



YouthLink Scotland Submission to Scottish Government on the Resource Spending Review 2022

YouthLink Scotland

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 the voluntary and statutory sector. Our vision is of a nation which values its young people and their contribution to society and where young people are supported to achieve their potential.

Scotland's youth work sector reaches in excess of 380,000 young people in youth work opportunities each week. The activities, venues, and approaches utilised to deliver youth work are varied. This includes youth clubs, youth projects, specialist or targeted provision, social activism, outdoor learning, awards programmes, uniformed organisations, digital, and democratic participation. Youth work in all its forms provides fundamental support to young people across all 32 of Scotland's local authorities, supported by voluntary organisations and 1000s of local youth work volunteers.

Introduction

This submission to Scottish Government on the Resource Spending Review¹ makes the imperative case for investment in youth work services and concludes with the key outcomes we would like to see in relation to budgeting and resourcing of local authority and voluntary youth services.

¹ <https://consult.gov.scot/budget-and-public-spending/resource-spending-review-framework/>

At the third annual cabinet meeting with children and young people held in 2019, one of the issues raised by the young people present was ensuring the legacy of the year of young people 2018. Of particular interest was diminishing budgets to youth work services. This resulted in one of the key actions agreed by the Cabinet Ministers noted below:

*"We will consider resourcing for participation of children and young people, including examining current funding streams, to ensure that participation is sustainable. In doing so, we will consider how national approaches to participation are reflected in the local structures which can facilitate participation"*².

This was followed by a reinforced commitment by Scottish Government to an ambitious new National Youth Work Strategy (2022-2027), highlighting the year of young people and youth work's role in supporting young people at the heart of policy development³. Youth work's significant role in the lives of young people was echoed throughout the parliamentary process of incorporating The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law⁴ and the role of youth work as an equal partner in education has been reiterated during on-going education reform⁵ and as part of the review of Scotland's curriculum⁶.

More recently the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund (YWERF) Impact Report⁷ highlighted the instrumental role youth work does to support education renewal from COVID19. It showed a total of 17,904 young people across Scotland benefited from YWERF, experiencing improvements in wellbeing, learning engagement and skills development. In particular, it illustrated the powerful impact youth work and schools and Community Learning and Development (CLD) partnerships in the community can have at improving outcomes for young people.

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/third-annual-cabinet-meeting-with-children-and-young-people/>

³ [Scottish Government announces commitment to new National Youth Work Strategy from 2020 | Together Scotland](#)

⁴ [Youth work is human rights work - Children's and Young People's Centre for Justice \(cycj.org.uk\)](#)

⁵ [YouthLink Scotland | Education reform consultation on behalf of Professor Ken Muir, University of the West of Scotland and Independent Advisor to the Scottish Government](#)

⁶ Ibid

⁷ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/7037/ywerf-report-2022-final.pdf>

Evidence gathered from young people, teachers, parents, youth workers and other partners over the course of the programme demonstrated that, of young people participating in funded programmes:

- 82% developed their skills
- 79% experienced improved health and wellbeing
- 78% overcame barriers to learning
- 61% were more engaged in learning
- 37% achieved recognition of achievement and attainment e.g. youth awards.

One teacher said: *"This project ensured young people were able to achieve qualifications they wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity to engage with. For one of our pupils in particular, this project was the first time he had engaged with productive learning in two years. He now has skills and qualifications to achieve a post-school destination"*

Another major finding of the report was the consistent positive impact that youth work partnerships had on young people's sense of health and wellbeing. 79% reporting improvements in wellbeing by participating in funded projects and parents were quick to praise the impact of youth work activities: *"Our youth worker has been amazing at identifying my daughter's needs with mental health. This has enabled her to offer my daughter better and more personalised support"*.

One young person added: *"I can deal with my emotions much better now and feel supported if I have a bad day...I have also been helped with how to talk to teachers better now as I used to get chucked out of the class a lot for shouting back at them if they spoke to me in a way I did not like. Dealing with my emotions and anger in school has been one of the best things I learned to do"*.

