YouthLink Scotland's Response to the Review of the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland

Introduction

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation, representing over 100 regional and national youth organisations from the voluntary and statutory sectors. We champion the role and value of youth work and represent the interests and aspirations of our sector. We are an organisation with a sharp focus on the needs of young people. Our approach is founded upon being inclusive, accessible, ethical, equitable and diverse. We are an organisation that promotes learning, innovation and progressive thinking and are committed to the highest standards of protection and safety for young people.

We aim for a nation that values its young people and their contribution to society, supported through critical relationships with youth workers to achieve their potential. As the collective voice of the youth work sector, we represent their interests, policy, and practice needs to the local and national government. We achieve this by supporting the sector to demonstrate the impact and value of their work and by promoting a positive image of young people and youth work.

We campaign for equality of access to high-quality youth work for all young people, supported by a confident, skilled, well-led and effective workforce while playing an essential role in delivering Scotland's national outcomes. As part of this process, we have been calling for Education Reform to drive a transformed education system that addresses the purposes described in Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)[1].

Response

Our vision for education is that every child and young person can experience their right to an education which helps them to develop their personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential (UNCRC Article 29). A rights-based approach, with the learner at the centre, is how we will create and deliver the kind of education that learners need for the future. We believe a rights-based approach must include a strengthened role for youth work within a more collaborative and enhanced system – including creating a system for qualifications and assessment.

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[1] https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/7735/youthlink-scotland-response-to-national-discussion-on-education.pdf

A rights-based approach should reflect parity of value in terms of what we capture, measure and why. An assessment and qualifications system should support progression in young people's learning across settings, value the achievements of all learners and demonstrate a parity of esteem across different qualifications and awards. Above all, it should reflect what is important to learners and help them articulate their skills and achievements.

Question 1:

a) Should information be gathered across all four capacities? Yes/No/Unsure

YES

Question 2:

Please consider each of the capacities in turn. What kinds of information should be gathered on learners' progress and achievements in each capacity?

Young people learn, progress and achieve in each of the capacities through formal and non-formal education settings (such as youth work) and activities and opportunities in their wider life. The purpose of recording progress and achievements in the four capacities should be to support learners in understanding their holistic progress within a life-long learning journey. The approach should therefore demonstrate the value of all learning by gathering information across formal and non-formal learning settings.

The recording of progress and achievement towards the four capacities must also be owned by the young person. Whilst data is needed to demonstrate that formal education is delivering opportunities across all four capacities, only a person-centred approach will support recognition of all of a young person's progress and achievements. We suggest that capturing progress relative to the four capacities might be best achieved through ongoing profiling. This would also support an equitable approach, recognising that some learners will not have access to the same opportunities to progress and achieve across the capacities to the same extent. Every learner's journey is different.

A skills-based approach could be used to help learners recognise and track their progress and achievement across the four capacities. For example, youth workers use the newly refreshed Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework to help young people understand and articulate their skills, progress and achievement. As young people work towards the National Youth Work Outcomes, they develop essential, transferable skills. Youth workers use the Framework alongside a range of tools and methods such as reflective conversations, portfolios and learner profiles.

For example, West Lothian Council Youth Work Services supports young people to understand, track, record and value their skills and achievements by developing and creating space that enables reflective conversations after each input and measuring the journey with the young person at the end of the group work programme.

Youth awards are another approach that could support an interdisciplinary approach to capturing skills, progress and achievements. For example, Youth Scotland offers

Hi5, Dynamic Youth Awards (DYA) and Youth Achievement Awards (YAA) which are SCQF levelled 2-7. The awards are based on experiential learning with portfolio-based assessment that enables learners to undertake ongoing reflection, understand and record their achievements. Several youth awards are on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), but all provide equally valuable opportunities to develop skills and capacities and recognise achievement.

Any approach adopted to capture progress across the four capacities will require support for learners and practitioners to ensure it is a meaningful process. We also believe that the relationship with a trusted adult, such as a youth worker, is critical.

Question 3: What, if any, information on learners' achievements obtained outside school and college should be gathered? Please explain your response.

We believe that a rights-based approach to recognising achievement means it is imperative that learners should be able to evidence awards and achievements obtained outside of the formal setting. This must demonstrate parity between formal and non-formal achievements.

Young people participating in youth work told us as part of the national discussion that they value their skills and achievements gained through youth work, with 82% (603 out of 723 young people) saying they were more important or just as important as their achievements in formal settings. As such, 88% (612) felt these achievements should be recorded and acknowledged alongside exams and other measures of progress through formal education[2].

Young people learn, develop and achieve through youth work in communities, schools and colleges. One of the unique and successful features of youth work is that young people choose to participate and co-create their learning alongside youth workers. Information gathered about achievements through this approach to learning should also be person-centred. Some young people will not wish to share their personal achievements. Additionally, we need to be sensitive to the fact that not all young people have access to youth work and other non-formal opportunities. A holistic approach to recognising achievement should help learners to celebrate what is unique and important to them. It should be approached 'as one', rather than separating formal from non-formal achievements.

