



YouthLink Scotland's response to the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD)

Overview

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation representing local, regional and national youth organisations from the voluntary and statutory sectors. We aim for a nation that values its young people and their contribution to society, supported through critical 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. We campaign for equal access to high-quality youth work for all young people, supported by a confident, skilled, well-led and effective workforce while playing an essential role in delivering Scotland's national outcomes.

Youth work is one of the most powerful community-based assets to help us create a better society. The practice nurtures confidence and boosts educational attainment. It stimulates personal development and helps young people manage relationships. It provides volunteering opportunities and assists young people who come into contact with the law. It aids a young person's mental health and positively respects and promotes the fundamental rights of children and young people in Scotland¹.

YouthLink Scotland wishes to see a country where children's and young people's rights are recognised and rooted deep in our public and voluntary services. We know youth work is essential in supporting young people to understand and use their rights and enabling critical service providers for children and young people to do the same. We have been calling for the Community Learning and Development (CLD) regulations to be strengthened to prevent cuts to youth work provision and ensure we take a rights-based approach to service delivery². We believe this will help solidify youth work's role in the heart of communities and deliver the ambitions of a renewed and enhanced learning system.

As a rights-based practice³, youth work promotes inclusion, mutual respect, and equality. It is fundamentally about building relationships based on trust and shared

¹ [Youth work is human rights work - Children and Young People's Centre for Justice \(cycj.org.uk\)](https://www.cycj.org.uk)

² [Youth-Work-Manifesto-21-FINAL.pdf \(youthlink.scot\)](#)

³ [Youth Work Outcomes & Skills Framework | YouthLink Scotland](#)

understanding and using the strength of these relationships to develop a person-centred and non-formal learning approach to the development of young people.

It focuses on the 11-25-year age group. This can include primary to secondary transition support, after-school clubs and uniformed groups.

The workforce includes professionally qualified youth work/CLD and other experienced practitioners, including volunteers, who hold a range of competency-based qualifications and skills to practice youth work. Youth workers are based in the third sector and local authorities. The work is delivered across various settings, including youth centres, schools, colleges, outdoor education centres, or via outreach programmes and detached youth work.

CLD is a field of professional practice that enables people to identify their own individual and collective goals, to take action to bring about change and through this to achieve these goals.

CLD is delivered in diverse settings and sectors, by practitioners with a wide variety of job titles and volunteer roles, working with people of all ages. This includes (but is not necessarily limited to –

- Community Development (building the capacity of communities to meet their own needs, engaging with and influencing decision makers);
- **Youth Work**, family learning and other early intervention work with children, young people and families;
- Community-based Adult Learning, including adult literacies and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL);
- Learning for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the community, for example, people with disabilities, care leavers or offenders;
- Working with individuals and communities to improve their health and wellbeing;
Volunteer development;
- Learning support and guidance in the community.

YouthLink Scotland process for responding to the consultation

It is important to note that this review is narrower in scope than the previous Osler and Alexander reports into CLD, yet it could be as consequential. If the focus is primarily post-16 skills-based targeted provision only, there are some concerns that the current broad range of support youth work offers could be diluted. The Review may be liable not to consider holistic and preventive approaches – such as youth work's role in addressing poverty and promoting positive health and well-being, youth justice, and equality.

It is worth noting that YouthLink Scotland was not consulted about the CLD Independent Review before the Minister's announcement in the Scottish Parliament in December 2023. While welcoming the review, YouthLink Scotland has noted the importance of completing the national youth work strategy, which has been paused. YouthLink Scotland has offered its full support to the review team regarding the CLD Review process and engagement of the youth work sector, but no specific support has been sought.

YouthLink Scotland is aware that the independent review team are keen to hear from as wide a range of voices as possible, including youth work practitioners and learners. As part of our engagement in the process, our team members attended key stakeholder events. We brought together their critical networks to discuss the topic across the thematic areas and build on existing intelligence.

A gap was raised in the consultation by youth work leaders about how to engage young people in the consultation. YouthLink Scotland provided further [supportive notes to help practitioners](#) and [young people respond](#) to the consultation. We did this through a process of stakeholder engagement, including working with young [#IWILL ambassadors](#) in Scotland to create the young people's survey, coordinating the material with [Young Scot](#) and The [Scottish Youth Parliament \(SYP\)](#) and connecting this with our main Local Authority Youth Work Managers and Voluntary Organisation Youth Work Managers Networks. We commended the additional supportive notes for reading and responding within the youth workers area or thematic work context across all our networks and publicised more widely.

We encouraged respondents to look at [case study examples of the impact of youth work](#) to ensure the transformative impact and breadth of youth work activity is captured throughout all the review themes.

Ambition

The impacts of COVID-19 have challenged our Scottish education and skills system and are at a pivotal point. One that could transform the learning experience for children and young people. The Independent Review of CLD is another opportunity to get it right for every child, lift young people out of poverty, and ensure every learner knows they matter. As part of this, there is a need to ensure that all parts of the system work collaboratively to provide the right level of support to help learners achieve the best possible outcomes. It is necessary to include youth work as an essential and integral sector to support this aim.

Our ambition for Scotland's children and young people can only be achieved by ensuring that youth work is a core element within our learning system. This was echoed by James Withers, Head of the [Independent Skills Review](#), at [YouthLink Scotland's Policy Convention](#) on December 23, placing youth work at the heart of education reform on December 7, 2023. Mr Withers referred to youth work as having the "*recipe*" for success as a critical and positive contributor to education practice, facilitating young people's personal, social and educational development⁴.

⁴ <https://www.youthlink.scot/what-is-youth-work/>

This is in keeping with what Professor Emerita Louise Hayward, lead for the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment, had to say about youth work and its contribution to reform during her speech at YouthLink Scotland's youth work conference in 2023. She specifically highlighted:

“The Review of Qualifications and Assessment brings youth work from the margins to the centre of our education system. Yes, the curriculum will continue to offer areas of subject study, but also project work and individual personal pathways to achievement, and youth workers are already skilled in these individually tailored approaches. We need to co-construct learning opportunities with young people that engage them. Youth workers, with their relational approach to learning can help the system move forward. The system needs to change. The National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills framework is part of that change - need to consider how it can be part of a future system for understanding and recording young people's progression. Importantly the National Youth Work outcomes and skills in the framework matter to every learner. We need to ensure that youth work is not just associated with certain groups of learners - all young people should have access to youth work”.

