
YOUTH WORK AND CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

January 2021



YouthLink Scotland welcomes the OECD review of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and the opportunity to consider how it is being designed, implemented and experienced by learners.

CfE has been a significant driver in moving towards an inclusive curriculum. However, we're not there yet. To ensure the curriculum contributes as effectively as possible to the future of all young people in Scotland, we must fully embrace the range of practitioners (including youth workers) who are involved in its delivery and truly value the totality of a young person's learning across both formal and non-formal settings.

The COVID-19 crisis has significantly highlighted the role of youth work and the need for collaboration to bring about improvements to enhance student learning. As we recover we need to consider what we have learned this year and make the systematic and cultural changes that our children and young people deserve.

This paper outlines youth work's role in implementing CfE and identifies the key areas where the OECD review can seek to strengthen CfE.

YouthLink Scotland calls for:

- Stronger recognition of youth work's integral role within education policy.
- Strong leadership that recognises youth work's contribution to designing and delivering children and young people's curriculum entitlements through a Broad General Education (BGE) and Senior Phase, including opportunities for personal learning and achievement.
- Clearer guidance for all leaders regarding collaboration in curriculum design, including greater alignment between community and school planning.
- Parity of esteem between the different learning pathways and contexts – a curriculum that offers and values, personalisation and choice.
- Embrace the opportunity of incorporation of UNCRC, to strengthen what we mean by the Aims of Education (Article 29) and realise our ambition for young people.

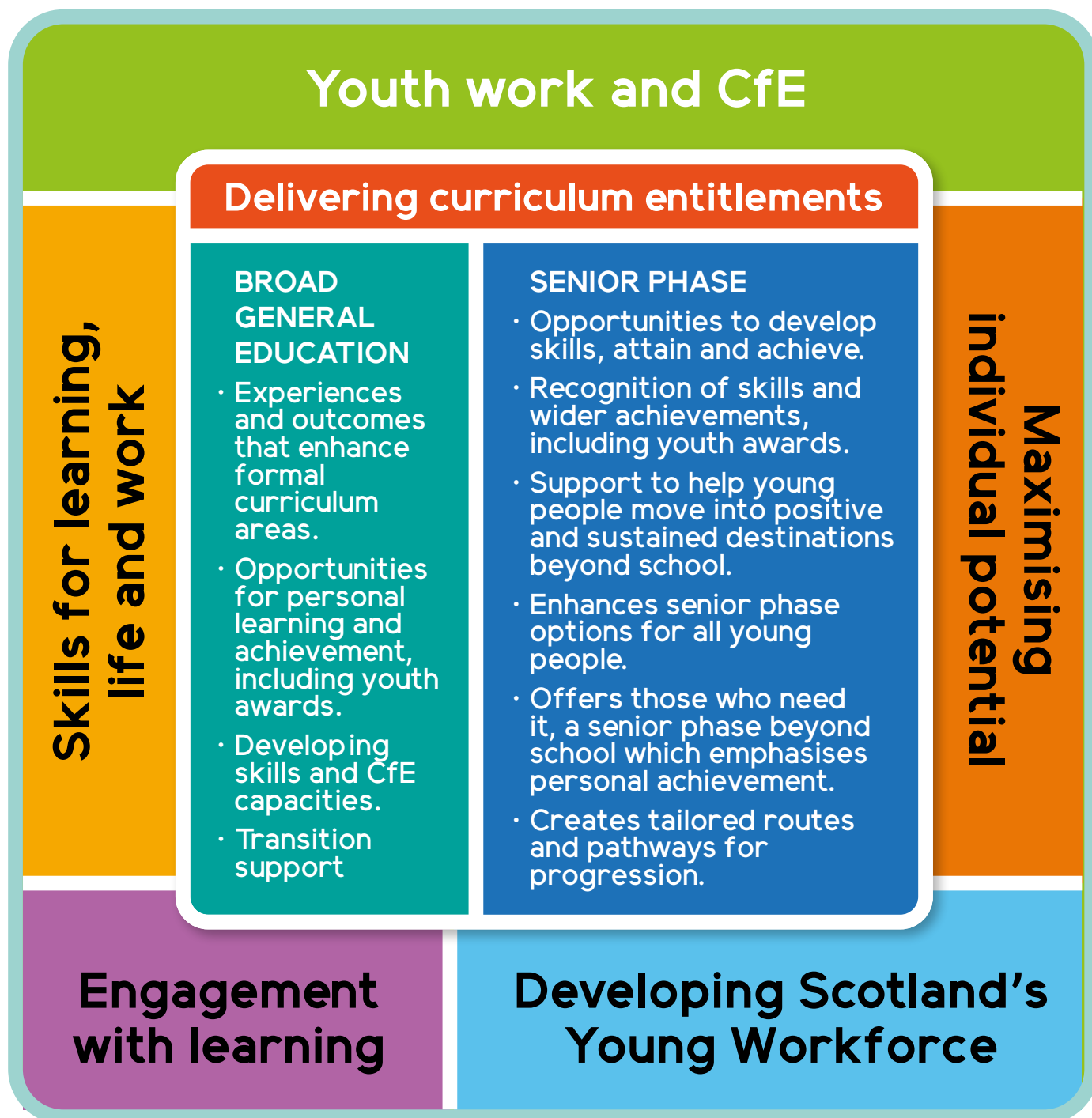
Youth work is Curriculum for Excellence

The CfE national rhetoric is clear – the curriculum is *"the totality of all that is planned for children and young people throughout their education"*¹.

This includes youth work. Youth work is part of the education system, delivering CfE across communities and schools.

Youth work is a recognised education practice that facilitates the personal, social and educational development of young people. It is one strand of Community Learning and Development (CLD). Youth workers, in the third sector and local authority, plan and deliver a significant variety of non-formal learning opportunities, helping children and young people to develop the skills and attributes they need to thrive. This complements and enhances learning through the formal curriculum, maximising individual potential with appropriate support and challenge. For some young people, youth work is the key to unlocking learning, overcoming barriers to engagement and providing a more tailored curriculum offer.

¹ <https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/>



The four capacities of CfE underpin Scotland's National Youth Work Outcomes. Youth work learning experiences are planned and measured around seven outcomes. As young people work towards these outcomes they develop important skills for learning, life and work. The key skills young people develop through youth work are described in the [Youth Work Skills Framework](https://www.youthlink.scot/education-skills/youthwork-outcomes-skills/). This Framework helps youth workers to support young people to recognise, articulate and demonstrate their skills development – and understand how they can transfer them to other contexts. Each skill is mapped to CfE and My World of Work.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly highlighted the role of youth work and the kinds of collaboration that work best to bring about improvements to enhance student learning. There is a growing body of evidence to demonstrate youth work's contribution to CfE:

[Learning through Lockdown](#) captures the scale and impact of youth work during the school summer holiday period 2020.

[National case study evaluation 2020](#) provides robust evidence that youth work contributes to closing the poverty-related attainment gap – developing skills, improving health and wellbeing, improving attendance and engagement in learning and helping young people move into positive sustained destinations post school.

Findings from the [Food Insecurity and Learning Loss](#) pilot evaluation point to the value of a youth work approach and the importance of partnership in successful delivery.

[Outdoor Learning and Education Recovery](#) outlines the integral role outdoor education plays across the breadth of Scotland's Curriculum³. This includes Learning for Sustainability⁴ to connect young people with nature, and raise awareness and understanding of environmental issues and encourage global citizenship.

[Youth work and employability](#) outlines the crucial role of the youth work sector in Scotland's social and economic renewal in the aftermath of Covid-19 – by developing young people's skills and providing them with a solid, lasting foundation from which to build a brighter future. This includes the sector's role in Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, as an integral part of CfE.

Numerous pieces of research have revealed the importance of universal youth work to young people and its value in supporting young people to develop and grow. Some examples areas include: confidence and self-esteem, skills development, equality and inclusion, realising potential, broadening horizons, improving health and wellbeing, education, and increased readiness for the employment market.⁵

The youth work sector recently received £3m in Scottish Government funding to support the

educational recovery of young people across Scotland most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. The Youth Work Education Recovery Fund will enable the sector to support young people in some of the country's most vulnerable communities to engage and re-engage with vital youth work learning opportunities. This is an important step in acknowledging the key role played by the sector in closing the poverty-related attainment gap and mitigating the impact of the crisis on young people's learning.

