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A study into the current climate change policies of the youth work sector in Scotland

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Abstract

This paper examines the current state of climate change policies within the youth work sector in Scotland and delves into what future direction could be taken by the sector in response to feedback from both youth workers and young people. It also establishes the current barriers and opportunities facing the sector in terms of addressing climate change. Current literature on this topic was evaluated, related to youth climate activism and the impact of youth work. In order to consider both the views of youth workers and young people, qualitative primary data was also collected in the form of semi-structured solo and group interviews. Participants from across the sector were invited to take part, from both rural and urban areas, from local and national organisations and from local authorities. This primary data was collected to establish the views and experiences of those within the sector on key issues such as climate literacy, obstacles to progress, and future goals for environmental policy. Key findings include that, although the youth workers felt they had some level of climate literacy, they did not feel confident about it, that time is a significant barrier in taking action against climate change, and that there is a need for a joined-up, collaborative approach across the sector and with external actors.

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List of Abbreviations

YLS	YouthLink Scotland
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
COP26	26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties

Chapter 1
Introduction

Climate change is a global issue that has been looming on the horizon for many years now. In the summer months of 2021, Canada and the US experienced deadly heatwaves and wildfires, the Met Office issued its first ever extreme heat warning for the UK, parts of Germany were devastated by floods, and the IPCC published their latest report stating that "it is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, oceans and land" (Ahmed, 2021; IPCC, 2021; Oltermann, 2021; *BBC News*, 2021). While the number of countries pledging to reach net-zero in terms of emissions by 2050 or a similar date continue to grow, it is clear that action by governments has fallen far short of what is needed to ensure that the global temperature rise and overall damage is limited.

From the Fridays for Future school climate strikes to Extinction Rebellion protests, young people have been proactive in speaking up about climate change, increasingly involving themselves in demonstrations and activism, and further educating themselves about climate change over recent years. The passion demonstrated by young people in encouraging governments and corporations to take stronger action and further steps to tackle climate change has been widely commended. However, it could also be said that the increasing number of protests and activism by young people highlight a need for the institutions that help educate and support young people – such as schools and the youth work sector – to improve their own policies related to climate change.

The turning point in the recent increase in youth climate activism could be attributed to the Fridays for Future strike movement, which formed in August 2018, when Greta Thunberg began her own climate strike outside of the Swedish Parliament. Following this, the movement quickly gained momentum, with global strikes taking place in March and May of 2019, and, culminating in the 2019 Global Week for Future, which saw 4,500 strikes take place across 150 countries (Milman, 2019). Although there have been other forms of activism aimed at encouraging governments and corporations to take action on climate change, such as the civil disobedience movements of Extinction Rebellion in November 2018 and April 2019, the school climate strikes have been of particular interest because the activism is being led by young people, who are typically excluded from decision making and political discourse (UNICEF, 2021).

According to the Scottish Government's National Youth Work Strategy 2014 -2019, youth work is "an empowering process which enables young people to exercise genuine power – to take decisions, follow them through and take responsibility for their consequences" (The Scottish Government, YouthLink Scotland and Education Scotland, 2014). Youth work plays an important role in fulfilling the goals of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 12, which states that any child capable of forming their own

views has the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting the child, with those views also given due weight (United Nations, 1989). The rights of the child are currently being mainstreamed into policy across Scottish Government portfolios (The Scottish Government, 2018). Additionally, YouthLink Scotland (YLS) has set out three essential and definitive criteria that must be met by youth work. These are that young people are involved of their own volition, that youth work must build up in the spaces where young people are, be it a geographical region or specific area of interest, and that youth work recognises that young people and youth workers are partners in a learning process (YouthLink Scotland, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). Based on these criteria, particularly the criterion that youth work must engage in the spaces where young people are, it can be argued that youth work should be focusing on environmental issues and climate change as they become key points of discussion for young people.

One of YLS's priority areas is Learning for Sustainability, which was embedded within the previous National Youth Work Strategy and weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development education and outdoor learning (Education Scotland, 2021). At present, YLS has organised several environmentally conscious projects, including On Our Wave Length, #IWill4Nature, Our Bright Future, and climate literacy training in collaboration with Keep Scotland Beautiful. Additionally, both young people and youth workers recently raised climate change and environmental issues as priority areas during the consultation period of the new National Youth Work Strategy 2021-2025 (YouthLink Scotland, 2020). COP26 is also fast approaching in Glasgow this year, so the momentum to act in addressing climate change is growing across the youth work sector and the country, as it seeks to adapt policies for the future.

Youth work led initiatives have proved successful in the past in Scotland by engaging with young people at a local level. The No Knives, Better Lives initiative was launched in 2009 in response to high rates of knife crime, collaborating with local partners and focusing on supporting young people to change behaviours (YouthLink Scotland, 2019). The initiative has been incredibly successful since its inception, with large reductions in violent crime and weapons possession observed. While the initiative to reduce knife crime has a very different, more targeted area of focus compared to environmental issues, lessons can be learnt from the success of the initiative across Scotland. For example, the No Knives, Better Lives initiative has worked across all 32 local authority areas of Scotland, provided training and support to youth workers, and worked in partnership with young people to support them in addressing the issues that affect them on a daily basis (YouthLink Scotland, 2019, p. 10). The impact of this initiative is clearly visible, demonstrating the important role that youth work led initiatives can play in supporting young people to make their voice heard and encourage positive change.

However, at present, there is very little research into the role that young people play in tackling climate change and lack of a centralised strategy or approach from the youth work sector. While some in the sector are very clear with their aims of protecting the planet, others

appear to mention the issues infrequently, although there may be several factors for this, such as a lack of climate literacy, funding, or time.

While there is a lot of work ongoing in the sector promoting youth social action, outdoor learning, global citizenship and more to support young people in taking action, connecting with nature, and helping biodiversity to flourish, YLS have reported a gap in knowledge, confidence, and climate literacy amongst the workforce. Therefore, while the youth work sector could play a pivotal role in helping to adapt for and mitigate the impacts of climate change, the lack of an overview of where the sector currently stands and what both young people and youth workers want to see in future is prohibiting further progress.

Thus, this research seeks to examine the current state of environmental policy and action to address climate change within the youth work sector, before exploring the possible opportunities that can be taken advantage of and barriers that may hinder progress in future environmental policy development.

The literature review explores existing research in youth activism related to climate change, as well as the impact of youth work in Scotland. However, as climate change activism by young people has only become prominent in recent years, there are some gaps in the literature, which this study aims to fill.

Primary data in the form of semi-structured solo and group interviews with both young people and youth workers will be analysed, giving a unique insight into the experiences and views of those carrying out youth work and those accessing it. Effort has been made to ensure that the data collected covers both rural and urban areas, as well as inviting local authorities, local organisations, and national organisations to take part.

The keywords of this research include young people, youth work and youth workers, policies, programmes, good practice, climate change and environmental issues. As some of YLS's member organisations support young people up to the age of 30, in the context of this research, young people refers to those within the age bracket of 11-30. Youth work refers to a recognised education practice in which young people choose to participate, which builds on where young people are, and which recognises the youth worker and young people as partners in the learning process. Youth workers refers to those who are employed or volunteer within this sector. Policies refers to the course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization or government. Good practice refers to policies or programmes that are generally accepted to be of a higher standard than other alternatives and can be learnt from. Climate literacy refers to the understanding of human impacts on climate and the impacts of climate on human systems. In the context of this research, while climate change was the focus of questioning, many participants referred to wider problems, such as sustainability, air pollution, or recycling. Therefore, climate change refers to the long-term global shifts in climate patterns, while environmental issues is used as a wider umbrella term to refer to the changes and damage being done to the planet, such as rising sea levels or depleting biodiversity, that come about because of human impact.

Chapter 2
Literature review

The literature review will delve into the relevant studies related to youth activism and the challenges that the youth work sector faces. There will also be an exploration of some of the current environmental policies of the sector in Scotland to help to frame the research. The review will be organised into three sections: (1) the increase in climate activism among young people and the significance or impact of it, (2) the impact of youth work and the challenges it faces in developing good environmental policies, and (3) the current outlook of the sector and context of the issues within Scotland.