Professor Hayward continued,

“I think there are a number of issues that it's really important to consider. We're facing very difficult financial circumstances, and I think that our traditional way of working in individual silos is no longer sustainable in this climate. So, we have to look at how we are going to ensure as a society that every learner has the best possible life chance.

“And that means bringing together all of our resources in education, and in youth work, and in other areas, to focus these and to make best use of each of these individual components to give every learner that best possible life chance. And youth work has got to be a central part of that process”.

Moreover, the final report from the National Discussion⁵ cements youth work as part of Scottish education. It acknowledges that learning occurs across various settings utilising various approaches, including in the community and outdoor learning. It also highlights the vital role of youth workers in supporting health and wellbeing. This helps to create safe learning spaces, facilitating youth voice and as trusted adults that provide pastoral care with the need for access to youth workers identified as especially important.

The National Discussion said that collaborative partnerships were vital to deliver the vision for learners. The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) already recognises that youth work improves health and wellbeing, readiness to learn and educational outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty⁶. As part of its approach to tackling child poverty through education, the Scottish Government is building

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/learners-scotland-matter-national-discussion-education-final-report/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-equity-funding-national-operational-guidance-2023/>

capacity for strengthened collaboration between schools and youth work through a SAC national programme delivered by YouthLink Scotland⁷.

The Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment⁸ determined that a broader range of opportunities should be part of the curriculum. This includes opportunities for personal pathways and project-based learning as an entitlement for all educational settings. These individually tailored approaches are where youth workers are already skilled and delivering. It will be essential to embed youth work into such curriculum developments, ensuring young people can access opportunities in all educational settings, including schools and youth work settings in the community.

Youth work is part of the broader professional practice of CLD⁹. Its voice needs to be heard clearly and strongly throughout the Review. We encourage member organisations and stakeholders to participate by replying to the consultation and engaging organisations and young people to do the same.

The voice of youth work is vital in this review because the youth work sector, voluntary and statutory, represents a vital part of the wider CLD field, made up of 1000s of paid staff and volunteers - serving over 500,000 young people.

Youth work is an essential practice

We know that COVID-19 significantly impacted those living in poverty. Scotland's worst-affected communities now face the added burden of the cost-of-living crisis while our youth work organisations face increasing demand for their services with reducing budgets and staffing. This is galling when we consider that during the coronavirus pandemic, youth workers moved quickly to provide whole-family support and establish digital services. They were described as "*nimble and adaptable*", doing "*whatever they could, whenever they could*" to keep young people safe¹⁰. During the most restrictive phases, young people could not attend school, college or work and could not meet and socialise with their peers. All the sports, arts, volunteering or youth work activities young people participated in were halted. Despite ongoing challenges, youth work groups continued to build strong partnerships with local communities, pairing tried and tested methods of supporting children and young people with innovative new interventions. Youth work services offered support for food poverty, finance, and mental health support, which continued as the lockdown restrictions lifted, leading to deeper relationships with young people¹¹¹².

Demographic breakdown of Lockdown Lowdown responses¹³ showed that young people in areas of higher deprivation are at a higher risk of their education being impacted negatively, compounded by the fact they are less likely to attend or have

⁷ <https://www.youthlink.scot/education-skills/scottish-attainment-challenge/>

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/future-report-independent-review-qualifications-assessment/>

⁹ <https://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/about-cld/what-is-community-learning-and-development-cld/>

¹⁰ [YouthLink-Scotland-Youth-Works-Role-During-Covid-19-Final-Report.pdf](#)

¹¹ [YouthLink-Scotland-Youth-Works-Role-During-Covid-19-Final-Report.pdf](#)

¹² [Acting on Poverty - Youth Scotland](#)

¹³ [LockdownLowdown - Breakdown of Key Findings - Young Scot Corporate](#)

access to youth groups. This is impacting negatively on their health and wellbeing¹⁴. Inequitable access to education remains a concern for young people and is of significant disquiet to youth work leaders¹⁵. The initial phase three report highlighted that only 25% of young people in the most deprived areas attended or had access to youth work activities, compared to 40% in more affluent areas. The survey also found that young people in the most deprived areas were the least likely to attend in person. However, regardless of where they are from, young people noted how they felt good about their mental and physical health due to attending youth work groups¹⁶.

After consultation with the sector in 2017, the impact of universal youth work was identified as a priority area, leading to 4 studies using the participatory methodology transformative evaluation. In 2023, the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering group completed a priority-setting consultation with the sector and young people to establish the topics and questions which will shape the work of the research steering group over the next 5 years in collaboration with the sector.

We understand that the actions we take now will be crucial. Young people deserve a commitment to continuing and enhancing the services that supported them before and during the coronavirus pandemic to maintain and improve their well-being and prospects.

Thematic Area 1

Awareness and Visibility

A recent sector survey undertaken by YouthLink Scotland showed that youth work directly supports more than 500,000 young people¹⁷. To widen the reach and impact of youth work, 49% of providers offer detached youth work, and 69% of organisations work collaboratively with schools.

- **How visible is CLD, and the positive outcomes it can deliver? (please consider learners/potential learners, decision-makers, and other relevant service providers)**

The CLD Strategic Guidance sets out the purpose of CLD and the outcomes the Scottish Government expects it to deliver. This includes delivering the strategic objectives in the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework (NPF). There is strong acknowledgement within the CLD Strategic Guidance that CLD delivers outcomes that can combat poverty and inequality. The CLD Regulations support local authorities in making the role and contribution of CLD more visible. Local authority youth work services engage in ongoing and robust self-evaluation to improve performance and deliver better outcomes for learners and communities. This includes

¹⁴ [Latest demographic breakdown indicates learning loss risk for young people in deprived areas \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](#)

¹⁵ [sector-warning-release-may-2020.pdf \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](#)

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ 77 of these organisations offer youth work support directly to young people. 25 are intermediary organisations also representing a wider group of community-based youth work providers.

measuring progress in achieving the CLD plan and engaging in HMIE inspections and progress visits.

Further, the youth work sector uses a common language and framework to demonstrate and articulate the positive outcomes it can deliver alongside learners. [The National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework](#) supports young people in recognising and expressing their development across various outcomes. It also provides a common language and framework for youth workers to plan, self-evaluate for improvement, and measure and communicate the positive outcomes youth work delivers to learners – at the local and national levels.

Skills development remains an important element of youth work's role and impact across lifelong learning, including post-school learning and career services. The sector's skills focus is supporting understanding of youth work's role and impact across the landscape for young people, decision-makers and stakeholders. This includes youth work's role in the career services ecosystem and delivering the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) skills for learning, life and work.

