

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT / COSLA

Since 2020 we have had a variety of meetings on this issue, with both officials from government and representatives of COSLA. In a bid to move forward positively we issued a joint statement with COSLA in September 2021, you can find the statement below. There was also a very positive video message from the Minister which sat alongside this.

JOINT STATEMENT ON THE RESUMPTION OF INDOOR YOUTH WORK

"COSLA and YouthLink Scotland, the national agency for youth work, are fully committed to ensuring the safe return of youth work, including safe access to facilities.

Local authorities across Scotland continue to face significant challenges as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. We acknowledge the ongoing work that is being undertaken to resume vital services. This includes the collaborative efforts, with third sector partners, to reopen facilities for youth work.

We do not underestimate the physical and mental health impacts which children and young people have experienced throughout the pandemic, and that these impacts have fallen unequally across society. This is why we have committed to the safe return of youth work services as part of Scotland's transition out of lockdown to help address the impacts associated with extended periods of isolation and reduced participation in normal activities.

There has been a breadth of evidence gathered during this pandemic, including young people's views through the Lockdown Lowdown survey, the Equity Audit and YouthLink Scotland's reports on the youth work sector. We know from listening to young people and from collating evidence across the pandemic, that providing safe spaces for young people to engage with their peers and youth workers, receive support and rebuild important relationships, is crucial to mitigating the impact of the pandemic on our young people's mental health, wellbeing and learning.

Scottish Government guidance highlighted the vital role CLD, and youth work plays in education. YouthLink Scotland's Access to Facilities Report (June 2021) identified that there are still considerable barriers to overcome. However, we have seen many positive examples of local authorities and their partners working collaboratively to reopen spaces for youth work for all young people. We know that through continued local authority leadership and focused collective action we will see continued reopening of spaces for youth work.

To ensure young people have access to the support they need, it is essential that safe spaces for youth work are available, now that youth work can fully open again. We know that youth work is key to reaching and engaging young people, to provide mental health support, signpost to other services, tackle isolation and help young people re-engage in learning.

Please get in touch with COSLA or YouthLink Scotland if there is any additional support we can provide in what will continue to be challenging circumstances.”

Following this statement, in response to ongoing concerns from the sector, we carried out our 4th survey. Again we met with COSLA to discuss the findings and the ongoing challenges, which led to the issue being raised an agenda item at their board meeting. The survey results were also sent to Scottish Government.

Tim Frew

Chief Executive

YouthLink Scotland - The National Agency for Youth Work

COSLA RESPONSE – December 2021

In November, following a meeting of the COSLA Children and Young People Board, we received the following response from COSLA on the issue of access to facilities, see excerpt below:

"Before giving you a summary of the local situation and challenges, it's important to let you know how valued youth work and youth workers are by Board members. Many of my Board colleagues expressed their feelings on the importance and value of youth work for the wellbeing of young people across the country. Indeed many members highlighted where services have restarted, reflecting the findings in your survey that access to facilities has increased in recent months.

Given the statistics you provided within your survey, you'll be well aware of some of the challenges facing our local authority colleagues. Board members were clear that where it's possible to open facilities, this is happening across the country.

In terms of local issues, the Board highlighted the following:

- We have received ring-fenced funding from the Scottish Government which is used to cover the additional cleaning costs related to the school day. This resource is already committed for day to day cleaning, additional cleaning for youth work and extra-curricular provision is not covered by this funding*
- You will be aware of the ongoing pressures on our workforce and there are particular issues around availability of janitorial and cleaning staff*
- It was also noted that the current Scottish Government guidance on reducing the risks in schools means that schools continue to face disruption to every day activity with limits on parent's access, caps on assemblies and the continued use of face coverings. We believe that the further relaxation of these restrictions (when it is safe to do so) will be key in making schools more accessible to youth work and the broader community.*

While this list is not exhaustive and there will be nuances across the country, as will be highlighted in your survey, the Board are clear on the importance of youth work. Please be assured that where it's possible to open facilities, local staff are ensuring this happens."

In December 2021, YouthLink Scotland and the Children and Young People's Commissioner launched the results of the survey with a media campaign, please see the press release and statements below. Bruce Adamson is very concerned about the current situation and is happy to meet with Scottish Government and COSLA in support of our sector: