



DRAFT Response by YouthLink Scotland on the UN Concept Note relating to Children's Rights and the Digital Environment

1.

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 therefore well positioned to respond to the UN Concept Note on Children's Rights and the Digital Environment. This response is informed by YouthLink Scotland members. However, we support the submissions made by individual members of the organisation.

2.

Digital Positive Approach

The rights of children and young people are embedded through various international treaties and within the existing legislature of many countries and notably they are enshrined via the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)¹.

3.

We are pleased that the 2018/2019 Programme for the Scottish Government sets out the Government's commitment to incorporate the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law. This will involve a period of public consultation and we look forward to being involved in the passage of any legal Bill incorporating UNCRC into the fabric of law making in Scotland. YouthLink Scotland encourages reflection on the principles of UNCRC, as part of a broader approach to

¹ European Commission: Developing Digital Youth Work, "Policy Recommendations and Training Needs" (Page 7).

digital youth work, ensuring that youth work and young people's digital cultures are supported locally, nationally and internationally.

4.

Digital youth work is supported by the same ethics, values, and principles underpinning youth work in general and we support this approach. This is reflected in the Youth Work Outcomes, which articulates the difference that youth work makes with, and for, young people in Scotland. Each outcome has a set of indicators that help youth workers and young people to comprehend the difference youth work is making and how well young people are progressing towards the outcomes. More details can be found via the YouthLink Scotland website below:

<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/policy/youth-work-outcomes/>

5.

We are supportive of the "*5Rights and The UNCRC*" campaign, aimed at enabling children and young people to access the digital world creatively, knowledgeably, and fearlessly. This approach looks at internet safety, literacy and empowerment for young people under a single framework. The 5Rights Youth Commission is made up of 19 young people aged 14-21 from across 12 different local authority areas in Scotland. The people and groups involved are diverse in nature and devoted to making sure all children and young people are empowered in the digital world by the same rights they have offline. The 5Rights Framework includes:

- Right to Remove
- Right to Know
- Right to Support and Safety
- Right to Informed and Conscious Use
- Right to Digital Literacy.

For more information and for ideas how this might be incorporated within the UN Concept Note, including thoughts around the role of governments, educators youth workers, businesses, and parents and carers, identified barriers and recommendations, we commend the 5Rights and the UNCRC campaign section of the YoungScot website:

<https://young.scot/5rights/>

6.

Through YouthLink Scotland's direct participation on the digital youth work expert group (set up under the European Union Work Plan for Youth for youth between 2016 and 2018) and engagement with our members - we consider that the best approach is to foster ideas around the crucial role digital participation plays as part of modern life.

7.

There is an acknowledgement that young people in Europe spend a significant amount of time consuming various forms of media and technology, including video streaming, messaging, blogging and gaming etc. This provides a platform to share experiences, exchange views, interact with friends, and provide a contribution to society. However, access to the internet and social media can be problematic for the most disadvantaged young people, particularly when they leave school, or are not in training². We are enthusiastic to see the issue of accessibility considered at each stage of policy and practice development. This includes youth work practitioners who can benefit from digital technologies in the delivery of quality youth work. Understanding of beneficial digital technologies should be widened³ as young people will require technological skills and as such, the youth work sector should aim to embed positive digital use in everyday practice.

8.

We should involve young people in all stages of design, development, implementation, and review of digital youth work and take account of barriers to involvement and how those barriers can be overcome. Further, any EU recommendations in this area, should be accompanied by raising awareness of digital rights and how this fits into the wider framework of rights. This will assist parents, teachers, and carers, families, and youth workers to build a positive and trusting relationship with young people around their digital use.

Risks

9.

Young people consulted for YouthLink Scotland's Action on Prejudice Programme commented on the Scottish Government's recent consultation on hate crime in relation to aspects of digital communication. The strong view expressed amongst the vast majority of young people is that online hate crime is a significant issue and takes place on social media outlets. Some examples included, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and WhatsApp. Young people felt that online hate crime is not currently treated the same as face-to-face hate crime by the criminal justice system or in society. Some testimony included the following:

- *"People actually get away with it online, and I think that's why people feel more comfortable to be hateful to other people online"*
- *"People belittle cyber-attacks and cyber-bullying far more than they treat face to face...socially I would say it's not taken as seriously".*

² Youth Participation in Democratic Life, LSE, 2013.