The youth work sector has communicated its role and commitment to delivering the recommendations from the [Careers Review](#). YouthLink Scotland led the sector's engagement in the Careers Review and represents youth work on the Careers Services Collaborative Delivery group – ensuring youth work is a visible and vital element of the ecosystem. Similarly, YouthLink Scotland plays a crucial role in the Scottish Government Ministerial grouping on tackling social isolation and loneliness in Scotland and supports youth work groups, including those furthest from mainstream services, through targeted grants to work with young people on innovative community-led projects to deliver upon the strategy. The Ministerial grouping allows an opportunity to provide feedback with examples of the positive role of youth workers in the lives of young people and increase the sector's visibility in meeting the objectives of the strategy and encouraging cross-directorate cooperation.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was recently written into Scots Law and is enshrined in the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework. [The General Principles](#) of the UNCRC (Articles 2, 3, 6, 12) are the essence of what youth work exists to do. Certain areas on the right to personalised education (Articles 28, 29), alongside a right to play and recreation (Article 31), are particularly relevant to our sector - clustered together in the Framework for Children's Rights Reporting, as "*Education, Leisure and Culture*". YouthLink Scotland [policy briefing on youth work and UNCRC](#) acknowledges the unique positioning of youth workers within the heart of our local authorities and the third sector as advancing the rights of children and young people and its role in supporting youth voice and visibility for the sector.

YouthLink Scotland undertakes national work to measure and communicate the sector's impact across various public policy areas. As some examples (more available upon request), this has included [employability](#), [volunteering study](#), and [closing the](#)

[poverty-related attainment gap](#), [COVID-19 education recovery](#) and [food insecurity, digital skills and cyber resilience](#), the report on [Lessons and Learning from youth work during COVID-19](#) and the positive impact of youth workers providing low-level mental health support in schools [research findings](#) from Dumfries and Galloway.

The four impact of community-based universal youth work studies have been used to start conversations in and out with the sector to target policy recommendations and influence decision makers. As an example, we know that the study conducted in [Edinburgh](#):

- Informed the local need within the current Edinburgh Youth and Children's Work Strategy.
- Helped to prioritise youth work as a programme of work within the 2023-2026 Edinburgh Children's Services Plan, giving youth work a prominence within the local Children's Services landscape.
- The research is currently being used to lobby for the protection of the CEC Third Party Grants to be invested in local community-based youth work organisations.

The research has also been shared at conferences including YouthLink Scotland's National Youth Work Conference and in publications such as the [Link magazine](#) which is read by the sector.

- **Awareness and visibility. If you work in CLD or are a local decision-maker, please tell us how you make people aware of CLD learning opportunities.**

Youth work managers are vital to increasing the awareness and visibility of CLD learning opportunities. Youth work services increasingly use social media platforms to communicate opportunities to young people. This became especially vital during the coronavirus pandemic, where many local authorities delivered support and learning opportunities virtually and engaged whole families in crisis through social media. Local authorities partner with voluntary sector groups and organisations to coordinate youth work services. This includes forging local partnerships such as the [Perth and Kinross Youth Work Partnership](#).

YouthLink Scotland undertakes national work to measure and communicate the sector's impact and visibility across various public policy areas, making local and national decision-makers aware of CLD learning and engagement opportunities. As some examples (more available on request), this has included employability, volunteering, and [closing the poverty-related attainment gap](#), [COVID-19 education recovery](#) and [food insecurity, digital skills and cyber resilience](#) and the report on [Lessons and Learning from youth work during COVID-19](#).

Finally, YouthLink Scotland's fortnightly [member briefing](#) highlights the best from Scotland's youth work, including policy consultations, sector news, learning and training, jobs, and funding opportunities.

- **Awareness and visibility. Do you think there are clear career progression pathways in CLD for practitioners or volunteers?**

The availability of different levels of training and qualification can vary across geographies, and there is an increasing need for 'work-based' routes to train, exacerbated by the declining number of volunteers in recent years.

[Progression pathways in CLD](#) for practitioners, staff and volunteers, are available from [National Youth Work Induction](#) through to postgraduate level qualifications.

It is important to note however that many people enter CLD as a volunteer or part time worker to focus on improving their practice, rather than pursuing career progression as they have other priorities and/or careers in other professions. As young people's needs, priorities and contexts change it is critical for the sector to continue to upskill and update their practice.

Creating and supporting high-quality volunteering experiences is important to this wider tapestry of youth work support. Through youth work, young volunteers can build skills, access a range of valuable experiential learning (including accredited awards and qualifications) and progress towards and into employment.

As James Withers, Head of the Recent [Skills Review](#), said,

"National policy should recognise that skills are not an alternative to education, but an essential product of learning and training, and give equal value to the various settings and pathways in and through which skills development can occur".

Scotland's professional frameworks are considered highly within the international community, and we have been asked to contribute to workforce development projects within the Council of Europe and EU-CoE Partnership for Youth. This includes a recent review of the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio, a competency framework and self-evaluation tool contributing to surveys on the practice architectures of youth work in Europe.

Thematic Area 2

Accessibility and availability

As stated in the introduction, YouthLink Scotland wants Scotland to be the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up. We want a nation that treasures

the whole well-being of children and young people¹⁸. To do this, equal access and local availability of youth work and CLD services is crucial.

Research has shown incredible value in a community response to COVID-19 recovery that includes the availability of youth work provision¹⁹, particularly for the most vulnerable²⁰. Youth work plays a crucial role in bringing communities together and is uniquely positioned to endorse and enhance community-based support to improve young people's mental health and well-being.

We believe any policy response to supporting availability should focus on working alongside communities to identify and tailor responses, considering issues at a local level. Youth workers operate in the heart of our local authorities' and are equipped and connected to build upon the strong partnership relationships and understanding of local communities to make this happen.

To support this direction of travel, YouthLink Scotland worked alongside youth work leaders to provide a Manifesto for youth work. We asked all political parties to stand with us and support our youth work sector at the local and national level by delivering our three key asks, including:

- A right for all young people to access youth work opportunities.
- Investment in youth work services.
- Formal recognition of the positive impact of youth work across public policy areas.

A recent sector survey undertaken by YouthLink Scotland showed youth work supports more than 500,000 young people. It highlighted

- 88% of these organisations support young people in building their health and wellbeing.
- 77% are offering support with mental health.
- 71% support young people in participating and growing as active citizens.
- 75% of these support young people developing skills through volunteering opportunities.
- 69% of these are working collaboratively with schools to offer targeted support and broader opportunities for learning.
- 67% of these offer employment support to young people.
- 63% are offering opportunities for youth awards / accredited learning.
- 62% are offering outdoor education.
- 60% are providing youth information.
- 49% are offering sports-based activities.

