also an important forum for consultation for professionals in the field of leisure in Iceland.

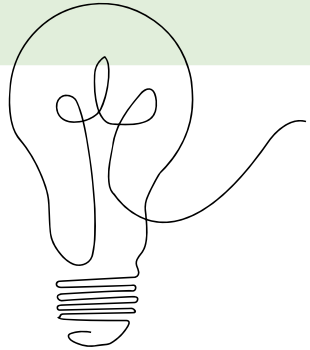
Primary goals of FFF:

- Raising awareness of the importance of leisure work for young people
- Raising awareness of the education of leisure workers
- Raising professionalism and unity of leisure workers by creating a platform for discussions and debates
- To be leading in professional discussions and advisory to the government in leisure matters
- Supporting cooperation with other NGOs that work with children, and young people, domestically and internationally
- Encouraging more research and education in the leisure field
- Looking into possibilities of creating a union of leisure workers

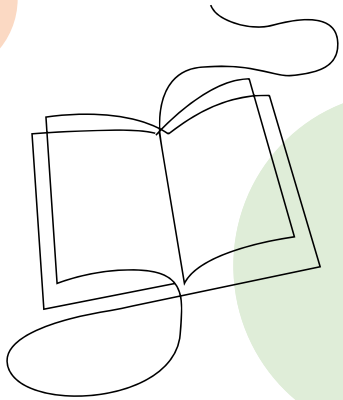
Summary of key ideas

Australia, Iceland and Estonia have different histories and context - this has, of course, also influenced the development of youth work. Australian youth work is strongly based on human rights issues, Icelandic youth work has grown from leisure and with leisure into strong community and preventive work and Estonian youth work focuses on supporting the positive development of all young people. Youth centeredness and care for young people are clear principles in all countries as well as the tendency toward professional and ethical conduct in youth work.

There are associations uniting youth workers in all three countries, which have been established or became active around the 2000s. Interestingly, youth workers' professional organisations in Australia and Iceland have played an important role in developing codes of ethics, while in Estonia the State has played a greater role in this process. Youth workers' associations are working towards professional practice and support the professional development of youth workers in many ways.



Theroretical starting point: Professionalism and youth work: Literature review



Professions

Current definitions of what constitutes a profession typically involve very similar elements regarding attributes, structures and other requirements that are broad enough to encompass the wide range of professions seen today (Cruess et al. 2004, p. 75). The Professional Standards Councils define a profession as “a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards” (2021, para. 6). A profession “positions itself as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and is recognised by the public as such. A profession is also prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others” (Professional Standards Council 2021, para. 6). However, historically there has been little consensus around defining a profession, as many competing frameworks exist in the literature.

When reviewing the literature surrounding historical attempts to define a profession, the most predominant framework is the taxonomic approach that emerged from the 1960s (Runte 1995, p. 1; Weiss-Gal & Welbourne 2008, p. 282; Saks 2012, p. 2). This theory seeks to identify specific characteristics that distinguish between professions and non-professions, with most of these characteristics relating to the idea of superior knowledge and skill (Saks 2012, p. 2). Thus, this approach avoids giving a definition of professions, and instead attempts to classify existing occupations (Evetts 2003, p. 3). There were two main variants of the taxonomic approach: the trait and fundamentalist approaches (King et al. 2018, p. 2; Saks 2012, p. 2).

Trait theory centres on the idea that professions have a set of attributes in common that other occupations do not (Saks 2012, p. 2). Greenwood (1957, p. 45) was one of the first to operationalise the term profession, by identifying five distinguishing characteristics: “1. systematic theory, 2. authority, 3. community sanction, 4. ethical codes, 5. a professional culture”. Many have adapted and added to this list, with the most common additions being autonomy of action, altruistic service, and monopoly over a knowledge base, formal education, entry requirements and commitment to service (Saks 2012, p. 2). Runte (1995, p. 2) suggests that

the reason for such variation in these lists of characteristics came largely through researcher bias, where studies would select important traits based on whether they would elevate a particular occupation to a professional status. Ultimately, the trait approach focused predominantly on the structure of professions rather than their functions, and thus no causal relationships were explored (Abbot 1995; Runte 1995, p. 2).

The fundamentalist variant of the taxonomic approach built on the trait models but were more concerned with the functional role played by professions, and in particular their relationship with society (Muzio et al. 2013, p. 702). Here, "occupations with very complex knowledge and skills of great importance to society" were given an elite social status in return for protecting their clients (Saks 2012, p. 2). Thus, the core characteristics were in place not only to protect the profession's value, but also to protect the public from professionals taking advantage of their specialist knowledge (Runte 1995, p. 2). Professions therefore have an element of trustworthiness that elevate them above occupations and thus justify their economic and social rewards (Burbules & Densmore 1991, p. 49).

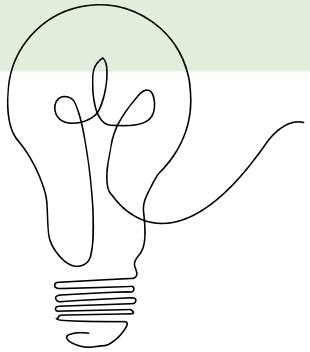
The main criticism of the taxonomic theory is that it is only representative of occupations seen as the original professions, particularly medicine and law (Saks 1983). Burbules and Densmore (1991, p. 50) further argue that being classified as a profession through these characteristics is a symbol allowed for select occupations to legitimise these groups as elite. Thus, it is less of a case of occupations being seen as professions based on having particular attributes, and more of a reward for particular professions to legitimatise their superior economic and social standing (Burbules & Densmore 1991, p. 50). Morris et al. (2006 p. 711) also point out that this theory reflects "Anglo-Saxon ideals of authority", which can only be fully applied to a handful of traditional occupations, and that many professions today do not fit into their parameters.

A second sociological theory that emerged from the 1970s was the power approach, which focuses on how professions establish and maintain their monopoly when threatened by other occupations, clients or bureaucracies (Weiss-Gall & Welbourne 2008, p. 281). Abbott (1995) explains professions as being in a continual struggle for exclusive rights to knowledge and skills, and constantly battling with other groups for control over clients and the market. Thus, Saks (2012 p. 4) contends that unlike the taxonomic approach, the power approach does not place specific knowledge as the key component of the definition of profession, rather it is their protected position in the market, or their continual attempts to retain exclusivity through limiting entry into professions, which is the defining feature (Saks 2012, p. 4).

More recent explorations of professions have developed what is known as the professional model (Ingersoll & Collins 2018, p. 200). In this model, inclusivity to the status of professions is due to factors such as training, licensing requirements, favourable working conditions, an active association, workplace authority, high compensation and high prestige (Ingersoll & Collins 2018, p. 200). Thus, occupations are assessed according to the degree to which they possess these characteristics. Cruess et al. (2004, p. 75) agree with many of these traits in their definition of profession, but also argue that a social contract between professionals and society must exist for an occupation to be considered a profession. That is, in return for the promotion of public good through their service, professionals are granted a monopoly of knowledge, autonomy of practice and the right to self-regulation (Cruess et al. 2004, p. 75).

Summary of key ideas

The idea of a profession has been extensively studied during the past century, and yet researchers have been unable to come up with a single definition or theory to explain the concept. One of the earliest theories surrounding profession was the taxonomic approach, which attempted to distinguish between professions and non-professions by identifying a series of traits that professions had in common, but non-professions did not possess (Runte 1995, p. 1; Weiss-Gal & Welbourne 2008, p. 282; Saks 2012, p. 2). A major critique of this approach is that the traits were selected to be only representative of the traditional professions, mainly law and medicine (Morris et al. 2006, p. 711; Saks 1983). The fundamentalist approach built on this idea of a checklist of attributes, by looking at how professions functioned in society (Muzio et al. 2013, p. 702). Under this approach, professions gain economic and social rewards in exchange for providing society with their specialist knowledge and skills (Muzio et al. 2013, p. 702; Saks 2012, p. 2). Another key theory explored in the literature is the power approach, which assumes that professions are constantly trying to strengthen their superior position in the market (established through their exclusive right to knowledge) against other emerging groups, bureaucracies and even clients (Weiss-Gall & Welbourne 2008, p. 281; Abbott 1995). Thus, limiting entry into professions and limiting access to knowledge and skills is the defining feature of a profession (Saks 2012, p. 4). More recent definitions of professions combine features from these historical models and emerge with some key themes of what a profession looks like today. These include a commitment to ethical standards, a commitment to serve society, the ability to self-regulate, and specialist education and thus possession of expert knowledge and skills (Professional Standards Councils 2021, para. 6; Cruess et al. 2004, p. 75). Additionally, one of the most fundamental indicators of a profession is the recognition of the title from society and clients (Hoyle 1982, p. 161).



Professionalism

While definitions of professions are based at the institutional level, definitions of professionalism must look at the individual level of the professional. The Professional Standards Council (2021, para. 6) defines a professional as "a member of a profession, governed by codes of ethics and who are committed to competence, integrity and morality". Ingersoll & Collins' (2018, p. 200) define professionalism as the attitudinal or psychological attributes of those who are considered to be, or aspire to be considered as, professionals. Lynch et al. (2004, p. 366) also identify the important of societal expectations to the concept. That is, professionalism exists in part because society expects professionals to act professionally (Lynch et al. 2004, p. 366). Similarly, Bossers et al. (1999, p. 117) identify professionalism as a tool to enhance professional image and status in society.

Martimianakis et al. (2009, p. 830) suggest that professionalism is both an ethic and a process. That is, it is a conceptualised process to develop the correct character traits to act professionally (Martimianakis et al. 2009, p. 830). Some, such as Miller et al. (1993) have attempted to compile lists of characteristics that are indicative of such professional behaviour, and thus constitute professionalism. However, Ingersoll and Collins (2018, p. 200) contend that although professionalism is often considered part of the professionalised process, it is not considered a reliable indicator of the professional model- members of professions do not necessarily exhibit more attributes associated with professionalism than those in non-professionalised occupations. Further, Cruess et al. (2004, p. 75) argue that unlike the definition of a profession, which must be broad enough to encompass a wide range of professions, the definition of professionalism must be more industry specific. This is since the services provided by each profession vary greatly, and so too must the behaviours and expectations prescribed as professionalism (Cruess et al. 2004, p. 75).

Other researchers disagree with defining professionalism through a set of attributes or characteristics. Martimianakis et al. (2009, p. 830) argue that a deep understanding of professionalism is only possible through investigating the sociological, political and economic dimensions of professionalism both in terms of the individual and the institution. Lynch et al. (2004, p. 366) similarly contend that a major difficulty in assessing professionalism is the context-specific nature of professionalism, as well as the frequent use of abstract definitions.

Tummons (2014) identifies professional standards as a key mechanism for achieving professionalism. In their discussion of professionalism Bossers et al. (1999, p. 117) highlight the importance of associations or governing bodies when discussing professional standards. Even though they are seen as voluntary behaviours, these bodies publish industry specific standards that practising members are expected to uphold (Bossers et al. 1999, p. 117).

Summary of key ideas

Discussions around professionalism must look at what it is to be a member of a profession and, subsequently, what it means to act professionally (Ingerstoll & Collins, 2018, p. 200; Lynch et al., 2004, p. 366). Some have attempted to compile lists of characteristics that indicate the presence of professionalism (Miller et al., 1993). Therefore, professionalisation can be defined as an ethic that is acquired through a process of learning specific professional attributes (Martinianakis et al., 2009, p. 830). However, these attributes cannot be the only indicators of professionalism, as members of non-professions can easily exhibit the same characteristics (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018, p. 200). Another key theme in the literature is the idea that professionalism is very context dependent, and so must be looked at in terms of specific professions (Cruess et al., 2004, p. 75; Lynch et al., 2004, p. 366). The role of governing bodies in professionalism is also widely discussed. These associations are typically responsible for publishing and upholding specific professional standards, which are vital to achieving professionalism (Tummons, 2014; Bossers et al., 1999, p. 117). These standards are typically what decide professional behaviour in a specific profession, and although they are usually seen as voluntary, practising members are expected to conform to these behaviours (Bossers et al., 1999, p. 117; Tummons, 2014).