2.1 Increasing climate activism among young people

Due to the relatively recent increase in young people's involvement in climate activism, there is not an abundance of literature available regarding this topic. However, this itself highlights the need for further research into the reasons behind the increase in activism, the impact young people are having on addressing the issues, and the equal impact that activism has on those taking part. While the majority of the literature reviewed related to climate activism and young people discusses behaviour from 2018 onwards, there is some research that focuses on earlier fossil fuel divestment campaigns in the US and demonstrates the important role that environmental activism, and youth activism as a whole, can play in expanding the boundaries of learning and identity development (Curnow and Gross, 2016). In their research, Curnow and Gross also note that, although there has been increasing research into the political engagement of the youth, there is still less work on student campaigns, even though fossil fuel divestment campaigns have become incredibly popular across college and university campuses in the US. They also note that there is even less documentation on the activism that school students engage in. Curnow and Gross used semi-structured interviews to conduct their research and found that the fossil fuel divestment campaigns were not only highlighting environmental issues, but also bringing together notions of solidarity, anti-oppression, and climate justice in a shift towards intersectionality that is led by young people. While this research was limited to fossil fuel divestment campaigns within US colleges and universities, it does highlight the changing parameters of climate activism.

Other authors have also explored this new wave of environmental activism, with Sarah Pickard labelling the new generation of campaigners as "Do-It-Ourselves" (DIO) protestors (Pickard, 2019). According to Pickard, DIO activism occurs when people take initiative and act politically of their own accord. This kind of activism can stem from a sense of disillusionment with the current political system, alongside growing distrust. Pickard states several key identifiers of DIO activism, the first being that it is enacted on an individual level, for example veganism, recycling, using active travel over cars, avoiding planes, boycotting, and reducing their plastic consumption for those involved in environmental activism. These choices reflect the values of a growing group of "socially liberal 'young cosmopolitans' who attach

importance to post-materialist values" (Pickard, 2019, p. 5). However, one issue identified by Pickard during her interviews is that some within the environmental movement believe that this kind of individual action is insufficient in the face of the global climate crisis. Therefore, another identifier of DIO activism is that it involves people coming together to act collectively. For young people, involvement in political and environmental activism can make them feel less alone. There is also the benefit of cross-generational protest within DIO activism, where both young and old come together and can learn from each other. DIO activism helps to position young people against the stereotypes and generalisations they face which paint them as apathetic or lazy, according to Pickard. She also highlights an increased role for technology within DIO activism among young people, whether it is watching documentaries on YouTube or liking and sharing content on social media, which seems particularly relevant given the increase in home-working and home-schooling that has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of cross-generational relationships related to climate change, Lawson *et al.* have presented research which shows that it is possible for climate change concerns to be built within parents indirectly through child-to-parent learning (Lawson *et al.*, 2019). Their research focused on middle school-aged children in the USA. While the research presented four major findings, the most relevant to this topic is that children in the treatment group fostered more climate change concern among their parents than in the control group and that changes in parents' climate change concern were most pronounced among the groups that are typically most resistant to climate change communication, such as those who are politically conservative. This shows that young people play an important role in further distributing their knowledge and education, so it is vital that they are equipped with the correct information. Not only do youth workers and young people benefit from the cross-generational relationship that youth work fosters, but the wider community also stands to benefit from the skills that young people can bring home.

O'Brien *et al.* have presented a typology for understanding dissent expressed through climate activism by young people, establishing three distinct types of activism – dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous dissent (O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward, 2018). O'Brien *et al.* first explore the reasons behind young people engaging in political activism, noting that in early studies of youth activism, young people were suggested to be inclined to oppositional politics as part of the development of an identity independent of their parents, although more recent studies suggest that youth activism has a "profound, positive influence on propensity to dissent from prevailing norms" (O'Brien *et al.*, 2018). The typology put forward in the research presents dutiful dissent as occurring when young people's concerns are voiced within institutional spaces – both existing and newly created. This includes activism within political parties and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and could be applied to activism within the youth work sector. Crucially, the research notes that this type of dissent plays a vital role in ensuring that there are visible conversations about climate change and that responses are enacted through processes like policy changes. Additionally, O'Brien *et al.* noted that dutiful

dissent can also provide young people with key skills and further insights into the wider political landscape that may help them explore additional types of dissent or action. Although perhaps less relevant to this research into the youth work sector, O'Brien *et al*. also explore disruptive dissent, where activists usually display more interest in challenging and changing the system rather than working within it, and dangerous dissent, which defies the norms by developing alternatives that create and sustain long-term change. While the youth work sector may be more aligned with dutiful dissent, the research does highlight the complementary nature of all three types of dissent and draws attention to the way the different types of activism have worked together in previous successful social movements, such as women's rights or LGBTQ+ rights. Furthermore, O'Brien *et al*. also emphasise the role that education plays, noting that education on climate change typically focuses on informing the youth about the mechanisms behind climate change and the impacts on it, while arguing that education on dissent and action against climate change requires additional elements such as critical thinking and further attention to wider issues such as social and environmental justice.

On the theme of justice, research by Thew, Middlemiss and Paavola explores claims of climate justice from youth which have not previously been explored in academic literature (Thew, Middlemiss and Paavola, 2020). In the research, Thew *et al*. studied a UK-based organisation during 2015-2018 and noted that youth participants initially conveyed injustices based on what they perceived to be future risks to their generation, although over time this was observed to shift towards a position of solidarity with injustices experienced by other groups during the present. The shift in attitude appears to have come about from interactions with other stakeholders whose framing of justice was different and became replaced with intragenerational injustices. However, this is concerning as it suggests that young people feel a need to shift their idea of injustice to accommodate the challenges faced by other groups, while other groups are not expected to reciprocate. Thew *et al*. also highlight an important issue in their research which, like other studies of youth participation, found that young people felt their participation was more about being seen rather than heard. This highlights the need for further support of young people to ensure that their voices are heard, that their participation is not tokenistic, and the injustices that young people face as a generation – particularly future injustices – are not overlooked.

In a similar vein, Lee *et al*. have conducted analysis of literature related to 8- to 19-year-old's perceptions and comprehension of climate change (Lee *et al.*, 2020). Here, the research looked at what children and adolescents' perceptions of climate change were in relation to its causes, impacts and solutions, as well as exploring what differences in perceptions could be observed across the past three decades, different geographical locations, and different age groups. While the research covered many different countries, of particular note to this study is the finding that a "more collaborative and nature-oriented learning environment was associated with higher levels of belief that the climate is changing in the United Kingdom" (Lee *et al.*, 2020, p. 5). On the reported perceptions of causes of

climate change, Lee *et al*. found that participants' understanding of the causes of climate change tended to be vague and generalised, although scientifically accurate knowledge of the causes tended to increase with age. Similarly, concepts of solutions to climate change were also reported to be at a superficial level and featuring misconceptions, alongside scientifically incorrect ideas about solutions. Also explored in the research is the concept of responsibility, with a clear disparity between how willing a participant would be to take a certain action relative to how useful they perceived the action to be. While the research by Lee *et al*. focuses on the accuracy of climate and environment-related knowledge, it does not explore the links between knowledge and behaviour, noting that knowledge of what actions are effective in addressing climate change appear to be more strongly related to behaviour than an understanding of the mechanisms behind climate change. There is also a potential oversight in not thoroughly assessing the cultural differences between countries or locations, such as participants being more willing to use public transport in an area with sufficient infrastructure. However, the study also introduces some insightful implications for educational policy, which could be relevant for youth work policy. Lee at al. note that a lack of knowledge does present a barrier to engagement regarding climate change and the tendency for those in high income nations to endorse smaller, individual, and less effective actions needs to be addressed, which may arise due to the perceptions that the global nature of climate change means local action is less important. Additionally, the study suggests that climate change education make use of existing technologies which had been effective in strategic messaging in education, for example focusing on personally relevant issues and "using active and engaging teaching methods […] or using art-based approaches", which could have implications for the alternative education offered by youth work (Lee *et al.*, 2020, p. 15).

2.2 The impact of youth work

Moving on to discuss the role of youth work in empowering and supporting young people to act, there is little research that exists outside of a government or organisation's own research, which could present some biases. Opening with an editorial from the Child & Youth Services journal, Gharabaghi and Anderson-Nathe emphasise the initial importance of child and youth services that are responsive to climate change (Gharabaghi and Anderson-Nathe, 2018). They note issues with employment preparation programmes often preparing young people to join unsustainable industries and highlight that young lives across the globe are disrupted by climate change, whether it is climate change refugees escaping desertification in Cairo or those in Europe who have youth services interrupted due to unexpected heatwaves which they are poorly prepared for. While this editorial is not based on primary data, it does introduce some interesting questions that should be asked about the role youth services can play related to climate change. These include asking how the youth living in precarious situations experience climate change, how climate change fits into broader discourse about the rights of the child, how youth services are adapting to be responsive to the changing future, how youth workers can take charge of their roles within the response to climate change, and what young people are doing themselves to combat

climate change. The last three questions put forth by Gharabaghi and Anderson-Nathe will be of particular importance to my research and highlight the need for this kind of exploration to be done.

