

YOUTHLINK SCOTLAND POLICY CONSULTATION PROTOCOL

Protocol Purpose

This protocol should be used by YouthLink Scotland staff to determine the appropriate course of action to fulfil our public policy function. It will assist staff by setting out clear steps and actions which should be undertaken in a manner which is timely, proportionate, and relevant. This protocol also establishes principles of how we deliver our policy function at YouthLink Scotland.

Principles:

- To act in a manner which furthers the interests, profile, and understanding of youth work in Scotland.
- To act within the framework of YouthLink Scotland's vision, mission and organisational values
- To develop responses which are reflective of inclusive practice, equalities and young people's human rights.
- To be reflective of the views of YouthLink Scotland members
- To be transparent, open and accessible to members, partners and other stakeholders.

Context

In each financial year, YouthLink Scotland will respond on average to 20 public policy consultations. These requests will come primarily from the Scottish Government, but also from the Scottish Parliament and UK Parliament by way of committee inquiries. It may also include specific or one-off consultations by partner organisations or stakeholders.

There has been an increased trend towards digital consultation, with responses to consultations largely being required to be submitted using an online portal. In the case of the Scottish Government, the tool is called Citizen Space. Responses made using Citizen Space are then included in analysis of responses by the Scottish Government. Citizen Space responses can be saved and edited, and generates a PDF version of the submitted form.

This protocol seeks to establish a logical, practical, and achievable process for policy consultations responses—consulting meaningfully with our membership when that is both possible and appropriate, and drawing on existing insights, intelligence and experience in order to react quickly to specific member needs. The protocol also considers communication with members and stakeholders at all stages of the policy cycle and takes cognisance of the time required to decide a policy consultation might not be appropriate, however that it is considered in the best interests of the sector to influence via other means or one of our members are better placed to respond.

Consultation Protocol: The Process

This protocol should be used for public consultations, this is broadly defined as those published by the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament, UK Parliament or any other body/organisation where comment is invited openly and transparently by a fixed date.

Step 1: Identification of Policy Opportunities

All YouthLink Scotland staff have a responsibility for identifying possible policy consultations, relevant to the youth work sector. These may come to staff via email, newsletters, be identified on social media, or mentioned at meetings or events you attend. In the first instance, you should check if the consultation is

already listed on our website (if yes, no further action is required; if no, then please send any information you have to the Policy and Research team).

The Policy and Research team will be subscribed to notifications/alerts from public bodies informing of new consultations. They will also regularly review the Scottish Government Citizen Space portal for new and relevant consultations.

Taking cognisance of capacity, YouthLink Scotland cannot respond to every public consultation, and the Policy and Research Manager will have responsibility for deciding which consultations we respond to in consultation with the Chief Executive. Consideration will be given to relevance to youth work and impact on young people and their human rights, and on third sector, public sector or governance. This will also be factored against staff capacity and organisational priorities at the time of the consultation period.

Step 2: Communication of Policy Opportunities

The Policy and Research Manager will request that the consultation we are responding to is listed on our website. When we are responding to the consultation this should be clearly stated and a named point of contact provided on the website listing. This should then be included in the subsequent Youth Work Briefing, and repeated again within 4 weeks of its closing date. Once posted on the website, Social Media content will also be generated and posted during the consultation period.

If it is the case that the consultation should be listed, but YouthLink Scotland is not making a response, then these can also be included on our website.

For policy responses which are particular and specific to youth work, the opportunity to respond should also be shared by email to all YouthLink Scotland members. Where a policy response may impact on a particular sub-group of our membership, a tailored email should be sent i.e. third sector, outdoor learning, children's sector, equality and faith groups etc.

Members will be reminded regularly that opportunities for policy consultation will primarily be communicated via the Youth Work Briefing, to reduce their email traffic.

Step 3: Gathering Views

The Policy and Research Team will identify key consultation questions from those provided, and will also develop any additional or specific questions related to youth work which should be considered.

