



YouthLink Scotland welcomes the **Scottish Attainment Challenge report from the Scottish Parliament’s Education, Children and Young People Committee.**

We are encouraged to see the Committee recognise the vital role of partners, including youth work, reinforcing the need for strong collaboration across the system to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty.

Youth work is an integral part of the Scottish education system<sup>1</sup>. As part of the collective agency required to deliver the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) mission, youth work focuses on improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty. This includes addressing barriers to learning and offering flexible and tailored options and pathways for young people to develop and recognise skills and achievements. These improve attendance, engagement, attainment, health and wellbeing and school leaver destinations<sup>2</sup>.

In November 2021, Education Secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville acknowledged (while launching the Scottish Attainment Challenge refresh) that it is not only schools that affect the wellbeing, readiness to learn and educational outcomes of children and young people. She emphasised the vital role played by those who work in partnership with schools<sup>3</sup>, including youth workers, and confirmed that a number of national programmes would be enhanced. This would include a stronger focus on youth work, enhancing support across the system, enabling these partners to continue to target work to raise attainment and improve equity.

The role of youth work in improving the wellbeing, readiness to learn and educational outcomes of children and young people is strongly emphasised in the refreshed SAC framework and PEF guidance, launched in March 2022.

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<sup>1</sup> [Youth Work: A Guide for Schools | Resources for Collaboration \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/resources/youth-work-a-guide-for-schools/)

<sup>2</sup> [national-evaluation-publication.pdf \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/national-evaluation-publication.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-23-11-2021?meeting=13424&iob=121852>

Local authorities and school leaders are encouraged to work in partnership with youth work partners to develop effective strategic plans and approaches to closing the poverty related attainment gap and to support and enhance their work to achieve the SAC mission. This includes how Scottish Equity Funding and Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is utilised. These recommendations are welcomed. However, further work is needed to understand how they are being implemented. Additionally, short-term funding remains a barrier to effective, sustainable collaboration. As such, YouthLink Scotland supports the Committee's recommendation that local authorities and Education Scotland consider sustainable investment for third sector organisations.

YouthLink Scotland's SAC national programme is funded to support consistent and effective collaboration between schools and youth work to close the poverty-related attainment gap. This includes supporting partnerships to evaluate the impact of sustainable partnerships on outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The Committee notes the role of local authorities, RICs and Education Scotland to ensure consistency and to understand and share best practice. YouthLink Scotland are committed to working in partnership with these agencies to embed youth work within the accountability framework, to ensure a genuine system wide understanding of what works for children, young people and families.

The Committee's report also highlights the importance of life outside of school. Youth work plays an important role in improving outcomes for young people in collaboration with schools and in the wider community. Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, and today, youth work continued to tackle inequity, including addressing food insecurity, engaging young people in learning, supporting learning and transitions during school holiday periods, and continuing to provide opportunities for young people to develop skills and achieve. This included the projects delivered through the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund. These projects supported young people to engage with youth work activities that build their confidence and skills, support their health and well-being, and address the poverty-related attainment gap. Further, the fund facilitated strong partnerships across the education system, to deliver effective, innovative and evidence-driven, approaches to achieving equity. The impact of youth work, out with the

school gates remains under acknowledged within the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

A whole education system approach is needed to mitigate the impact of COVID19 on the most vulnerable learners and to accelerate progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap. To achieve this, we would strongly advise that the Education, Children and Young People Committee considers in more depth the role of youth work in closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

**ENDS**

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