In a study into youth perceptions of youth work in increasing social capital with young people considered NEET in Scotland, Miller, McAuliffe, Riaz and Deuchar found that youth work projects helped to diminish feelings of isolation from and resentment to traditional community structures such as formal education, libraries, or sports centres (Miller *et al.*, 2015). They also found that youth work projects helped to give people a sense of empowerment and establish spaces to allow them to create relationships through positive community engagement. As previously discussed in the research by Thew *et al.*, many young people feel as if their participation in discussions related to climate change could be mere tokenism, therefore the role that youth work projects can play in empowering them beyond this is vital. Additionally, Miller *et al.* found that young people reported additional benefits from the youth work projects, such as interacting with people that they would not normally have the opportunity to and developing hard and soft skills which further enabled them to take part in work outside of the projects. There are some limitations in that the study had a small scale of sampling and did not explore the views of those traditional institutions that young people felt excluded from and the reasons for these tensions. However, while the research by Miller *et al.* focuses particularly on young people considered to be NEET, the findings on the positive impacts of youth work projects could be applicable to the wider sector and young people who feel less animosity towards their local community as it is possible that they will be even more likely to freely involve themselves in these kinds of projects.

Similar research carried out more recently by McPherson into the redemptive qualities of further education and youth work for working-class young people in Edinburgh found that more progress was made by participants when these institutions were more individually tailored and of an informal nature, helping to develop a more relaxed and personal relationship dynamic between young people and youth workers (McPherson, 2020). McPherson carried out semi-structured interviews with ten participants, five male and five female, who were recruited through youth clubs, secondary schools attached to youth clubs, and word of mouth. Three key findings were presented by the research, the first being that most of the participants had negative experiences of school, with the majority having left or planning to leave at the earliest legal possibility. The second finding was that college-based further education was a key effective source of education and support for the participants. Finally, youth work also emerged as an equally important source of support for many of the young people. There are some limitations in that this research focused only on Edinburgh and has therefore neglected the impact that youth work has on more rural areas, although the findings on transformative effects of youth work echo other research, such as that conducted by Miller *et al* (2015).

Finally, YLS have also helped to conduct generalised research into the impact of community-based universal youth work in Scotland, commissioned by Scotland's Youth Work

Research Steering Group (Fyfe *et al.*, 2018). The research collected data in three cycles across an 11-month period, with different young people identified to participate in each cycle and the aim of collecting "significant change stories" from the 129 participants. This study was clearly of a larger size than those previously mentioned, although there are limitations in that the small number of sites which means the generalisability of the research outside of these areas is limited. Additionally, while the research by Miller *et al*. (2015) and McPherson (2020) focused on young people considered to be NEET and working-class young people respectively, this study fills a gap in that it did not have such specific parameters on the youth participants. The findings align with what has been previously discussed, in that youth work organisations are consistently recognised as inclusive and safe environments that "offer young people opportunities to express themselves and provide new experiences to learn and develop through structured educational and leisure activities" (Fyfe *et al.*, 2018, p. 29). However, the study also found that examples of young people becoming active in their local communities were less evident and youth work fell short of empowering wider community action and youth-led change. This is significant, considering the potential impact youth work and young people can have in addressing issues like climate change and the consequential effect on the wider community.

2.3 The context of youth work in Scotland

Since 1999, policy priorities for youth work and children and youth services across Scotland developed at a rapid pace, while the devolution of powers to the Scottish Government has resulted in the creation of national policy priorities that emphasise the potential of youth work. Some policy drivers within Scotland for youth work include enhancing health and wellbeing, tackling poverty, providing opportunities for achievement, developing employability skills, and promoting the rights of the child (Fyfe *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, the sector is guided by a national youth work strategy, which is developed by Education Scotland, the Scottish Government, and YLS. A 2018 report by the Scottish Government found that 32% of young people participated in uniformed youth groups, 23% in democracy groups, and 21% in youth clubs, which again emphasises the importance of youth work reflecting the issues that young people are interested in, especially environmental issues (Scottish Government, 2018).

Chapter 3
Methodology
3.1 Introduction

This research is designed to explore the current outlook of environmental policies within the youth work sector in Scotland and what direction could be taken in future, from the perspective of both young people involved in youth work and youth workers. The research has been carried out as a collaboration between me and YLS, with YLS supporting in the search for participants and the initial direction of the topic. The research topic was refined through the exploration of literature related to increasing climate activism among young people and the impact of youth work in Scotland. As already noted, there has been an increase in research on young people and climate activism in recent years, although there are still gaps to be filled. Similarly, there is some research into the role that youth work plays in supporting young people, although it is generalised in nature. Thus, there is a lack of research into climate activism related to youth work, which is an area in which we can expect to see an increase in interest from young people in future and that this study aims to contribute to.

3.2 Research design

As this is an exploratory study, qualitative research was determined to be more suitable than quantitative research. As knowledge of specific answers to be put forward as options is needed for the latter and, given the lack of extensive literature on this topic, it would be challenging to take a quantitative approach. Moreover, a qualitative approach emphasises depth over breadth and allows youth workers and young people to freely voice their experiences and views. Qualitative research has been shown to be useful at drawing out the views of marginalised populations, which will be important for this research as the opinions of young people are often disregarded as alarmist or seen as tokenism (Andrade, 1995; Han and Ahn, 2020; Thew, Middlemiss and Paavola, 2020). In the case of this research, the term "young people" has been used to refer to those who access the services of any of the members of YLS and therefore the age bracket extends from 11 to 30. However, no further parameters were set and invitations to take part were sent out to all member organisations and local authorities.

3.3 Collaboration with YLS

This research was carried out in collaboration with YLS. Therefore, the initial research topic was suggested by YLS, in line with where they believe there are gaps in knowledge and where they expect there to be a need for work in future. The collaboration was beneficial in that it allowed me to access YLS's links with youth work organisations and local authorities through membership-wide email updates, social media, and direct contacts, which accelerated the process of finding participants (Appendix 5). Furthermore, I was able to access support from YLS in terms of their many years of experience in the youth work sector and the advice of their in-house research team. While the collaboration has been helpful in accessing participants and support, as the research topic was already determined, it could be argued that there may be a sense of bias in the research if YLS had played a significant role in establishing lines of inquiry or specific groups to sample. However, although the research

topic was set out by YLS, the direction of the questions and the groups invited to participate were set out solely by me, thus avoiding this potential issue. Those taking part were encouraged to be honest and data has also been anonymised to provide a layer of security for participants to help avoid bias.

3.4 Research method

Research was conducted in the form of semi-structured solo and group interviews with both young people and youth workers, although the two distinct groups were not mixed to avoid one group feeling unable to speak their true feelings in front of the other. A total of 11 participants were interviewed – 5 youth workers and 6 young people. I chose to speak to both youth workers and young people because, as previously mentioned, the Scottish Government and YLS have emphasised the rights of the child, particularly the right to be heard (The Scottish Government, 2018). While youth workers can provide their views and experiences on the inner workings of organisations, these organisations aim to impact on young people and therefore it would be remiss to neglect the perspectives of those who are meant to benefit from youth work.

3.4.1 Semi-structured solo and group interviews

Initially, I had planned to utilise focus groups for the discussions with young people. Moderately-structured focus groups were chosen as the research method due to their conversational nature which ensures that the environment remains informal and helps the discussion to flow (Krueger, 1998). Moreover, it was primarily assumed that the increase in online meetings due to the ongoing pandemic would allow me to reach out to more participants. However, due to a combination of issues such as the start of the school summer holidays and the increase in digital fatigue during the COVID-19 pandemic, securing focus groups of a suitable number with young people was challenging. Nevertheless, there was still an interest from a small number to take part and therefore the method was adapted to semi-structured interviews instead.

Youth workers and young people were not provided with information beforehand, other than the participant information sheet and consent form which stated that the research was looking at environmental policies and the future direction of these within the youth sector (Appendix 2 and 3). Therefore, the research was able to avoid any biases that may have arisen if participants were able to prepare answers beforehand (Marshall and Rossman, 2014).