¹⁸ [National-Youth-Work-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf \(youthlink.scot\)](#)

¹⁹ Harkins C. Supporting community recovery and resilience in response to the COVID-19 pandemic-a rapid review of evidence [Internet]. Glasgow; 2020. Available

from: [https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/7854/ COVID19_Comm_Recovery_FINAL.pdf](https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/7854/COVID19_Comm_Recovery_FINAL.pdf)

²⁰ Ibid

This demonstrates the integral and essential role of the relationship youth workers build with young people, meeting them where they are as part of an ongoing partnership approach to improve their lives and well-being.

- **If someone wants to do CLD learning, how likely is it that they will find the knowledge they need or want?**

Understanding the local population and their learning needs takes time to build and requires a dedicated workforce to do the work in a meaningful way. By its definition, young people should find the learning they need and want through youth work. As a non-formal educational, person and group-centred practice, learning opportunities are built from young people's needs. They are partners in co-creating their learning and development. Youth workers offer relevant and timely support and encouragement to access and benefit from learning that is bespoke to their needs²¹.

Youth workers are continually updating their skills and knowledge to be able to meet young people's emerging needs. Examples of this include youth workers building their skills and confidence to support young people: with mental health concerns; to navigate an increasingly digitalising world; to cope with eco-anxiety and make a difference to the climate crisis; who are experiencing racism and discrimination and more.

Youth work practitioners are also clear that youth volunteering can be an essential route towards and into positive destinations and recognise that their relationships with the young volunteers they work alongside enable them to offer relevant and timely support and encouragement to access and benefit from learning that is bespoke to their needs²².

- **Do you have any concerns or hopes about the CLD learning offer in the future?**

Youth workers make a difference to people. They build the social fabric of communities and enrich people's lives. They stand alongside people during tough times. None more so than during COVID-19. They are essential in building a fairer Scotland. However, there remain some challenges, for local authorities and the Third Sector alike, including:

- Stagnant and insecure funding
- The cost-of-living crisis
- An increasing demand for vital services.
- A Reduction in volunteering numbers post-COVID

A contributory solution would include stronger statutory basis for CLD is needed to ensure the sector's impact on national and local priorities and outcomes, whilst maintaining the unique values and principles which underpin the approach.

²¹ <https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/Website-version.pdf>

²² <https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/Website-version.pdf>

Youth work can play a strong role in advocating for youth voice to be heard within the opportunities provided through implementation of UNCRC and the new Community Planning structures.

Our hope is that the future CLD offer takes account of the recommendations during the [Lifelong Learning and Skills Reform: A Right to Youth Work as Part of Every Learner's Journey](#), focusing on why Education Reform must seek to deliver changes to the structure and culture of Scottish education to demonstrate parity across settings and approaches to learning.

- **To what extent do you feel that the CLD learning is available at a time and location that works for the learner?**

Young people have a right to access youth work where and when needed, supported by a [sector-led](#) paper highlighting the need for youth work to be part of every learner's journey.

Learning from COVID-19 demonstrates [the importance of access to safe spaces for youth work](#). The impact of COVID and access to facilities for the youth work sector had significant challenges. The Young Scot, Scottish Youth Parliament, and YouthLink Scotland joint [lockdown lowdown report](#) from during Covid-19 highlighted the negative impact when access was removed.

The reach and creative offer of digital youth work, specifically online youth work, enables youth work to be accessible and offered to young people where they are – including online spaces and rurally isolated locations. The life-changing impact of this is explored through [a study with LGBT Youth Scotland](#). We know many marginalised groups are also facing digital exclusion. Digital youth work and CLD work towards digital inclusion, whether that is support focused on devices, connectivity, or, critically for CLD educators, digital skills and literacy²³.

Youth workers ensured that the children and young people of key workers and those who were identified as vulnerable continued to receive multi-agency support through community/school hubs. Youth work in these settings ensured children and young people had access to a range of learning opportunities and support including transition and health and wellbeing.

Young people have a right to access youth work where and when needed, including in school²⁴. Therefore, CLD learning should be available at a time and location that works for the learner. This aligns with [the nature and purpose of youth work](#), meeting young people where they are partners in a learning process. The characteristics and purpose demonstrate youth work as an empowering process. Youth work is one of the few practices whose remit allows young people to exercise genuine power – to make

²³ [A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

²⁴ <https://www.youthlink.scot/news/lifelong-learning-and-skills-reform-a-right-to-youth-work-as-part-of-every-learners-journey/>

decisions, follow them through and take responsibility for their consequences. Youth work seeks to tip the balance of power in young people's favour. Part of this process is being available at a time and a location that works for the learner.

This is exemplified by the over 700 young people who responded to the National Discussion on Education through youth work. Many spoke about the impact of having access to youth work as part of their education/in school. 87% of young people said all young people should be able to access youth work during the school day. The final report from the National Discussion² highlighted the vital role of youth workers in supporting health and well-being – helping to create safe learning spaces, facilitating youth voice and as trusted adults that provide pastoral care, with the need for access to youth workers cited as especially important.

- **Are you aware of any financial costs for learners accessing CLD learning?**

Financial viability is the most pressing concern for the sector, with organisations facing increasing costs. We are now in a position where over a third have used their reserves. Using reserves for business is storing up more problems and threatening the medium to long-term viability of the sector.

This presents considerable operational challenges, including the recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers. We also know that third-sector employees on the front line are experiencing poverty through low pay and insecure employment. When we consider how the sector's resilience was tested and the positive impact it had during the pandemic²⁵. It is disappointing to learn that our often lifeline youth workers are finding themselves struggling with the effects of poverty. This challenges the sector's ability to provide consistent support, especially when there is a steep demand for vital services.

Additionally, within most local authorities access to CLD and youth work services are free at the point of access to ensure that there are no financial barriers to accessing services. Local authority CLD youth work services understand that the cost of living can be a barrier to accessing youth work and wider CLD opportunities. This can include childcare, transportation (as above) and other expenses associated with participation in activities. Local authority youth work services strive to ensure that financial hardship is not a barrier to participation.

Some of our network leads tell us there is a need to recognise the role of youth work managers and the additional training that they may also need.

Many marginalised groups face digital poverty. Digital youth work and CLD help towards digital inclusion, whether that is support focused on devices, connectivity or, critically for CLD educators, digital skills and literacies²⁶.

