



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

The role of Youth Work in the Scottish Educational System: a
study of policy and practice

Placement Based Dissertation Public Policy MSc

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August 2022

Abstract

Partnership between youth work and the formal education system has gained increasing relevance within the Scottish Education System. However, youth work's role in education has not been fully understood, and some tensions have marked the interaction between systems. In this context, this research aims to generate more profound knowledge regarding the role that youth work has taken in the education system and the challenges the sector is confronting in performing this role. This topic is explored by analysing the interaction between policy -through educational framework analysis- and practice -through interviews with youth work sector actors. Overall, the research shows that the Scottish Educational Framework has installed a rhetoric that positions Youth Work as a relevant education partner and is coherent with its core elements; however, a series of factors have generated a gap between policy discourse and its implementation, and sometimes relegated YW to a secondary role within the education system. This context of operation has presented a permanent challenge for the sector, as being in this position has obligated the sector to be constantly justifying its practice and made the boundaries of its identity vulnerable to external expectations. These findings expect not only to contribute with knowledge for the sector to further enhance its position within the educational system, but also to give clues regarding broader challenges operating in the Scottish System that could be translated to other practices.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to extend my gratitude to my supervisor and program director, Jay Wiggan, for his support and guidance during this process. I would also like to thank the YouthLink Scotland team for allowing me to collaborate with them and learn from their experience, especially Amy and Gill, whose support was essential for carrying this research through. Finally, I am deeply thankful for the help of my family and friends, who, despite being far away, supported me every step of the way.

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Introduction

Youth Work (YW) is an informal educational practice that takes place in a wide range of settings, is implemented through various methods, and is delivered by diverse actors -both volunteers and paid professionals- and institutions -both from the statutory and the third sector. Although it is mostly defined as an educational practice, it has been associated with different fields, such as justice, health, leisure, wellbeing, education, and others. The nature of YW is flexible, and its forms of provision are diverse; however, some core elements characterize this practice: 1) young people (YP) must choose to engage, 2) the work must build from where YP are and their individual necessities, and 3) youth workers and the young person are partners in a learning process (YouthLink, 2018).

As any educational practice, YWs' development has been determined by social and political contexts and has not been immune to broader governmental aims. In this context, it must be acknowledged that recent international policy trends have moved YW practice from value-based leisure activities to activities that are more focused on educational outcomes and skills development (Dunne et al., 2014). Political priorities such as reducing youth disengagement and unemployment, and policy trends such as service integration and multi-agency partnerships, have enhanced YWs' role within educational systems (Ord et al., 2021; Bradford & Byrne, 2010). In this scenario, increasing emphasis has been given by governments to collaboration between formal education and YW, and the sector has mobilized towards school-based or school-related provision. Nevertheless, the role of YW within education systems is far from being fully understood (Corney, 2006), and several tensions have marked the interaction of YW practice with policy and formal education contexts (Coburn & Gormally, 2015; Corney, 2006; Blackham & Smith, 2018).

In Scotland, the sector has increasingly gained relevance within the education system; however, YouthLink Scotland, which is the national agency for YW and the organization where this placement-based dissertation was conducted, believes YW still lacks parity of esteem within the system, and that there is a deficit of understanding regarding the sectors' role. In this context, there is a need to generate a more profound understanding of the role of YW in the Scottish Education System and the tensions or challenges that the sector is confronting in fulfilling this role. Many approaches could be taken to explore this topic; however, this research will focus on understanding the interaction between policy and practice. In that sense, the study will look at how youth works' role is represented in Educational Policy Frameworks (policy), how the YW sector understands its role in the educational system (practice), and the challenges that arise from these two fields. The research question is: *How is the role of YW in the Scottish Education System being understood and translated into practice?* This question will be answered through the following objectives:

- Explore the role YW is given within the Scottish Education Policy Framework.
- Identify how the YW sector understands its role in the Scottish Education System.
- Analyse the challenges that the YW sector confronts when interacting in the Scottish Education System.

To comply with these objectives, this research will take a qualitative approach. The first objective will be approached through desk-based research and the second through interviews with YW sector managers and policy actors that work in relationship with the YW sector. Finally, the third objective will be answered by analysing both sources and their interaction. Overall, the study expects to

contribute with knowledge for the sector to further enhance its position within the education system, but also to give clues regarding broader challenges operating in the Scottish System that could be translated to other practices.