While semi-structured interviews were chosen instead of focus groups, many of the structuring choices used in focus groups were adapted to suit the new method. In this project, because there was less of a specific question to be answered, the interviews were only moderately structured, including more open-ended questions that would spark the participant's or group's curiosity about the overall topic. However, the downside of this approach is that group interviews can be quite erratic in terms of their productivity. Within any one group, it can be difficult to tell when the discussion is leading up to an exciting insight, or just meandering. The structure used in the interviews followed the Funnel approach, beginning with one or two broad, open-ended questions which allowed the participant or

participants to express their own thoughts on the research topic. In the central part of the discussion, the interview pursued a set of predetermined, broadly defined topics. Finally, the session concluded with sharply focused discussions of narrowly defined issues (Appendix 4). The goal in moderately structured focus groups is to find a few questions that not only interest the participants but also get them to talk about the topics that interest the research team, which is what I aimed for with the interviews too (Morgan, 1998). The elements of structure and content were constant across all interviews, allowing for some level of cross comparison (Galletta, 2013). However, due to the nature of semi-structured interviews and the mix of solo and group interviews, the interviews varied in length between 30 minutes and 69 minutes.

Self-selected samples were used for the semi-structured interviews due to the existing relationship between YouthLink Scotland and member organisations, although this did present some issues that needed to be considered. The first is that those who responded to the call for participants may have different motivational reasons than the general population within the member organisations, especially as there were no participant stipends or rewards available for this research. For example, the participants may have felt particularly strongly about the issue, which could lead to a biased idea of the group perspective (Morgan, 1998). Therefore, it was important to try to ensure that the focus groups were representative of young people in Scotland, particularly when it comes to gender and location. As research has shown that women are more likely to be active in discussion and action on climate change, it could have been particularly beneficial to have a male-specific youth group represented in the focus groups (Hunt, 2020).

The five youth workers came from a national organisation, a rural local organisation, and two local authorities – one rural and one urban. The six young people came from a national organisation and a rural local authority – three from each. In order to ensure that the participants felt comfortable in contributing their true views and experiences and to ensure this research can be used by YLS without any potential repercussions for the participants, the organisations are referred to by their type, rather than their name, and the participants have been given pseudonyms, which can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

	Type of organisation	Role	Pseudonym in study
1	Local authority (urban)	Youth worker	Catherine
2	Local organisation (rural)	Youth worker	Rona
3	Local authority (rural)	Youth worker	Sarah
4	Local authority (rural)	Youth worker	Nina
5	National organisation	Youth worker	Mark
6	National organisation	Young person	Julie
7	National organisation	Young person	Daniel
8	National organisation	Young person	Mike
9	Local authority (rural)	Young person	John
10	Local authority (rural)	Young person	Fred
11	Local authority (rural)	Young person	Raphael

3.4.2 Ethics

Ethical approval for this research was received from the School of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Edinburgh in May 2021. I also obtained membership of the PVG Disclosure Scotland scheme in respect of regulated work with children.

I obtained informed consent from the participants through consent forms. Additionally, participants under the age of 16 were required to obtain added consent from a responsible adult. The data, including consent forms, video recordings, and transcripts, were kept securely and confidentially in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and with the Data Protection Act 2018. Alongside the informed consent forms, each participant was also provided with an information sheet, which provided further details, such as how the data would be stored and used. Each participant was also asked at the start of every interview recording to confirm that they had received and read the participant information sheet, signed the consent form, and were happy to be recorded.

3.5 Research evaluation

3.5.1 Data analysis

The recordings of interviews with participants were transcribed and anonymised. These transcriptions were then analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. I chose to code as much of the transcripts as possible, even if not all themes were later used, as this method helped to bring themes to the foreground that I had not initially considered. Some of the codes that were most used include climate literacy, time, cooperation with other organisations, climate justice, and COVID-19. These were used to establish the key findings, which were then compared to the research explored in the literature review.

3.5.2 Risks and limitations

There were some potential risks identified during the planning of the research which had to be mitigated. The first of these was working with young people. As already noted, I obtained membership of the PVG Disclosure Scotland scheme to allow me to work with children and young people prior to starting the research. Furthermore, in all interviews with young people, youth workers that they were familiar with were present to make the participants feel more assured and to ensure that youth workers could debrief with them afterwards if necessary. While eco anxiety and mental health issues were raised by some of the young people during the interviews, the interview schedule (Appendix 4) did not include discussion of any sensitive issues and therefore any associated risk was deemed to be low.

As previously noted, there were limitations with sampling in terms of the ongoing pandemic and the resultant increase in online working. This was a double-edged sword as, while it was beneficial in terms of allowing me to contact groups across Scotland without having to travel, it also had drawbacks in that pandemic restrictions were lifting at the same time and people were dealing with digital fatigue, leading to a reluctance to participate. These problems were raised by youth workers in email communications with me (Alevizou, 2020; Gillett and Kleiderman, 2021). Although conducting interviews online allowed me to speak to

people outside of Edinburgh, it could have excluded those who do not have access to a stable internet connection. However, this was unavoidable due to ongoing pandemic restrictions.

Another limitation is the small sample size of the research. Despite significant efforts, there were external factors raised by youth workers which could explain the smaller number of participants, including the start of the summer holidays and the previously mentioned pandemic impacts. However, I believe that the interviews conducted have still been valuable, as the smaller sample size has allowed me to examine the individual views and experiences of participants in more depth than would have been possible with a larger data set in the same timeframe.

Moreover, there were time constraints in that the placement with YLS was only due to last eight weeks, during which the planning of the interviews, securing of participants, the interviews themselves, and transcription was meant to take place. These constraints shaped the sampling of participants, although ultimately six interviews were carried out with a total of 11 participants.

Chapter 4

4.1 Summary of key findings

This study presents four key findings. The first is that, while all youth workers interviewed had some level of climate literacy, most did not feel particularly confident about this. Furthermore, in the same vein, there was also a clear difference in the way that information about climate change was sought between youth workers and young people. All youth workers interviewed referred to resources related to climate literacy that they were aware of, although there was a feeling that these were sometimes hard to find or not well joined up and there was frustration that this was not provided in-house by the organisation or local authority. While the youth workers primarily referred to learning from specific climate-focused youth work resources, the young people interviewed focused much more on easily accessible online media. Five of the six young people interviewed said they informed themselves about climate change online, mentioning podcasts and YouTube, as well as emails from environmental charities. The young people interviewed that were still within the school system also expressed frustration that, although there was education on climate change at school, it did not emphasise the urgency of the issue and took a more technical, scientific perspective rather than also exploring social and justice elements.

The third key finding is that, while there are expected funding barriers to creating change, another issue that youth workers face is time. All youth workers interviewed identified time as a significant barrier which was holding back a shift towards more environmentally conscious policies. Youth workers noted the short timeframe in which they had to work with young people, where other issues, such as mental health or difficulties at school, were prioritised over climate change. They also mentioned difficulties related to training, in that many youth workers did not have the time to undertake additional training in climate literacy on top of a growing pile of other issues that are often handed to the youth work sector. Some of the young people interviewed were also aware of this and emphasised that they did not want to see additional pressure placed on the youth work sector to deal with climate change alone.

Finally, in terms of the future of environmental policies within the youth work sector, there was an emphasis on the need for a joined-up, collaborative approach across the sector, between both local authorities and organisations. All youth workers interviewed felt that the sector did have a responsibility to support young people in tackling climate change, alongside other institutions such as the Government or education system. Similarly, the young people interviewed felt that the youth work sector could play a role in further supporting education on climate change that the school system missed, such as education on justice or activism. Due to the aforementioned time barriers, it was also suggested by youth workers that smaller pre-packaged activities that could be deployed across the sector related to climate change could be useful, alongside further collaboration with other sectors, such as the arts.

