



Introduction

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation, representing 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. Youth work is part of the wider grouping of informal and non-formal learning which is known as Community Learning and Development. Our sector has a workforce in excess of 75,000 – including over 70,000 adult volunteers. We reach in excess of 380,000 young people in youth work opportunities each week. We are responding to The Advisory Group on Economic Recovery on behalf of our members. However, we support the submissions made by individual members of the organisation.

1.

In recent years the youth work sector has fallen victim to savage funding cuts and an austerity driven agenda and we are acutely aware that Covid-19 impacts on budgets and the scope for new public spending. However, the youth work infrastructure and exceptional response from people within the sector, provides an opportunity for Scottish Government to think more broadly about which actions would best promote civic and economic renewal. The youth work offer and its contribution across a range of key policy areas should therefore be included in Scottish Government plans.

2.

We know from our recent LockdownLowdown survey, in partnership with The Scottish Youth Parliament, and Young Scot asking young people from across Scotland¹ their concerns about COVID-19 that young people need reassurance that their life opportunities are not at risk. Allaying these fears through a social and economic lens should be one of the priorities of the Scottish Government Economic Working Group.

¹ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/news/april-2020/lockdown-lowdown-what-young-people-in-scotland-think-about-covid-19/>

3.

We agree with the Economic Recovery Group that while there are enormous challenges brought by Coronavirus there is a strategic opportunity to build a greener, fairer and more inclusive society in Scotland and a reimagining of our economy. In order to do this, we believe a concerted effort needs to take place on the social return for investment in youth work. The youth work sector is therefore crucial to any meaningful renewal.

4.

While the activities, venues, and approaches utilised to deliver youth work are varied – and include youth clubs, youth projects, specialist or targeted provision, social activism, outdoor learning, awards programmes, uniformed organisations, and democratic participation – youth work in all its forms provides fundamental support to young people across Scotland’s local authorities and the voluntary sector. We know from our Universal Youth Work Research² that youth work contributes to a growing body of evidence developing in Scotland, making a significant contribution to the lives of young people. We need to see greater recognition of the benefits of youth work as a form of informal education in a post-covid landscape that views “*blended*” learning as the new normal and it should be available to all young people.

5.

We must reflect carefully on resourcing for participation of children and young people, including examining current funding streams, ensuring that participation is sustainable. In doing so, consideration on how national approaches to participation are reflected in the local structures which can facilitate participation needs to happen now. The call for evidence from The Advisory Group on Economic Recovery provides an opportunity to explore these points and take relevant action.

6.

We acknowledge the pressure placed on systems during the pandemic. We also recognise prior to Covid-19 that the resources available to deliver services fell in real terms. However, it is in a time of financial challenges,

² <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/3183/impact-of-community-based-universal-youth-work-in-scotland-november-2018.pdf>

where it is crucial to draw attention to the value of youth work and evidence that investing in our young people provides considerable long-term benefits.

7.

In 2019 YouthLink Scotland launched the #InvestInYouthWork campaign³ to show the value of youth work in Scotland. A survey of youth workers highlighted perceived reductions to youth work services, budgets and staffing across Scotland over the last three years and this is a serious concern. Our response summarises the main arguments for prioritising investment in youth work (the need for which is exacerbated in this crisis) and how it changes the lives of young people (the most crucial point of all), the value of youth workers, and the wider social and economic benefits.

8.

We believe youth work is intrinsically valuable and young people have a right to it. However, the value of youth work lies not only in the difference it makes directly to the lives of the young people who engage with services, but extends further to the many benefits it provides to wider society by tackling inequalities and promoting positive outcomes for individuals. The “*common weal*” benefits from having young people who are engaged in positive activities – they make valuable contributions to their communities.

9.

