



External Affairs Inquiry

YouthLink Scotland Statement on Scotland's Relationship with the EU

1.

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. YouthLink Scotland supports the submissions made by individual members of the organisation.

2.

Youth work seeks to engage young people in the active creation, preparation, delivery and evaluation of initiatives and activities that reflect their needs, interests, ideas and experiences. Through this process of non-formal and informal learning, young people gain the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need in order to move forward with confidence¹. The inquiry asks questions on the principles that should inform the focus of the Scottish Government's external affairs policy regarding the European Union. YouthLink Scotland's membership is diverse and so there are a range of opinions on Scotland and its relationship with the EU. We do however have evidence based concerns in relation to the repercussions for young people, the youth work sector and the implications on current funding arrangements - particularly in relation to operational Erasmus+ and other international projects in the event of a "No Deal" Brexit. It is acknowledged that youth work produces a wide range of positive outcomes for individuals and their communities, leading to critical reflection, enhanced well-being, a sense of belonging, and strengthened capacity to make beneficial choices. It supports positive and purposeful transitions in personal, civic, economic and cultural life, enabling the development of competences that facilitate life-long learning and active participation in society². Many of these positive outcomes are already being in achieved in Scotland, illustrating the vital importance of member States continued

¹ Recommendation CM/Rec (2017) 4 of the Committee of Minister to Member States on Youth Work https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680717e78

²ibid

commitment to accessible, quality youth work for all young people. If funding arrangements are de-prioritised, young people are at risk of becoming a disillusioned and disengaged group. We must adequately support young people via the provision of quality youth work, otherwise there is a threat to social cohesion and weakening the potential for dealing effectively with some of the major challenges of our time³.

3.

We note a letter to the UK Secretary of State for Education on behalf of the Scottish Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee⁴, highlighting a recent evidence session to the Committee, where the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations referred to the recent 'value-for-money' exercise into Erasmus+ being undertaken by the UK department. It stated that, "*We are aware of the UK Government's value-for-money exercise on Erasmus +, Horizon 2020 and other programmes, and we understood that the process concluded that Erasmus+ is not deserving of continued support under the value-for-money criteria. We have tried to influence those criteria, and we have made it very clear that we think that the consideration of the criteria has been flawed*". The issue of what form the UK's participation in the Erasmus+ programme would take is a matter for the proposed negotiations between the UK Government and the EU. We share the concerns of the committee that the Erasmus+ programme would not be considered value-for-money by the UK Government⁵ and strongly advise that young people and the youth work sector is considered during the negotiation process.

4.

The Committee has acknowledged that Erasmus+ is the most significant source of funding in Scotland at providing opportunities for cultural exchange and embedding an international outlook in our young people⁶. We support the committee in appreciating that Erasmus+ is playing an important role in developing the skills and experience of volunteers and professionals who support young people, such as youth workers, and teachers and staff in further and higher education⁷.

³ Ibid

⁴

https://www.parliament.scot/S5_European/General%20Documents/CTEEA_2019.05.07_ConvToUKSecStateForEdu.pdf

⁶ Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, Official Report, 25 April 2019, Col.28
[https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/Committees/Report/CTEERC/2018/3/14/Erasmus-](https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/Committees/Report/CTEERC/2018/3/14/Erasmus-Recommendations) Recommendations from the Scottish Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee on Wednesday 14 March, 2018 following committee evidence session on Erasmus+

⁷ Ibid

5.

YouthLink Scotland and Youth Scotland launched a joint report earlier this year on Brexit and youth work in Scotland called "*Hear EU*". The report detailed research on youth workers' perceptions of the impact of the UK leaving the EU on the youth work sector, on communities and on young people. We reached out to three contributors to gain their thoughts on youth work's role in talking to young people on issues like Brexit. Some of their comments are noted below:

Rachael Hatfield, Vice-Chair of Highland Youth Parliament and #iwill Ambassador

"As a young person I believe that youth work has a crucial place in letting young people talk about some of the most divisive political issues we face, such as Brexit. Now, I'm not talking about voting intentions or influencing us to think a certain opinion to be correct, I'm talking about the participation ethos that surrounds youth work, as well as youth workers being able to help us find our voices. Youth work is prime placed to help us understand what is happening in the world we live in, especially when these decisions are being made about us, for us, yet without us".

Dave Beck, Lecturer in Community Development, University of Glasgow:

"Youth Work is needed to help rebuild a vibrant, participatory democracy where there are spaces to think, challenge and hold all accountable for shaping our collective future. Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child states that all children should be given a say the decisions that affect them. But engagement must be learned; and democracy is learned by practicing democracy. And so, it is not just the conversations that we have with young people that is important, it is "an insistence upon a democratic practice, within which every effort is made to ensure that young people play the fullest part in making decisions about anything affecting them".

Maria Doyle, Legal Research Officer, Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

"Youth work gives us the knowledge and understanding we need to have a say in our rights and a say in what can be changed. Young people consistently stress how important youth work is in their lives. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the right of every child and young person to be listened to and have their views taken seriously. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child stresses how young people are "agents of change" and have the "potential to contribute positively to their families, communities and countries".

The report found that youth workers perception of future funding for Scotland's youth work sector can be broadly understood in the following ways:

- Youth work will experience a negative financial impact irrespective of Brexit due to reductions in public services and spending

- Youth work funding will be impacted as a consequence of Brexit's impact on the wider economy
- Youth work will have less funding as a direct impact of Brexit because of the loss of specific EU programme and project funds such as Leader, Erasmus+, ESF.

There is concern that the loss of these funds will affect organisations ability to develop international cooperation and that it will disproportionately impact organisations in rural areas. Further, that it will have a detrimental effect on staff learning and development and for young people to experience new places, culture, and volunteer, work, or study in Europe¹⁸.

6.

The feelings of unease about youth work's financial future are reflective of what many organisations heard previously from the sector and foreseen by Coburn and Gormally in 2017⁹. However, the findings do provide additional insight as to the specific work areas and priorities that may be impacted by the loss of direct funds from the EU (beyond Erasmus+), namely for youth employability and rural areas.

7.

We supported focus groups for "*A Better Brexit for Young People*" encompassing research from 40 groups, a YouGov poll of over 3,000 diverse respondents and 5 consultation events. This included young people from all over the United Kingdom, drawn from a diverse range of economic, social and geographical backgrounds, overwhelmingly speaking of a vision of a more equal and globally inclusive country. The report calls on the UK and the EU to work with young people to ensure their aspirations for post-Brexit Britain are reflected during the negotiation process¹⁰.

8.

We will continue to campaign for the long term security of the Erasmus+ fund, work with other organisations to better understand the demographics of the youth work sector, including in relation to non-UK EU citizens and their contribution to our workforce. Our intention is to provide support, advice, and trusted information related to Brexit and impacts for local authority and voluntary youth work organisations. We urge the Scottish Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee to continue to collaborate with us in this aim.

9.

Our support for the EU Youth Strategy is long standing with many of the aims already being achieved in Scotland. We believe in positive collaboration to further the

⁸ [Hear.EU report](#)

⁹ [Coburn and Gormally Report](#) *Facilitated via the European Engagement Working Group*

¹⁰ <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/research/research-projects/a-better-brexit-for-young-people>

empowerment of young people and their role in society and shared understanding of support for youth work as a vehicle to that end.

10.

YouthLink Scotland hopes that the Scottish Government's future relationship with the EU and with countries outside the EU will be one which invests in and facilitates international exchange and collaboration for the benefit of young people, youth workers and the youth work sector.

ENDS