However, there were also additional barriers that were mentioned by some of the participants which seem important to mention separately. The first is that all young people interviewed mentioned the significant level of privilege there is in comfortably being able to

make sustainable choices, such as buying locally grown produce or avoiding fast fashion. The young people showed a high level of awareness that choices to tackle climate change are not always accessible to all and emphasised the need for this to be reflected within the youth work sector. However, this does also suggest that there may be a lack of education around sustainable options, as these sentiments neglect to note that shopping second-hand is typically cheaper than buying new clothes or that vegetarian diets can be more affordable than eating meat (European Association for the Study of Obesity, 2018). Furthermore, there was talk of eco anxiety by both youth workers and young people, as well as exhaustion from the pandemic, which could prevent young people from taking action in their personal and political lives and, likewise, should be reflected within the youth work sector. Finally, as to be expected, the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that were put in place as a result were also identified as a barrier by some of the participants.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Climate literacy

As noted, while all youth workers interviewed stated that they had some level of climate literacy, most did not feel particularly confident about this. Although they felt confident in working with young people, there was a gap in the knowledge on climate change and wider environmental issues. Many of the youth workers spoken to felt as though they were also learning from young people, which highlights the reciprocal nature of youth work, where both young people and youth workers work in collaboration. The reciprocal nature of climate activism was raised by Pickard (2019), who emphasised the importance of this type of cross-generational relationship as it allows both young and old to come together to learn from each other. Nina, a youth worker from a rural local authority, acknowledged that she could not be an expert on every issue, but still expressed a desire to have more knowledge of climate-related issues:

> You know, I don't feel as if I'm as well educated in or as well upon in climate issues as I would like to be. There's a recognition in there, that in your job you can't be spot on with all everything you do [sic]. You know, you try your hardest to get that breadth in of understanding, but I do feel that climate literacy is something that I certainly don't feel confident with.

Nina's colleague Sarah concurred, adding that she felt as though she was learning all the time from young people. However, both Nina and Sarah highlighted how effective they thought the work of Keep Scotland Beautiful was. YLS and Keep Scotland Beautiful have collaborated on a toolkit and training regarding the climate emergency which is specifically targeted at youth workers (YouthLink Scotland, n.d.-a). The success of this toolkit and training was reiterated by Rona, a youth worker at a rural local organisation, who had completed two courses with Keep Scotland Beautiful, which she labelled as "really excellent". However, while the toolkit and training from Keep Scotland Beautiful were praised, Rona also noted that there are few resources available from her organisation, which other youth workers reflected. When asked about the level of engagement within the organisation and how well equipped it was, Rona noted that, while there was an environmental policy, it seemed to contain very

little. She also mentioned how COVID-19 had "blanketed everything", putting projects on hold and lowering the motivations of young people to involve themselves in addressing climate change.

Catherine, a local authority youth worker from an urban area, noted that her organisation had produced a strategy based on consultation with various groups. While Catherine had more of a positive outlook on her organisation's strategy, she did state that she was not sure how joined up it was. Like Rona, Catherine also mentioned how COVID-19 had impacted environment-related behaviour, for example with public transport, where there had been a reduction in use due to health concerns and now there was a need to rebuild confidence through the wider context of the local authority.

Mark presented a different perspective, in that he felt impressed by how active the youth work sector was in environmental issues. However, while Mark found that there was information available, he did acknowledge the difficulty in accessing it:

> *Finding that information directly I would say isn't obviously available and I*
> *wouldn't know exactly where to look, I wouldn't know who to go to try and*
> *find information or kind of climate literacy training.*

Lee *et al*. (2020) noted that youth participants in their research often had a vague understanding of the causes of climate change which presented a barrier to engagement regarding climate change. This barrier can also be found within my research, where youth participants noted that education within schools on climate change was not at a level that they would like it to be at and therefore they were required to seek additional information elsewhere. Similarly, O'Brien *et al*. (2018) noted that education on climate change typically focuses on informing the youth about the mechanisms behind climate change, rather than focusing on dissent and action against climate change, which requires additional elements such as critical thinking and further attention to wider issues such as social and environmental justice.

When asked about climate literacy, John, a young person involved with a rural local authority, stressed that there was education on climate change provided to young people and that most people his age understood what was happening. However, he emphasised the lack of action by schools and governments, among others, and the lack of urgency in their actions:

> *What I think the problem is, is that there isn't an urgency there. There's not*
> *a sense of urgency and there's not a sense of real impact on anyone really*
> *[…] I think there's a lot of apathy around climate change and what it's doing*
> *to the planet, and I think because it's a process which takes so long to really*
> *manifest in the physical world, in a way which we can see anyway, I think it*
> *is really dangerous.*

Furthermore, Fred, a young person involved in the same local authority, highlighted that, although he would like to see further support and education from the youth work sector, he would like to see more emphasis on climate activism. As a youth activist, he noted the pressure that some youth activists felt in terms of their position, where they were bombarded

with largely negative climate news and people often treated them "like a 5-year-old […] or as an adult", either not being taken seriously or being overburdened. This statement can be linked back to the research by Thew *et al.* (2020), which demonstrated that young people often feel as though their participation is tokenistic. Echoing the findings of Lee *et al.* (2020), instead of trying to simply educate young people on the mechanisms behind climate change, Fred suggested that the youth work sector focus on educating on climate activism and elements that mainstream school education may miss:

> *Support with organisation of, like, protests, […] lots [of young people] mostly would not have, not know where to start when organising protests and like having to contact police and stuff to inform them. Like most young people would have no clue how to do that, and I think that's something youth work organizations should help support young people through.*

4.2.2 Time as a barrier

Of the youth workers interviewed, time was identified as a significant barrier to making changes within the youth work sector related to climate change. Funding was also identified as a barrier by all participants, not just youth workers, although as Sarah stated, "It's always funding, but funding goes across the board with anything that we're doing." As funding is often raised as an established issue across the youth work sector and beyond, I have chosen to focus on time as a barrier. Firstly, time was identified as a barrier in improving climate literacy by youth workers. Although there are lots of different websites online regarding climate change and discussions that can be had with young people about environmental issues and what support they need, Nina emphasised that youth workers needed time during their working hours to seek out this information and inform themselves:

> *You need that time in your work time, don't you? To just say I'm going to put this time aside where I can go and look for the information, find where there's support and I'll find what's out there so that you can at least be passing that on to young people.*

In a similar vein, Catherine noted that there were difficulties with time in terms of training staff, adding that sometimes staff were not given training because the time it would take to train them in a particular issue would be greater than the amount of time they were delivering youth work sessions. Catherine stated that a lot of the staff within the local authority were part-time and therefore it was a challenge to find and justify the time to train someone if they were only running a youth club for two or four hours a week. As a result, she mentioned the need for there to be creative thinking about how youth workers can improve their climate literacy and thereby improve their support of young people within a tight timeframe:

> *Quite often upskilling temporary staff, I think, is always an interesting dilemma because we want to be able to give them the skills, whether it's about smoking or sexual health […] So, I suppose it's thinking creatively*

about how we can upscale some of our part time staff as well as full time,
but there isn't many full time.

Taking a creative approach to supporting youth workers and young people is supported by the research from McPherson (2020), which found that more progress was made by participants when the youth work was more informal in nature. Rather than following existing methodical ways of learning about climate change, similar to what participants in this research have mentioned about the education system, it could be suggested that more creative, informal approaches are vital to expand climate change education into an inspiration to act.

Furthermore, time was described by Mark as a barrier in that climate change was often quite low down on the list of priorities when organising events or activities. He noted that if it was low down on the list of priorities, particularly when time was short, climate change – and sustainability, as Mark saw it - would be thought about last and often ended up not being included in planning. Mark suggested that sustainability be embedded into processes, similar to the way that there had been changes over recent years with introducing diversity and inclusion at the beginning of processes:

I think similar to [diversity and inclusion], sustainability needs to be the first
thing you think about alongside that before you plan anything and then I
think you would see quite a big change and that would also remove a lot of
the other barriers like cost because you would have embedded that in at the
beginning.

Moreover, time was identified as a barrier for young people too, in that they were having to make choices "between what they have to do for their education and what they would like to do in their life and […] then giving them down time", as noted by Susan. Rona also described how the time in which young people were involved in youth work was often quite short. Climate change policies that have been implemented, such as the Scottish Government's net-zero by 2045 plan, are often very long term (The Scottish Government, 2021). Therefore, the youth work sector is in a unique position where the scope has to be focused a lot more on the short term:

At the point where you're getting to young people and they're beginning to
go, "yeah, we can make a difference", they then leave your governance and
go away, […] it means that we've got a very limited, you know, our scope
sort of has to be focused in a peculiar temporary way.