This paper will start with a (1) literature review that will first delve into YW policy and the role of YW in education and then focus on the Scottish context. The following section will describe the (2) methodological approach and its limitations. Then (3) findings and discussion will be presented, starting with the (3.1) analysis of the Scottish Educational Framework and continuing with the (3.2) analysis of the interviews. Finally, the report will finish with the (4) conclusions and recommendations.

1. Literature Review

This literature review will start by exploring YW policy and the different approaches that have characterized its development, setting the basis for discussion regarding the role given to YW in the Scottish Educational Framework. The second section will delve specifically into the relationship between YW and educational systems, exploring the ideas and issues that literature brings up regarding the topic. Finally, the third section will focus on how YW has developed in Scotland, setting the elements to discuss the specific challenges that the sector might confront in the country.

1.1 Youth Work Policy

YW practice has been driven by various concepts (McGregor, 2015) and firmly determined by historical, social, and political contexts. Furthermore, the nature of this practice -which occurs in different settings, through a variety of activities, and touches different themes- has made it difficult to assimilate for external observers (Cooper, 2018) and sometimes promoted fragmentation and vagueness in the field (Thole, 2000, in Cousee, 2009). In this context, it has been argued that lack of clear conceptualization has made YW more vulnerable to policy priorities; as Verschelden et al.(2009) state, changing priorities might be causing policymakers to narrow and even subvert YW practice.

In this scenario, it is relevant to mention that throughout history, different approaches have determined YW practice, each serving different aims and linked to different values (McGregor,2015). From a general perspective, YW has been embedded either in deficit models-where youth is perceived as a problem (Dunne et al., 2014) and emphasis is given to the control of anti-social behaviour (Jeff & Smith, 1999)-, or in positive models -which recognize the value of youth as a resource and promote inclusion, empowerment, and participation (Dunne et al., 2014). In the same line, specific models of YW have been developed to theorize different approaches. Dunne et al. (2014) revised the most relevant models developed internationally and identified the following categories: 1)treatment approach, which begins with the assumption that YP are problematic and must be treated to comply with cultural norms; 2)reform approach, which focus on social exclusion and see YW interventions as a way to integrate disadvantaged or at-risk YP into prevailing social norms; 3)advocacy approach, which sees the youth worker as an advocate of YP rights and social structures as problematic and unjust for youth; 4) empowerment approach, which claims that YP must gain control of their lives through a critical understanding of economic, political, and social powers. In a previous effort, Copper and White(1994,in Cooper 2012) linked similar approaches to political tradition, arguing that different political ideologies spawn different forms of youth work:

Table 1:YW models

Model	Political tradition	View of human nature	Values
Treatment	Conservative	Negative	Social cohesion
Reform	Liberal/Social-democratic	Reformable	Equal opportunity
Advocacy	Liberal/Social-democratic	Neutral	Rights
Radical Advocacy	Social-democratic/socialism	Positive	Social Justice

Empowerment	Liberal/neoliberal	Neutral	Freedom from interference
Radical Empowerment	Anarchist/socialism	Positive	Equality of social power

Source: Adapted from Cooper 2012

Although these approaches tend to coexist in different expressions of practice (Cooper, 2018), it seems relevant to identify how they articulate with policy development, and in turn, with practice. According to Dunne et al. (2014), in the 19th and early 20th centuries, YW in Europe was primarily value-based and focused on leisure activities; however, the involvement of governments -which came mainly in the post-war period- brought significant changes to the sector. In that line, the authors mention that in the post-war period, youth policy was primarily driven by deficit models, being YW a tool to support problematic YP and fill the gaps left by other services. However, today policy moves from that negative rhetoric and sets on positive models, setting a discourse of empowerment and personal development where YP are seen as an asset to society. Nevertheless, it has been argued that the vision of empowerment in policy is often 'limited' to giving tools for personal development and promoting equal opportunity, not considering critical agency and structural causes of inequality (Sercombe, 2015); hence, not reflecting on more 'critical' or 'radical' approaches to YW. On the other hand, there is a persistent trend toward targeted and issue-driven approaches aimed at hard-to-reach YP, with a focus on preventing and remedying problems (Dunne et al., 2014), which can be interpreted as a gap between operation and rhetoric. Overall, it could be stated that rhetorically current policy developments draw on elements from models that have a positive or neutral view of YP. However, in operation, there is still a focus on negative or reformable perceptions of YP. In the UK context, this could be associated with traces of the 'third-way' rhetoric installed by New Labour, where long-standing antithesis were reconciled through language, and youth was seen as "the future, hope, energy, and possibility, but also dysfunctional, a threat, pathological" (Sercombe, 2015, p.43).