Professionalisation

Professionalisation refers to the process by which an occupation increasingly meets the criteria associated with a profession, and is thus afforded the identity, status and respect that comes with the title (Hoyle 1982, p. 161; Kenny 2019, p. 153). Evetts (2003, p. 407) attributes the desire of occupations to be considered professions to the fact that the ideology is very appealing. The term profession can be used as a marketing device to appeal to clients and a motivational tool for employers (Fournier 1999; Evetts 2003 p. 396). It is therefore attractive on the institutional level for occupations to be considered professions, and on the individual level for workers to be considered professionals (Evetts 2003, p. 396).

Ingersoll & Collins (2018, p. 200) contend that professionalisation refers to the degree to which occupations exhibit the sociological attributes, structures, characteristics and criteria of the professional model. Professionalisation is thus an acknowledgement that a particular occupation produces a highly complex type of work requiring specialised knowledge and skill (Ingersoll & Collins 2018, p. 200). The rewards for professionalisation come largely in the form of increased social standing and status. Runte (1995, p. 2) contends that professionalisation happens as occupational groups develop more specialised knowledge. As an industry gets more complex, so too must the work and thus the training of the individual (Runte 1995, p. 2).

Morris et al. (2006, p. 711) propose that "claims to professional status must be placed within social, economic and political contexts, and seen as being shaped by these contexts rather than assuming professional claims" are static and objective. Thus, an occupation can be recognised as a profession by undergoing the process of professionalisation rather than possessing certain characteristics (Morris et at. 2006, p. 711). Similarly, Burbules and Densmore (1991) summarise that becoming a profession is not just a matter of occupational will, but is only made possible through a combination of social, political and economic circumstances.

Morris et al. (2006, p. 711) contend that the process of professionalisation will only happen when an occupation is doing something that is not covered by other professions, and when they then self-organise to control the labour supply to both keep and ensure quality of service and exclusivity. Weiss-Gall & Welbourne (2008, p. 289) agree with the need for internal cooperation to ensure the process of professionalisation, however they situate their argument within the power approach. They propose that there are two types of professional power that are vital, the first being inner power, which refers to the ability of an occupational group to work cooperatively through forming associations and membership with a common ideology (Weiss-Gall & Welbourne 2008, p. 289). The second is external power, which speaks to the capability of the occupation to exert influence outside the profession; this concerns providing a service that is not provided in the current market (Weiss-Gall & Welbourne 2008, p. 289). They argue that without the appearance of both types of power, an occupation will be unable to consolidate public opinion that acknowledges them as a profession and thus undergo professionalisation (Weiss-Gall & Welbourne 2008, p. 289).

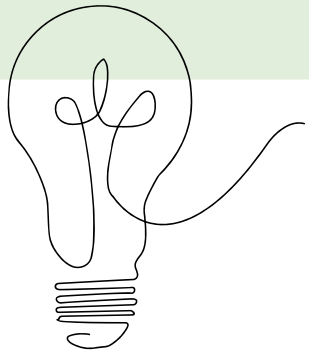
Another key aspect in the process of professionalisation is that of setting boundaries, and specifically the ability to self-regulate (Morris et al. 2006, p. 711). Martimianakis et al. (2009, p. 831) notes that self-regulation is a marker of legitimacy for occupations seeking recognition as professions. Additionally, self-regulation is seen as a privilege to be granted when society trusts professionals to act altruistically (Martimianakis et al. 2009, p. 831). Evetts (2011, p. 10) identifies codes of ethics as a form of professions regulating their services to the public. In this way, professionalism is a key part of professionalisation, as professions must be trusted to be able to create and uphold their own moral obligations (Evetts 2011, p. 10).

Autonomy has also been identified as a key indicator of a profession, and thus vital when considering professionalisation. Mastekaasa (2011, p. 36) states that a high level of autonomy is more important to professions than other trades. Further, this level of autonomy and the subsequent expectation of quality provide justification for professions' claims to social and economic rewards (Mastekaasa 2011, p. 37). Davis (1996, p. 441) claims that a lack of autonomy comes from having to take orders from

an employer, and that this status as an employee stops the process of professionalisation. Similarly, Frostenson (2015, p. 20) suggests that increased managerial power leads to a loss of professional autonomy. This process can be termed de-professionalisation, whereby professionals lose the ability to influence, and the power to define their own work and boundaries of their profession (Frostenson 2015, p. 20). Stoddard et al. (2001, p. 676) also identify the importance of professional autonomy at the collective level. They suggest that a profession must have the autonomy to control the standards of entry as well as set the terms of their work (Stoddard et al. 2001, p. 676). In terms of individual professional autonomy, professionals must have the ability to structure their own work (scheduling) as well as control over decision-making in relation to their clients (Stoddard et al. 2001, p. 676).

Summary of key ideas

Professionalisation refers to the process through which an occupation is recognised as a profession by society and is afforded the social and economic status that come with the title (Hoyle 1982, p. 161; Kenny 2019, p.153). Professionalisation can be very attractive to emerging professions on both an institutional and individual level due to these perceived rewards (Evetts 2003, p. 396). For professionalisation to occur, a sector must be engaging in work that is not covered by other professions in the current market, and thus have exclusive rights to a set of knowledge and skill (Morris et al. 2006, p. 711; Ingersoll & Collins 2018, p. 200; Weiss-Gall & Welbourne 2008, p. 289). The sector must then self-organise through forming associations to control their exclusivity (Morris et al. 2006, p. 711; Weiss-Gall & Welbourne 2008, p. 289). Other key features of professionalisation have been identified as the ability to set boundaries, and control intake into the profession (Morris et al. 2006, p. 711). Additionally, the ability to self-regulate through codes of ethics and professional standards is another vital feature of professionalisation, as this is seen by society as a marker of legitimacy (Martimianakis et al. 2009, p. 831; Evetts 2011, p. 10). Professional autonomy is also recognised as an important marker of professionalisation, where professionals must develop the ability to set the terms of their work in terms of scheduling and making decisions for their clients (Stoddard et al. 2001, p. 676). Therefore, the most important features of professionalism include exclusive rights to knowledge and skills, the formation of regulatory bodies and codes of conduct, control of entry, self-regulation and professional autonomy (Morris et al. 2006, p. 711; Ingersoll & Collins 2018, p. 200; Weiss-Gall & Welbourne 2008, p. 289; Martimianakis et al. 2009, p. 831; Evetts 2011, p. 10).



Critiques of professionalising youth work

One of the most common critiques of professionalisation in this sector is the idea that the relationship between youth workers and young people does not at all resemble the typical relationship between professionals and their clients. Kenny (2019, p. 154) argues that the inclusive nature of youth work is a direct contrast to the strict boundaries put in place between professionals and clients. Similarly, Davies (2016, p. 11) labels the relationship between youth workers and young people as covenantal, whereby parties are more concerned with the quality of the relationship. Through collaborative acts, this relationship develops into one of trust with both the individual and their community (Davies 2016, p. 11). Thus, unlike many professions who are primarily concerned with their professional community, youth work places the priority on the community of their clients (Davies 2016, p. 11). Similarly, Metz (2017, p. 4) argues that building relationships with young people requires an "open, equal and flexible attitude", which would be affected by professionalisation and its subsequent features of protocols and the idea of the youth worker as an elite professional.

Metz (2017, p. 3) states that a key feature of youth work is its "emancipatory objective", which badly aligns with the structures associated with becoming a profession. Similarly, Kenny (2019, p. 154) argues that effective youth workers seek to make themselves unnecessary by giving communities the tools to take control of their lives themselves. Youth workers are therefore much less concerned than other professionals about ensuring job security (Kenny 2019, p.154).

A key feature of professionalisation is the idea of implementing standards (Metz 2017, p. 4). Quixley & Doostkhah (2007, p. 5) argue that this idea of consistency in youth work is very hard to achieve, as everyday youth work practice is influenced by a range of personal and environmental factors. Further, each organisation in the sector also has their own methods and values, which makes consistency even more difficult (Quixley & Doostkhah 2007, p. 5). Thus, Quixley and Doostkhah (2007, p. 5) contend that at both an individual and organisational level, youth work practice is constantly subject to change and it is very hard to achieve universal practice standards and ethics. A possible negative consequence of this process of standardisation is creating a harmful distance between youth workers and the young people they work with (Metz 2017, p. 4). Sercombe (2004, p. 20) further argues that accepted standards of practice could be harmful to youth work in the way that it would get rid of styles of work that are unconventional but effective. Likewise, Lorenz (2009, p. 12) contends that youth workers must be allowed to take a critical stance towards the changing cultural values of young people, as youth is a social construct that is shaped by these values. Thus, the universalising process of professionalisation does not align with the variety of practice in youth work (Kenny 2019, p. 154).

Kenny (2019, p. 154) warns that a consequence of narrowing the definition of youth work through processes of standardisation and training is the exclusion of people who work in the sector but are not employed as professionals. This potential issue can be applied globally, to those who do the work but are not formally named (Kenny 2019, p. 154). Sercombe (2004, p. 20) similarly identifies the outcome that some youth workers may be underqualified and therefore lose their jobs with these changes. Metz (2017, p. 3) also highlights the current differences between professional youth work (where practitioners are paid and requires formal training) and volunteer youth work. She argues that although professional youth work demands higher quality work, volunteer youth work is still important to the sector (Metz 2017, p. 3). Thus, professionalisation is not compatible with youth work as a whole, but professional youth work must strengthen its existing and often unacknowledged professionalism (Metz 2017, p. 4). This professionalism would come in the form of developing a professional identity and specific body of knowledge and skills (Metz 2017, p. 4) Kenny (2019, p. 155) similarly argues that some professionalisation can occur in the sector without the process of professionalisation. This method would not only acknowledge the existing professionalism of professional youth workers, but it would strengthen the position of youth work without compromising its current structure and methods (Metz 2017, p. 4).

Other features of professionalisation such as the implementation of an ethical code have also been the source of criticism among authors. Quixley and Doostkhah (2007, p. 11) question whether a process of professionalisation, and more specifically an ethical code, would actually improve outcomes for young people. They argue that creating a separate body responsible for ethical standards will reduce individual accountability in practice, which could be detrimental to young people (Quixley & Doostkhah 2007, p. 11). Likewise, Skott-Myhre (2013, p. 21) states that implementing these structures to youth workers introduces "top-down discipline" that gives no benefit to the actual processes of youth work, namely building relationships in the community. Interestingly, Quixley and Doostkhah (2007, p. 16) point out that ethics are already a fundamental part of youth work, and so the main objective in establishing a professional code of ethics is because of a need for recognition from social powers. A code of ethics would provide little practical guidance, leave workers open to reprimand and add no value to the actual practice of youth work (Quixley & Doostkhah 2007, p. 23; Skott-Myhre 2013, p. 21).

Another key critique in professionalisation of youth work is the fear that it will move the focus from young people to that of the youth worker. Skott-Myhre (2013, p. 21) argues that the need for self-affirmation through professionalisation will prioritise the youth worker and places young people in a secondary role. Professionalisation will therefore advance rights of youth workers at the expense of young people (Skott-Myhre 2013, p. 22). Features of professionalism such as standards of practice and codes of ethics exist to protect workers rather than clients. (Quixley & Doostkhah 2007, p. 30). Current youth work practices involve youth workers embedding themselves into communities, and they are thus well placed to see any negative effects of their practice and adjust them (Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt 2013, p. 151). With stricter protocols, this type of relationship may not be possible and thus be detrimental to the beneficiaries of the service (Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt 2013, p. 151). Further, the actual process of professionalisation will distract time and energy away from young people, and the work that goes into addressing their needs (Quixley & Doostkhah 2007, p. 36; Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt 2013, p. 152).

