



YouthLink Scotland Report on Sector Engagement Following the CLD Review Report

YouthLink and Sector Engagement Process

The independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD) occurred between December 2023 and July 2024.

YouthLink Scotland supported the sector with a suite of [resources](#), including information for youth workers and a particular resource designed by and for young people to engage with the consultation and respond by the closing date of March 3.

This also helped inform YouthLink Scotland's [response](#) to the consultation. This included an [Executive Summary](#) of the reply.

The recommendations [report](#), Learning for All, for Life, was released on July 17, 2024.

YouthLink Scotland welcomed the launch with initial comments disseminated through the fortnightly youth work briefing.

During August and September 2024, YouthLink Scotland consulted the sector through network meetings to understand how the report was received. This report outlines areas of agreement and disagreement with the report and its recommendations, where further consideration and discussion are required.

The findings below represent the sector's initial response to the report over this period and should not be conflated with YouthLink Scotland's formal response to the Independent Review.

Key considerations

- YouthLink Scotland broadly welcomes the Review of CLD.
- The sector needs further engagement on the details and support with any recommendations taken forward by the Scottish Government and COSLA
- YouthLink Scotland would expect to be part of the proposed Strategic Leadership Group, should the Scottish Government and COSLA accept this recommendation.
- Ongoing work referenced in the report must be included to support any recommendations. For example, expanding and disseminating the [youth outcomes and skills framework](#).

Network engagement following the recommendations

Consensus/positives

- Entitlement to youth work
- Impact of youth work
- Recognition of underfunding comparative to public investment in education and skills
- Better use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) and Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) funds.

There were positive responses to seeing an entitlement to youth work being highlighted in the recommendations. One **YouthLink Scotland Member** said, *“It would be useful in the next stages to flesh out how this would look on the ground and make clear that there would need to be a legal duty to provide this entitlement to all young people”*. The dedication to a right to youth work was reflected across both the **Local Authority Youth Work Managers** and the **National Voluntary Youth Work Organisation Scotland** Network Sessions.

All the networks agreed that the sector needs to get better and “*smarter*” at sharing the impact of successful youth work practice, *“focusing on the right things to share – not the delivery process, but the impact of what we are doing”* (**youth workers from Digital Youth Work Network**).

Note: YouthLink Scotland is leading the development of a consistent digital approach to impact measurement in partnership with the Robertson Trust.

Cross-sectoral support exists for youth work’s strengthened role in PEF and SAC.

The **Local Authority Youth Work Managers Network** noted it was *“good to see the comments on life-long learning, whole-education settings, and not just school”*.

The sector is unanimous on the role of youth work at the centre of [education and skills reform](#). Several networks picked up the latter as an opportunity to sync the ambitions of the review with broader public policy progress on the learning system.

Overall, people were impressed with aspects of the report that helped them understand what the youth work service offers. However, they reiterated the perspective that the reviews are narrowly defined and skewed towards skills and employability and targeted provision. It does not appear to take a holistic and preventive approach, considering youth work’s role in addressing poverty and promoting positive health and well-being, youth justice, and equality.

Areas for further consideration

- Limited resources
- Mandatory Registration with CLDSC
- One size fits all approach
- Young people's voice and priorities need to be better considered.