The evidence and experience from 2020 suggests that we must now strive to truly integrate youth work within CfE. To do this, youth work should be centrally represented within education policy and its development, both nationally and at local authority level. This will foster the independent, but equal status of all those with responsibility for CfE and support strong leadership that clearly demonstrates mutual respect for differing pedagogies in the learning workforce. Through a more cohesive approach, we will demonstrate to young people the equal value of different pathways and approaches to learning and achievement.

Collaboration in curriculum design

The OECD recommended in 2015 that "*CfE needs to be understood less as a curriculum programme to be managed from the centre and more a dynamic, highly equitable curriculum being built constantly in schools, networks and communities.*"⁶

This is just one area where the youth work sector comes into its own. The principles of curriculum design are embedded in the youth work approach. Youth work practitioners co-design the curriculum with young people, offering breadth, depth and progression through personalised and relevant learning opportunities. This enables all learners to find personalised pathways and undertake opportunities for personal achievement.

Youth work is also informed by community planning and in response to identified need within schools and college communities. Where youth work and



schools work collaboratively to design and deliver a curriculum offer this helps to both close the gap and raise the bar simultaneously. [Pathways in Partnership: The Development of FARE Scotland's Partnership Programme with Glasgow Schools](#) is one example of this approach.

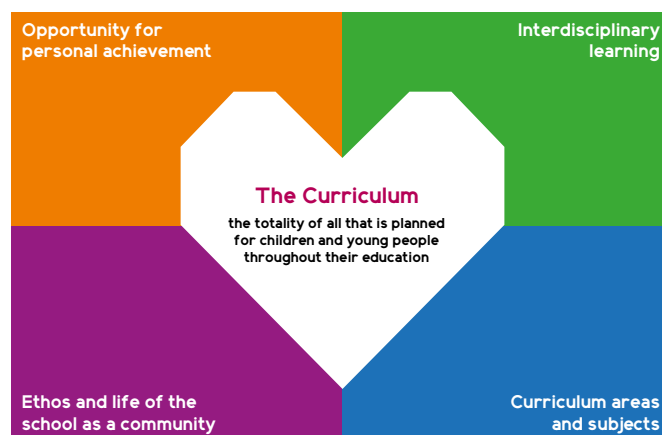
Whilst local empowerment within the system is welcomed, we still do not have a curriculum that is consistently and genuinely built in a collaborative manner across schools and communities. If this happened, we could achieve the vision of collective responsibility. YouthLink Scotland would urge clearer direction and guidance for all leaders on collaboration in curriculum design and delivery at local level. This will ensure children and young people experience a curriculum which is coherent from ages three to 18 and acknowledge the potential for learning up to and beyond the age of 25.

A curriculum that offers and values, personalisation and choice.

The CfE Refreshed Narrative states that “*personal achievement provides children and young people with a sense of satisfaction and helps to build motivation, resilience and confidence.*”⁷ Youth work plays a key role in planning and delivering opportunities for personal learning and achievement.

As one of the four contexts through which young people experience the curriculum, we must demonstrate to children and young people that personal learning and achievement is equally valued.

Parity of esteem in relation to the different learning pathways available to young people will facilitate full implementation of CfE.



⁷ <https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/>

Young people have told us they want their personal learning and achievements recognised. Youth awards are an important route through which young people have the opportunity to work towards a recognised accreditation that they can use to demonstrate their skills and achievements to employers and open up further options for their learning journey.

Youth awards:

- Help young people to develop a wide range of skills such as leadership and confidence.
- Enable young people to talk about their skills with confidence and understand their value.
- Support young people in their learning and to progress to further and higher education, training and employment on leaving school.
- Are valued by employers as helping young people gain skills for work.
- Can be life changing experiences for young people.

Youth work awards are widely used by the youth work sector to provide opportunity for and recognise personal achievement. Youth awards are achieved in a variety of settings. Many schools work in partnership with youth work and [youth award providers](#) to provide tailored pathways and enrich the formal curriculum offer.