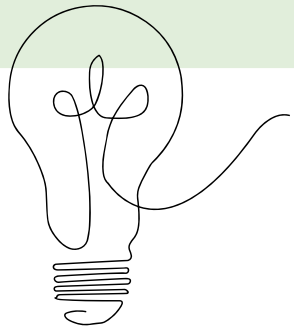
It has also been suggested that youth workers themselves are resistant to professionalisation and the subsequent sense of being organised (Sercombe 2004, p. 21; Karsten 2016, p. 2). Sercombe (2004, p. 21) attributes this to youth workers being used to autonomy, and the large amount of intuition that goes into their practice. Similarly, Karsten (2016, p. 2) states that youth workers are used to ignoring rules that are not in the best interests of young people and operating in environments mainly without hierarchies. This results in a lack of interest and reluctance to self-organise, and thus professionalise (Karsten 2016, p. 3).

Summary of key ideas

There are numerous critiques in the literature in relation to youth work as a profession, undergoing the process of professionalisation and the role of professionalism in the sector. Some authors have issues with labelling youth work as a profession, due to the incompatible core values and practices of youth work and those of a typical profession (Metz 2017, p. 3; Kenny 2019, p. 154; Davies 2016, p. 11). One such characteristic of youth work is the need to build close, inclusive relationships based on trust between youth workers and the young people they work with (Kenny 2019, p. 154; Davies 2016, p. 11). Professions, on the other hand, tend to set strict boundaries between professionals and clients, which Metz (2017, p. 3) argues would create a harmful distance between youth workers and young people. Another key feature of youth work incompatible with a profession is the duty of an effective youth worker to empower young people with the skills to take control of their lives (Kenny 2019, p. 154; Metz 2017, p. 3). This can be seen as a big contrast to the inclination of professions to ensure their job security by safeguarding knowledge (Kenny 2019, p. 154).

The process of professionalisation in youth work, and the accompanying structures have also come under criticism by researchers. Key features of professionalisation include implementing standards through protocols, ethical codes and training (Metz 2017, p. 3; Quixley & Doostkhah 2007, p. 30). Thus, universalisation is characteristic of professionalisation, which would be detrimental to the freedom and variety of practise that youth workers need to be effective in the communities they work in (Kenny 2019, p. 154; Quixley & Doostkhah 2007, p. 23). Not only would consistency in a code of practise or ethics be very hard to achieve due to the nature of youth work, implementing bodies of regulation may result in reduced individual accountability among youth workers, which would have negative consequences for young people (Quixley & Doostkhah 2007, p. 5, 11). Thus, professionalisation in this sector exists to validate and protect the rights of youth workers, and will have little benefits, but negative consequences for young people (Skott-Myhre 2013, p. 21; Quixley & Doostkhah 2007, p. 30).

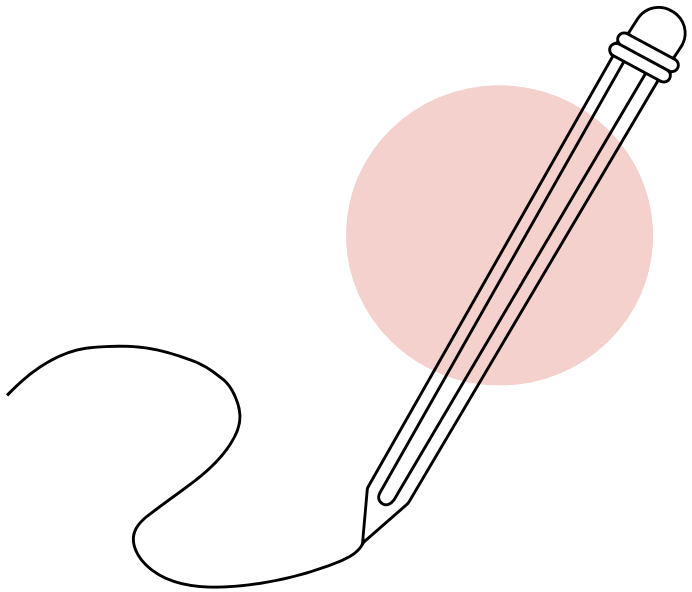
Another danger of professionalisation is the effect it would have on members of the sector who are not formally qualified, and thus could not be seen as a professional (Kenny 2019, p. 154; Metz 2017, p. 3). Volunteer youth workers are an essential part of youth work, and yet may not have a role in youth work as a profession (Kenny 2019, p. 155; Metz 2017, p. 3). Some suggest that it is possible to advance professionalism in the sector without undergoing professionalisation, which will advance the position of youth work whilst retaining the structures that make it unique. (Metz 2017, p. 4; Kenny 2019, p. 155). Overall, concerns around the professionalisation of youth work are centred on the idea that it will result in negative consequences for young people, and direct power and resources away from them and into the profession itself (Skott-Myhre 2013, p. 21; Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt 2013, p. 151; Quixley & Doostkhah 2007, p. 36).



Survey descriptive analysis report: Youth workers' survey results Australia, Iceland and Estonia

Executive summary

An online survey was distributed to youth workers based in Australia, Estonia and Iceland- 346 youth workers completed the survey. The survey explored attitudes and opinions towards key components of youth work practice, frameworks underpinning the profession and connectedness across the workforce. The analysis was largely descriptive in order to characterise the workforce and identify opportunities for further investigation or development. Differences in the pattern of responses were examined across country of origin, type of employment (paid versus voluntary), educational background and length of experience in youth work.



Key findings

1 A total of 346 youth workers completed the online survey

- Respondents comprised of youth workers working in Australia (n=144, 41.6%), Iceland (n=113, 32.7%) and Estonia (n=89, 25.7%).
- Most workers were employed in a paid role (n=294, 85.0%) while a minority worked in a voluntary role (n=19, 5.5%) or a combination of roles (n=31, 9.0%).
- Over half of respondents held a qualification in youth work, or in a closely related area such as community services or child health (n=207, 59.8%). Qualifications not specific to youth work were also reported, such as psychology, education, social science and criminal justice (n=68, 20.0%).
- Respondents from Australia were significantly more likely to report youth work-specific qualifications when compared to Iceland and Estonia (X2=26.21, p<.001).

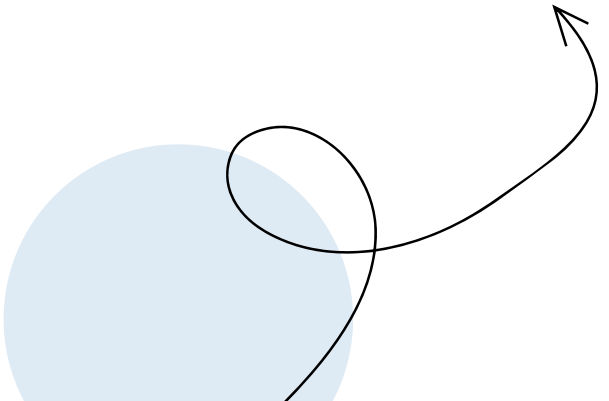
2 Nearly all responding youth workers highlighted that the active participation of young people was an important aspect of youth work (94.5%) as was respect for young people (94.2%). Although the majority of respondents rated all principles of youth work highly, some significant differences were observed:

- Respondents from Estonia and Australia were significantly more likely to rate access to education as important (91.7% and 92.3% respectively) when compared to staff from Iceland (61.1%; X2=48.3, p<.001).
- Staff with no formal educational qualifications were significantly less likely to rate cultural identity as an important factor in working with young people (74.0%) in comparison to staff with youth work specific qualifications (87.4%) and qualifications not specific to youth work (84.5%; X2=7.121, p=.028).

3 The majority of youth workers were aware of the Code of Ethics in their country (n=246, 71.2%) and over half felt it was relevant to their daily role (n=212, 61.3%).

4 Although youth workers valued the Code of Ethics for providing a framework for practice, they also highlighted that it was a non-binding and static document. Youth workers were not obligated to adhere to the Code of Ethics and currently, the Code failed to address contemporary issues in working with young people.

5 Youth workers described a significant gap in resources and funding required to meet the needs of young people. Several respondents also highlighted a lack of consistency in practice across the workforce.



Full report

Method

A total of 407 participants commenced the survey. Among these respondents, a total of 61 participants were excluded due to extensive missing data (>50% completed). The following analysis was conducted on the final sample of 346 participants. A total of 10% (n=36) of cases were included in the sample with missing data throughout (<50%).

The analysis was largely descriptive, with frequencies, means and standard deviations obtained to examine the patterns in respondent attitudes and opinions towards the professional standards of the youth work workforce. Chi-square analyses were also conducted in order to explore differences in responses across country of employment, type of employment (paid or voluntary), length of experience in the role and educational background.

	n(%)		n(%)
Gender		**Years of work in the youth work sector**	
Female	254 (73.4)	Under 1 year	14 (4.0)
Male	85 (24.6)	1–5 years	102 (29.5)
Non-binary	2 (.6)	6–10 years	92 (26.6)
Prefer not to say	5 (1.4)	11–15 years	57 (16.5)
		16–20 years	45 (13.0)
Age		20+ years	34 (9.8)
25 years or less	43 (12.4)		
26–35 years	144 (41.6)	***Workload**	
36–45 years	97 (28.0)	Fulltime	213 (61.6)
46–55 years	44 (12.7)	Part time	102 (29.5)
56–69 years	17 (4.9)	Casual	29 (84)
70 or older	1 (.3)	More than one youth work job (paid youth work role)	48 (13.9)

Table 1: *Demographic characteristics of the respondents*

Demographic and professional characteristics of respondents

Survey respondents comprised youth workers working in Australia (n=144, 41.6%), Iceland (n=113, 32.7%) and Estonia (n=89, 25.7%). The demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1. Most respondents were female (n=254, 73.4%) with at least five years of experience in the youth work sector (n=230, 66.5%). Most workers were currently employed in a paid role (n=294, 85.0%) while a minority worked in a voluntary role (n=19, 5.5%) or a combination of roles (n=31, 9.0%).

Several significant differences were observed across the responding staff from each country (see Figures 1-3). Respondents from Iceland were significantly more likely to work in a full-time youth work role, when compared to respondents from Australia and Estonia (X^2=13.03, p=.010). Meanwhile, respondents from Estonia were significantly more likely to report multiple paid youth work roles (n=20, 24.1%) in comparison to respondents from Iceland and Australia (X^2=11.58, p=.003). Youth workers based in Estonia were also significantly more likely to report working in a voluntary role (X^2=28.71, p<.001) with more than 1 in 10 respondents either employed in a voluntary capacity (n=13, 14.8%) or a combination of both paid and voluntary roles (n=14, 15.9%).