YouthLink Scotland commissioned research by Hall Aitken⁴ established the huge economic and social value of youth work. The social return on investment of youth work in Scotland is at least 3:1 – this means that for every £1 invested in youth work, at least £7 of value was created and the total value of youth work in Scotland is at least £656 million⁵. This value includes both savings to public spend and economic gains (and this is a conservative estimate to avoid over-claiming – the actual impact could be much greater). Hall Aitken also outlined some of the longer-term outcomes of youth work resulting in reduced costs to the education system, increased personal earnings from better qualifications, reduced wage scar from youth unemployment, positive health behaviours such as reduced incidence of

³ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/news/blogs/may-2019/get-involved-in-the-investinyouthwork-campaign/>

⁴ Hall Aitken, *Social and economic value of youth work in Scotland: initial assessment*, January 2016, <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/index.asp?MainID=21159>

⁵ Ibid: 6

depression, reduced incidence of obesity, reduced incidence of STIs, greater productivity due to reduced absences, reduced costs of criminal justice interventions, savings on welfare payments and reduced risk of children going into the care system.

10.

UNISON⁶ surveyed youth workers about budgetary cuts and many mentioned the impact of youth work cuts on the general public – an increasing breakdown between young people and the wider population, resulting in poorer mental health, increased social isolation, increased substance abuse, anti-social behaviour and crime. The UNISON report also draws attention to the link between the cuts to youth services and increased pressures on statutory services (social care, mental health services, social work, the NHS, police, criminal justice system and the education system) – all a consequence of the loss of support and opportunities youth work services once provided.

⁶ UNISON, *A Future At Risk: Cuts in Youth Services*, August 2016 - <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/08/23996.pdf>

11.

In 2011, the Christie Commission report⁷ called for moves towards preventative spending, estimating that as much as 40 per cent of all spending on public services is accounted for by interventions that could have been avoided by prioritising a preventative approach⁸. Yet budget cuts have meant that Scotland is moving in the opposite direction and preventative work is not being prioritised. Instead, high levels of public resources are poured into alleviating social problems and tackling "*failure demand*" – demand which could have been avoided by earlier preventative measures.

12.

We urge the Economic Advisory Group to consider preventative spending to improve outcomes for people and communities and reduce demands on public services. Point 6.10 of the Christie Commission states: "*if we do not manage to effect a shift to preventative action, increasing "failure demand" will swamp our public services capacity to achieve outcomes. In all aspects of our system of public services, therefore, from setting national policy to reforming the governance and organisation of public services, through to the design and delivery of integrated services, all parties must prioritise and build in action which has the effect of reducing demand for services in the longer run*".

13.

Youth work is the ultimate preventative measure. Making cuts to youth work is a short term approach which fails to recognise the negative impact this will have across wider society in the long term. The devastating impact of youth service cuts increases the burden on other public services, which have to spend far more money resolving problems which could have been avoided through the preventative measures which youth work offers. Investment in youth work offers both short term and long term financial savings to a range

⁷ Christie Commission/Scottish Government, Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, 29 June 2011 - <https://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/352649/0118638.pdf/>

⁸ Ibid:7

of budgets – police, justice, welfare, health and wellbeing and education⁹. UNISON cites an Audit Commission report from 2009, exploring the benefits of sports and leisure activities in preventing anti-social behaviour among young people estimated that a young person in the criminal justice system costs the taxpayer over £200,000 by the time they are 16. But one who is given support to stay out of trouble costs less than £50,000¹⁰. Yet, youth workers are reporting that preventative work is not prioritised.

14.

Hall Aitken evidenced that youth work has changed the lives of more than 1 in 10 of the Scottish population. Fundamental to this is the skill, passion and commitment of youth workers, which means just one positive relationship with a youth worker can change a young person's life. One respondent quoted in Hall Aitken's research describes her experience of attending a youth group: *"It was amazing to know that there were people in my life that truly believed in me"*, while another stated: *"my life would not be the same without the youth workers who supported me. I might even say I'm not even sure I'd be alive today if it wasn't for the youth workers and the youth group I attended"*¹¹.

15.