On the other hand, the increase in targeted approaches has been linked to changes in funding structures, which have become less flexible and connected to accountability and measurable outcomes (Dunne et al., 2014; Bradford, 2010; St.Croix, 2018). Several authors have argued that this target-driven focus and emphasis on measurement -which can be associated with ideas of New Public Management- is problematic for the sector, as it can constrain the informal nature of YW and threat elements such as the relevance of processes, the voluntary principle, and the aim of practice always starting from the necessities of the individual (Sercombe, 2015; St.Croix, 2018; Coburn & Wallace, 2011). Furthermore, it has been argued that the emphasis on generating data - which usually follows accountability expectations- would fail to measure the success of YW practice, as its relevance goes beyond numbers and should be found in its transformative effects and the value given to it by YP (Sercombe, 2015). In that sense, recognizing that YW operates in a system in which practice must be accountable, a claim has been made to move from a managerial to a democratic approach to accountability (St.Croix, 2018).

In conclusion, although different approaches coexist within YW practice, policy draws predominantly on some of them. Currently, policy rhetoric is predominantly linked to empowerment and liberational ideas; however, these ideas are 'limited' and accompanied by an increasing focus on targeted and accountable activities. For some authors, this has tensioned some

aspects of YW practice. In this scenario, it seems relevant to understand how the role that practitioners give to their practice links with policy discourse and with the tensions mentioned in literature.

1.2. YW in the educational system

Given the flexible nature of YW and the different approaches it can take, throughout history, this practice has been linked to welfare, health, justice, education, and other systems. However, in literature and national policies, YW is mainly presented as an educational practice (McGregor, 2015). In that line, Spence (2008) mentions that various pedagogical concepts and theories have been used at different times and places to describe YW practice. The first important consideration is that YW is usually defined as 'non-formal education' -which refers to learning that occurs outside of the formal education field yet is structured and guided by learning objectives-, or 'informal education' -which refers to non-structured learning experiences that occur in a wide variety of settings and are related to a lifelong process of learning (Spence, 2008; La Belle, 1982). On the other hand, YW has been associated with ideas of 'social education', which became relevant in the post-war period as a means of helping YP to develop socially during their leisure time (Spence, 2008); 'experiential learning' which is understood as learning by doing and draws on elements of authors such as Dewey (Ord, 2012); and 'critical pedagogy' which builds on the work of Freire and starts from the view of education as an opportunity to critically think about oppressive structures and empower learners to build ideas (Coburn, 2010). Overall, YW draws from what has been considered the 'new wave' of learning theories, moves from traditional discourses of education, and focus on wider approaches to learning and achievement (Sommerland, 2003, in Coburn & Wallace, 2011; Coburn & Wallace, 2011).

In recent years, YW has moved from leisure activities to activities oriented toward skills development, educational purposes, and the labour market (Dunne et al., 2014). This approach is related to issues such as economic crisis, unemployment, increasing number of early school leavers, and the complexity of YP transition processes, which has made the development of human capital and strengthening the education of YP a priority for governments (Verschland et al., 2009). Furthermore, governments have promoted multi-agency partnerships, multi-disciplinary teams, and a generalized integration of educational services (Ord et al., 2021; Bradford & Byrne, 2010), giving YW a broader space within education systems. Thus, school-based YW has significantly increased its numbers (Corney, 2006), being today much more common to see schools cooperate and connect with YW organizations in different forms (Dunne et al., 2014).

In hand with this new emphasis of collaboration within formal system and YW, came a need for more formal measurement and accreditation for YW processes and the requirement of providing indicators of performance in terms of outcomes, outputs, and competencies (Coburn & Wallace, 2011); which go in line with managerial perspectives that are characteristic of formal education. As was mentioned in the previous section, this trend has been seen as conflictive in academic literature, evidencing a tension between policy expectations and YW core elements. In that sense, the promotion of multi-agency partnerships and the integration of services, opened a door for youth workers to be more involved within the educational system; however, the conditions of this integration could be seen as a limitation to the nature of YW practice. As Delvin (2008, quoted in Dunne et al. 2014, p.77) stated, "a central challenge of YW and youth workers will be to retain a core

sense of vision and purpose regarding the relational, educational and associative mission of YW in a climate of increasing managerialism and outcome-focused accountability”.