²⁵ <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Stretched-to-the-Limit-Report-WEB.pdf>

²⁶ [A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/a-changing-nation/how-scotland-will-thrive-in-a-digital-world/pages/10.aspx)

YouthLink Scotland also understands that transport alienation is a perennial issue for the youth work sector, particularly those young people reliant on scant bus services in rural and remote rural places. This is why we supported the campaign and welcomed the Scottish Government's commitment to increase free bus travel up to age 23. Youth work's focus is on the 11-25 year age group, so we would welcome the age of free transport of all forms of transport to be looked at up to the age of 25 to cater for our whole sector and more broadly about how transport planning and operation can focus on the public good it delivers in local areas.

Thematic Area 3

Support and learning

We know youth work plays a vital role in Scottish education. YouthLink Scotland's Youth Work and Schools Partnerships team, funded by the Scottish Government as part of the SAC, undertook a national case study evaluation²⁷. This provided robust evidence that youth work improves the readiness to learn, health and wellbeing and educational outcomes of children and young people, contributing to the Scottish SAC mission to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

In 2021, the £3 million Youth Work Education Recovery Fund enabled 64 youth work programmes across Scotland to provide opportunities for 17,904 young people. The Scottish Government established the Fund to allow the sector to engage young people in some of the country's most vulnerable communities and support their educational, social and emotional recovery after the pandemic. The fund's impact report showed that:

- 82% of participating young people developed their skills.
- 79% of participating young people experienced improved health and well-being.
- 78% of participating young people overcame barriers to learning.
- 61% of young people were more engaged in learning.
- 37% of young people achieved recognition of wider achievement attainment, e.g. youth awards²⁸.

The report identified youth workers' ability to build trusted relationships and create positive and safe spaces for person-centred learning. This contributed to improved outcomes for children and young people.

- **Are CLD staff and volunteers trained/qualified to support a learner's journey towards achieving high-quality positive outcomes?**

The workforce includes professionally qualified youth work/CLD practitioners and other experienced practitioners, including volunteers, with various competency-based qualifications and skills to practice youth work. Training, qualifications and professional development are based on the [CLD Competent Practitioner Framework](#), which

²⁷ [national-evaluation-publication-1.pdf \(youthlink.scot\)](#)

²⁸ <https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ywerf-report-2022-final-designed-report.pdf>

includes competencies, Values and a Code of Ethics, and on the appropriate National Occupational Standards – for each domain of practice: [Youth Work](#), [Adult Learning](#), [Family Learning](#) and [Community Development](#).

In 2018, the youth work sector published a common [National Induction Checklist](#) as an agreed minimum standard for induction into youth work practice for paid staff and volunteers across the statutory and voluntary sectors. This is currently being refreshed.

As young people's needs, priorities and contexts change, it is critical for the sector to continue to upskill and update their practice. At YouthLink Scotland, we offer [training](#), resources, networks and guidance on a range of important and emerging areas of youth work practice to build the sector's confidence, skills and knowledge to deliver high-quality youth work.

Our professional learning offer ranges from blog articles, through e-learning, face to face and online workshops and learning communities, to our national conferences and conventions. Our training and development opportunities are for all youth workers: volunteers; paid staff; sessional; full time; managers.

These professional learning opportunities aim to build skills and confidence according to the CLD and the Youth Work National Occupational Standards (NOS).

During the co-production of the paused National Youth Work Strategy, there was considerable sector backing for a National Training offer that is free, accessible and accredited for all across the sector, accrediting youth workers to a certain standard of knowledge. We would urge this to be considered as part of the Review.

Additionally, throughout the European youth work community, we see the same themes as priorities for youth work and young people's lives: Digitalisation, sustainability, mental health, inclusion, democracy, and employment. These align closely with the priorities of the sector in Scotland that YouthLink is committed to supporting the development of practice skills and confidence to meet the emerging needs of young people. By investing in workforce development around these areas, the sector is growing in confidence to meet young people's needs now and in the future.

Investing in the youth work sector's capacity to further research and articulate its role will be crucial to supporting a learner's journey towards achieving high-quality positive outcomes.

- **From your experiences, is learning taking place in a safe and welcoming environment?**

[Young people responding to the National Discussion](#) through youth work said youth work supports them in feeling safe, heard, and supported. Youth workers focus on the environment being safe and welcoming, and is inherent in the youth work approach, including:

- Building self-esteem and self-confidence.

- Developing the ability to manage personal and social relationships.
- Creating learning and developing new skills.
- Encouraging positive group atmospheres.
- Building the capacity of young people to consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control.
- Supporting a 'world view' which widens horizons and invites social commitment²⁹.

The [Impact of Universal Youth Work Research](#) series reinforces that youth work provides safe spaces and contributes to many important outcomes and achievements for young people, including health and well-being, educational attainment and employment. As just some examples, 347 stories of significant change were collected from young people through four studies examining the impact of universal youth work. This research illustrated that youth clubs are places that reduce isolation, create a sense of belonging and provide new experiences and opportunities for informal learning. Young people also recognised and articulated the importance of having a trusted adult and a safe space created by youth workers with whom they often form long-term relationships. In many cases, this relationship continues well into young adulthood. These key relationships helped young people feel valued and supported, improving their mental health and well-being³⁰. Further, CLD competencies practitioners are working towards include "Providing *learning and development opportunities in a range of contexts*".

However, we have had some recent examples where access to facilities remains an issue. In one situation, a need was identified by the local community and the council for some new youth work in an area of deprivation and a new group was established. They have since been moved twice in the space of 6 months due to other demands on space and the lack of a budget to rent suitable accommodation. Examples like these raise the question of how much we value CLD or its learners. Space and place must be supported alongside the objectives of providing a safe and welcoming environment - an approach agreed upon and used by youth workers themselves.

- **Are learners encouraged to give and receive regular feedback on their learning and if it is meeting their goals?**

The Youth Work National Occupational standards define the competencies of a youth work practitioner, including "*enabling young people to identify, reflect and use their learning to enhance their future development*", so regular feedback is built into their agreed goals. As a youth-led practice, young people shape their learning through ongoing self-evaluation and participation in developing the youth's work learning opportunities. Youth workers use various tools and approaches to support learners in

²⁹ [Statement-on-the-Nature-and-Purpose-of-Youth-Work.pdf \(youthlink.scot\)](#)

³⁰ Ibid

recognising and tracking their progress, including the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework, reflective conversations, and Youth Awards.

Through [YouthLink Scotland's vast youth work networks](#), young people have also had an opportunity to share their learning, supporting them to have reflective conversations with their youth workers about the impact youth work has had on their lives and the role of their youth worker on delivering upon local and national policy aims.