Figure 1: *More than one paid youth work role*

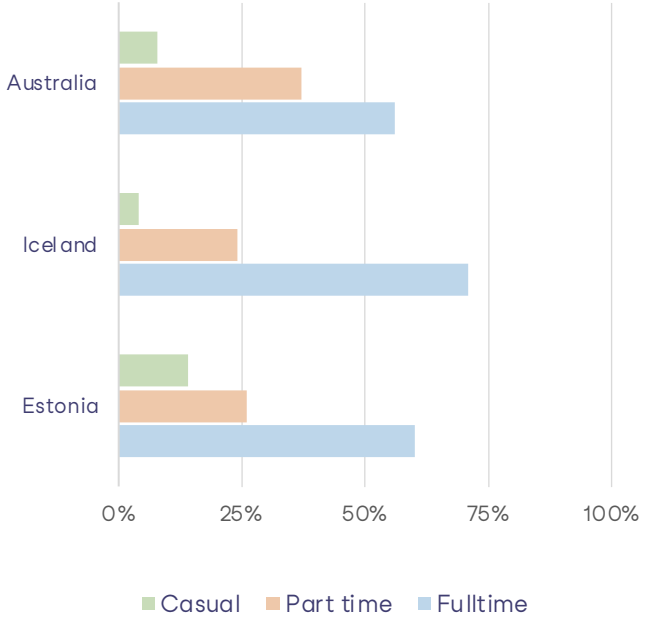


Figure 2: *Type of employment*

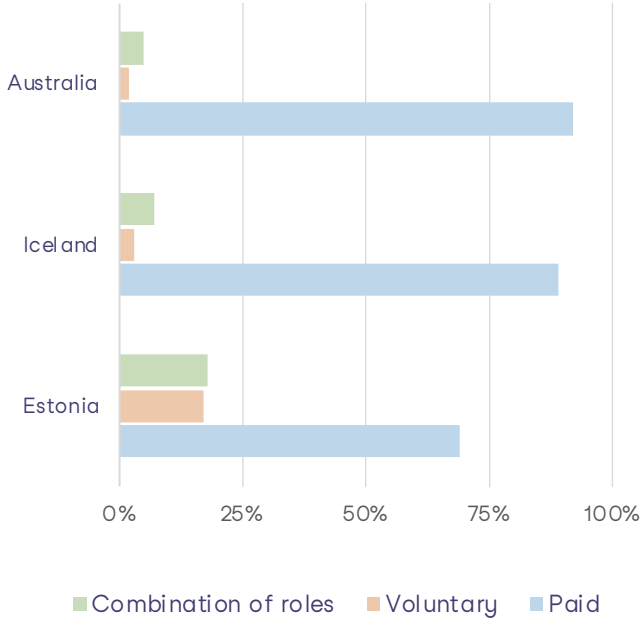


Figure 3: *Paid or voluntary role*

Over half of respondents held a qualification in youth work, or in a closely related area such as community services or child health (n=207, 59.8%). Qualifications *not* specific to youth work were also reported, such as psychology, education, social science and criminal justice (n=68, 20.0%). Among youth workers in Estonia, nearly half held an Estonian Occupational Certificate (n=38, 42.7%).

Type of qualification	**n (%)**
Qualification related to Youth work or community services	***207 (59.8)***
-Certificate	22 (6.4)
-Diploma	32 (9.2)
-Bachelor degree	130 (37.6)
-Masters	18 (5.2)
-Professional youth work qualification	5 (1.4)
Other qualification not related to youth work	***68 (20.0)***
-Certificate /Diploma	6 (1.7)
-Doctorate	3 (.9)
-Bachelor degree	27 (7.8)
-Masters	10 (2.9)
-Other qualification (ie. teaching, education)	23 (6.7)
No qualification	***73 (21.1)***

Table 2: *Qualifications and training*

The educational background of responding youth workers varied across the country of work. Respondents from Australia were significantly more likely to report youth work-specific qualifications when compared to Iceland and Estonia (X^2=26.21, p<.001).

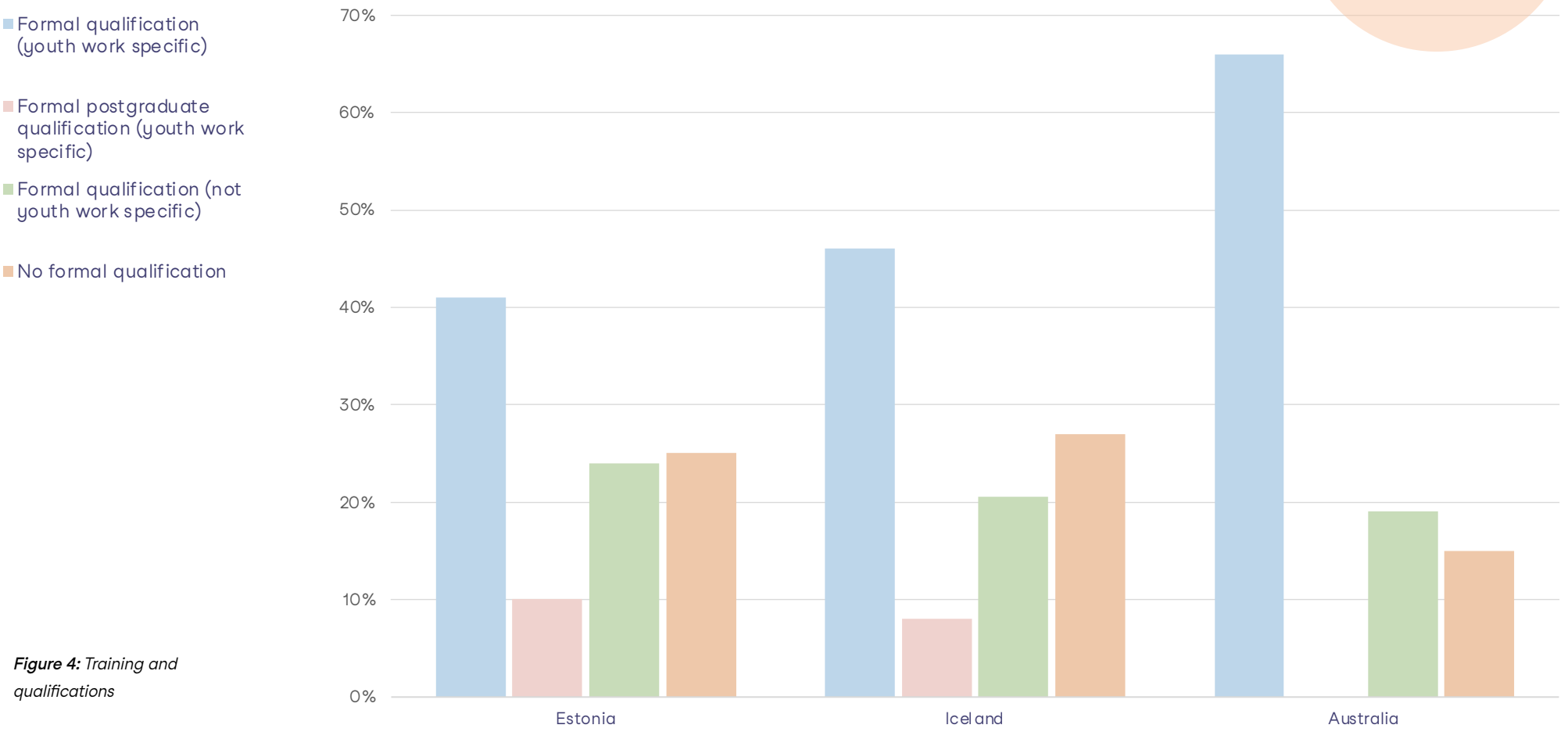
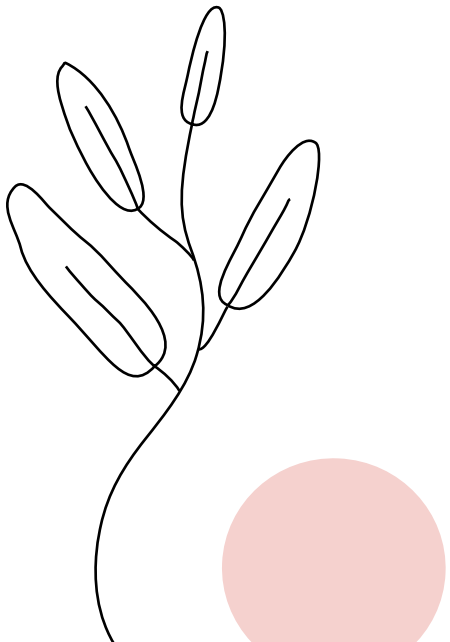


Figure 4: *Training and qualifications*

Attitudes and opinions towards the key characteristics of the profession

Table 3 describes staff attitudes and opinions towards key characteristics of youth work. Although all items were rated highly (>70%), the active participation of young people was most commonly rated as an important to very important aspect of youth work (94.5%) followed by respect for young people (94.2%). When specifically asked about the principles and frameworks underpinning youth work, the most important characteristics were acting with integrity and the best interests of young people (87.6%), treating young people equitably (86.1%) and inclusion and acceptability (85.8%).



How important is it for youth work to enable ...	**Important/ very important** n(%)
Empowerment for young people	318 (91.9)
Participation for young people	327 (94.5)
Social justice for young people	309 (89.3)
Safety for young people	318 (91.9)
Respect for young people	326 (94.2)
Human rights for young people	320 (92.5)
Connection to family and community	315 (91.0)
Positive health and wellbeing	326 (94.2)
Positive transitions to adulthood	326 (94.2)
Independence	323 (93.4)
Cultural identity	290 (83.8)
21st century skills	261 (75.4)
Environmental sustainability	253 (73.1)
Civic engagement	247 (71.4)
Access to education	277 (80.1)

Table 3: *Attitudes and opinions towards youth work*
(continues on next page)

How important are the following principles and practice frameworks for young people?	**Important/very important** n (%)
Voluntary participation of young people	272 (78.6)
Anti-oppressive and non-discriminatory practices	290 (83.8)
Professional boundaries between youth workers and young people	261 (75.4)
*Recognition of Indigenous people	129 (37.3)
Duty of care to young people	278 (80.3)
Protect the privacy of young people	283 (81.8)
Respect the confidentiality of young people	283 (81.8)
Reliability to young people	293 (84.7)
Being honest and transparent with young people	295 (85.3)
Acting with integrity and the best interests of young people	303 (87.6)
Consider the social context of young people	291 (84.1)
Treat young people equitably	298 (86.1)
Professional self -care	287 (82.9)
Professional cooperation and collaboration	289 (83.5)
Professional knowledge and skills	288 (83.2)
Inclusion and accessibility	297 (85.8)
Partnership with young people	290 (83.8)
Non-formal and informal learning methods	281 (81.2)

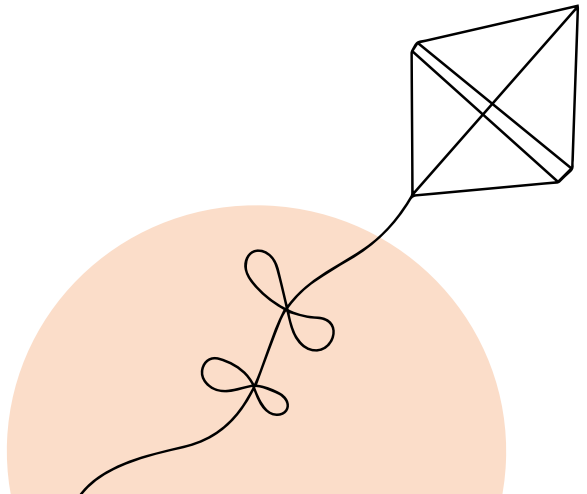
**Only asked of respondents from Australia, 86.6% of Australian respondents endorsed this item*

Most respondents felt the primary purpose of youth work was to support, empower and advocate for young people (see Figure 5). Significant challenges to the role were also identified. Namely, staff described barriers such as short-term funding, competing organisation priorities and lack of resources and services. Staff also disclosed inconsistencies in practice due to the lack of governance of the sector and variance in qualifications.