The Policy and Research Team should determine the level of sector engagement which will be required to produce an informed and influential policy response. The response should be informed by (but not limited to):

- YouthLink Scotland's Strategic Plan
- YouthLink Scotland's networks
- professional knowledge and judgement
- the practice and experiences of YouthLink Scotland members
- YouthLink Scotland's national programmes
- YouthLink Scotland's manifesto
- Youth Work Outcomes
- National Youth Work Strategy
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- trusted research
- policy and political horizon scanning linked to upcoming opportunities and;

- publications by our members and partners such as policy/research impact or annual reports.

Members should be invited to give their views, as described in Step 2. Should response and information be required to specific questions these should be included in email communication to the named member contact. Should the response require collective discussion and sharing of multiple experiences/perspectives we should utilise existing member networks to organise relevant meetings and agenda items. Opportunity to participate using digital means should be provided as standard.

YouthLink Scotland should utilise its frequent network events, and where possible members' views should be sought within the business of these networks – either to raise members' awareness, or to dedicate time for discussion within the network meeting.

Step 4: Preparing a Response

The Policy and Research Team should prepare a draft written response, where possible at least 10 working days, before the consultation deadline. YouthLink Scotland staff with relevant expertise in an area may be asked to help prepare responses. Capacity and appropriateness will be taken into account by the Policy and Research Manager. A final draft should then be sent to SMT, where possible at least 5 working days before the consultation deadline. SMT are invited to provide final comment. The consultation response should be submitted by the Policy and Research Team, 1 day before the consultation deadline. There may be certain policy responses completed well in advance of the consultation deadline to then be distributed to the sector to inform possible responses they might wish to make to strengthen the position of the sector and build intelligence on key issues. This will be considered in the context of wider priorities and on a case by case basis.

Step 5: Submission of Responses

The submission should be made in a timely manner. The submission should be submitted using the preferred means of response from the consultation organiser, usually Citizen Space, or by email. Confirmation of submission should be requested and noted.

When Citizen Space has been used, a copy of the response should be presented in to published document (PDF), and set out where possible using the terms of the style guide below.

A copy of the final submission should be sent SMT, and to the PA to the Chief Executive for inclusion in YouthLink Scotland Board papers.

Step 6: Communicating Policy Responses

Once the response has been made and the date of the consultation deadline has passed, the website listing for the consultation should be changed to "closed". Our response should then be uploaded to the website. Social media listings should be generated and posted to share the publication of the response.

The response will be communicated to the YouthLink Scotland Board at the next occurring Board meeting.

Step 7: Influencing

YouthLink Scotland may choose to share their policy response directly and purposefully with other organisations, this may be done in advance of submission or following submission. This serves to further the understanding of youth work, and to create opportunities for collaboration.

The policy response becomes the organisation's position on the relevant topic, and should be referenced for future influencing, lobbying or campaigning activity.

Policy response should be acknowledged by the Public Affairs Manager and Communication Team who may develop an influencing strategy based on the response – such as targeting the response to specific decision-makers, or for engaging the media via press releases.

Step 8: Evaluating Policy Impact

The Policy and Research Team should annually review and evaluate the policy influencing function. The toolkit *Charting the Waters* provides a suitable framework for this evaluation.

http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/media/uploads/resources/charting_the_waters_-_how_to_evaluate_policy_influencing_work.pdf

The Policy and Research Team should proactively seek publication of analysis reports from consultations that YouthLink Scotland has responded to, as well as final publications. These publications should be reviewed for content which favours youth work, or where changes have been made that reflect our policy response.

When appropriate, a comment/response to the final publication should be made as a Statement from the Chief Executive and posted on our website and social media channels.

Additional Notes

- a) A timeframe for each consultation process with deadlines to respond will be intimated at the start of each process and these will differ from consultation to consultation.
- b) Where there are any conflicting views that cannot be reconciled the final decision on wording lies with the Chief Executive or in their absence by the Policy and Research Manager.
- c) A respondent list (of members) will be kept for each consultation to track engagement, comments and amendments suggested. All draft documents will be dated and version control will be tracked – this information will be in the document Header.
- d) YouthLink Scotland prepares policy responses on behalf of our membership, and will do so by representing a position which has consensus across the membership. It does not claim to be the position of any one individual member or of all member organisations. Individual member organisations retain the right, and are encouraged, to make their own response.

ENDS