On another hand, historically, there has been debate regarding the compatibility of YW with formal settings such as schools. In that sense, there has been a tendency to position YW against schooling, arguing that some essential elements of YW practice -such as the voluntary principle, friendly relationship focus, and young person as the starting point - are not compatible with formal settings of education, which are characterized by strong structures, pre-set outcomes, and formal relationships (Coburn & Gormally, 2015; Corney, 2006; Blackham & Smith, 2018). Furthermore, there have been fears about the potential blur of professional boundaries and values of YW if it integrates into school settings (Corney, 2006). However, other lines of the debate argue that YW practice can collaborate in schools without losing its essence. For instance, Coburn & Gormally (2015, p.3) say that “as an educational methodology, YW can contribute to mainstream schooling while retaining a distinctive ethical purpose and value base” and that rather than dwelling on differences, the system should “seek understanding of commonalities that help to explore the potential for a complementary education system which fundamentally has the interests of YP at its heart”.

Finally, it must be mentioned that the push towards partnership and collaboration is not condition for success, as several challenges must be confronted for this way of working to be effective. In that line, Cheminais (2009) mentions that there are different degrees of partnership working and that the level at which these are accomplished will affect the effectiveness of practice. In that sense, the authors mentions that the degrees are: Coexistence -acknowledging partners-, Cooperation -sharing information-, Coordination -planning together-, Collaboration -long-term commitment- and Co-ownership -practice change; and that at least Cooperation, Coordination and Collaboration must be achieved for effective working. One of the challenges that might hinder partnership is the linkage between different professional cultures, as understanding and respecting the role of other professionals is essential for effective work (Sloper, 2004; Salmon, 2004). In that line, Harris (2005, pp.84) mentions that for partnership to be authentic, “we need to understand the positioning of others as well as having a shared vision and common language”. Finally, Ranade (1998, in Salmon, 2004) mentions that differing professional languages can lead to communication difficulties and inequality of power in collaboration. If this is translated to the YW context and the aim of working collaboratively with other education partners, it must be mentioned that literature has raised concerns about the lack of understanding of teachers and school administrators regarding the role of youth workers -what they do and why they do it- and the methodological, theoretical, and ideological underpinning of their practice (Corney, 2006).

Overall, although the sector has moved toward school-related provisions, this movement has not been exempted from tensions. In that sense, policy arrangements may open different roads for YW to integrate in the education system; however, complex partnership structures and management ideas can bring extra challenges to the sector.

1.3. YW in Scotland

This section will focus on YW development in Scotland, but first it will briefly present a few contextual elements.

1.3.1. Governance in Scotland

Governance can be seen as the dispersion of power from central government to other centres of influence (Cairney, 2019) and comes from the realization that no single actor has the knowledge or information to manage the increasing complexity of society (Newman, 2001). Although this concept is common within different nations, it has been claimed that the Scottish Government has pursued a distinct governance style, with a higher willingness to devolve policy delivery to other organizations (Cairney, 2009). Other authors have related Scottish governance to New Public Governance (McMulling et al., 2021; Lindsay et al., 2013), which has been seen as a successor of New Public Management, focuses on inter-organizational relationships, and gives increased relevance to partnership, networks, and cross-sector collaboration (Osborne, 2006; Lindsay et al., 2013). In that sense, Scotland has built up community-based policy networks where different actors are considered partners in the policymaking process (McMulling et al., 2021). In concrete terms, Cairney et al. (2016) mention that the Scottish Government produces a broad national strategy - National Performance Framework - and trusts bodies such as Local Authorities (LA) to meet its aims; in turn, LA work with the public, voluntary, and private sector to produce shared purposes that are relevant to the local context. This specific approach was presented by the SNP in 2007 as an outcomes-focused approach, contrasting with the target-focused approach adopted by the previous coalition (Arnott, 2016).