Primary aims of youth work	Biggest challenges in youth work sector
To teach healthy relationships, encouragement, healthy boundaries and positive reinforcement.	Access to quality services such as mental health/housing etc., recognition of young people as important and having something worthwhile to contribute, connection to community and family.
Empowering young people through challenges and supporting them to move through to the next phase of their life.	The sector still has practitioners working with young people that are yet to have formal training or achieve formal qualifications.
Mental health and wellbeing, building resilience in young people.	Engaging disengaged young people in programs and events.
To enable young people to access their potential and resources to support them.	Governments don't recognise the profession in policy making.
Engagement, Advocacy, Participation.	Ensuring that the work is youth led and recruitment.
Enabling the human rights of young people through empowerment, social justice and participation.	Lack of understanding of what youth work is by the community. Lack of high-level consistent training in the sector. Low paying positions expecting high level work resulting in burnout and stress.
Raising the voices of and opportunities for young people.	Having to deal with being assaulted, not being supported by upper management, not being able to connect with a young person, work life balance.
Advocacy and support to get through barriers to achieve goals to support young people to make informed decisions.	Collaboration with stakeholders and waiting times for professional services.
To support young people to flourish, recognising that each young person is an individual and may require different supports.	Lack of adequate resourcing for both young people and their families of origin. A solid theoretical framework.
Supporting young people to have the best future they possibly can for them and their families.	Funding to provide for all the youths' needs.

To teach our young people life skills for the future, and for them to strive towards an education then on to a good work ethic.	Support from upper management.
Linking young people with services. By building great rapport.	Non recognition by other professions.
Young people being empowered to be who they want to be and that person's ability to live and contribute to the world they live in.	Understanding of our Practice and methodology.
To help young people learn the skills and knowledge to get the right education, be independent, work and have the support for health and wellbeing.	Political agenda at any level.
To set Goals and help them achieve them. Be a positive role model.	Burn out due to lack of support and understanding for the level and intensity of work that Youth Workers carry out. Short term contracts and low pay.
Promote and support best outcomes for young people.	Lack of support from organisations in staff safety.
Resource, support, advocate, mentor.	Team not skilled enough. Professional development is expensive.
To reach and support young people who are not active in leisure activities.	Learning how to handle very difficult and demanding persons and learning from experience.

Table 4: *Aims and challenges of youth work: Extracts from responses*



Significant differences in attitudes and opinions across key variables

Significant differences in the endorsement of items as 'important to youth work' were identified across the key variables of country, education, type of employment and years of experience (see Figures 5). Although most items were rated highly by staff from all countries, staff from Estonia and Australia were significantly more likely to rate *access to education* as important (91.7% and 92.3% respectively) when compared to staff from Iceland (61.1%; X^2=48.37, p<.001). Similarly, staff with no formal educational qualifications were significantly less likely to rate cultural identity as an important factor in working with young people (74.0%) in comparison to staff with youth work specific qualifications (87.4%) and qualifications not specific to youth work (84.5%).

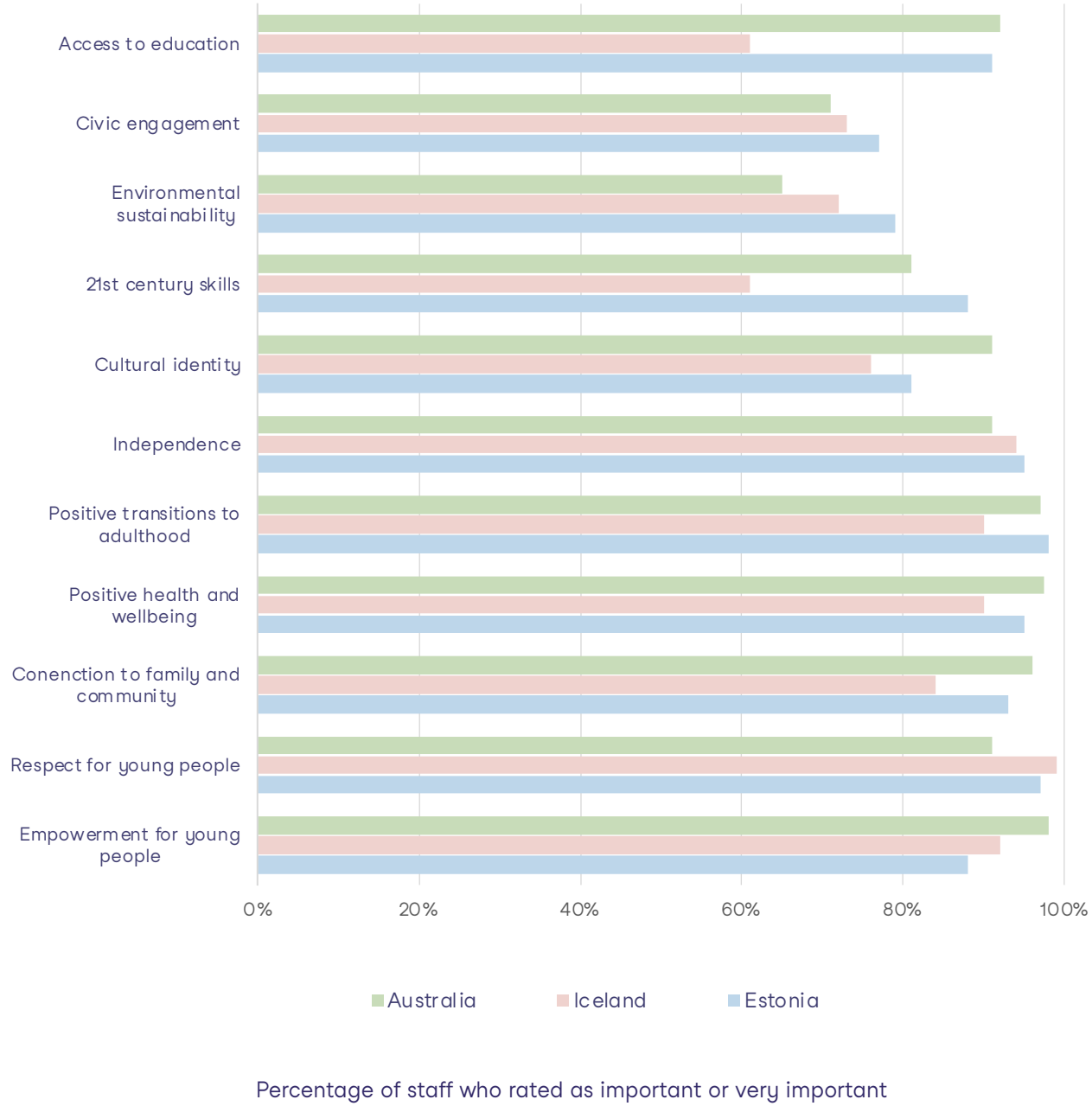


Figure 5a: *Significant differences in attitudes and opinions across countries*

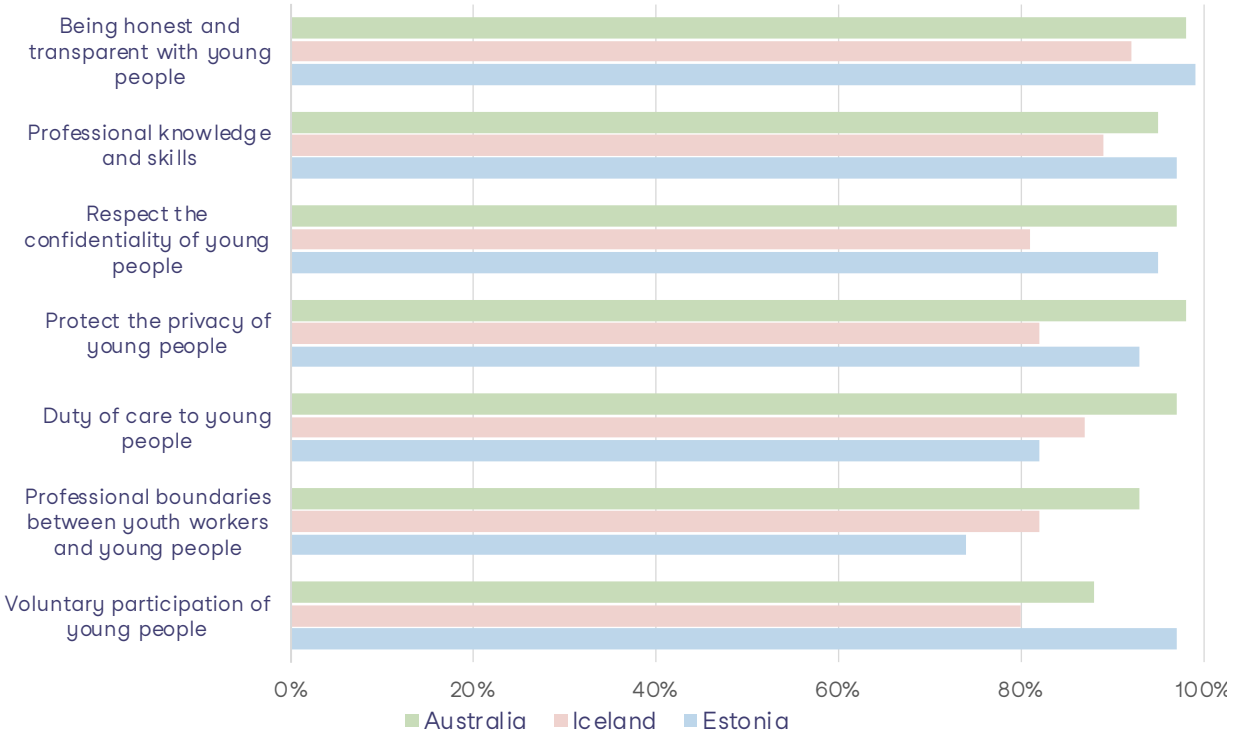


Figure 5b: *Significant differences in attitudes and opinions across countries*

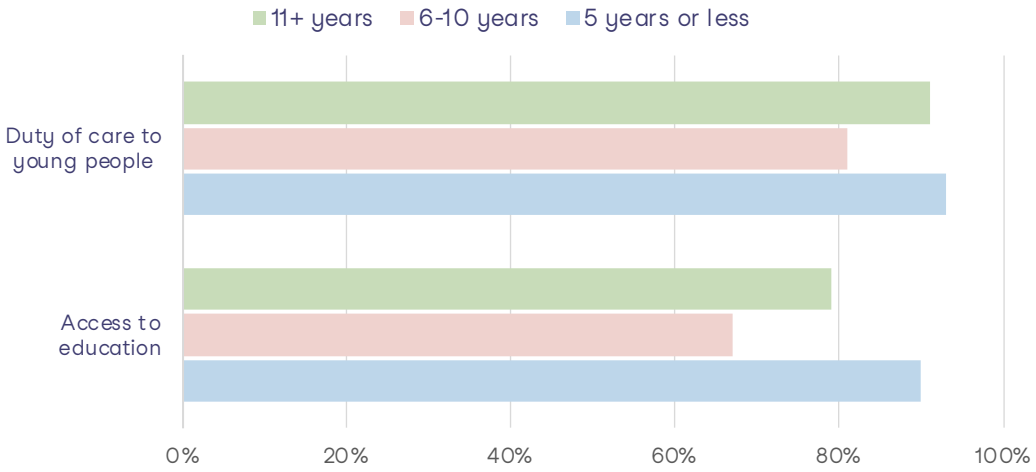


Figure 6: *Significant differences in attitudes and opinions between years of experience*