³ National Youth Council of Ireland, 2016.

There was an identified need to stop the cycle of online abuse as its effect was viewed as serious and sometimes permanent. The permanence refers to online abuse being written, audio or video recorded, leading to the reach being wider as the abuse can be shared, read, and re-read. Many of the young people discussed how they felt online abuse was worse than in-person, however that it is currently not treated as seriously, even though it has either the same or a greater impact on the victims and can reach a wider audience. Some young people stated,

“It has the same effect...as if someone was saying it to you...so you’ll still feel the same...you’ll still feel hurt by what they’ve said...it’s just not been said out loud, it’s been written”

“I think it’s worse because they are protected by the screen...they are more likely to say something worse and on the internet you can contact many more people than you can when you are just out in the public”.

10.

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) produced a report on the Scottish Government on the Children’s Parliament consultation on the Privacy Impact Assessment of Glow⁴, part of which is summarised below:

Messages from children about their use of technology included:

- Children associate using technology with having fun, learning and connecting with other people
- Children like using technology because it is fun and entertaining. At the same time children feel a tension between using technology and doing other activities, like going outside and being active. They worry they might become “addicted” to technology
- Children feel that technology is an important part of their lives and that it should be incorporated into more aspects of teaching and learning. Technology helps them develop new skills and learn new information
- Children value the internet’s ability to help them stay connected to the people in their lives
- Children say that learning is best when it is active and engaging. They use Glow in order to access games that help with their learning, such as practising maths and developing language skills
- All children like using technology, but they have different views as to the amount of adult involvement or supervision they want. Younger children like using technology with their parents or carers so that they can be supported in accessing technology and older children appreciate feeling trusted to go online on their own

⁴ Glow is the Scottish School National Campaign to end Mental Health Stigma and Discrimination.

- Children want adults to help them navigate technology so they feel safe, confident and capable. Children say that using technology is best when it is fun and feels safe. They want to learn how to use technology safely, but they can be scared off when they experience it negatively (like cyber bullying or seeing adult images) and when adults focus predominantly on the risks (like being approached by strangers or being asked for personal information)
- Children value their online privacy. They are protective of their passwords and personal information and they are concerned about their information being available to people they don't know.

Many children say that they love using technology and would like it to be part of their jobs in the future and they want opportunities to play with actively creating content, as well as consuming content like games. They say that they would like to connect with other children who are passionate about technology and would like to help each other learn and be part of an online community. Children acknowledge a tension between technology being a way to have fun, learn new things and connect with friends and with technology at times feeling scary, unsafe, uncomfortable and confusing.

The full report can be found here:

<https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CP-Children-and-technology-Report-2014-Reduced-File-Size.pdf>

11.

YouthLink Scotland Member, Girlguiding Scotland, reports that:

- 27% of girls aged 13-25 reported to have experienced sexual harassment (eg. sexist comments or jokes, cat-calls, unwanted attention or touching) while on social media within the past year (2018)
- 13% of girls aged 12-25 said they would like to be taught (would like to have been taught) digital skills at school.

This data is from Girlguiding Scotland's "*Girls in Scotland Survey 2018*". The full Girls in Scotland survey can be downloaded [here](#).

12.

We recommend that the UN Concept Note acknowledges the risks inherent through negative digital use and the impact that can have on young people, their communities, and the youth work sector.

13.

YouthLink Scotland is content to enter into further dialogue with the UN on this matter and to represent the views of the youth work sector.

ENDS

EDITOR'S NOTES

The full report from The European Commission's Developing Digital Youth Work, "*Policy and Recommendations and Training Needs*" for youth workers and decision makers (which included Youthlink Scotland as the UK representative) can be found here: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fbc18822-07cb-11e8-b8f5-01aa75ed71a1>