- **How 'joined-up' are CLD services related to other related services, such as schools, mental health support, benefits/money advice, employability services, etc.?**

When CLD is adequately resourced, it is often the service that helps to join up related services. They are established in local communities, know their population and the organisations that work locally. Therefore, they can work across organisational boundaries in order to address local need. It is a skill set that is not necessarily available amongst other partners but is hugely undervalued.

Youth work is the glue that binds connected services, offering essential opportunities for realising the ambitions of cross-curricular areas, examples include, Learning for Sustainability (LfS) (and the recently launched [Action Plan](#)). Youth work values and pedagogies align closely with LfS and offer support for formal education.

We know youth work is recognised as improving health and wellbeing, readiness to learn, and education outcomes alongside schools. This includes, community-based solutions and early intervention approaches, reducing the stress on other services such as CAMHS and ensuring there is support to step up and step down from services. As an example, Dumfries & Galloway has a mental health pathway that goes from low level mental health support up to clinical interventions by CAMHS. The Youth Work intervention is the first tier low level mental health support on that pathway to use an early intervention approach that is starting to reduce the number of referrals to CAMHS. The project has robust pre and post evaluation methods in place to measure the effectiveness and impact of the project in relation to young people's emotional, behavioural and psychological wellbeing. The [report](#) showed enhanced mood and wellbeing and readiness to learn. It's important to learn from the success of this project and consider how similar model incorporating youth work could be replicated across Scotland.

Youth work is embedded in employability services⁶ and is a critical partner in delivering Scotland's careers services⁷. Retention of what works well and investment in these assets will be crucial in any youth work sector future-proofing.

As some examples, youth work plays a vital role in Scottish education: Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is intended to be a holistic experience, encompassing learning across four contexts and different educational settings – including youth work. 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. We have seen collaboration with formal education has improved since

the introduction of the YouthLink Scotland, Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) National Programme.

Further, partnership with youth work is encouraged by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland through national guidance on using Pupil Equity Funding and Strategic Equity Funding⁴.

- **What role do Colleges and Universities play in CLD?**

Youth workers are essential partners in the learning community. Youth work and college partnerships support engagement and re-engagement with learning and sustained participation.

Colleges and universities play a vital role in the training and development of CLD practitioners alongside sector providers. Colleges offer courses at various levels, from SCQF Level 3, PDA in youth work at SCQF Level 6 and HNC Working with Communities at SCQF Level 7. To gain professional qualification in CLD, a CLD Standards Council-approved qualifying programme at degree level or above must be completed, currently offered by 4 universities across Scotland. These programmes all include a critical practice placement element. Local authority CLD services are the main provider of placements for students in college and university, including those undertaking the PDA in youth work and the degrees, as well as students from other fields, creating work and research-based placements

YouthLink Scotland is the Secretariat for The Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group (SYWRSG). It plays a vital role in collaborating with the sector to critically examine the long-term impact of youth work on the lives and lifestyles of young people and the wider communities across Scotland. The group is an established partnership that brings together key representatives from the youth work sector, universities, related policy areas and government. The group works collaboratively to support the development of evidence-based and data-driven practice across the youth work sector in Scotland. Universities play a crucial role in this partnership, drawing on their expertise in research methods, research ethics and analysis to ensure the research produced is robust and the sector is better able to communicate the positive impact of youth work.

Thematic Area 4

Pathways and progression

Youth workers are embedded in local partnership approaches and work collaboratively to support young people in securing and sustaining progression pathways. Youth work expressly supports learners to reflect on progress and enhances their personal and educational progression.

A recent youth work sector survey undertaken by YouthLink Scotland, was completed by the local authorities and third-sector providers, offering youth work support directly to over 500,000 young people. It highlighted:

- 76% are helping to tackle issues relating to the environment/sustainability.

- 60% are helping to tackle issues related to equality.
- 39% are helping to tackle issues related to community safety.
- 30% are helping to tackle issues related to Youth Justice.
- 28% are offering opportunities for intergenerational work.
- 26% are involved in community regeneration.
- 14% are involved in international youth work.

The Youth Work Education Recovery Fund provided a national snapshot of youth work's impact on young people's progression and pathways. It demonstrated:

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

A smaller number of projects measured four further outcomes showing:

- 96% of young people improved their literacy and numeracy.
- 81% secured positive destinations.
- 55% showed improvements in school attendance.
- 35% developed their readiness for work.

The Outdoor Education Recovery Fund is another valuable source of data from projects across Scotland showing how it can impact young people's progression and pathways, which offers:

- 87% of participating young people experienced improved physical health and wellbeing.
- 83% of participating young people had a stronger connection with and appreciation of nature and place.
- 95% of participating young people developed their skills.
- 83% of participating young people were more engaged in learning.
- 100% of young people progressed in related Curriculum for Excellence areas and subjects.

The National Case Study Evaluation (2020) also includes a sample of data from across Scotland showing young people's progression through youth work:

- 86% of young people improved their health and wellbeing.
- 85% developed their skills.
- 77% became more engaged in learning.
- 72% took steps to overcome barriers to learning.
- 65% improved their literacy and numeracy.

- **How are learners made aware of opportunities to take their learning to the next stage, e.g. volunteering, more advanced learning, employability support, etc?**

The availability of different levels of training and qualification can vary across geographies, and there is an increasing need for 'work-based' routes to train. Youth work plays an essential role with vulnerable learners, in particular, who need ongoing support to sustain participation/transition. Youth workers are embedded in local partnership approaches and work collaboratively to support young people in securing and sustaining progression pathways. It expressly helps learners to reflect on progress and enhances their personal and educational progression. Youth work also provides opportunities for pathways and progression through [volunteering](#).

As an example, the Prince's Trust is embedded in over one third of Scottish secondary schools, local practitioner networks and employability partnership forums to work in collaboration to secure and sustain positive progression.

The case work approach supports the personal elements of a young person's journey. Following referral, young people participate in a diagnostic interview process with their case worker (job title is Youth Development Lead). This helps to develop trust, secures on-going interest, and encourages young people to identify their own strengths, development areas and needs. This support allows us to support young people across the employability stages and create a progressive pathway towards a positive outcome.

A Youth Development Lead will have regular meetings with young people to evaluate their journey so far. To track progress, we apply a distance-travelled methodology over the course of our interventions, using our custom designed tool, My Journey, supporting young people to assess their own skills development and plan their next steps. The length of a young person's journey with us is driven by the individual. While a 'Get into' course can last up to six weeks, the individual support journey for a young person through our case work approach can be between 10 weeks and six months, depending on the needs and goals of the individual.