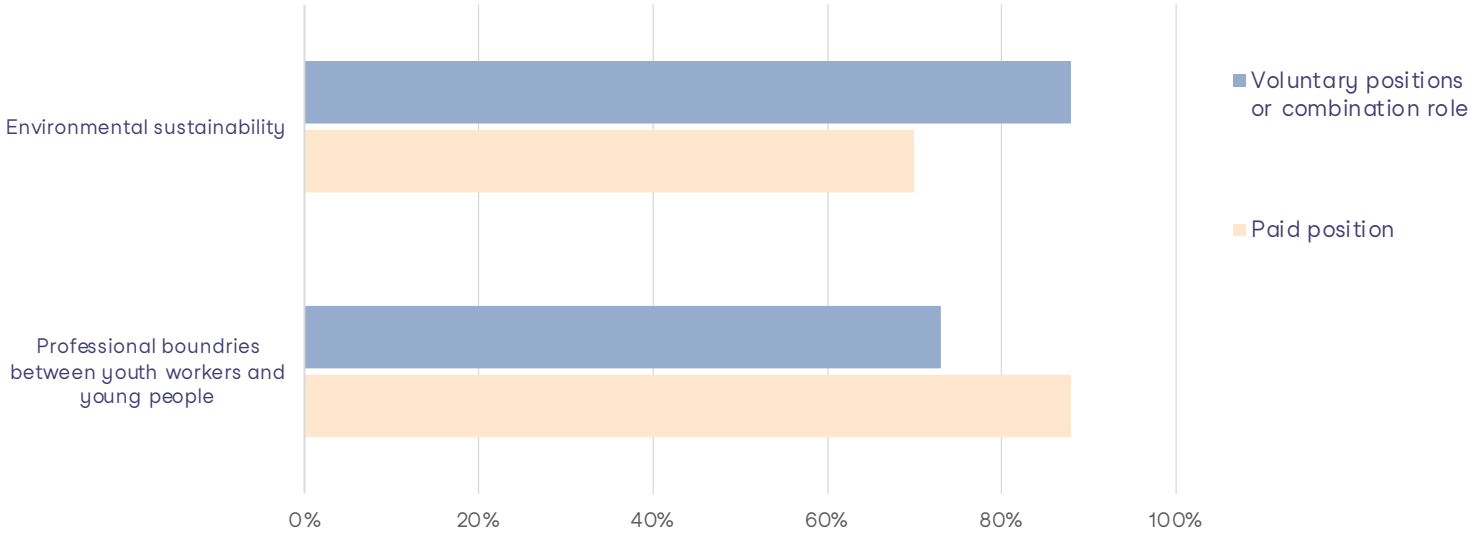


Figure 7: *Significant differences in attitudes and opinions between paid versus voluntary positions*

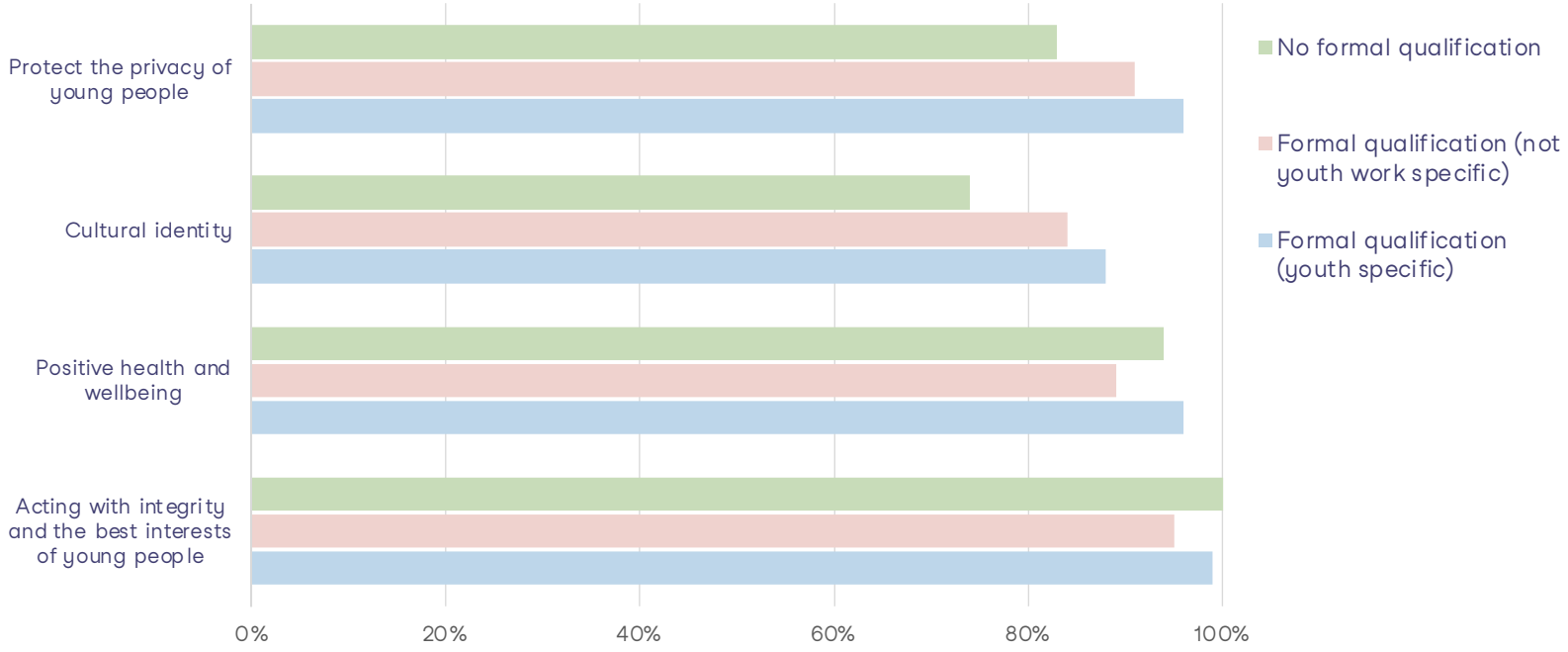


Figure 8: *Significant differences in attitudes and opinions between formal qualification (youth specific), formal qualification (not youth specific) and no formal qualification*

Key components of the youth work profession

Staff were asked to rank components of the youth work profession from most important to least (refer to Table 6). The most important components to staff were the code of ethics (n=78, 22.5%) and specialised formal training (n=42, 21.1%). Most staff were aware of the code of ethics (n=246, 71.2%) and most felt it was relevant to their daily role (n=212, 61.3%).

Important components of Youth Work Profession	n(%)
Code of ethics	78 (22.5)
Relevant legislation	57 (16.5)
Specialised, formal training or education	42 (21.1)
Occupational standards	40 (11.6)
Status/recognition in society	19 (5.5)
Occupational insurance	5 (1.4)
Existence of professional accreditation	23 (6.6)
Pay and conditions	25 (7.2)
Aware of the code of ethics in your country?	
Yes and abide by it	238 (68.8)
Yes I have read it, but do not apply it	4 (1.2)
Yes, but it is not relevant to my practice	4 (1.2)
I know it exists but never read it	16 (4.6)
No, not aware of it	21 (6.1)
Relevance of the code of ethics to everyday work?	
Detractor	22 (6.4)
Passive	82 (23.7)
Promoter	130 (37.6)
Relevance of code of ethics to your job (7-10)	212 (61.3)
Are ethical issues discussed in staff meetings?	
All the time	47 (13.6)
Sometimes	106 (30.6)
Occasionally	70 (20.2)
Rarely/never	33 (9.5)
Importance of human rights framework to work	
Detractor	26 (7.5)
Passive	77 (22.3)
Promoter	156 (45.1)

Table 5: *Components of the youth work profession*

Significant differences in attitudes and opinions across key variables

Significant differences were observed in perceptions of the Code of Ethics across the country of respondents. In particular, youth workers from Australia were significantly less likely to report that the Code of Ethics was a detractor to their work (4.6%) when compared to workers from Iceland (15.9%) and Estonia (11.3%) (X^2=14.55, p=006). Further, youth workers with formal qualifications, were significantly more likely to report using the Code of Ethics in their daily role (91.3% and 83.6% for youth work specific qualification and *other* formal qualification respectively) when compared to staff with no formal qualifications (63.8%; X^2=27.06, p<.001).

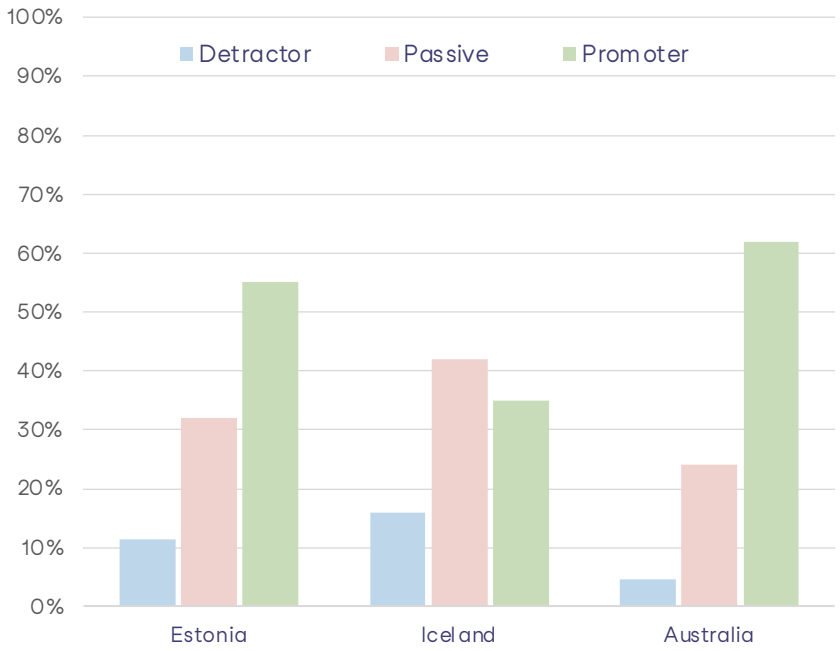


Figure 9: *Relevance of the Code of Ethics across country across qualifications*

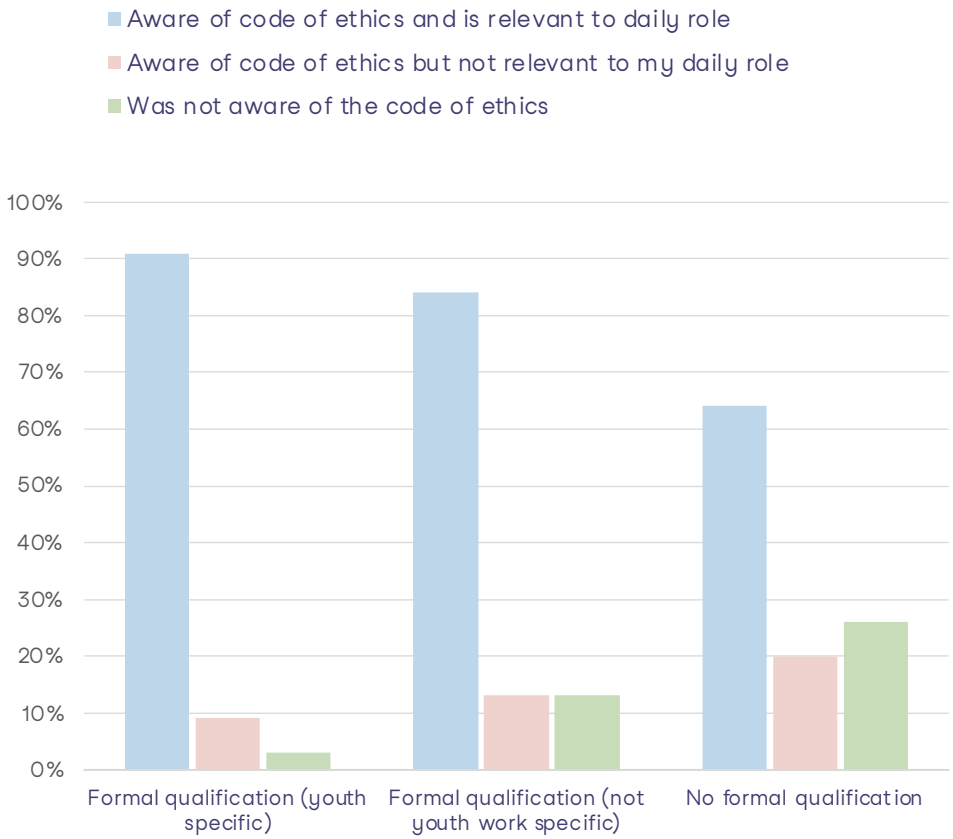


Figure 10: *Relevance of the Code of Ethics across qualifications*

Several staff disclosed that the Code of Ethics provided guidance and a framework to their role. In particular, staff felt that the Code set a standard for the profession and provided some protection to the young people they worked with. However, staff also noted that the Code of Ethics fell short in terms of addressing current issues with young people (i.e. social media) and failed to meet the needs of young indigenous people. The primary issue with the Code of Ethics was the lack of enforcement from peak bodies and organisations. The lack of obligation to adhere to the Code contributed to additional burden on the workforce as they were left juggling the competing priorities (organisation expectations versus outcomes for youth). The standard of service delivery was also impacted as there was a significant variation in practice across the workforce.