Young people were also aware of the pressure that the youth work sector faced, in terms of funding and time, with Fred noting that, although the sector should have a responsibility to address climate change and wider environmental issues and help support young people in tackling climate change, it should not be pushed onto the sector just because it was convenient:

I don't think they should have sole responsibility because we've seen it with
lots of aspects of life that social work, schools, police should be dealing with

*such as issues like knife crime, drugs, lots of those issues are shunted onto
youth work for it to deal with so they are stretched to the limit.*

4.2.3 The future of environmental policies in the youth work sector

Looking ahead towards the future of environmental policies within the youth sector, many of the youth workers interviewed mentioned the importance of working with other organisations and highlighted impactful projects that they had seen or been involved with. Mark emphasised that there was a "really significant environmental charity sector in Scotland", although he was unsure of how well it linked with the youth work sector, adding that linking these two would be a good first step in introducing greater sustainability to the sector and having additional access to experts from the environmental charity sector which could help to bridge the literacy gap.

Having previously highlighted the valuable toolkits and training that Keep Scotland Beautiful and YLS have provided, Rona also spoke of collaboration with other sectors on additional programmes, such as the Youth Climate Film Project, created by Keep Scotland Beautiful and Screen Scotland (Keep Scotland Beautiful, 2021). Collaboration with other organisations is not only beneficial in pooling resources and sharing knowledge, as it could help promote further engagement of young people with individuals that they may not normally have the opportunity to work with, the importance of which had been noted by Miller *et al*. (2015). Rona also described a music project in Edinburgh called Oi Musica and emphasised the importance of young people feeling empowered in doing their own projects, from beach litter picks to environmental art projects, that could then link into something bigger:

> *Whether it's the Science Museum in Glasgow or Oi Musica in Edinburgh or Keep Scotland Beautiful, they're all doing things around climate change, and they've all given youth workers an opportunity to link into something bigger and I really think that it's a nice model when kids are empowered to do something themselves, but then can link into something bigger and see that it's a national conversation and that people do care.*

Similarly, both Susan and Nina referred to external programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the John Muir Award which, although not necessarily focused on climate change, generated casual conversations among young people that in turn create "unintended sparks". Susan also referred to a group local to her which worked with local primary schools and introduced conversations about environmental issues at a young age.

The idea of introducing conversations about environmental issues at a young age was reflected by some of the young people, with Daniel, a young person involved in a national youth work organisation, noting the importance of encouraging children to immerse themselves within their natural environment, particularly when it is so at risk. He suggested that this kind of education would help children appreciate biodiversity and the mindfulness provided by being outside, among other things, but also suggested that teaching these things at a younger age would help young people better reflect on their role and impact on the natural world. Both Daniel and Julie, another young person involved in the same organisation,

also detailed the importance of involving families, not just children and young people. Daniel spoke as someone with a background of not believing in climate change, who had now changed his views, and stressed the influence that families had on young people. Adding to this, Julie noted that parents could learn behaviours from their children and vice versa, and therefore it was important to consider involving parents or guardians in initiatives.

This sentiment was echoed by Catherine, who drew an interesting parallel between the way information about the health risks of smoking had been passed from children to their parents and how something similar could be happening with climate change, particularly when, as previously mentioned, many adults feel that they do not have sufficient knowledge about climate change or are learning from young people. This parallel is reflected in the existing literature, which shows that children can help to foster climate change concern among their parents – importantly across socio-economic boundaries (Lawson *et al.*, 2019).

Most youth workers agreed on the importance of the youth work sector finding opportunities and creating opportunities for young people to take action, educate themselves further, or seek additional support. Parallels were also drawn with LGBTQ+ rights, with Nina stating that there would have been similar discussions about things like education and future policies regarding that issue that are now happening with climate change. She suggested that young people needed the same safe spaces to talk about these issues that they had access to with discussions on LGBTQ+ rights, but that any policy should not be about forcing something down throats and rather should focus on creating opportunities for young people to organically explore the issues further. As O'Brien *et al.* (2018) noted, previous successful social movements, such as LGBTQ+ rights, have relied on the confluence of different types of activism and youth work could play a role in supporting dutiful dissent related to climate change. The youth work sector should also be ensuring that, even if they are unable to support young people in every climate-related endeavour, they are able to direct them to further support or opportunities that may be of interest.

However, within the aforementioned time constraints, Catherine described "little mini projects that we could establish that would be easy to just parachute into youth clubs" as a way of capturing young people's imaginations. She mentioned seed bombing – where vegetation is introduced or reintroduced to land by throwing or dropping seed balls – and other arts and crafts related projects that had been done in the past, noting the need for diverse, smaller scale projects that could be rolled out across Scotland and would encourage a wide range of young people to get involved, from tree planting to bike riding, rather than focusing on one type of project. This, again, echoes what has previously been discussed on the need for creative and informal solutions to be sought, as they have clear benefits (McPherson, 2020).

4.2.4 Additional constraints

Interestingly, while climate justice was hardly discussed in the interviews with youth workers, both group interviews with young people involved discussions on elements of justice within environmental issues. Julie noted that people from lower income areas were less likely to have access to information and tools to help them tackle climate change. Alongside this,

while someone from a lower income area may be interested in environmental issues, they may not have the financial means to act and therefore it was suggested that the sector ensure that these kinds of barriers are considered in any kind of education or initiatives developed. Fred also brought this issue into the discussion, mentioning the privileged position of being able to comfortably make environmental decisions and not have to worry about the increased costs of sustainability. However, as Lee *et al*. (2020) found, this type of response could also suggest a superficial understanding of solutions to climate change and misconceptions about environment-related behaviours. Thew *et al*. (2020) also noted in their research that young people felt a need to shift their idea of injustice to accommodate the challenges faced by other groups. This can also be seen within my research where, despite the young people raising feelings of eco anxiety, they also highlighted that they may be in positions of privilege, thereby disregarding some of their own concerns and attend to others first.

Eco anxiety was raised by both young people and youth workers as a significant pressure. John mentioned feelings of frustration when he had to make a choice that was perhaps less sustainable and described how there was a cycle of "I use reusable bags and we expand North Sea oil. I eat only vegetables because it's less damaging to the environment and we buy billions of pounds of oil from African countries" and so on. Fred also spoke of mental health issues that could arise from young people "being bombarded with negativity and constantly from being a youth activist and the pressure that puts on you [sic]". These feelings of frustration and negativity were also noticed by youth workers, with Susan suggesting that as a youth worker, there is an additional level of support required from youth workers, with a "responsibility to support them with [eco anxiety] so that they're not getting overwhelmed with all this climate stuff that's going on".

As was to be expected, the COVID-19 pandemic and its ongoing impact was also highlighted as a constraint in the lack of action against climate change. With restrictions placed on meeting in-person, being unable to meet friends, having to adapt to learning from home, and more, young people have undoubtedly been severely affected by the social and economic impacts of the pandemic (British Science Association, 2020; Leavey, Eastaugh and Kane, 2020; The Scottish Government, 2020). While Susan noted the increase in feelings of stress and loneliness among young people, Rona stated that there is "a real tiredness amongst young people right now" in coping with the huge change that the pandemic has introduced into their life. Rona pointed to the fact that other barriers, such as funding or literacy gaps, were easier to get over by looking for funds to apply for or collaborating with local organisations, while the pandemic was a much greater challenge:

> *The biggest barrier is the whole COVID thing right now because quite frankly, you know, we can get over barriers. But, right now, the COVID regulations make all these things much more, [pause] much more difficult. I mean, we were ready to go, basically.*

However, it was also suggested that there were lessons to be drawn from the way the pandemic has been dealt with, such as the rate at which policies were implemented and the amount of funding directed towards it. Both crises are of a global scale, so the difference in

approach by governments and institutions to climate change compared to COVID-19 was queried.

While there are additional constraints that could be difficult in shifting the youth work sector towards a more sustainable future, one of the young people involved in this research highlighted the importance of taking action urgently, no matter how small:

It's doing things imperfectly instead of doing things perfectly.

Chapter 5
Conclusion

While there is some research focusing on the role of youth in addressing climate change and of the impact of youth work, the relatively new nature of this topic means that there has not been significant research into climate change in relation to the youth work sector. This research sought to fill the gap by investigating the current outlook of the youth work sector related to climate change and explore how climate change can be addressed by the sector in future. Through semi-structured interviews conducted with both youth workers and young people, this research has identified current gaps related to climate change in the sector that need to be addressed and revealed potential opportunities that could be looked at. Doing so highlighted a need to address climate literacy among youth workers and the time barrier they face, as well as presenting cross-sectoral cooperation and creative thinking as some of the most effective paths to follow in addressing climate change.