As part of the upskilling and ongoing knowledge building process, we need to re-state where local and national specialist services and referral mechanisms are currently in operation. This should include recognising youth work as a valuable early intervention support industry. Investment in the youth work sector will assist in bringing the voices of young people to the heart of policy decision-making, which is in keeping with the principles of the UNCRC³¹.

- **How are learners supported with their learning to transition to the next stage?**

³¹ [Four principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child | UNICEF](#)

Many young people take on leadership roles and training within youth work. We have a strong tradition of growing our youth workers through this route. Youth work plays an essential role with vulnerable learners, in particular, who need ongoing support to sustain participation/transition.

As just one sector example, many Scouts move on to play leadership roles in the charity and take full part in adult training programmes. The Scouts approach of encouraging leadership from an early age is in keeping with the spirit across the sector. Many as young as 8 years old working alongside their peers and progress into the Young Leader Programme when they are 14 and onto a full suite of training provision at 18+. This has also been seen when young people have benefited from Erasmus+ youth work strand, extremely valuable to the youth work and wider 'youth' sector, enabling, life changing opportunities for young people who would not otherwise be able to travel, build friendships and learn from other cultures and places, often enabling them up to change trajectory and be in a position to pursue further education and employment.

- **How do we know if CLD learning delivers positive/good outcomes for the learners?**

The youth work sector uses the [National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework](#) to support young people in understanding their progress and work with them to create pathways and progression routes. YouthLink Scotland continues to develop robust evidence that youth work is delivering positive outcomes for young people. Some examples include:

The [Youth Work Education Recovery Fund](#) provided a national snapshot of the impact that youth work can have on young people's progression and pathways, demonstrating:

- 82% of participating young people developed their skills
- 79% of participating young people experienced improved health and wellbeing
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The challenge of recognition of the value (and professionalism) of youth work is not unique to Scotland. The European Youth Work Agenda (the combined agenda of the European Commission and Council of Europe Youth Work recommendations and strategies as declared at the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, 2020) and the Bonn Process of implementation features eight priority areas which include "Beyond the Youth Work Community of Practice: Communicate the value of youth work and engage effectively with different sectors" and "Promotion and Recognition: More strategic and coordinated efforts are needed to make youth work better understood, visible, and credible as a distinct work arena.

These sit alongside another six priority areas which align closely with the sector's ambitions for youth work in Scotland and give us an opportunity to reflect on the strength of the sector in Scotland, its impact and its role in Scottish society.

Scotland's professional frameworks are considered highly within the international community, and we have been asked to contribute to workforce development projects within the Council of Europe and EU-CoE Partnership for Youth. This includes a recent review of the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio, a competency framework and self-evaluation tool that contributes to surveys on the practice architectures of youth work in Europe (results forthcoming).

YouthLink Scotland's work on measuring impact through the Impact of Universal Youth Work and the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework was highlighted in Bonn Process report 2023.

Finally, research evidence can help the sector to consider the quality of its youth work and its impact on young people and how that can be improved. There appears to be

a continuing pressure on the sector to demonstrate the impact of its work despite the evidence already being available to policy makers.

Please use the space below to provide further thoughts or evidence about Community Learning & Development.

A recent youth work sector survey undertaken by YouthLink Scotland was completed by the local authority and third sector providers that offer youth work support directly to over 500,000 young people, highlighting:

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- 60% are helping to tackle issues related to equality.
- 39% are helping to tackle issues related to community safety.
- 30% are helping to tackle issues related to Youth Justice.
- 28% are offering opportunities for intergenerational work.
- 26% are involved in community regeneration.
- 14% are involved in international youth work.

Youth workers routinely work alongside the most marginalised in our society. They are based in the heart of Scotland's local authorities and can help address the key barriers and struggles experienced by different groups. We know that Children's Services Planning Partnerships will be central in delivering local collaborative approaches to deliver on local and national policy objectives. The review of CLD requires a united focus and purpose to provide the change to how CLD and related public services are delivered. Youth workers will be central to upskilling and delivering upon new digital landscapes in a digital positive way, meeting young people where they are with the tools they use to support and enhance their learning.

As the National Agency for Youth Work in Scotland, YouthLink Scotland will continue to work with local and national partners to understand and support the role of youth work in developing a holistic support offer that recognises the transformative impact of youth workers on the lives of children and young people, especially those furthest from mainstream services. It is this approach and understanding of marginalised communities that can help Scottish Government across policy on the protected characteristics and keep The Promise by 2030. YouthLink Scotland is [committed](#) to working with all of our stakeholders and The Promise Scotland, listening to the voices and experiences of our children, young people and youth workers with care experience.

There is a breadth of youth work activity beyond the parameters of the Review of CLD, which is captured by the sector-led renewed statement on the [nature and purpose of youth work](#). Our visioning section below captures some of that vast activity and positive impact on young people.

Visioning

The youth work workforce is an essential lifeline for communities where children and young people are at risk of poverty, food insecurity, personal safety and mental ill

health. A recent youth work review by BBC Children in Need identified the significant difference youth work can make in local communities. It showed that for some children and young people, there is not enough youth work to meet their needs, and as a result, children and young people are missing out on this essential support³².

Youth Work is a practice that promotes equity and social justice, that works with all young people, including the most marginalised, to share power and support them to make the most of the changing world around them. Youth workers partner with young people to develop essential skills for life, learning and work in the 21st century. Youth work helps young people raise their voices, challenge injustice and defend their rights.

Research has shown that young people experiencing poverty and those who struggle in school benefit from increased support through youth work³³. The more individually tailored and non-formal nature of utilising other institutions where there was a more personal relationship dynamic between youth workers and young people leads to progress towards forming or achieving their aspirations in these settings – often for the first time³⁴³⁵.

Complementary research highlighted the generation of social capital in young people growing up in one urban area and one rural area in Scotland via community-led youth work projects that aim to re-engage young people categorised as NEET (Not in Employment Education or Training)³⁶. It was seen that youth work positively impacts transitions and the young people themselves. Youth work practice acts as a glue between young people and their communities.