Youth work and the financial challenges facing local authorities and opportunity of the resource spending review

We know youth work helps to improve outcomes for young people. However, reductions to youth work services, and the resulting staff changes and shortages, means there are now fewer opportunities for youth workers to build

trust and rapport and maintain continuity with young people. The youth workers in Scotland surveyed by YouthLink and those surveyed by UNISON Scotland⁸ described the devastating cuts to the sector as indicative of a lack of value placed on their skills and of the processes of youth work which enable these relationships with young people to be established.

YouthLink Scotland acknowledges the pressure placed on Local and National Governments. We recognise that the resources available to deliver services have fallen in real terms. However, in a time of financial challenges for Scotland's local authorities, it is crucial to draw attention to the value of youth work and evidence that investing in our young people provides considerable long-term benefits. Numerous surveys of youth workers highlight perceived reductions to youth work services, budgets and staffing across Scotland over the last five years. This is a serious concern. As we consider how to renew from the coronavirus pandemic, we ask that local and national Government stand with us by recognising the positive changes youth work brings to the lives of young people (the most crucial point of all) and the value of investing in the youth work workforce.

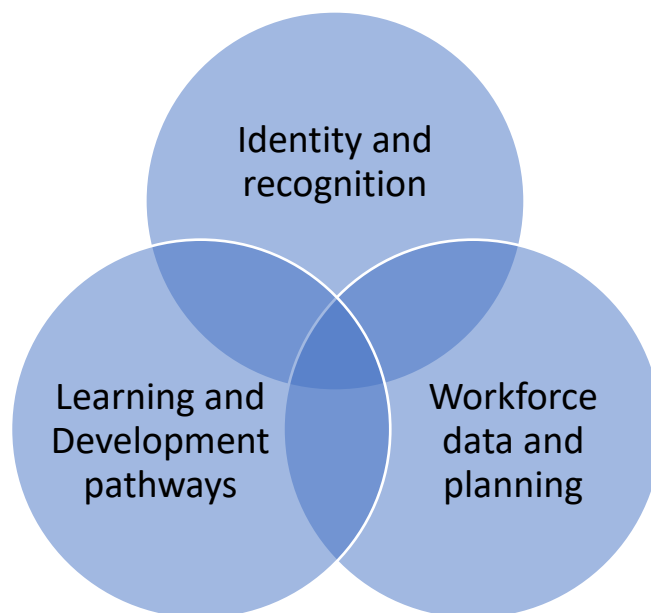
Budget strain on local authorities mean that Scotland is moving in the opposite direction and preventative work is not being prioritised. Point 6.10 of the Christie Commission states: *"if we do not manage to effect a shift to preventative action, increasing "failure demand" will swamp our public services capacity to achieve outcomes. In all aspects of our system of public services, therefore, from setting national policy to reforming the governance and organisation of public services, through to the design and delivery of integrated services, all parties must prioritise and build in action which has the effect of reducing demand for services in the longer run"*. We must view youth work as the ultimate preventative measure. We are aware making cuts to youth work is a short-term approach and it will have a negative impact this will have across wider society in the long term. We believe youth work is intrinsically valuable and young people have a right to it. However, the value of youth work lies not only in the difference it makes directly to the lives of the young people who engage with services, but extends further to the many benefits it provides to wider society by tackling inequalities and promoting

⁸ UNISON, *Growing Pains – A survey of youth workers*, May 2016 - <http://www.unison-scotland.org/2016/05/11/growing-pains-a-survey-of-youth-workers/>

positive outcomes for individuals. The “*common weal*” benefits from having young people who are engaged in positive activities means they make valuable contributions to their communities.

Mainstreaming multi-year funding for the youth work workforce and the voluntary sector

The youth work workforce is made up of youth work staff, volunteers and managers. We want our workforce at all levels to reflect the diversity of Scotland’s communities and be representative of the broad demographic of young people. Workforce Development is about developing confident and skilled youth workers who are able to meet young people’s emerging needs and understand the intersectionality of their lives. It is about our aspiration for a diverse and representative workforce, including practitioners with lived experience, who can be role models for young people. It is about developing leaders and managers with the skills to effectively lead their organisations. The diagram below illustrates the three key aspects that shape the development and enhancement of the youth work workforce in Scotland.