Whilst young people are aware of climate change and learn about it through the formal education system, this research has shown that there is clearly a role for the youth work sector to play in supporting young people to act in addressing climate change. All young people interviewed emphasised the importance of tackling climate change to them, with most stating that the youth work sector also had a responsibility to act. Nonetheless, the role of the youth work sector need not necessarily be solely focused on climate change, as other issues were also raised, such as mental health support with eco anxiety or learning how to make sustainable dietary choices. However, while this research has shown that there is a role for the youth work sector to play, there are also some issues that need to be addressed too. As expected, lack of funding was raised by all youth workers as an issue across their work. While it would certainly be beneficial to have increased funding directed at improving resources, this may not be feasible and therefore increasing the climate literacy of youth workers and addressing the time barrier have been raised as the most important within this study, with solutions that emphasise creativity and cross-sectoral cooperation being highlighted as the most valuable.

It is important to keep in mind that the small sample size of this study means it cannot be used as a generalisation for the whole youth work sector in Scotland, despite efforts to cover different demographics. An increased number of participants, both youth workers and young people, could have produced a wider variety of responses, including encompassing the views of those who are less interested or passionate about the topic of climate change. Nevertheless, this research does provide a good basis for further exploration of this topic in relation to youth work.

To better understand the implications of these findings, future studies could seek to explore how best to improve the climate literacy of the workforce within a limited timeframe, building on the success of Keep Scotland Beautiful resources that several participants mentioned. Furthermore, it is clear that cross-sectoral work could be beneficial by bringing in outside experts or promoting action against climate change through different lenses, such as creative ones. Therefore, future studies could also seek to explore the impact of youth work

alongside contributions from actors such as schools or corporations, among others. YLS has already demonstrated successful cooperation in creating climate change toolkits for youth workers with Keep Scotland Beautiful. Replication of this success with other organisations and improved signposting of the resultant resources would be good.

While there is scope for further research to be done on this topic, the findings and recommendations presented here, based on the views and experiences of youth workers and young people, clearly lay the groundwork for the important role that the youth work sector can play in supporting young people to take action in addressing climate change and in pivoting the sector to a greener future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Executive summary

Both young people and youth workers recently raised climate change and environmental issues as priority areas during the consultation period of the new National Youth Work Strategy 2021-2025 and, as seen from the increase in youth climate activism over recent years, it is clear that climate change is of key importance to young people. However, at present, there is very little research into the role that young people play in tackling climate change and lack of a centralised strategy or approach from the youth work sector. While some in the sector are very clear with their aims of protecting the planet, others appear to mention the issues infrequently, although there may be several factors for this, such as a lack of climate literacy, funding, or time. Thus, this research sought to examine the current state of environmental policy and action to address climate change within the youth work sector, before exploring the possible opportunities that can be taken advantage of and barriers that may hinder progress in future environmental policy development.

Literature review

The literature review primarily explored research focused on increasing climate activism in young people and on the impact that youth work has had in previous scenarios. On climate activism, the literature reviewed explored how campaigns were not only highlighting environmental issues, but also bringing together notions of solidarity, anti-oppression, and climate justice in a shift towards intersectionality led by young people. It also highlighted the benefits of cross-generational protest, the increased role of technology, child-to-parent learning, and the way in which young people perceive climate change. On the impact of youth work, the literature reviewed looked at youth perceptions of youth work in increasing social capital, including giving them a sense of empowerment and helping them to develop new soft skills. It also highlighted how youth work was considered as an equally important source of support to college-based FE by many young people and that further work is needed to ensure that young people are empowered to create wider community action and youth-led change.

Methodology

Research was conducted in the form of semi-structured solo and group interviews with both young people and youth workers. A total of 11 participants were interviewed – 5 youth workers and 6 young people. The five youth workers came from a national organisation, a rural local organisation, and two local authorities – one rural and one urban. The six young people came from a national organisation and a rural local authority – three from each. The recordings of interviews with participants were transcribed and anonymised. These transcriptions were then analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo.

Key findings

The research presents four key findings. While all youth workers interviewed had some level of climate literacy, most did not feel particularly confident about this. Furthermore, there was also a clear difference in the way that information about climate change was sought between youth workers and young people. All youth workers interviewed referred to resources related to climate literacy that they were aware of, although there was a feeling that these were sometimes hard to find or not well joined up. While the youth workers primarily referred to learning from specific climate-focused youth work resources, the young people interviewed focused much more on easily accessible online media and expressed frustration that school education did not emphasise the urgency of climate change.

The third key finding is that, while there are expected funding barriers to creating change, another issue that youth workers face is time. Youth workers noted the short timeframe in which they had to work with young people, where other issues, such as mental health or difficulties at school, were prioritised over climate change. They also mentioned difficulties related to training, in that many youth workers did not have the time to undertake additional training in climate literacy on top of a growing pile of other issues that are often handed to the youth work sector.

Finally, in terms of the future of environmental policies within the youth work sector, there was an emphasis on the need for a joined-up, collaborative approach across the sector, between both local authorities and organisations. All youth workers interviewed felt that the sector did have a responsibility to support young people in tackling climate change, alongside other institutions such as the Government or education system. Similarly, the young people interviewed felt that the youth work sector could play a role in further supporting education on climate change that the school system missed, such as education on justice or activism.

There were also additional barriers that were mentioned by some of the participants which seem important to mention separately. The first is that all young people interviewed showed a high level of awareness that choices to tackle climate change are not always accessible to all, although this does also suggest that there may be a lack of education around sustainable options. Furthermore, there was talk of eco anxiety by both youth workers and young people, as well as exhaustion from the pandemic, and the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions that were put in place as a result were also identified as a barrier by some of the participants.

Recommendations

All young people interviewed emphasised the importance of tackling climate change to them, with most stating that the youth work sector also had a responsibility to act. Nonetheless, the role of the youth work sector need not necessarily be solely focused on climate change, as other issues were also raised, such as mental health support with eco anxiety or learning how to make sustainable dietary choices. However, while this research has shown that there is a role for the youth work sector to play, there are also some issues that need to be addressed too. As expected, lack of funding was raised by all youth workers as an issue across their work. While it would certainly be beneficial to have increased funding directed at improving resources, this may not be feasible and therefore increasing the climate literacy of youth workers and addressing the time barrier have been raised as the most important within this

study, with solutions that emphasise creativity and cross-sectoral cooperation being highlighted as the most valuable.

To better understand the implications of these findings, future studies could seek to explore how best to improve the climate literacy of the workforce within a limited timeframe, building on the success of Keep Scotland Beautiful resources that several participants mentioned. Furthermore, it is clear that cross-sectoral work could be beneficial by bringing in outside experts or promoting action against climate change through different lenses, such as creative ones. Therefore, future studies could also seek to explore the impact of youth work alongside contributions from actors such as schools or corporations, among others. YLS has already demonstrated successful cooperation in creating climate change toolkits for youth workers with Keep Scotland Beautiful. Replication of this success with other organisations and improved signposting of the resultant resources would be good.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information. Take some time to decide whether or not to take part.

This research is being conducted in collaboration with YouthLink Scotland. I am looking to conduct research into the current climate policies of the youth work sector and climate change in the context of the sector. I am asking young people and practitioners who work with young people to share their views.

You have been invited to participate in this study as a young person involved in the youth work sector.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this Participant Information Sheet to keep and be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw from the study at a later date, without giving a reason and without any impact on any services you are using. Only the project team will have access to the research data until 30/09/2021. Taking part will not impact the service you receive from your youth group and service providers will not have access to the raw data at any point.

The research will take place via Microsoft Teams, where the video will be recorded. This will be professionally transcribed. The recording and transcription will be stored on a password-protected computer, and I will have sole access to the raw data. Your name will not be attached to the recording or the transcript. I will send you the transcript of the interview and you can let me know if there are any parts of it that you would prefer not to have quoted. The recording will be securely disposed of after use.

What does taking part involve?

Taking part will consist of your participation in an interview. You will be asked a number of questions regarding climate change and the role of youth work. The interview will take place

via Microsoft Teams at a time that it is convenient for you and will last approximately 1 hour. The interview will be video recorded.

There are no significant risks anticipated from participation in this research project.

By sharing your experiences with us, you will be helping Sophie Hoult, the University of Edinburgh, and YouthLink Scotland to better understand the climate policies of the youth work sector and how these could be improved.

What if I want to withdraw from the project?

Agreeing to participate in this project does not oblige you to remain in the study or to have any further obligations to the research project or team. If at any stage you no longer want to be part of the study, you can withdraw from the project by contacting Sophie Hoult at s.m.hoult@sms.ed.ac.uk. You should note that your data may be used in the production of formal research outputs (e.g., journal articles, conference papers, reports) prior to your withdrawal and so you are advised to contact the research team at the earliest opportunity should you wish to withdraw from the study.