The approach taken by Scotland is often contrasted to the approach taken in UK -which has been associated with neoliberal excesses- and positioned in favourable views (Cairney et al., 2016). Although the Scottish approach does advance in giving more relevance to different bodies, giving importance to networks, and moving from a central target-driven regime (Arnott & Ozga, 2010), a few elements must be considered in the context of this research. First, the Scottish Government has not been immune to new public management trends, and aspects of this can be found in its forms of governance (Cairney et al., 2016). Secondly, this form of governance is not exempted from its own/different issues; being one of them the inevitable trade-off between national policy and local flexibility. This can be seen as the unbalance between national uniformity and local legitimacy, and can lead to a reflexion regarding which is the value given to variability between local areas (Cairney et al., 2016).

These governance elements are relevant to bear in mind because they set the context of operation of YW. Especially considering that the role YW has on educational systems, until today, is mostly grounded in the possibility of establishing successful partnerships with schools. Furthermore, considering that a relevant part of the sector's provision comes from the 3rd sector, it is even more critical to understand the position of these acquirers within Scottish governance.

1.3.2. Education Policy in Scotland

After devolution, the first two governments were Labour/Liberal coalitions. This coalition perpetuated education policies that were in line with the UK Labour government, giving focus to issues such as choice, privatisation, and standards (Hamilton, 2020; Arnott & Ozga, 2010). However, when the SNP came to power, there was a shift in policies and especially in narrative (Hamilton, 2020). Regarding narrative, Arnott & Ozga (2010, p.339) have argued that the general rhetoric of SNP has been "nationalist in its references to a shared 'project' that is social democratic with a Scottish accent" and has been characterized by paring economic growth and targeting resources to

address the consequences of poverty; hence, linking historically-embedded qualities of the Scottish polity to contemporary imperatives.

Regarding education policy narrative, Arnott & Ozga (2010) identified two parallel discourses. The first one is economy-driven and focuses on growth, skills, and success; positioning Scotland in a globally competitive environment and addressing international agendas of modernisation. The second links economic drivers to the “idea of a ‘flourishing’ Scotland and an emphasis on community, fairness and inclusiveness” (Arnott & Ozga, 2010, p.344). In that sense, education policy has been a key area for the SNP, as it combines the focus on economy with ideas of fairness and social justice; becoming “an arena for the formation and propagation of their discursive blend of social democracy and wealth creation as the key ingredients of modernized nationalism” (Arnott & Ozga, 2010, p.343). However, it must be mentioned that this approach has not been exempted from critics, as opposition has claimed that the SNP has used a social-democratic discourse while following neo-liberal policies that focus especially on economic growth (Cuthbert & Cuthbert, 2009). Furthermore, it has been claimed that the party is “appearing as the same uneasy compromise between centre-left and that of neo-liberalism as Labour” (Hassan, 2009, p.11)

Regarding policy development, and following elements of governance mentioned before, educational policy has taken a shift towards outcome-based policy-making and partnership approaches, and in the last years, the focus has been on ending poverty-related attainment gap (Arnott, 2016). On the other hand, Scotland remains committed to state-funded education that runs for the benefit of local communities and is managed by LA (McGowan, 2019). This educational background sets the ideas operating in the educational system; as such, they will allow to discuss the approach taken toward YW and how this contrasts with practitioners' views.

1.3.3. YW in Scotland

According to Davis (2009, in Verschelden, 2009), the very first developments of YW in the UK were in the later 18th and early 19th centuries and took form as bottom-up popular education. However, by mid-19th and early 20th-century, practice was characterized by being provided by voluntary associations and usually associated with determined values. It was only later in the 20th century when the government started to give more relevance to YW policy, especially given the detrimental effects that changes in society and consecutive wars had on YP (Davis, 2009, in Verschelden, 2009). From 1960 on, the development of YW started differentiating between England and Scotland. England -reflecting on welfare ideas- had a ‘golden era of youth work’ around the 60s (Coburn & Gormally, 2019); however, this development was soon restricted by the Thatcherism period and consequently by the New Labour and its emphasis on marketization and managerialism (Davis, 2009, in Verschelden, 2009). On the other hand, in Scotland, YW never experienced a ‘golden age’ of investment. Hence, until relatively recently, the sector mainly thrived as a voluntary and community-based endeavour, being less dependent on state-funding and a bit more resilient to policy change (Coburn & Gormally, 2019). A relevant change came with the establishment of the Alexander Report (1975), which established a Community Education Service compounded by YW, Adult Learning, and Community Development, funded by government, and operationalized through LA (Mackie et al., 2013). This enterprise promoted collaboration between these three practices and between the statutory and voluntary sectors, and one of its aims was to encourage active citizenship and democratic participation, especially within most disadvantaged groups of society (Mackie et al., 2013).