The success and sustainability of the youth work workforce relies on identity and recognition, learning and development pathways, workforce data and

planning and alignment with the Fair Work Framework⁹. This includes ensuring opportunity, security and respect for those with protected characteristics and seldom heard voices to join and thrive in the sector. Investing time and resource in the workforce will enable young people to thrive through their engagement with excellent youth work practice. In order to increase job security, reduce the risk of in-work poverty, and enable long term relationships with young people, the youth work workforce must be resourced by funders to align with the principles of the Fair Work Framework. Therefore, we are asking Scottish Government and other funders to provide multi-year funding for the youth work workforce to enable long term contracts.

As such, we support SCVO's calls for funders to provide funding over a longer-term with positive terms and conditions, such as inflationary uplifts to meet rapidly rising costs, a contribution to core operating costs beyond service and project funding. Trust and flexibility should be built in so organisations can adapt their offers based on changing needs and to maximise the added value of their skills, knowledge and experience and the role of youth work should be recognised as integral to realise this aim.

Many of our member groups funding comes from the public sector through a mixture of grants and contracts. Our members have expressed an increased struggle as the sector pivoted to help young people in need during the coronavirus pandemic. The annual funding cycle has been cited as a matter having a significant impact on organisations' ability to deliver key organisational outcomes prior to COVID19. In turn, this has impacted on the youth work sector's capacity to support Scottish Government with its National Outcomes. Which is why we support calls from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) to mainstream multi-year funding across Scottish and local government funding of the voluntary sector, regardless of the priorities set out in the spending review. We share their view that this will help deliver the best value of Scotland's public spending.

This is reinforced by YouthLink Scotland's survey of the sector, which found some youth workers are volunteering their time in order to keep services operating and often putting their hands into their own pockets to ensure activities go ahead. Concerns were also raised of the increasing reliance on volunteers as a measure to keep services running. The role of volunteers is

⁹ <https://www.fairworkconvention.scot/the-fair-work-framework/>

critical to the success of youth work and volunteers deserve to be invested in too, with appropriate training and support available from qualified youth workers.

Recognising the Benefits of Youth Work for Young People

A significant impact of youth work is the positive impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing. There is a wealth of evidence to support this¹⁰¹¹ and is reinforced by work undertaken by the Young Foundation¹². This brought together a wide range of research and identified that it is the changes youth work makes to individual and intrinsic outcomes (the social and emotional capabilities) that lead to more concrete outcomes such as career success, reduction in risky behaviours and building positive relationships.

Moreover, through the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC), Scottish Government recognises this need to take a more holistic approach to tackling the poverty related attainment gap, placing greater emphasis on the importance of youth work to improving the wellbeing, readiness to learn and educational outcomes of children and young people. Therefore, maximising the positive impact of public spending within education must invest in the vital role youth work can play in a whole education system approach to support our most vulnerable learners, within schools and providing a bridging link to services in the community¹³.

In 2021, the OECD¹⁴ recommended that Scotland considers how the curriculum provides opportunities to develop a broader range of skills and capacities, alongside knowledge, across the four capacities. Youth workers design and deliver learning experiences for young people across communities, schools and colleges. This helps to maximise opportunities for learners to develop the four capacities and a broad range of skills that allow them to achieve and succeed.

¹⁰ [National Study | The Impact of Universal Youth Work \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/national-study-the-impact-of-universal-youth-work)

¹¹ [Youth Work & the Attainment Challenge \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/youth-work-the-attainment-challenge)

¹² [Amplify Youth: putting young people at the heart of social change – The Young Foundation](https://www.youngfoundation.org/amplify-youth-putting-young-people-at-the-heart-of-social-change)

¹³ <https://www.gov.scot/news/closing-the-attainment-gap-4/>

¹⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/education/scotland-s-curriculum-for-excellence-bf624417-en.htm>

This is even more pertinent when considering that youth work can reach some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised young people. This highlights the responsibility Scottish Government and local authorities have to invest in youth work services – without which, the crucial contribution youth work makes to learning for our most vulnerable young people is lost. The incredible results that youth work can achieve will not be attainable without proper investment in staff, volunteers, and services at local level. Crucially, there is evidence that diminishing youth work budgets are already reducing the life chances of young people and increasing inequalities.

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) campaign, *Youth Work and Me*¹⁵, surveyed young people about their experiences of youth work in Scotland and found youth work is important to them because it provides opportunities, support, greater confidence and self-esteem, friendship, skills, a voice, access to non-formal education, and independence. If youth work did not exist, young people think there would be more isolation, crime and anti-social behaviour, boredom, mental health problems, poverty, and deaths. They also believe there would be fewer opportunities and less support, confidence, youth-led change, friendships and independence.

Research by UNISON highlighted how severe the cuts to youth services in Britain has had a devastating effect on young people. In England, many parts of the country now have no recognisable youth services at all. Research by the YMCA in England found between 2012 and 2016, 600 youth centres closed, 3,500 youth workers lost their jobs and 140,000 places for young people were lost¹⁶. We know from working closely with our member organisations that similar concerns are being raised in Scotland. There is a real danger that for some youth work provision, it could be non-recoverable if urgent action to save and prioritise youth work is not taken. This report also found the overwhelming majority (91%) said the cuts were having a particular impact on young people from poorer backgrounds, with more than half identifying black people, young LGBT people and young women as experiencing particular difficulties. Respondents spoke of increasing levels of social isolation and lack of support for young people, leading them to become withdrawn from society. Some respondents reported the increased risk of young people being

¹⁵ https://www.syp.org.uk/youth_work_and_me

¹⁶ YMCA, Youth and Consequences, April 2018 - <https://www.ymca.org.uk/research/youth-and-consequences>

caught up in gangs or becoming more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The broader picture is of young people who are *"frustrated, unsupported and alienated"*¹⁷.

Youth work now and in the future

In 2011, the Christie Commission report¹⁸ called for moves towards preventative spending, estimating that as much as 40 per cent of all spending on public services is accounted for by interventions that could have been avoided by prioritising a preventative approach. Given the focus on education reform in Scotland, and a refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) (with a greater emphasis on how education can support wider approaches to tackling child poverty) now is the time to be investing in those services which are engaging, supporting and improving outcomes for Children and Young People.

It is clear from our recent surveys of youth workers in Scotland that there are considerable financial challenges contributing to reduced youth work provision. It is therefore essential going forward that we have a clear picture of budget spend for youth work, so we can identify gaps in provision and establish whether there needs to be improved financing of youth work services. We repeatedly hear from youth workers of the devastating effect of cuts to youth services which are placing young people in an increasingly precarious position. Our member groups speak of the growing inequality and poverty impacting young people and the increasing prevalence of poor mental health. This was particularly evident during COVID19. Those hit the hardest are from deprived backgrounds and often have fewer educational and employment prospects. The reduction in youth work services means there is a loss of a crucial support system as they attempt to find their way in already challenging circumstances. At a time when disadvantaged young people need youth services more than ever, young people are finding they have nowhere to go, leaving them increasingly vulnerable¹⁹. This means young people are missing out on services, and also in the decision-making processes in their community. The latter is crucially important if Scottish

¹⁷ UNISON, *A Future At Risk: Cuts in Youth Services*, August 2016 -

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/08/23996.pdf>

¹⁸ Christie Commission/Scottish Government, *Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services*,

29 June 2011 - <https://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/352649/0118638.pdf/>

¹⁹ [access-to-facilities-headline-survey-nov-2021.pdf \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/access-to-facilities-headline-survey-nov-2021.pdf)

Government wishes to deliver on its flagship policy of incorporating the UNCRC into Scots Law²⁰ and ensuring that it is implemented in every Local Authority in Scotland.

Youth work can help deliver some of the immediate policy implications and challenges arising from the coronavirus outbreak and support the future of Scotland beyond the immediate crisis²¹. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this consultation and we would be happy to be involved in further discussions and/or provide detailed briefings illustrating the value and impact of the youth work sector. We would be willing to go further with our recommendations about how the innovative work of the sector can be scaled up, bringing about a social return for the spend and how the funding landscape for Scotland's local authority and voluntary sector could be improved as a way to ameliorate the devastation we have seen in young people's education and lives during the most restrictive phases of the coronavirus pandemic.

There needs to be proper investment in youth work to ensure there are the resources and experienced staff and volunteers available to support young people effectively and deliver high quality services. Such investment would demonstrate recognition of the vital job youth workers do and acknowledge the significance of their skills and experience. The wellbeing and morale of youth workers is something worth valuing, so they can continue to build life changing relationships with young people.

