Consultation Response YouthLink Scotland –

Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy

Please contact spaterson@youthlink.scot for more details on this response.

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work and the collective voice of the sector. Our members have a workforce of 55,000, including 45,000 volunteers, working with 500,000 young people across Scotland.

We play a crucial role in promoting the rights and well-being of young people. Our organisation advocates for young people's rights and ensures that their voices are heard in policy-making and decision-making.

We champion and advocate for the youth work sector so that all young people can access high-quality youth work. Our membership of voluntary and statutory youth work organisations and intermediaries, including every local authority, spans all of Scotland, and changes lives for the better every day.

Our values

- We believe in young people and prioritise their needs and rights.

- We are committed to the highest standards of protection and safety for young people.

- We are a learning organisation, promoting innovation and change.

- We represent our members with integrity and value collaboration with partners.

- We are committed to being inclusive, accessible, ethical, equitable and diverse

Part 1: Proposed Vision and Objectives

1. Do you agree with the vision?
Yes, with recommendations.

1a. Please explain your answer or provide more information:
The vision to support strong, resilient, inclusive communities where everyone enjoys the realisation of their human rights aligns closely with the ethos of Scotland's youth work sector. It complements YouthLink Scotland's mission as the National Agency for Youth Work in Scotland, which is to promote young people's rights and well-being while ensuring their voices are heard in policymaking and decision-making.

YouthLink Scotland contributes to this vision through:

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- Advocacy: Supporting the full implementation of the UNCRC, advancing *The Promise*, and influencing policies that affect young people.

- Empowerment and Participation: Promoting youth participation and youth voice in decisions that affect them, creating platforms for young people to express their views, and facilitating their direct involvement in consultations and advisory groups.

- Education and Campaigns: Raising awareness of young people's rights, providing resources and training to empower young people, and running impactful campaigns.

- Support for Youth Work: Ensuring the youth work sector delivers high-quality services aligned with rights-based principles and providing critical support to youth workers and young people.

- Equality and Diversity: Promoting diversity and inclusion, opposing discrimination, and creating equitable opportunities for all young people.

- Research and Evidence: Conducting research to inform evidence-based policies and disseminating knowledge to improve youth work practices.

While the vision provides a strong framework, it must explicitly acknowledge young people as a distinct group who face systemic barriers and inequalities, with a specific focus on upholding their rights through the implementation of the UNCRC. This would ensure that Scotland's commitment to human rights encompasses the critical role of youth work in building inclusive, rights-respecting communities.

2. Do you agree with the objectives?
Yes, with qualifications.

2a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.
The objectives effectively outline the steps required to advance equality and human rights. However, to fully realise these objectives for Scotland's youth work sector and young people, the following considerations must be included:

Systemic barriers often prevent young people from accessing youth work services equitably. A commitment to a legal right to youth work, aligned with the UNCRC, would ensure that all young people—regardless of background, geography, or circumstance—can access opportunities and support.

YouthLink Scotland has extensive experience facilitating youth participation. Embedding transparency requires ensuring that young people have accessible,

meaningful opportunities to influence policymaking, particularly at early stages. This involves creating mechanisms for their voices to shape planning and outcomes.

Proposal for a nationwide awareness campaign

YouthLink Scotland is uniquely positioned to support the integration of this strategy across Scotland alongside partners in the sector. As the National Agency for Youth Work, we would be interested in discussing with government a nationwide awareness campaign to engage public bodies and promote best practice in young people's participation, which could include:

- Showcasing examples of successful youth participation in policy-making processes.

- Providing training and resources to public bodies on embedding rights-based, participatory approaches.

- Facilitating sector-wide discussions to share learning and build a collective understanding of how young people's voices can influence decisions effectively.

Our offer reflects YouthLink Scotland's commitment to ensuring that the knowledge, experience, and priorities of young people shape public policy and services. This collaboration would help create a culture that values and promotes the participation of young people at all levels of decision-making. Our commitment to young people's advocacy, participation, education, equality, and research positions it as a key partner in delivering this.

By championing young people's rights and collaborating to promote best practices in participation, we can collectively ensure that Scotland is a global leader in equality, human rights, and the empowerment of young people.