Strengths of the Code of Ethics	**Limitations of the Code of Ethics**
Accountability and equity.	It needs to be promoted, taught in youth work courses and adhered to by employers.
It gives young people and the community confidence and consistency in our work. It sets clear expectations regarding acceptable and unacceptable work practices (accountability).	I feel the Code of Ethics needs to be reviewed to meet current trends i.e.- the use of social media to engage young people.
Invaluable, provides a framework that I expect all members of my team to abide by.	Organisations and programs that hire youth workers don't abide by the code, making it risky to follow it.
A guideline to refer to when unsure of something.	Currently it is that it is not enforced or monitored.
Help govern the sector and ensure that both staff and young people are safe.	They are general and I would hope that these are expectations of any social industry.
… No matter a young person's location or circumstances they should be able to access the same level of professionalism as other young people (regardless of location, circumstances and socio-economic status).	They aren't recognised by peak organisations like local governments that employ youth workers as the overarching guidelines to abide by, therefore sometimes can be hard to balance both priorities – organisation or young people.
Guidance in your practice and outlining expectations.	Does not cater well to first nations people. Not enough emphasis on culture that is meaningful.
Its basis in human rights means that it has legitimacy and is hard to argue with and works in the best interests of young people.	Outdated practices at times and impacting moral compasses.
	Needs more cultural competency and trauma informed practices.

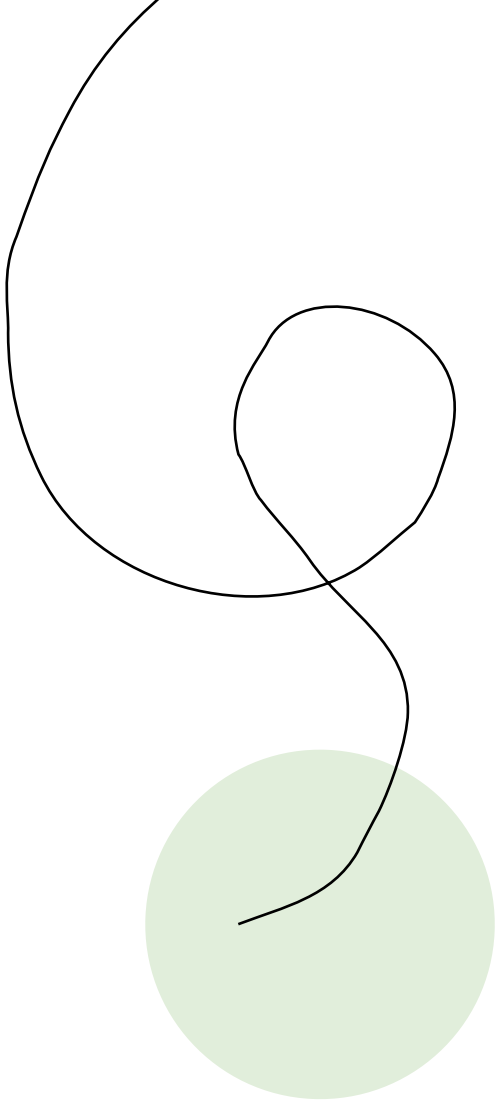
Table 6: *Strengths and limitations of the Code of Ethics: extracts from responses*

Respondents also detailed the ethical dilemmas were frequently encountered in their role. Although the dilemmas ranged from concerns around boundary setting to disclosure, primarily youth workers described trying to maintain a balance between the needs of the young person and the requirements of stakeholders and the organisation.

Common ethical dilemmas encountered in youth work

- Workplace limitations on allowing young people to have full control. Competing priorities of organisation and views of young people's boundaries.
- Working within program guidelines which are very prescriptive, and a one size fits all framework does not always fit with every young person.
- Working so closely with children in an artificial home environment when they are desperate for a parental figure, as attachment is part of their development... only to have to discourage the attachment because of policies and procedures.
- Whether or not to stay in contact after a young person exits a program. If you have a strong relationship with a young person and suddenly withdraw all support, what happens to that young person? Not everyone has another reliable adult to ask for constructive advice. I often wonder if giving them an email address could be okay, depending on a number of factors. Have still never done it, as internal policies either prohibit this outright, or imply that it is not okay.
- Where to draw the line between professional practice and helping a young person who wished to confide in you but is scared to pass on details to higher authorities when young people break the law.
- When to report to Child Protection and or other authorities, managing parent expectations and what a young person wants.
- When to breach confidentiality of the child, working in a school I do need to disclose to teachers and welfare staff but the dilemma may be how much.
- When making recommendations about a young person and weighing up a sentence in custody or community where duty of care comes into it for the wider community. Hard to see a young person placed in custody.
- What to share about yourself and why.
- Understanding what my role is and what services to provide.
- Type of work undertaken outside of youth work. Public social media accounts and content Not having legislation about relationships between young people and youth workers (boundaries).
- To be asked or to turn a blind eye to something that's against the law.

Table 7: *Ethical dilemmas encountered: extracts from responses* *(continues on the next page)*



- Support for multiple family members, parents requesting information about their child.
- Stepping over boundaries to provide safety.
- Staff who neglect the needs of young people because they do not know about the code of ethics.
- Staff discussing some staff issues with [a] young person.
- Sometimes wanting to help clients in ways that technically are forbidden in my role and breach boundaries/ red tape – i.e. wanting to give them money out [of] my own wallet for groceries; wishing I could let them sleep on my foldout sofa when they're feeling too unsafe in emergency accommodation.
- Sharing of sensitive information. Being transparent with young people in practice.
- Setting appropriate boundaries. Working with involuntary clients without a formal boundary that leaves them highly vulnerable and at risk.
- Maintaining boundaries when working with low socio-economic youth facing a variety of issues, and practising self care when you make little money, get no overtime or time in lieu, and are expected to perform at a high level. You feel pressure to do so as often you are on a contract basis.
- How to handle and create a positive outcome when bureaucracy is getting in the way of a positive client outcome.
- Having young people share their stories to educate others, potentially creating secondary trauma.
- How to respect young people's time when [I] cannot afford to pay them for participation. Constant consultation with young people followed by no (communicated) change.
- Disclosures of abuse and how to handle them. Young person choice-making overshadowed by parents (especially in disability).
- Cultural appropriateness.
- Gender equity issues.
- Conflict of interest - working with two young people who know each other Priorities of young person vs parent/guardian. Challenge of personal values vs Organisational policy.
- If and how much to put emphasis on your own values.

Professional Associations and connection to the youth work sector

Most staff felt that they were connected to the youth work sector (n=247, 71.4%) and approximately one third were a member of a professional association. Staff highlighted the need for Professional Associations to promote the exchange of resources and information amongst the workforce (n=256, 74.0%) and providing professional development and training opportunities (n=253, 73.1%).

Do you feel part of the youth sector?	**n(%)**
Very much	128 (37.0)
Somewhat	119 (34.4)
Neither disconnected, nor connected	20 (5.8)
Somewhat disconnected	13 (3.8)
Very disconnected	3 (.9)
Member of a professional association	125 (36.1)
What should the function of a professional association be?	
Sharing resources and information	256 (74.0)
Providing professional development and training opportunities	253 (73.1)
Networking events	219 (63.3)
Media responses	157 (45.4)
Advocating to peak bodies and governments regarding youth work	236 (68.2)
Advocating for pay and conditions	214 (61.8)
Personal indemnity insurance	95 (27.5)
Promotes professional identity	187 (54.0)
Endorses professional training programs	186 (53.8)
Professional standards	204 (59.0)
Giving relevant legislation and regulation	195 (56.4)

Table 8: *Connection with professional associations*

Youth workers from Estonia and Iceland were significantly more likely to report membership to a professional association for youth workers (56.8% and 69.8% respectively) than youth workers based in Australia (17.7%) (X2=64.785, p<.001). Length of experience as a youth worker was also significantly associated with membership to a professional association (X2=17.026, p<.001) with youth workers with five years of experience or less the least likely to report membership to a Professional Association (see Figure 12).

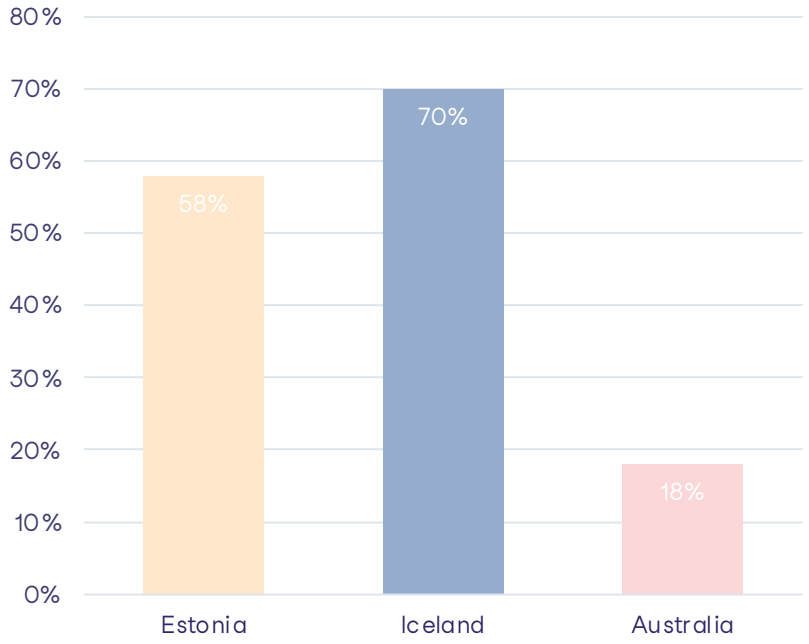


Figure 11: *Membership to professional associations across professional association.*

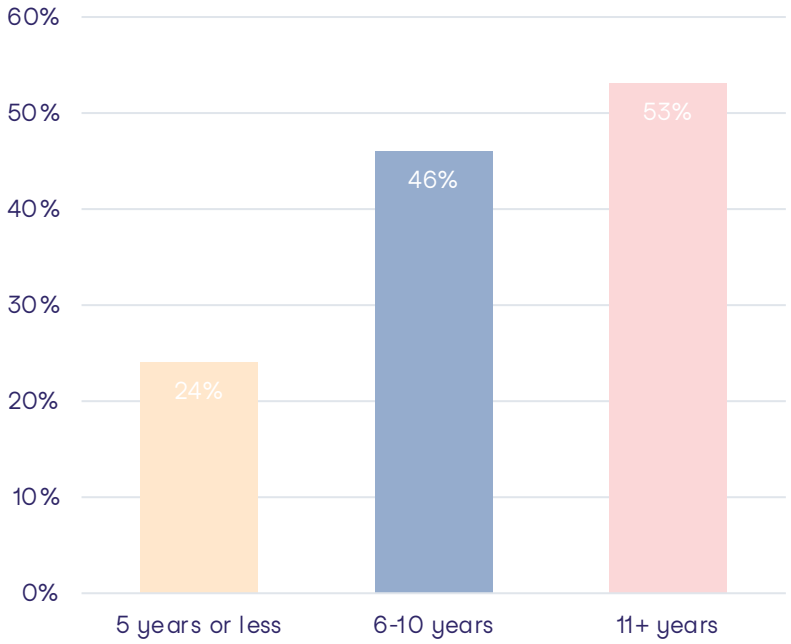
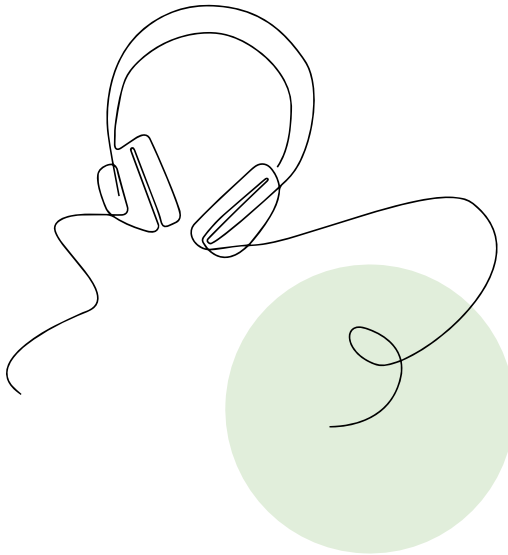


Figure 12: *Membership to professional associations across length of experience*

Discussion



The following chapter summarises the main differences and commonalities related to the key components of youth work practice, frameworks underpinning the profession and connectedness across the workforce in Estonia, Iceland and Australia. It also examines the main challenges associated with the professionalisation of youth work in the three countries.