Recommendations

There is an opportunity for the Resource Spending Review to be the catalyst for something transformative for youth workers and the tens of thousands of young people they support. It is a chance to invest in essential public services. It also creates an opportunity for the voluntary sector to secure the mainstreaming of multi-year funding across local and national Government. We know from speaking with YouthLink Scotland member groups that limiting funding to a single year has proven problematic. Greater financial security will

²⁰ [Scotland votes to incorporate children's rights in law - Unicef UK](#)

²¹ <https://www.rsecovidcommission.org.uk/coming-out-of-covid-19-reimagining-scotland/>

help build planning and delivering capacity so youth workers can operate freely to the betterment of the young people they work alongside in the heart of Scotland's communities.

YouthLink Scotland believes the Resource Spending Review should consider youth work's role in meeting Scottish Government ambitions as a way of ensuring monies allocated for the day to day delivery of essential services and programmes. This should include a commitment to investing in the youth work sector throughout the remainder of this Parliamentary Term. This approach is integral to the success and life chances of young people. However, for youth work to be effective, it requires investment at all levels and a commitment to protect and enhance youth work budgets.

As such, YouthLink Scotland recommends:

- Access to youth work opportunities available to all young people as an essential part of their education.
- Comprehensive funding of youth work services.
- Acknowledgment of the importance of universal and targeted services.
- Core funding for local authority youth work services.
- Continued discussion on what an enhanced statutory duty to provide youth work (a current Scottish Government commitment) for young people would look like and how we get there in this Parliamentary Term.
- Youth work budgets in every local council to include designated monies for sessional staff, support for volunteer and youth forums, as well as support for third sector youth work organisations.
- Mainstreaming multi-year funding for the voluntary sector.
- A focus on learning in and around nature is given due consideration.
- Youth work budgets collected and published alongside broader CLD budgets in order to promote transparency about the level of local service provision
- Young people playing an active part in decisions that affect their services, including budgetary decisions.
- An undertaking of Child Rights Impact Assessments at national and local authority level on all budgeting decisions.

- Inclusion and investment for youth work as an essential element of the education reform's ambition to transform Scottish education and deliver young people's right to education in its broadest sense.
- Protect investment in the SAC to support youth work's crucial role in tackling poverty.
- An enhanced role for youth work as key industry to increase the proportion of young people in employment, education and training.
- Scottish Government builds on the ambition set out in the school age childcare framework to provide families with flexibility and choice - including youth work provision.

As our previous National Youth Work Strategy²² states: we want a Scotland where the rights of children and young people are not just recognised, but rooted deep in our society and in our public and voluntary services. The recent UNCRC Concluding Observations highlighted concern that that recent fiscal policies and allocation of resources have contributed to inequality in children's enjoyment of their rights, disproportionately affecting children in disadvantaged situations²³. Effective engagement can empower young people through providing opportunities to develop leadership skills, take responsibility, make decisions and make a real and lasting contribution to society. Budgetary decisions on youth work services should be no different and young people ought to play an active part in these too. As such, there should be a commitment for young people to be involved meaningfully by local councils in budgetary decision making and in line with the commitments to incorporate UNCRC into Scots Law. Youth workers can help make this happen. Further, an enhanced statutory duty to provide youth services only works if there is full core funding so that the necessary resources are available to provide high quality delivery of those services, meaning Scottish Government must ensure local authorities have the core funding they need for this to take place.

We request that Scottish Government also asks the fundamental question, *"do we as a society have the necessary services and provision to meet the needs of all our young people in Scotland?"*. Answering this question should

²² <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/policy/national-youth-work-strategy/>

²³ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding observations [CRC/C/GBR/CO/5]*, 2016, p. 3, http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=987&Lang=en

include allocation of resources to youth work services acknowledging its true impact. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up and that is why all young people, in every part of Scotland, should have access to high quality and effective youth work practice.

There is an opportunity to help local authorities become future proofed against foreseeable financial risks. We would urge the Resource Spending Review to focus on preventative spending and in doing so recognise the huge value of what youth work offers in terms of early intervention and prevention. Accordingly, investment in youth work provided through local councils should be protected and prioritised.

ENDS

For more information on this policy response, please contact YouthLink Scotland's Policy and Research Manager, Kevin Kane.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Link to spending review consultation:

<https://consult.gov.scot/budget-and-public-spending/resource-spending-review-framework/>