You can withdraw from the project up until four weeks after receiving your copy of the transcript of your interview.

If you withdraw from the project all the information and data collected from you, to date, will be destroyed and your name removed from all the project files.

How will my data be stored?

All your data will be processed and stored in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) along with the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). The project will be also be guided by and adhere to YouthLink Scotland the University of Edinburgh's data protection guidance and regulations, see http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk/InfoStaff/DPstaff/DataProtectionGuidance.htm

All personal details, including contact details, addresses, phone numbers etc, will be kept strictly confidential within the research team, stored on password-protected and encrypted devices and/or University secure servers, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, and the latest University of Edinburgh data security protocols.

Electronic project data will be uploaded as soon as possible to a secure University of Edinburgh server and stored there for the duration of the project, only accessible to the project team.

All paper records will be transferred to locked storage at the University of Edinburgh as soon as practicable. Your Consent Form will be stored separately from your responses.

At the end of the project, after all publications have been published, all data will be deleted using the latest University of Edinburgh protocol for secure data deletion.

What will happen with the results of the research project?

The results of this study will be published in a dissertation and executive summary for YouthLink Scotland. Quotes from your interview may be used in these outputs, and these will be anonymous unless you give permission for your real name to be used in the Consent Form. If you wish to obtain a copy of the final work, you can contact Sophie Hoult or YouthLink Scotland.

I am conducting this research as a student in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Edinburgh. I am the sole researcher and will be carrying out the interview with you. YouthLink Scotland is supporting me in this project.

This research project has been approved through the ethical review process in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Edinburgh.

Contact information

If you have any further questions about this project, please contact the lead researcher Sophie Hoult at s.m.hoult@sms.ed.ac.uk.

If you have any concerns about the way in which the project has been conducted, or you wish to make a complaint, you can contact the Deputy Director of Research (Ethics and Integrity) in the School of Social and Political Sciences:

      Deputy Director of Research (Ethics and Integrity)

      School of Social and Political Sciences

      University of Edinburgh

      Edinburgh EH8 8LN
      e-mail: ethics-ssps@ed.ac.uk

For general information about how the University of Edinburgh looks after research data go to: https://www.ed.ac.uk/records-management/privacy-notice-research

If you have any queries about how the project data is managed, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer, Dr Rena Gertz, at dpo@ed.ac.uk. See https://www.ed.ac.uk/records-management/about/data-protection-officer

Thank you for taking time to read this Participant Information Sheet.

THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
**School of Social and
Political Science**

YouthLink
Scotland
The national agency for youth work

CONSENT FORM

Please initial each box

If you are happy to participate in the research, please initial each box as appropriate (leave blank any box for which you prefer not to give consent) and then sign this form at the end:

1.   The researcher has given me my own copy of the Participant Information Sheet, and I have had the opportunity to read and consider the information.

2.   I have been given the opportunity to ask any further questions and have had these questions answered to my satisfaction.

3.   I understand that participating in the research involves taking part in an interview lasting a maximum of 1 hour.

4.   I have been given information about how my data will be stored and used during and after the end of the research, and I have read and understood this.

5.   I understand that my words may be quoted in a dissertation and an executive summary for YouthLink Scotland.

6.   Please choose one of the following two options:
     - I am happy for my real name to used in publications and outputs.

OR • I would not like my real name to be used in the above and a
pseudonym may be used instead.

[ ]

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7. I understand that the research team will be recording the Microsoft Teams
video and I give my consent for these videos to be reproduced for educational
and/or non-commercial purposes, in academic publications, reports,
presentations, websites and exhibitions connected to the research project.

[ ]

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9. I agree for the data I provide to be retained by the research team in secure
storage for the requirements of funders.

[ ]

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11. I agree that the researchers can contact me at a future date should they wish
to follow up on this research.

[ ]

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12. I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the project
up to four weeks after receiving a transcript of my interview and I do not have
to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part *(and this will be
without any impact on any related services I am using).* I have read and
understood the Participation Information Sheet about the implications of
withdrawing at different points during the life of the project.

[ ]

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13. I understand I can ask for specific quotes or statements not to be used (or to
be redacted from the data) if I wish.

[ ]

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14. I understand that if I want to withdraw from the project up to four weeks
after receiving a transcript of my focus group, I can contact Sophie Hoult who
will discuss with me how existing data will be managed, as outlined in the
Participant Information Sheet.

[ ]

I agree to take part in this research project

Signed by interviewee……………………………………………. Date: …………………………

Please print your name in BLOCK CAPITALS………………………………………………………

Age of interviewee (if under 16)………………………………………………………………………………

Signed by researcher recording consent……………………………………………………. Date: ……………………

Please print your name in BLOCK CAPITALS……………………………………………………………

NB: If you are under 16, a responsible adult has to sign this form with you

Signed by parent/guardian……………………………………………………. Date: ……………………

Please print your name in BLOCK CAPITALS……………………………………………………………

<u>Introduction</u>

Explain who I am

- Master's student at UoE working on the research as part of my dissertation with YouthLink Scotland.

Go over purpose of the focus group

- We want to understand the views and experiences of young people about current climate change policy in youth work and what they would like to see in future.

Details about their participation:

- **voluntary** - both overall and in relation to any specific questions and discussions
- **recording** of discussion
- **confidentiality**, and how findings will be reported
  - No names, nothing that could identify them individually
  - Recordings held on a secure server; only research team and transcribers have access to them.
- ask people to **respect each other's views** and confidentiality
- **length** –1 hour. Will finish on time.

Basic ground rules

- No right or wrong answers – just interested in your views and experiences
- Really want to hear from everybody so encourage people to come in when they want – only request that do not all talk at once (recording)
- We'll start with questions, but want you to talk to each other, not just to us.
- That said, there may be points where we need to interrupt or move the discussion on – not that we're not interested, we just need to make sure we cover everything and hear from everyone.
- Everybody has a right to their views and people's views may be different: feel free to disagree with other people whilst respecting their right to their views
- Helpful to have all mobile phones either off or on silent
- Do you have any questions?

1. **Introductions**
- Ask to introduce self – background, role in organisation, day to day activities

2. **Climate literacy**
- Where do you inform yourself about climate change?
    - Online/by yourself?
    - Through an organisation?
- Do you feel satisfied with the current level of education/discussions on climate change (at school/organisation) – and why?
- Do you feel like your youth work organisation is well-equipped to be addressing climate change – and why?
    - Are adults climate literate enough to help?

3. **Personal engagement**
- Do you engage with climate change voluntarily/regularly?
- Do you feel like you have a personal responsibility to act on climate change?
- Which environmental organisations/movements do you engage with – and why?
- What encourages you to take part in acting to address climate change – and why?

4. **Ideal future**
- Do you think youth work organisations have a responsibility to address climate change?
    - Are there any specific areas you think YWOs should focus on – and why? (Reducing plastics, carbon offsetting, encouraging biodiversity, etc)
    - Are there any examples of good practice that you could share? (Either in own organisation or that they have seen)
- What resources and support do youth workers need to build their own climate literacy / support young people take climate action / develop green and sustainable programmes and services.
- What are the barriers and challenges that youth workers find in relation to building their climate literacy / supporting young people take climate action / developing green and sustainable programmes and services?
- How important is learning about/helping address climate change to you – and why?

5. **Final thoughts and end**
- Anything they feel we've not covered that they want to add?
- Bring discussion to a close, thank respondents and reiterate confidential nature of the group.

- Any questions about YouthLink Scotland or the research?

Appendix 5 – Invitation to participants

I'm conducting some research on behalf of YouthLink Scotland, as part of my master's degree at the University of Edinburgh, on the current climate change policies of the youth work sector in Scotland and what should be done in future.

As part of this, I am looking to conduct a series of focus groups with young people from a diverse selection of youth groups.

The focus groups would be conducted online with approx. 6 young people. The key themes we would explore are climate change, youth activism, climate literacy, young people's priorities, and future goals. Ideally, I would conduct these focus groups during June.

Do you have a group of young people that you think might be interested in taking part?

Additionally, I am looking to speak to youth workers themselves about some of the same key themes, particularly climate literacy and current climate change policies.

Do you have any youth workers who may be interested in taking part in a separate focus group or interview?

I'm happy to discuss this further and look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,

Sophie Hoult