”What are the main differences related to youth work in Estonia, Iceland and Australia?”

Based on the analysis of the results of the survey, it can be stated that the opinions and attitudes of youth workers in Australia, Estonia and Iceland reflect high levels of similarities in the value base of youth work, where youth centeredness is in focus. Resemblance can be noticed also in the aim and essence of youth work – working towards empowerment and active participation of youth.

On the one hand, the differences that have emerged in the analysis describe the differing historical development of the youth work field in these three countries. For example, the way youth work is managed in Estonia – where the local municipalities are responsible for the implementation of youth work- influences the structures of youth work and thus also the profile of the youth worker. Limited resources in local municipalities can lead to a shortage of specialists, which can result in youth workers working part-time in the field or being active in several jobs (e.g. about 24% of Estonian respondents having more than one youth work related job) or volunteering in the field next to the paid position (e.g. in Estonia more than 1 in 10 respondents). The respondents emphasised a lack of resources and the need to train practitioners as some of the aspects that present the most challenges in the field.

Similarly, there are differences in the qualifications of youth workers (respondents from Australia having significantly more likely youth work-specific qualifications when compared to Iceland and Estonia), which may be due to employers’ requirements, for

example, in Estonia youth work-specific qualifications are not necessity for working with young people, or youth work-specific training can be replaced by having a professional certificate. The question that deserves further investigation is whether the lack of professionally trained practitioners relates to staff turnover and reflects more broadly youth workers professional security or lack of it.

The results of the study revealed strong similarities in the value base of youth work, but also noticeable differences between countries emerged, in which a distinction in the focus of youth work can be noticed. While Australian youth work is firmly based on the concept of human rights, in the context of Estonian and Icelandic youth work, the focus is on the personal development of a young person. This difference could explain why Australian youth workers prioritised as principles of youth work: *Professional boundaries between youth workers and young people* & *Duty of care to young people* and Estonian youth workers prioritised: *Voluntary participation of young people*, as one of the main characteristics of youth work. Similarly, the results show that Icelandic youth workers are less likely to select the principles: *Privacy of young people & Respect the confidentiality of young people,* compared with practitioners in Australia and Estonia, which can be connected with Icelandic youth works' clear preventive objective through close cooperation with parents and the community.

Alternatively, the results of the analysis can also describe the differences in the development of the youth work field based on the needs of society and young people. For example, the 21st century skills raised by Estonian youth workers as an important topic of youth work can reflect the diversity of regional development of youth work. Innovation, including smart and digital youth work, has been a priority of EU youth work related cooperation in recent years, where Estonia has taken a spokesperson role in the process. Similarly, environmental sustainability is another focus area of the EU, as well as being an important issue for many young people in the society, which initiates related activities in youth work. Environmental sustainability, prioritised among volunteer youth workers, can describe a situation where new, emerging issues are easier to deal with by non-profit organisations or voluntary groups than youth workers working in municipality structures.

An interesting aspect that deserves further inquiry is the comparatively lower importance of a *Civic engagement* as characteristics of youth work in respondents' answers. Does it reflect the change of youth participation as a concept among the youth workers or it is a response to the several societal developments connected with youth empowerment?

”What are the main challenges related to the professionalisation of youth work in Estonia, Iceland and Australia?”

The main challenges related to the professionalisation of youth work in the three respective countries can be summarised around the criteria associated with professions, such as specific/formal education and training as a basis of special knowledge and skills; commitment to professional service; and recognition by society or a social contract with the public.

Specific education and training

One of the characteristics of a profession is the presence of a specific body of knowledge and supportive training (Greenwood 1957; Saks 2012), the results of the survey show that in Iceland and Estonia more than a quarter of the respondents did not have specific training in youth work (in Australia the respective percentage being 13.5%).

The importance of formal education, as the way distinct values in the field are reinforced, is confirmed by the survey results, as there were notable differences in the attitudes of a practitioner with and without specific education. This difference occurred in youth work value-based elements such as: *Acting with integrity and the best interests of young people* & *Positive health and wellbeing*, where staff with formal qualifications rated these elements as more important than those without (see Figure 9). Similarly, youth workers with no formal qualifications were less familiar with Codes of Ethics or saw no relevance of it to their work.

The significance of specialised training was also emphasised by the practitioners themselves, highlighting it as one of the key components of the youth work profession. Considering that training provides practitioners with a specific knowledge base and professional skills, it is important to advocate the acknowledgment and recognition of youth work education (both formal and non-formal training) conducted by professional associations, which provide diverse professional development opportunities.

The survey results show that a significant number of youth workers (33. 5% of respondents) were newcomers in the field, having worked for less than five years, which may also explain the lack of specific qualification. However, a percentage of beginners in the field could also describe the fluctuation of the workforce.

Commitment to professional service

Professionalism can be seen as competent action guided by codes of ethics (Professional Standards Council 2021; Martimianakis 2009). Most youth workers (71%) participating in the survey were aware of the Code of Ethics and saw the relevance of it as a framework for best practice. The characteristics practitioners described youth work by: *Acting with integrity and the best interests of young people, Treating young people equitably, Inclusion and acceptability etc.*, reflect both principles and frameworks underpinning youth work as well as the philosophy of the Code of Ethics.

The results of the survey show that Australian youth workers tend to be less critical towards their Code of Ethics than colleagues from Iceland or Estonia. Attitudes in relation to the Code of Ethics among youth workers can reflect the different roles and impact of the Code of Ethics in different countries. The significance of the Code in the field could depend on the starting points for its creation and adoption: in Australia (State of Victoria) the Code is linked to professionalisation of youth work but in Estonia the Code of Ethics was created as a part of

a youth work description and has stayed unaltered for decades. The challenge now is to develop the Code in a way that addresses contemporary issues in working with young people as well as determines a value-base of youth work. Areas that need further examination include if the Code of Ethics should be mandatory for working in the field, through which instruments should youth workers adhere to the Code, and the best way to monitor the implementation of the Code in practice.

Recognition by society

Understanding the role and importance of youth work to society is demonstrated in the survey results through respondents highly valuing the connecting and empowering role of youth work, which can include empowering youth for participation, social inclusion and justice, human rights, and best interests of young people etc. When respondents described their attitudes and opinions towards key characteristics of youth work (see Table. 3), the active participation of young people was most commonly rated as an important to very important aspect of youth work (94.5%) followed by respect for young people (94.2%).

At the same time, the biggest challenges described in the survey results are also connected with society: lack of recognition, understanding or supportive political agenda and resources (including low pay) were mentioned, but also lack of collaboration and recognition by other professions. This corresponds to the earlier discussion about professions, where competition and ongoing struggle for the better positions of the profession are on the agenda. Nevertheless, recognition seems to relate to the practice itself – with its' ability or inability to explain it – this is also seen as one of the biggest challenges and brings us back to the training and education of youth workers.

After *Code of Ethics (22.5%)* and S*pecialised, formal training or education (21.1%)*, the next most common components of a profession to occur in the survey were *The importance of relevant legislation (16.5%)* and *Occupational standards (11.6%)*, describing the need for acknowledgement of youth work as a profession on the legislative level. The role of Professional Associations in the enhancement and promotion of professional conduct through codes of ethics or occupational standards cannot be underestimated. Based on the results of the survey, one of the expectations for the professional association is advocating to peak bodies and governments regarding youth work.

The results of the analysis reveal the relationship between the period of employment and sectoral involvement – the longer a youth worker is active in the field, the more likely they are a member of a professional organisation (In Australia, gaining membership to a professional organisation differs from other countries where there are no qualification criteria requirements for enrolment). Therefore, one of the functions of the professional associations could also be strengthening the community of practice and subsequently advancing the professionalisation of the youth field.

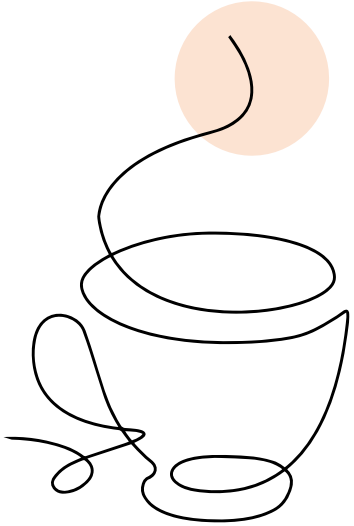
Summary

The research report investigates the subject of professionalisation of youth work and the main challenges within it in Estonia, Iceland and Australia.

Despite different histories and contexts, youth work in Australia, Estonia and Iceland has developed similarly, where youth centeredness and care for young people are the main focus of youth work and principles of positive youth development, human rights and leisure, together with preventive work, illustrate the practice. Youth workers' associations in all three countries are focused on supporting the professional development of youth workers and play an important role in introducing the possibilities and application of codes of ethics in youth work.

Some theoretical points introduced earlier made it clear that the concept of the profession has been and still is rather disputable and changing. However, ethical standards have always played a role in defining a profession. To be a member of a profession means acting professionally and ethical considerations lay the foundation for that. The role of the professional associations as upholders and supporters of professional and ethical behaviour are relevant here. The more recognised and distinctive the profession becomes in the society, the more it can be said that professionalisation is taking place. On one hand - youth workers seek and wish to be recognised, but on the other hand the strict regulations and boundaries may influence the core processes of youth work - building close, inclusive and empowering relationships with young people. These relationships are context specific and could be difficult to predict and describe in standards. The question is worth asking, will professionalisation take the focus away from youth onto the profession itself? Can the price for the professionalisation of youth work be the loss of youth centeredness, or is this worry unjustified?

This report is based on an online survey that was distributed to youth workers in three countries, which investigated attitudes and opinions towards key components of youth work practice, frameworks underpinning the profession and connectedness across youth work. Based on the analysis of the results of the survey, it is apparent that youth work in Australia, Estonia and Iceland manifests as a value-based ethical practice working towards empowerment and active participation of young people. The results show the importance of formal education and specialised training as one of the means to ensure high-quality youth work and consistency in practice across the workforce. Through this survey it is evident that a Code of Ethics is highly valued by youth workers as an important component of the youth work profession and as a framework for practice. At the same time, youth workers described several deficiencies in using the Code as a non-binding and static document that fails to address contemporary issues in working with young people. Therefore, further examination is needed on the use and application of Youth Work Codes of Ethics in participating countries to identify the gaps and challenges in national contexts.



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