



Education Reform: position statement from Scottish Youth Work Leaders

Introduction

The purpose of Scottish education is to ensure that all children and young people develop the knowledge, skills and attributes to reach their potential in learning, life and work. Youth work in Scotland is part of the education system¹. It is a valuable element of the learner journey for all children and young people, helping them to develop a broad range of skills, capacities and achievements to support them to succeed. It complements and enhances delivery of the formal curriculum, and the provision of support for pupils, contributing to raising attainment and improving outcomes for young people, especially, but not exclusively those impacted by poverty. The role and impact of youth work within education is further outlined in [Youth work: a guide for schools](#).

The Scottish Youth Work Leaders Forum believes that education reform is an opportunity to transform our education system. Professor Ken Muir's report [Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education](#) recommended a number of structural and cultural changes, to take forward the OECD recommendations² and deliver excellence and equity in education. 'Putting Learners at the Centre' is key to achieving the ambitions laid out in Ken Muir's report and delivering the OECD recommendations. We support the view that a rights-based approach is the only way to achieve excellence and equity through Scottish education and to get it right for every child and young person.

As Scotland moves to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law and with a Scottish Human Rights Bill on the horizon, education reform provides us with an opportunity to create a system of education that supports *"the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential"*³. An equitable and rights-based offer for all learners around education must include access to youth work.

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).

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

² <https://www.oecd.org/education/scotland-s-curriculum-for-excellence-bf624417-en.htm>

³ [The Right to Education - UNICEF UK](#)

We call for education reform to drive a transformed education system that seeks to address the purposes described in Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) through:

- The creation of a renewed and shared vision for education which accords narrative privilege to youth workers, and drives the culture change needed to better recognise the sector's role in education.
- New national agencies for Scottish education, as proposed by education reform, will more fully reflect and support the role of youth work within education.
- A curriculum which delivers a more equitable balance across all four capacities⁴, settings and contexts for learning, and which promotes the development of skills alongside knowledge and understanding.
- An assessment and qualification system which supports progression in young people's learning across settings, better recognises and values the wider achievements of all learners and delivers parity of esteem across different qualifications and awards.
- Ensuring that young people's voices are consistently heard and valued, that they are genuinely involved in their learning, and encouraged to become critical thinkers.
- Youth work's role is valued within the post school education, research, and skills ecosystem in Scotland.

Renewed and shared vision for education

Ken Muir recommended a national discussion to establish a 'compelling and consensual vision for the future of Scottish education'. His report called for the discussion to consider the vision for Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and how the education system seeks to address the purposes described in Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The process would require a cultural and mindset shift, including according narrative privilege to all those with an interest.

On 14 June 2022, Education Secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville invited children, young people, families and teachers to join a National Discussion on Education. She called for "*fresh, innovative ideas to help to deliver change and drive improvement*" and for this to be "*the most inclusive ever discussion on education in Scotland*", bringing "*the widest possible range of voices and views into the room*"⁵.

Scottish Youth Work Leaders call for:

- **The creation of a renewed and shared vision for education which accords narrative privilege to youth workers, and drives the culture change needed to better recognise the sector's role in education.**

⁴ <https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/3/>

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/news/national-discussion-on-education/>

- The youth work sector must be included and heard as valued contributors in the national discussion, with opportunity to debate and challenge emerging suggestions as part of the eco-system.
- A focused conversation should take place with youth workers, in partnership with YouthLink Scotland.
- Young people participating through youth work will have their voice heard and valued.
- Scottish Government and COSLA should work with the youth work sector to ensure young people understand the possibilities for the future of Scottish education. In particular the role of youth work in realising the right to education in its broadest sense.
- The renewed, shared vision will strengthen shared understanding of roles across the system and contribute towards valuing youth work equitably as part of education.

New national agencies for Scottish education

Scottish education remains too narrowly defined. It is too often understood as formal learning, planned and delivered by teachers, in a formal setting. This is not consistent with the national rhetoric for Curriculum for Excellence, which clearly states that the curriculum is *“the totality of all that is planned for children and young people from early learning and childcare, through school and beyond”*⁶.

Youth work does not always feel included in the support provided by national education agencies, for other parts of the system. This includes career pathways, opportunities for continued professional development and workforce wellbeing support. The workforce also includes tens of thousands of volunteers who are also committed to continuous learning and development and deserve recognition and support. The sector is also not sufficiently represented in curriculum development and review. The terms of the CLD regulations, and its implications for resource allocation, exacerbate this challenge and so the regulations need reviewed as a matter of urgency.

We would encourage the Scottish Government to consider how the creation of new national agencies can strengthen understanding and investment to enable youth work to fulfil its potential role within CfE.

Scottish Youth Work Leaders call for:

- **New national agencies for Scottish education to more fully reflect and support the role of youth work within education.**

⁶ <https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/4/>

- The new national education agency will work with YouthLink Scotland and other key bodies to reflect, support and invest in the professional learning and wider workforce needs of youth work.
- Staffing should include those with experience of the youth work sector, to encourage and facilitate collaboration and culture change across the system.
- The new agencies will drive the culture change required to value youth work as part of education.
- Consideration of the role of youth work in supporting the scrutiny process and evidence gathering within inspections focused on 'education' rather than institution.
- Youth work to be included in a curriculum and assessment agency. This includes being involved in discussions to consider curriculum development, review and approaches to assessment/measuring progress.
- Support from national agencies to further embed youth work within the accountability framework for CfE. This would include exploring and resourcing the development of a common impact measurement framework and how youth work can enhance the measurement of progress under health and wellbeing.
- Investment in youth work's role around learner participation, as an integral and ongoing element of curriculum review and as part of the curriculum experience for all learners.
- Further ensuring youth work is recognised and resourced as a critical component in building a confident, skilled and compassionate young workforce, as outlined in the National Youth Work Strategy 2021-2026.

Curriculum development

To achieve our vision for excellence and equity, all learners should be given a broader offer, based on their needs, which includes non-formal learning such as youth work (including youth awards) as an equitable component. This will require a more collaborative approach to curriculum design, delivering a more equal balance of experiences for learners to develop across the four capacities and contexts for curriculum.

The OECD recommended that Scotland considers how the curriculum provides opportunities to develop a broader range of skills and capacities, alongside knowledge, as captured in the four capacities for CfE⁷. Education reform must acknowledge that many young people are already developing a broad range of skills and the CfE capacities out-with the formal classroom, for example, through youth work, including youth awards⁸.

⁷ <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/cfe-building-from-the-statement-appendix-incl-btc1-5/what-is-curriculum-for-excellence>

⁸ <https://www.awardsnetwork.org/>

Reform should also consider how strengthened collaboration with youth work can help plan and deliver learner experiences across the four contexts for curriculum⁹. For example, *personal learning and achievement* helps young people to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills for learning, life and work. Greater emphasis should be placed on this within curriculum design, working in collaboration with youth work and youth awards, who play a key role in planning and delivering opportunities for personal learning and achievement, in formal and community learning settings. Youth work also has particular strengths in designing and delivering *interdisciplinary learning* and *ethos and life of school as a community* and can complement learning through *curriculum areas and subjects*.

Scottish Youth Work Leaders call for:

- **A curriculum which delivers a more equitable balance across all four capacities¹⁰, settings and contexts for learning, and which promotes the development of skills alongside knowledge and understanding.**
- Greater alignment between community planning, school planning and education service improvement plans, and a whole sector approach to strategic planning to close the poverty related attainment gap at local authority level.
- A right to access youth work as part of every learner's education experience.
- National policy for education will promote youth work as a valuable and integral element of the learner journey for all children and young people, helping them to develop a broad range of skills, capacities and achievements to allow them to succeed, across formal and non-formal settings.
- Through strengthened partnership with youth work (including youth awards), a wider range of pathways and opportunities should be available for learners making subject choices and entering the Senior Phase.