3. Do you agree that strengthening leadership is a key driver for mainstreaming equality and human rights?
Yes.

3a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.
Strong leadership is essential for mainstreaming equality and human rights, particularly for young people who are often marginalized or excluded from decision-making processes. Leaders must recognise the value of engaging young people meaningfully in shaping policies and services that affect their lives.

4. Do you agree with the focus on different levels of leadership?
Yes.

4a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.
The focus on different levels of leadership—political, executive, and public sector—is essential for ensuring equality and human rights are embedded across all layers of society. However, it is important to recognise that leadership is not confined to formal roles or senior positions.

Young people can and should be leaders within their communities and society.

5. Have we captured the core elements of strengthening leadership within the context of mainstreaming?
Yes, but with recommendations.

5a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.
The core elements outlined are strong and provide a solid foundation. However, they could be strengthened further by explicitly referencing young people and their role.

Recommendations include:

- **Embedding participatory leadership:** Leaders should commit to participatory approaches that actively include young people, particularly those from marginalized or underrepresented groups, in decision-making processes. This ensures that leadership is inclusive and reflective of Scotland's diverse population.

- **Sustaining investment in leadership development:** To strengthen leadership across the public sector, sustained investment is needed in programs and initiatives that promote rights-based, inclusive leadership, including those that support young people to become future leaders.

6. What actions would you recommend to ensure strengthening leadership as outlined above will contribute to mainstreaming?

- Create mechanisms for young people to participate in leadership development programmes at all levels, including mentoring schemes, advisory boards, and youth councils.

- Provide training for leaders on engaging with young people meaningfully and effectively, ensuring they are equipped to support and amplify youth voices.

- Ensure leaders model inclusive, participatory, and rights-based practices by involving young people directly in decision-making and providing regular feedback on how their contributions shape policy.

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- o Implement youth-led monitoring and evaluation processes to assess the effectiveness of leadership in advancing equality and human rights.

- o Publicly report on progress in engaging young people and mainstreaming their perspectives across policy and service delivery.

7. Do you agree accountability and transparency are a key driver for mainstreaming equality and human rights?
Yes.

7a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.
Accountability and transparency are essential for ensuring that public bodies and decision-makers genuinely uphold equality and human rights. For young people, these principles are particularly critical. While young people are often asked for their views, there is a recurring issue where their input is not meaningfully considered or acted upon. This undermines trust, devalues participation, and perpetuates inequality.

Young people have the right to be heard under Article 12 of the UNCRC, which emphasises their right to express their views in matters affecting them and for these views to be given due weight. Accountability and transparency are the mechanisms through which this right can be realised.

For young people to fully engage in policy processes, information must be accessible, understandable, and available in formats that suit their needs, including through digital and creative platforms. Decision-makers must demonstrate how young people's contributions influence outcomes, which creates trust and ensures their participation is meaningful.

8. Have we captured the core elements of accountability and transparency within the context of mainstreaming?
Yes, but with recommendations.

8a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.
The core elements are well captured but could be strengthened by explicitly addressing the need for participatory accountability mechanisms for young people and marginalised groups. While the strategy outlines formal accountability mechanisms such as scrutiny bodies and reporting processes, these often feel distant or inaccessible to young people.

9. What actions would you recommend to ensure greater accountability and transparency contribute to mainstreaming?

Develop accessible reporting formats, establish regular feedback loops, and require public bodies to involve young people in decision-making processes. Strengthen Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (EHRIAs) to explicitly consider young people's rights. Expand advocacy roles, introduce clear accountability for participation, and raise awareness through education and training.

10. Do you agree that ensuring an effective regulatory and policy environment is a key driver of mainstreaming equality and human rights? Yes.

10a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.
To lead globally in equality and human rights, Scotland must ensure regulations and policies explicitly address young people's rights under the UNCRC. Policy frameworks must consider the unique needs of young people and include them in shaping solutions, particularly in areas like youth services, education, and employment. Tools like Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (EQIAs and HRIAs) are essential to ensure policies support young people's rights, with a focus on marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

11. Have we captured the core elements of ensuring an effective regulatory and policy environment within the context of mainstreaming? Yes, but with recommendations.