A study conducted with around 110 BAME young people by Intercultural Youth Scotland and EDI Scotland in June 2019 reported, "*Four in five male respondents (80.0%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'My school promoted a welcoming and diverse culture'. In comparison, only 48.1% of female respondents expressed similar levels of agreement*"³⁷. Youth work is offered to girls and young women to have fun, learn new skills, and grow in confidence. These spaces have allowed girls and young women to explore their interests and enhance their skills and employability. The study offers insights into the experiences of some BAME young

³² <https://www.bbcchildreninneed.co.uk/2021/11/our-ceo-simon-antrobus-on-the-transformative-power-of-youth-work/>

³³ <https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/national-evaluation-publication-1.pdf>

³⁴ McPherson, C. (2018) 'It's just so much better than school': the redemptive qualities of further education and youth work for working-class young people in Edinburgh, Scotland. *Journal of Youth Studies* <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13676261.2019.1599103>

³⁵ Education Scotland – the role of youth work in closing the poverty-related attainment gap – Dundee City Council <https://education.gov.scot/resources/the-role-of-youth-work-dundee/>

³⁶ Miller, J, McAuliffe, L, Riaz, N and Deuchar, R. (2015) Exploring youths' perceptions of the hidden practice of youth work in increasing social capital with young people considered NEET in Scotland. *Journal of Youth Studies*, Volume 18, Issue 4 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13676261.2014.992311>

³⁷ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b9aaa1c0dbda3921bdda433/t/5dc2cdb26ad765150b8959c1/1573047736181/IYS+EDI+Report+Artwork+1+1.pdf>

people in Scotland's schools, highlighting where improvements can be made through education on cultural differences.

A report by Girlguiding highlighted those young women aged 15 to 18 particularly report feeling worried, stressed and overwhelmed. The factors most affecting them are uncertainty about school, education, and finance, loneliness and isolation, and a lack of freedom and independence³⁸. Youth work is keenly positioned to mitigate the risk of loneliness and isolation, and the practice empowers young women to feel more confident about themselves and the role of their community in their development.

It is not just young women who benefit from youth work practice. Where masculinity intersects with poverty, outcomes for men are poor³⁹. Youth workers can offer strong protective factors to mitigate the risk of boys and young men acting out with harmful traits. Youth work supports boys and young men to act as positive role models, challenging others to Imagine a Man alongside key partners in championing the positive framing of masculinity in Scotland⁴⁰.

Notably, during the extended equalities consultation, as part of the co-production of the paused National Youth Work Strategy, groups consulted from across all the protected characteristics shared poverty as the critical exacerbating barrier to youth work in addition to the other inequalities they experienced. They said that without youth work, their connection to society would be worse, compounding the strong case for sustained and long-term investment in the youth work workforce.

We envisage a well-resourced and stable sector in which youth work organisations across the statutory and voluntary sectors can provide these opportunities for young people through state-of-the-art facilities and equipment, skilled, up to date and confident staff and volunteers, and secure funding that enables youth work to be an attractive and viable career or voluntary vocation.

Recognition of youth work in public policy

We must foster education and training, offering concrete opportunities for integration in the labour market and fighting discriminatory practices by creating meaningful inclusion and commitment to a personalised education that serves the many. Youth work as a social and educational practice can help deliver this aim. However, political action is needed.

The Scottish Government must harness the power of youth work and more comprehensive CLD partners by promoting and securing sufficient youth work services. Youth work partnerships between local authorities, voluntary organisations and young people will help deliver the focus needed on young people's personal, social and educational development, supporting a revisioned and enhanced CLD field.

To deliver this, the sector tells us, we must provide adequate protection and funding and rebuild a skilled workforce. The critical purpose of youth work is the exploration

³⁸ <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girlguiding-covid19-research-briefing.pdf>

³⁹ [NKBL_ImagineAMan_Apr23_Policy-Briefing_R1-3.pdf \(noknivesbetterlives.com\)](#)

⁴⁰ Ibid

with young people, individually and in groups, helping to create opportunities in an increasingly bleak and precarious funding landscape.

It is a national imperative to focus on the needs of young people, building physical and social skills and creativity and encouraging them to remain hopeful in challenging times. Youth work must continue to advocate the politics of the common good and demonstrate, in numbers and stories, how good youth work achieves this aim⁴¹, ensuring families receive the right support at the right time.

Youth workers often build relationships with the whole family, providing broader support and targeted at low-income families or those with protected characteristics. The approach contributes to raising attainment, supporting family well-being and enabling parents and carers to take up or sustain work, training and study. The practice is crucial to tackling child poverty and helping create positive changes in the lives of young people.

A thriving youth work sector

In response to the Scottish Government's Education Recovery: Key Actions and Next Steps, YouthLink Scotland has made key recommendations to ensure youth work is recognised and is funded as an integral and ongoing part of education recovery for Scotland's young people⁴². This is mirrored by our response to the education reform consultation on behalf of Professor Ken Muir, University of the West of Scotland and independent advisor to the Scottish Government, calling for significant reform of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)⁴³.

Throughout the European youth work community, we see recurring themes as priorities for youth work and young people's lives: Digitalisation, sustainability, mental health, inclusion, democracy, and employment.

These align closely with the priorities of the sector in Scotland, which YouthLink is committed to supporting the development of practice skills and confidence to meet the emerging needs of young people. By investing in workforce development around these areas, the sector can grow in its confidence to meet young people's needs now and, in the future, and ensure the Scottish Government delivers on its promise to ensure Scotland is the best place in the world for a young person to grow up.

We need to focus on the critical infrastructure to make this possible, tailoring support for priority groups and a greater focus on how public spending can help drive the changes needed. Youth work is already operating in this space and can adapt further to meet the aims of the National Government⁴⁴.

⁴¹ Wylie, T. (2015) Youth Work. *Youth & Policy Special Edition: The Next Five Years: Prospects for Young People*. <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/wylie-youth-work.pdf>

⁴² [YouthLink Scotland calls for prominent role for youth work in Scotland's Education Recovery Action Plan](#)

⁴³ [YouthLink Scotland | Education reform consultation on behalf of Professor Ken Muir, University of the West of Scotland and Independent Advisor to the Scottish Government](#)

⁴⁴ [yw-employability-audit-2022-final-002.pdf \(youthlink.scot\)](#)

Summary

Youth workers routinely work alongside the most marginalised in our society. They are based in the heart of Scotland's local authorities, across the vibrant third sector and in communities in every corner of Scotland, and can help address the key barriers and struggles experienced by different groups. We know that Children's Services Planning Partnerships will be central in delivering local collaborative approaches to deliver on local and national policy objectives. The review of CLD requires a united focus and purpose to provide the change to how CLD and related public services are delivered.

YouthLink Scotland will continue to work with local and national partners to understand and support the role of youth work in developing a holistic support offer that recognises the transformative impact of youth workers on the lives of children and young people.

ENDS

EDITOR'S NOTES