Qualifications and assessment

We support the Scottish Government commitment to develop approaches to qualification and assessment which are better aligned with the four capacities. However, the reform of qualifications and assessment (being led by Professor Louise Hayward) is also an important opportunity to recognise and value young people's learning, skills development and achievements across contexts and settings.

The process must include consideration of how we work across the system to capture skills and attitudes, alongside knowledge, to help young people understand their progress. Learning and progress through youth work (including youth awards) needs to be included to measure across all four capacities and to collect a broader range of measures such as health and wellbeing. This is also the only way we will achieve Ken Muir's recommendation that qualifications and assessment "*better recognise and*

⁹ <https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/4/>

¹⁰ <https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/3/>

value the wider achievements of all learners and deliver parity of esteem across different qualifications and awards”.

Additionally, an assessment system which only captures formal attainment and achievements does not represent a rights-based approach.

Scottish Youth Work Leaders call for:

- **A qualifications and assessment system which supports progression in young people’s learning across settings, better recognises and values the wider achievements of all learners and delivers parity of esteem across different qualifications and awards.**
- A new curriculum and assessment agency must include staffing with youth work background.
- Develop the Insight pupil tracking tool to capture a broader range of qualifications, such as those not included in SCQF. This should also extend to broad general education (BGE) phase and include youth awards (including those not included in SCQF) as valid evidence of achievement.
- Assessment should better recognise the importance of skills development, progress across all four capacities and improvement across non-formal learning settings.
- A wider range of measures to be used across the education system, valued as equally as traditional attainment measures. This will include youth awards.

Learner engagement

We support the steps being taken to ensure that learner voice is central to the reform process with greater focus placed on learner participation beyond the reform, to deliver a rights-based approach to education. Crucially, youth participation is embedded within youth work in Scotland. It is one of the National Youth Work Outcomes¹¹ and youth workers have particular skills and expertise in supporting children and young people to participate in their own learning and in the life and work of their school and wider community.

The review is an opportunity to strengthen recognition of youth work’s role in supporting engagement of young people in the reform process and helping the wider system understand the needs and views of young people into the future. This includes engaging with seldom heard groups, where relationships and long-term support are key. Ensuring young people are genuinely involved in their learning, encouraging them to become critical thinkers must be further embedded as part of the curriculum experience for all learners. Additionally, youth work can lead in this area of work, sharing practice and encouraging improvement as an integral part of the educational workforce in schools and beyond. However, this requires significant and consistent investment.

¹¹ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/policy-research/outcomes-and-skills/>

Scottish Youth Work Leaders call for:

- **Reform to ensure that young people's voices are consistently heard and valued, that they are genuinely involved in their learning, and encouraged to become critical thinkers.**
- Consider how the proposed changes to education can move us closer to addressing the purposes of education described in Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- Youth work should be recognised and invested in to lead in this area of work, as an integral part of the educational workforce in schools and beyond.

Post school education, research and skills

As part of the education and skills system, youth work supports young people across their learner journey to reach their full potential. This includes playing a vital role in the post-school ecosystem. Youth work is flexible and responsive in how it supports young people, with a particular focus on those furthest from the labour market, to overcome barriers, develop skills and progress towards and into employment. This includes one-to-one support, careers information, advice and guidance, youth awards and quality, meaningful volunteering and work experience opportunities that meet their goals and aspirations. The ability of youth work to support young people through key transitions is an important element of how Scotland can deliver a coherent and relevant experience for young people, across their learner journey.

Scottish Youth Work Leaders call for:

- **Youth work's role to be valued within the post school education, research, and skills ecosystem in Scotland**
- The role of youth work is clearly understood and valued in the development of a clear purpose and set of principles for post-school education, skills and research.
- A coherent learner journey through and beyond school which recognises the life-long nature of learning and aligns with future skills needs and strategic economic policy priorities.

Summary

Education reform is an opportunity to transform Scottish education for our children and young people. To genuinely put learners at the centre, we must work collectively to listen to what young people need, across all the places where they learn, and deliver their right to education in its fullest sense.

Youth work improves the wellbeing, readiness to learn and educational outcomes of children and young people. An equitable and rights-based offer for all learners around education must include access to youth work.

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