As described in the section above, a skills-based approach could be used to help learners recognise and track their progress and achievements obtained out with formal learning. Young people who participated in the national discussion with their youth workers spoke clearly that they needed Scottish education to help them develop life-relevant skills to help them prepare for their future life and work. Capturing skills development across settings would uphold a rights-based approach, with youth voice at the centre of creating a transformed approach to defining and measuring success.

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[2] https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/7719/views-of-young-people-participating-in-youth-work_web.pdf

A renewed approach to qualifications and assessment should also value skills and achievements recognised through youth awards and other forms of certification/accreditation gained by young people in community, school, or college settings. It is essential, though, that this is included as part of a meaningful approach to understanding and articulating the relevance of their achievements for their learner journey.

Question 4:

a) Should information be gathered on learners' skills and competencies as part of

their senior phase? Y/N/Unsure

Yes

b) If you have views on how this might best be done please provide them here.

Young people need to be able to understand their skills and competencies and articulate the value and difference they make. This should be part of a meaningful approach across the learner journey, focused on building a young person's understanding of their own development and informing next steps.

Youth workers work alongside young people to understand their learning and development, including skills and competencies. This includes providing experiential opportunities to develop a young person's ability to put different skills into practice in a particular context. 'I can' statements such as those in the Youth Work Skills Framework and the Career Education Standard are valuable tools to ensure that reflection and recording skills and competencies are meaningful and not simply about 'gathering information'.

We suggest that this Review does not overcomplicate the language of skills and competencies with terminology such as 'academic competencies'. It should seek to demonstrate parity across transferable skills and emphasise how learners put these into practice now and in the future.

Question 6: Please share your thoughts on what a 'better balanced' assessment system would look like. As well as considering the balance between external examination and internal assessment you may also wish to comment on the frequency of examinations.

A better-balanced assessment system should start from the values and principles agreed upon for Scottish qualifications and assessment system. Therefore, we urge the review to consider how we define 'success' for individual learners and equally value achievement that isn't externally assessed.

To do this, the purpose of assessment within CfE should focus on how we can best enable learners to demonstrate and understand their progress across the curriculum. Not simply how they evidence a particular subject qualification. As such, it should acknowledge that the curriculum is broader than schools. Youth work plans and

delivers learning and opportunities that are part of Curriculum for Excellence. We should also work closely with other educators, such as youth workers who could contribute to the picture of progress, alongside teacher judgement and learning that contributes towards continuous assessment.

It should also build flexibility, generating a more equitable balance between exams and continuous assessment. We know that for some young people, the stress and anxiety associated with exams do not best enable them to demonstrate what they have achieved.

Question 7: Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on introducing an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE.

Some form of recognition of achievement at the end of the BGE would help learners to understand and celebrate their progress within a lifelong learning journey. It should take a whole-person approach, where young people are central to contributing to this summary of their skills and achievements across different settings. This must reflect ongoing profiling throughout the learner journey, which draws on learning across settings.

Consideration should be given to how this would be valued by colleges, universities and employers. Further work must be progressed to change the broader culture around academic qualifications and pathways.

Question 8: Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on the idea of introducing a type of leaving certificate in the Senior Phase.

As mentioned above, this could be a valuable addition to understanding and celebrating achievements wider than formal qualifications. Significantly, it should demonstrate the value of achievements in the classroom, such as community engagement, volunteering and youth work, and youth awards.

Question 9: How should Scotland's qualifications and assessment system make best use of digital technologies?

Ideas discussed around BGE/Senior Phase certificates, alongside ongoing profiling, could be best supported through digital technologies. This may require the integration of digital technologies across local authorities. More vital collaboration with other educators in the assessment and recognition of achievement, including e-portfolios, would also require system change regarding access and integration of digital systems. The broader trajectory towards more digitisation and the necessity for young people to build skills in this vastly developing area should be recognised alongside youth work's role in building capacity in this space, as a tool for social action and also as an essential set of skills required in the modern world. Better use of shared platforms, including youth work practitioners' gaining access alongside teachers, will help support accessibility for those with additional support needs and contribute to the ongoing work to address digital poverty.

<u>Question 10: How can we make sure that proposals for a future qualification system will uphold the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements?</u>

Scotland has committed to pursuing a rights-based approach to education. This must also extend to our system of qualifications and assessment. At its centre, it must uphold the rights of all learners to recognise and celebrate all achievements that are valuable to them. Importantly, we need to acknowledge better that success looks different for individual young people and value skills and capacities equally to knowledge. The voice of young people should drive the future of our assessment and qualifications system.

<u>Question 11: Is there anything else in relation to the reform of qualifications and assessment which is not covered in this consultation which you would like to raise?</u>

Education Reform with rights at its core must drive the culture and systemic change needed to deliver young people's right to education. The consultation on the reform of qualifications and assessment should consider how it can support this ambition – including ways of generating parity across learning approaches, pathways and achievements. This can be done with the meaningful inclusion of youth work.

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EDITOR'S NOTES