



Youth Work Education Recovery Fund: A National Picture of Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented challenges, disrupting the lives of young people across the globe. In Scotland, one initiative stood out for its impact — the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund.

The Youth Work Education Recovery Fund bridged the gap between youth work and formal education. It provided over 48,000 activity hours for school pupils, fostering a strong connection between these two essential components of youth development. The fund's reach extended across all 32 local authorities in Scotland, creating effective partnerships between youth work organisations, both statutory and third sector, and formal education.

Promoting Holistic Development

The projects funded by the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund were designed to support not just academic growth but the holistic development of young people. Many programmes incorporated elements of outdoor learning and creative arts, recognising

the value of diverse experiences in shaping young minds.

Each project aimed to deliver at least three of the following outcomes:

- Developing young people's skills, including interpersonal skills.
- Improving young people's physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Enabling young people to overcome barriers to learning.
- Increasing young people's engagement in learning.
- Improving school attendance.
- Recognising young people's wider achievement and attainment.
- Enhancing young people's literacy and numeracy.
- Building readiness for work.
- Securing positive destinations.

The Youth Work Approach

What makes the youth work approach so effective in engaging and re-engaging young people in learning? The answer lies in the ability of youth workers to build strong, authentic relationships. They create positive conditions for learning, where young people feel trusted, respected, and listened to. Parents and teachers also appreciate youth work organisations' flexible and inclusive approach to learning.

Challenges and Ongoing Support

While the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund demonstrated the potential for effective collaboration, it also highlighted the need for ongoing support. Collaborative working between youth work organisations, schools, and Community Learning and Development (CLD) partners yielded wide-ranging benefits but also presented significant challenges.

Continued investment and support across the system are essential to develop and consistently embed effective collaborative practice. This remains a focus in the national programme led by the Youth Work and Schools Partnership team at YouthLink Scotland. It aligns with the refreshed mission for the Scottish Attainment Challenge, recognising the vital role that youth work can play in education recovery and improving outcomes for all young people.

Scope and Positive Outcomes

The scope of the programme was impressive:

- Supported by £3 million in funding from the Scottish Government.
- 64 funded programmes across Scotland.

- More than 17,000 sessions and 49,000 activity hours provided for young people.
- 17,904 young people participated.
- Targeted support in areas of multiple deprivation.

The impact is equally impressive:

- 82% of participating young people developed their skills.
- 79% experienced improved physical health and wellbeing.
- 78% overcame barriers to learning.
- 61% were more engaged in learning.
- 37% achieved recognition of wider achievement and attainment.
- 96% improved their literacy and numeracy.
- 81% secured positive destinations.
- 55% showed improvements in school attendance.
- 35% developed their readiness for work.

The Youth Work Education Recovery Fund has not only helped young people recover from the challenges of the pandemic but has also demonstrated the power of collaboration and youth work in supporting our young people and providing a whole education approach.



"I was so determined to reach the goals I set myself — that feeling when I did was amazing. It's made me think differently about school and my choices going forward."

— Young Person



"To see his spark reignite — priceless."

— Parent



"Youth workers have skills — and huge insight from the relationships they build with young people in communities — to help us engage young people in learning."

— Teacher



"I hope this influences a culture change — not to see learning in isolation — young people own their own learning — it doesn't belong to school or community."

— Youth Worker



"This is magnificent. What a model for others if we get the chance to do this again."

— Highland Council

Education and Skills: Strengthening the Position of Youth Work in a Transformed System

Youth workers have always been a vital part of helping young people understand their progress and accomplishments. This is a key aspect of good youth work practice, as is our ongoing effort to evaluate our work and improve its quality.

In our sector, we must continue to work on using data effectively and collaboratively to influence policies and ensure sustained investments in youth work.

Our Scottish Attainment Challenge National Programme has brought significant changes in how youth work is perceived, particularly in narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. On a local level, youth work teams are becoming more confident to collect data to show how youth work enhances well-being, readiness to learn, and educational outcomes.

Increasingly, schools and youth work teams are working together to measure impact so that they can build a more comprehensive understanding of what works and how to make improvements in the right places.

YouthLink Scotland is working closely with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to ensure that the contribution of youth work is better recognised and supported in local, regional, and national plans and reports. We also want the education system to acknowledge

and value the achievements and skills young people gain through community learning and collaborations with youth work.

The updated National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework is providing a common language that helps youth workers focus their impact evaluations with young people and school partners.

While we are good at collecting compelling stories from young people about how youth work changes their lives, we shouldn't underestimate the importance of statistical data. Quantitative data, collected in ways that respect youth work values and involve young people, is a powerful tool to advocate for investment in youth work.

Education and Skills: Strengthening the Position of Youth Work in a Transformed System

As we await the new National Youth Work Strategy, it is crucial for our sector to articulate our role and impact in important areas of public policy, such as those identified in the recent Programme for Government. We are uniquely positioned to amplify the voices of young people in driving change. For example, we recently enabled **700** young people to express their views as part of the National Discussion on Education Reform.

They stressed that the skills and achievements they gain through youth work are just as important as formal qualifications.

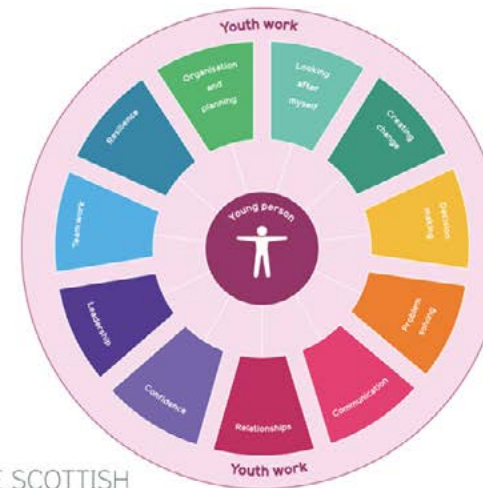
These young people provide invaluable data and insights for service improvement and system change. Here are the top lines from that consultation:

- Only 22% felt they were getting what they needed from education.
- 88% wanted the skills they learnt through youth work to be acknowledged alongside formal qualifications.
- 87% felt young people should have access to youth work in school.

The Scottish Government's programme for lifelong learning and skills reform offers a significant opportunity to transform the system and elevate youth work's role. Access to youth work is essential to implementing many recommendations and addressing the views and needs of young people who learn through youth work as part of their education.

We must continue to strengthen our collective voice and share both statistics and stories about our impact.

Positive Outcomes for Young People



- 94% improved their team working
- 91% improved their confidence
- 87% developed their communication skills
- 83% problem solving skills
- 81% were more practised in self-care
- 79% were building more positive relationships
- 66% of participating young people were demonstrating greater resilience



Youth work and school partnerships in the West Region have collated both quantitative and qualitative data to gauge impact. They are now testing a new dashboard tool to collate evidence using the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework.

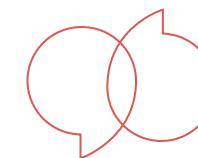


“Working in this way has allowed us to identify meaningful impacts that sometimes feel difficult to measure.”

— Depute Head Teacher



Dundee City Council have developed a set of digital resources to support quantitative and qualitative data-gathering at a programme level, structured around the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework.



“The outcomes and skills framework gives us a common language to explore the difference that youth work makes and creates a helpful focus for reflective learning conversations with young people.”

— Senior CLD Worker