11a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.
The strategy should emphasise the importance of involving children and young people in the design and review of policies, ensuring meaningful engagement with rights holders. Beyond compliance with EQIAs and HRIAs, policies must be monitored for their real-life impact on young people. The framework should also address systemic barriers, such as age discrimination and lack of tailored services, including youth work, with a focus on intersectionality to understand how factors like socio-economic status, disability, gender identity, and ethnicity intersect to affect young people's experiences.

12. What actions would you recommend to ensure that an effective regulatory and policy environment will contribute to the achievement of mainstreaming?

Key recommendations include embedding young people's voices in policy design, strengthening Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (EQIAs and HRIAs), and improving the accessibility of regulations. Focused actions include developing youth-specific impact assessments, investing in training for policymakers, and

establishing transparent monitoring and reporting systems. Collaborative policymaking with youth organisations and public bodies, alongside prioritizing long-term approaches, will ensure young people's rights are integrated across all policy areas, setting a global standard for equality and human rights.

13   Do you agree that utilising evidence and experience is a key driver for mainstreaming equality and human rights?
Yes.**13a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.**
Utilising evidence and experience is essential to mainstreaming equality and human rights because it ensures policies are grounded in the lived realities of those they impact. For young people, this is especially important, as their voices and experiences are often overlooked or undervalued in decision-making. YouthLink Scotland's range of networks could be utilised to gather evidence of young people's experiences.

14. Have we captured the core elements of utilising evidence and experience within the context of mainstreaming?
Yes, but with room for improvement

14a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.
The framework combines quantitative, qualitative, and lived experience data but should explicitly include young people as key stakeholders in evidence collection. A stronger focus on intersectional data specific to marginalised young people, particularly around race, disability, and gender identity, is needed. Additionally, establishing clear feedback mechanism for lived-experience panels will ensure young people's contributions meaningfully influence decisions.

15. What actions would you recommend to ensure that utilising evidence and experience as outlined above will contribute to the achievement of mainstreaming?

Prioritise evidence from young people by gathering through youth advisory panels and collaborations with youth work organisations.

Close data gaps on marginalised young people's intersectional experiences, including age, race, disability, and gender.

Embed young people's voices in policy processes, ensuring their active participation in consultations and decision-making.

Improve accessibility of engagement opportunities for all young people, including those with additional support needs, using inclusive methods.

Develop feedback mechanisms to ensure that insights from young people are used in policy development and decision-making.

Integrate evidence and lived experiences into monitoring and evaluation processes to assess policy impacts on young people.

Build capacity within the public sector to support youth-inclusive policymaking through training and knowledge-sharing.

16 Do you agree that enhancing capability and culture is a key driver for mainstreaming equality and human rights?

Yes.

16a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.

Enhancing capability and culture is crucial for mainstreaming equality and human rights, as it embeds these principles into every layer of decision-making and service delivery. Without this cultural shift, equality and human rights risk being treated as peripheral considerations rather than central to policy and practice.

For the youth work sector, this transformation is vital because young people often experience systemic barriers and exclusion. By equipping all public sector staff with the skills, knowledge, and motivation to prioritise equality and human rights, we ensure these principles are applied consistently, improving outcomes for young people.

17. Have we captured the core elements of enhancing capability and culture within the context of mainstreaming?

Yes, but with opportunities for refinement.

17a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.

The strategy captures many core elements, such as building a diverse workforce, embedding equality and human rights into management practices, and providing tailored training opportunities. However, there are areas where more emphasis be placed:

Embed young people's rights and needs in training programmes, with a focus on intersectionality.

Ensure cross-sector collaboration, using youth work expertise in rights-based approaches.

Align capability-building with Scotland's commitment to the UNCRC.

Develop measurable indicators to evaluate inclusivity and accessibility for young people.

18. What actions would you recommend to ensure that enhancing capability and culture as outlined above will contribute to the achievement of mainstreaming?

Please see response to 14,15,16 and 17

19. Do you agree that this Strategy will provide a foundation to influence a culture of mainstreaming equality and human rights within Scottish Government and the wider public sector?

Yes.

19a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.

Success depends on sustained investment, clear accountability, and inclusive and consistent implementation.

20. Do you agree that improving capacity is a key driver for mainstreaming equality and human rights?

Yes.

20a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.

Improving capacity is fundamental to mainstreaming equality and human rights because it ensures the necessary resources: time, people, and funding are in place to turn these policies into meaningful action. Without sufficient capacity, even the best intentions and knowledge will fall short of delivering change.

Capacity-building must also extend to supporting the third sector, where organisations are often at the forefront of delivering services to marginalised communities. Fair, sufficient, and sustainable funding allows these organisations to recruit skilled staff, innovate, and scale their impact, directly contributing to the wider mainstreaming agenda.

21. Have we captured the core elements of improving capacity within the context of mainstreaming?

Yes, but further clarity and emphasis on practical mechanisms would strengthen the approach.

21a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.

While the strategy highlights the importance of funding for the third sector, it should emphasise the need for multi-year, flexible funding arrangements. Many youth work organisations operate on short-term funding, which creates instability and limits their ability to plan strategically or respond to emerging needs.

The strategy could benefit from more detailed guidance on how public bodies can integrate equality and human rights into budgeting processes.

22. What actions would you recommend to ensure that improving capacity will contribute to the achievement of mainstreaming?

Provide Multi-Year, Flexible Funding for the Third Sector.

Embed Equality and Human Rights into All Budgeting Decisions.

Strengthen Third-Sector Partnerships. Ensure joint working between public bodies and third-sector organisations to co-design policies and services. This ensures resources are used efficiently and directly benefit marginalised groups, including young people.

23. Do you think the proposed approach to a collated Action Plan will drive change?

Yes.

23a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.

A collated Action Plan has the potential to drive change by centralising commitments and ensuring transparency, accountability, and alignment across sectors. By bringing together cross-cutting mainstreaming actions in one accessible location, the Action Plan can address current fragmentation and make it easier for organisations, stakeholders, and the public to track progress.

However, the Action Plan must also:

have specific outcomes for each action with a timeframe to ensure progress can be tracked meaningfully.

Include Sector-Specific Examples: Highlighting commitments relevant to youth work and other specific sectors will demonstrate practical application and inspire replication.

Promote Co-Design: The Third Sector, including youth work practitioners, should be involved in shaping and updating the Action Plan to ensure it reflects lived experiences and practical realities of young people.

24. Do you think there is a need for a cross-public sector toolkit to support mainstreaming of Equality and Human Rights?

Yes.

24a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.

A cross-public sector toolkit is essential for ensuring mainstreaming of equality and human rights is practical, consistent, and actionable. Many organisations, especially smaller third-sector groups like youth work organisations, struggle with limited resources, capacity, and technical expertise to implement mainstreaming effectively. A well-designed toolkit can address these gaps by providing accessible support.

25. What practical steps would you include to make the toolkit an effective resource?

Make the toolkit accessible through a dedicated, easy-to-navigate website.

Use clear, jargon-free language to ensure inclusivity.

Provide organisations with tools to assess their current capacity, capability, and gaps in mainstreaming equality and human rights.

Include tailored resources for sectors like youth work, education, health, and housing. For youth work, practical examples might include designing inclusive engagement strategies or addressing intersectional issues faced by young people.

Offer webinars, case studies, and scenario-based learning modules to actively engage people.

Training sessions either in person, online or as self-directed online learning that aligns with the toolkit.

26. What are your views on establishing additional reporting requirements?

Additional stand-alone reporting requirements should not be created.

26a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.

The existing statutory reporting framework already includes extensive mechanisms for monitoring progress on equality and human rights. Adding additional, stand-alone requirements risks duplicating efforts, increasing admin burdens, and

detracting from the time and resources available for implementing meaningful change.

For the youth work sector, reporting requirements should focus on practical, actionable outcomes rather than overly burdensome processes. Ensuring existing reporting frameworks are streamlined, accessible, and sector-sensitive will ultimately be more impactful.

27. To what extent do the drivers capture the full range of activity required to mainstream equality and human rights?

Captures the full range

Captures most of the range

Captures some of the range

Does not capture any of the range

Captures most of the range

27a. Please explain your answer or provide more information.

It has captured the majority of the range of activity required to mainstream equality and human rights. Specific consideration needs to be given to young people and how they are actively and meaningfully engaged throughout. With the UNCRC Incorporation it is vital that young people and their intersectional identities and experiences are included specifically.