



## **YouthLink Scotland response to National Improvement Framework consultation on enhanced data collection for improvement**

### **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 ethical, equitable and non-discriminatory. We are an organisation that promotes learning, innovation and progressive thinking and we are committed to the highest standards of protection and safety for young people.

Our vision is for a nation that values its young people and their contribution to society, supported through key 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 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 workforce that is confident, skilled, well led and effective, while playing an essential role in delivering Scotland's national outcomes. As part of this process, we have been calling for greater recognition of youth work's integral role within the education system. This includes delivering the key priorities for the National Improvement Framework (NIF). This ensures we collectively deliver on children and young people rights to equality of opportunity to positive and excellent educational outcomes regardless of their background. It is within this context we are responding to the NIF consultation on enhanced data collection for improvement. Our response includes a focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap.

### **Response**

The consultation seeks to ensure that the NIF reflects the ambitions of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and other key national policy priorities, including health and wellbeing and renewal from COVID-19.

Youth work is an integral part of the Scottish education system<sup>1</sup>. The shared purpose of which is to ensure that all children and young people develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to reach their potential in learning, life and work. This is reinforced in the refreshed narrative for CfE, noting that *“The curriculum is more than curriculum areas and subjects. It is the totality of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education.”*<sup>2</sup>. This should be viewed within the context of youth work being a practice that supports and enhances the basic rights of young people.

In partnership with schools, youth work improves the wellbeing, readiness to learn and educational outcomes of children and young people<sup>3</sup>. The youth work sector contributes to delivering the key priorities outlined in the NIF<sup>4</sup> and helps to achieve excellence and equity through:

- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education
- Improvement in children and young people’s health and wellbeing
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people
- Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people
- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

In 2021, Scottish Government invested £3million for a Youth Work Education Recovery Fund (YWERF), recognising the vital role of youth work to support children and young people’s educational recovery. The evaluation report from the fund provides significant evidence that these youth work interventions improved confidence, skills, health and wellbeing, engagement with learning, achievement and attainment.

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>5</sup>.

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. Local authorities and school leaders are encouraged to work in partnership with youth

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<sup>1</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/scottish-education-system/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.education.gov.scot/Documents/btc4.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> PEF Operational Guidance

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/achieving-excellence-equity-2022-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/documents/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5319/national-evaluation-publication.pdf>

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. Scottish Government also funds YouthLink Scotland to deliver one of the SAC national programmes. This is focussed on ensuring consistent and effective collaboration between schools and youth work to close the poverty-related attainment gap. Support through YouthLink Scotland will also ensure youth work continues to play a vital role in delivering the purpose of Scottish education to develop a broad range of skills, knowledge and attributes needed to succeed in learning, life and work<sup>6</sup>.

We recognise that this consultation is part of wider education reform. YouthLink Scotland welcomed the report<sup>7</sup> from Professor Ken Muir's work. In particular we were encouraged by recognition of the importance of promoting the development of skills alongside knowledge and understanding and to "*better recognise and value the wider achievements of all learners and deliver parity of esteem across different qualifications and awards*"<sup>8</sup>. This ambition is also reflected in the refreshed SAC, which seeks to encourage, reflect and value "*the breadth of achievements that contribute to improved outcomes for children.*"

We agree that the proposed changes to data collection should seek to reflect the ambition for CfE and national policy priorities such as health and wellbeing and confidence – including, priorities for COVID-19 renewal and improvement. Ken Muir's report similarly advised that overarching policies such as the NIF and SAC "*may need to evolve further*" in light of his recommendations.

YouthLink Scotland therefore calls on Scottish Government to:

Take a human-rights based approach by recognising what we value in all learning.

This means:

- Demonstrating the value of young people's progress and achievements across all contexts and settings e.g. progress and achievement through non-formal learning such as youth work. This will align with the SAC ambition to consider equity across the four contexts of learning, and across settings
- Using language consistently to demonstrate parity of esteem with formal learning. For example, remove references to 'wider' achievement and 'extra-curricular'. Personal learning and achievement is one of the four (equal) contexts through which learners experience the curriculum. This includes non-formal learning settings and approaches. Personal learning and achievement should be given equal weighting to other, traditional, measures of attainment. This will help drive equity of opportunity to a broad curriculum offer.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/putting-learners-centre-towards-future-vision-scottish-education/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/putting-learners-centre-towards-future-vision-scottish-education/>

Use this opportunity to support delivery of the vision for the future of Scottish education

- Ensure that proposed changes to data collection help to “*drive the kind of cultural and mindset shifts*” being called for in Ken Muir’s recommendations.
- Reflect the key role of youth work articulated within policy priorities such as Scottish Attainment Challenge and key priorities for COVID-19 recovery when considering approaches to data collection<sup>9</sup>.
- Consider how the proposed changes can move us closer to addressing the purposes of education described in Article 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>10</sup>
- Consider how the proposed changes help us work across the system to capture skills and attitudes, alongside knowledge, to help young people understand their progress. The proposed enhanced data collection does not effectively value or measure skills development. It also does not recognise the range of practitioners involved in young people’s learning.
- Include youth work when developing and delivering enhanced approaches to the collation, sharing and use of data to measure progress and drive improvement.
- Develop measures and approaches to data collection to value and measure information about the achievements of learners that are not matched to SCQF levels. For example, youth awards should be valued and measured as an equitable pathway to developing and accrediting skills.

## **ENDS**

## **EDITOR’S NOTES**

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work in Scotland. Our response represents the views and interests of our membership – gathered through our local authority and national voluntary organisation networks.

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<sup>9</sup> And identified as a strength of CfE to be retained in <https://www.gov.scot/publications/putting-learners-centre-towards-future-vision-scottish-education/>

<sup>10</sup> [UNCRC summary.pdf \(unicef.org.uk\)](https://www.unicef.org/uncrc/summary.pdf)