The **Local Authority, Youth Work Managers Network**, expressed support for the sentiment in the overall narrative of the review recommendations, but that the recommendations contained a lot of commitment to further process and that as the review does not take account of the stark financial environment, there will be *“limited resource to support the ambition”*. In support of this view, **The Youth Work Training and Workforce Development Network** focused part of their discussion on the reality of their service in practice. They stated that spending reviews, restructurings, and posts are under threat, and people are leaving, but recruitment freezes and services are at existential risk. This means the top priority is local firefighting and keeping the services going. It was recognised that in some places, CLD is the only department chosen for cuts despite high SIMD areas and significant need. Additionally, funding has been pulled from the local voluntary sector. The comments on investment were reflected across YouthLink Scotland's network discussions. One member of the **Policy Planning Group** said, *“Youth work is about education – yes! However, it is also about prevention —providing cost-effective solutions that generate lasting benefits for young people and society. Explicit recognition and investment in youth work is required”*. They also stated the National Agency for Youth Work, YouthLink Scotland, *“must be part of future discussions in the recommendation for a leadership group”*. This was reflected in the Youth Work Training and Workforce Development Network. They said, *“National bodies need to get in a room together and come to the sector and seek views and send a collective response back to Scottish Government. This should this be the first thing that happens - a national conversation”*. The **Local Authority Youth Work Managers Network** agreed and wanted a commitment to include YouthLink Scotland in future discussions.

Some other challenges from the network included:

- Minimum standards could mean a *“race to the bottom”*
- No resource to implement the recommendations
- Review of where CLD sits with LAs is a *“real concern”*.
- A *“one size fits all”* approach could be *“damaging”*.

- Concern a lifelong learning strategy subsuming the paused youth work strategy could “*dilute the role of youth work*”.
- Capturing the voices of young people was unclear, so going forward, this should remain a priority. To make their point, the network highlighted the extensive consultation with young people and youth workers on their priorities during the co-production of the early phases of the National Youth Work Strategy (NYWS) led by YouthLink Scotland.
- The target audience for the report could have been clearer.

The Youth Work Workforce and Training and Development Network added,

- “*People are being asked to produce briefing papers for a local authority without a national picture to support it.*”
- *Many youth work managers are being asked to incorporate developments and recommendations into the CLD Plans and look at elements aligned to local plans and delivery*”.

Some local authorities interpret the review as a directive or accept it as a national government policy position rather than the findings of a review. One network member said, “*Our whole world round about CLD is starting to crumble. If we’re not able to support and train people into the workforce and there aren’t jobs for them*”.

A key question for many networks, especially those from the Third Sector, particularly the **National Voluntary Youth Work Managers Organisation Scotland Network**, was whether the review was relevant to their role, purpose, and future development. Despite voluntary networks making up significant portions of youth work in Scotland, the “*opportunity to positively reinforce the importance of their role within the review was largely missed*”.

The recommendation for a “*progressive requirement for all those working or volunteering in CLD roles to be members of the CLD Standards Council*” was not welcomed by voluntary youth work networks and raised questions from LA managers. It was agreed that there would need to be mutual negotiation and deliberation between CLDSC and NVOYOS about what this would look like for the voluntary sector and how to make it most valuable and relevant for volunteers and straightforward for organisations to support. But that now is not the time. The recommendation comes when voluntary youth work and volunteering more broadly are asked to do more for less. Some went as far as to say obliging registration with the CLDSC is “*anti-volunteering*”. This compounded alongside the sector’s steadfast resistance to end the [fee waiver for volunteers PVG](#) as part of

Disclosure Scotland's recent consultation. This was reflected in the Youth Work Workforce Training and Development Network, "*Recommendation for mandatory registration with CLDSC for volunteers – can conflict with call for diversity and grassroots growth throughout the report. Unnecessary bureaucracy that might be impinging growth*".

In relation to whether the Review could be a lever for investment in youth, a member of the **Local Authority Youth Work Managers Network** said it was "*unlikely*" because "*there was very little mention of youth work*". However, it was picked up by another group participant that there was some "*potential through SAC and PEF*" to deliver as it was "*not a zero-starting point*".

Comments were made across the networks on the review, seeing ESOL as only being in crisis or as an overfocus when it is a small part of a bigger picture. Youth work, including the workforce, is also in crisis.

Summary

The review's terms of reference presented a clear opportunity to outline the important work around education reforms where youth work in the broadest sense has gained renewed recognition.

We look forward to working with the Scottish Government, COSLA and our partners as they respond to the recommendations and consider which to implement to address the challenges outlined above.

ENDS

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