The current pandemic has highlighted the need for education to understand and reframe what success should look like for children and young people. The focus on exam results once a year does not effectively demonstrate the range and depth of a young person's learning across the year. This year, formal education has been forced to consider the role of continuous assessment and professional judgement. Whilst for many young people the cancellation of exams was extremely stressful, this year's experience does provide a real opportunity to re-consider what the structure of school should look like, how we timetable opportunities for young people to develop skills and capacities as well as knowledge and how we truly capture and celebrate young people's success.

CfE works well where schools and youth workers jointly monitor and track the impact of the curriculum offer. The youth work sector is experienced in working with young people to measure progress. Scotland's National Youth Work Outcomes, underpinned by the four capacities of CfE, can be used effectively to measure progress in CfE. YouthLink Scotland's [Youth Work Skills Framework](#) helps youth workers support young people to recognise and articulate the transferable skills developed through youth work. This also offers a shared language to support collaborative activity around the skills agenda and continuous assessment of progress. Additionally, we believe youth awards should be given recognition alongside formal exam qualifications as valid evidence of learning achievement.



⁸ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5498/shetland-islands-visible-impact-final.pdf>

Closing the poverty-related attainment gap

As part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, youth work focuses on improving outcomes for children and young people who need it most. This includes addressing barriers to learning and offering flexible and tailored options and pathways for young people to develop and recognise skills and achievements. These improve attendance, engagement, attainment, health and wellbeing and school leaver destinations. Reflecting on youth work within Brae High School, Head Teacher Logan Nicolson said *“Our Youth Development Worker has played a vital role in many school improvement initiatives in our school, such as, tackling the attainment gap by supporting increased attendance and taking an active role in our pupil support and safeguarding teams... and contributing to many wider achievement opportunities.”*⁸

[Youth work: a guide for schools](#) outlines the key ways that youth work and schools can collaborate to close the gap. YouthLink Scotland’s Scottish Attainment Challenge programme [National case study evaluation](#) provides a range of examples to demonstrate youth work’s impact on closing the gap.

The implementation of Attainment Challenge funding has increased opportunity for youth work and school collaboration and is improving understanding of youth work’s role within CfE. To mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people most affected by poverty and inequality, we must continue to recognise that closing the poverty gap goes beyond the school gates. Youth work, in schools and communities, will play a key role in improving outcomes as we recover from the pandemic.

The youth work sector believes that youth work is valuable for all children and young people and that increasing equity of access to opportunities will support implementation of the UNCRC.

Embrace the opportunity of incorporation of UNCRC, to realise our ambition for young people

YouthLink Scotland strongly believes that this review is a real opportunity to transform our education system. Our position is reflected in the views we have gathered from the youth work sector. Scotland is on the cusp of incorporating UNCRC into Scots Law⁹. Our vision for incorporation should be one that realises our ambition for education. One of the many advantages of incorporation is that we have an opportunity to look again, at what mean by human rights and dignity in education.

The youth work sector has long argued that we should take a holistic look at how we deliver education. Our vision for the review is that more young people will get the opportunity to flourish in an environment that is truly young person led. Incorporation will accelerate discussions and encourage more engagement with children and young people and partners on how to deliver an education system that prioritises this approach. Consistent policy making means we should support the right to education in the broadest sense. This provides a real opportunity for the curriculum review to acknowledge this and build a unified approach to education for all; including:

- A system-wide shared vision of what we want for children and young people for the future.
- Changing the structure of school and traditional timetabling.
- Demonstrating to young people that their skills and capacities development is as valuable as subject-based knowledge.
- Offering and promoting more innovative and diverse pathways.

⁹ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/news/september-2020/uncrc-incorporation-can-empower-youth-workers-as-human-rights-defenders/>



Learning from COVID-19 and the opportunities afforded by the youth work education recovery fund provide a real opportunity for the review to drive a transformative phase of CfE.

CfE must seek to enable every child or young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor and that requires all young people have access to youth work as a key component of their learner journey.

For more information visit the YouthLink Scotland website or contact mbruce@youthlinkscotland.org.

⁹ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/news/september-2020/uncrc-incorporation-can-empower-youth-workers-as-human-rights-defenders/>

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