More recently, youth work leaders in Scotland responded to our Covid-19 survey report¹² revealing an immediate funding loss of £20 million to the sector, with predictions of further losses of tens of millions post lockdown. This cannot be allowed to happen – especially so, as the pandemic has crystalised the versatility and importance of youth workers and the youth work sector to the lives of young people in Scotland.

The Key figures to emerge from our survey are noted below:

- National voluntary youth work organisations in Scotland are facing an immediate income loss of £20.5m
- 70% of youth work leaders in Scotland believe there will be cuts to services and budgets after Covid-19

⁹ UNISON, *Growing Pains – A survey of youth workers*, May 2016 - <http://www.unison-scotland.org/2016/05/11/growing-pains-a-survey-of-youth-workers/>

¹⁰ *Tired of Hanging Around*, Audit Commission, 2009 cited in UNISON, *A Future At Risk: Cuts in Youth Services*, August 2016, p7.

¹¹ Hall Aitken, *Social and economic value of youth work in Scotland: initial assessment*, January 2016, p.51 <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/index.asp?MainID=21159>

¹² <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/4511/survey-report-final.pdf>

- 60% of local authority youth work services face significant digital barriers in connecting with young people
- 92% of youth work organisations have moved their services online
- One in two youth work leaders believe there will be a detrimental impact on young people's mental health due to lockdown restrictions

16.

There needs to be proper investment in youth work in order to ensure there are the resources and experienced staff available to support young people effectively and deliver high quality services. Such investment would demonstrate recognition of the vital job youth workers do and acknowledge the significance of their skills and experience. The wellbeing and morale of youth workers is something worth valuing, to ensure they can continue to build life changing relationships with young people.

17.

The value of youth work cannot be underestimated – it is integral to the work and life chances of young people – but for youth work to be effective, it requires investment at local and national level and a commitment to protect and enhance youth work budgets. YouthLink Scotland would like to see the Economic Recovery Group Consider:

- Access to youth work opportunities available to all young people as an essential part of their education
- Comprehensive funding of youth work services
- Acknowledgment of the importance of both universal and targeted services and investment in both
- Core funding for youth work services
- Youth work budgets in every local council to include designated monies for sessional staff, support for volunteer and youth forums, as well as support for third sector youth work organisations.
- An undertaking of Child Rights Impact Assessments at both a national and local authority level on budgetary decisions.
- Youth work budgets collected and published separate to broader Community Learning and Development budgets in order to promote transparency about the level of local service provision
- Young people playing an active part in decisions that affect their services, including budgetary decisions.

18.

YouthLink Scotland would insist on consideration given to a statutory obligation on local authorities to provide universal and targeted youth work services. As our National Youth Work Strategy¹³ states: we want a Scotland where the rights of children and young people are not just recognised, but rooted deep in our society and in our public and voluntary services. A statutory duty on local authorities would be based on the concept that access to youth work services is a right. This would also contribute towards fulfilling the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Scottish Government's responsibilities in relation to GIRFEC. Previous UNCRC Concluding Observations highlighted concern that that

¹³ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/policy/national-youth-work-strategy/>

recent fiscal policies and allocation of resources have contributed to inequality in children's enjoyment of their rights, disproportionately affecting children in disadvantaged situations¹⁴. This is pertinent as Scottish Government is taking a "*maximalist*" approach to incorporating UNCRC into Scots Law in this Parliamentary Term¹⁵. The youth work sector can help deliver UNCRC into law so it works in practice at all levels, however the ambition must be matched by investment in our sector.

19.

When asking questions about recovery and renewal, we request Scottish Government also asks "*do we as a society have the necessary services and provision to meet the needs of all our young people in Scotland?*" and ensure that this question is given due cognisance when considering the long-term sustainability and allocation of budgets as the country eases out of lock down. In doing so, allocation of resources to youth work services should be made acknowledging its true impact. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up and that is why all young people, in every part of Scotland, should have access to high quality and effective youth work practice.

ENDS

¹⁴ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding observations [CRC/C/GBR/CO/5]*, 2016, p. 3, http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=987&Lang=en

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/news/strengthening-childrens-rights/>