Through the creation of this service, YW practice was positioned closer to government action for the first time, as Community Education was acknowledged as a critical agent for the country's social issues. Moreover, it recognized education could not be limited to single organizations as it would simply "reflect the dominant values of society which controlled it" (HMSO,1975,quoted in Coburn&Gormally,2019,p.4), challenging established orthodoxies of education. Today the Community Education Service has evolved to Community Learning Development(CLD); however, it must be mentioned that the discourse surrounding CE/CLD has evolved through time and through policy scenarios. In this line, Mackie et al.(2013) argue that what started as a post-war welfare service, later developed to positioning CLD as a technique during New Labour, and now is being redirected to a view of CLD as a profession by establishing the Standards Council for CLD and reaffirming the practice as an identity rather than a catalogue of skills and outcomes that anybody can pursue. Although this last focus could be seen as 'dawn of liberation' for practice, Mackie et al.(2013) argue that managerialism aspects are not easily discarded and that discourses of professionalism are also linked to control.

Today CLD still incorporates these three strands of practice and, following elements of Scottish governance, its provision is managed by LA and strongly focused on partnership. In that sense, LA have the statutory requirement of providing CLD, but in practice, it is delivered through partnership activity within LA, 3rd sector, and other providers of public services (Scottish Government, 2013). On the other hand, some principles that underpin CLD are empowerment, participation, inclusion, and equality of opportunity (Scottish Government,2012); being positioned on the side of fairness and inclusiveness of the SNP educational rhetoric.

Now coming back to YW, this cross-sectional collaboration or partnership focus that is so characteristic of Scottish governance (McMulling et al.,2021) has not been exempted from tensions in the sector. First, it must be noticed that as YW is embedded within CLD, it does not have a statutory position of its own, and how LA integrates YW is not normed. Secondly, Sercombe et al. (2014) mention that integrating these three strands of practice under CLD has promoted diffusion of purpose and boundaries within them. Finally, it has been argued that there is an ill-defined relationship between CLD and the state, which has promoted ambiguous degrees of dependency and autonomy between sectors (Mackie et al.,2013). Overall, YW being embedded within CLD gave relevance to practice and more access to funding; however, it also gave it a unique position - different from other countries- that brought its own challenges for the sector.

Finally, it must be mentioned that -although in less degree- YW in Scotland has not been exempted from the effects of austerity measures imposed by UK Government (Coburn & Gormally, 2019). In that line, Unison's report 'Youth Services at Breaking Point' showed an £11m cut in LA youth service spending in Scotland 2016-19 (Jones, 2019), and a YouthLink Scotland's member survey reported that 70% of youth workers said their budgets had decreased in the last time (YouthLink, 2020). On the other hand, while Scotland has made an effort to move from target-driven policy (Arnott & Ozga,2010), it has been argued that tensions remain in the sector regarding market-driven economy and managerial approaches towards measurement and impact (Coburn & Gormally, 2019).

Overall, it can be stated that YW in Scotland has had a particular development that is associated with the governance and policy developments of the country; however, it has experienced challenges that are similar to those evidenced in international trends and others that are particular

to the context. In that sense, it seems relevant to explore how the role YW has taken in the educational system and the challenges reported in fulfilling that role are related to characteristics of the Scottish context.

2. Methodology

2.1. Desk-based research

To comply with the first objective of this research a general review of the Scottish Educational Framework was made. Once relevant literature and policy documents were reviewed and the central frameworks identified, two specific frameworks were selected -based on the relevance they had on YW practice- for deeper review: Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC). These frameworks cannot be reduced to one specific document, so the analysis included several governmental records. Additionally, given the complexity of the analysis and limitations of space and time, analysis of secondary authors and organizations was considered.

To complement the vision of the general frameworks a documental analysis of the National Strategy of YW was conducted. This document was constructed in collaboration between the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and YouthLink. The fact that YouthLink participated in this elaboration must be noticed, as it means that the document represents not only the governmental or 'policy' vision, but also incorporates the views of the sector.

2.2. Interviews

According to Peters & Halcomb (2015) interviews are a powerful method to provide insights into the participants experiences, perceptions or opinions. In the same line, Iñigues (1999) mentions that this approach is appropriate when the process to be studied involves the meaning created and shared by individuals or communities. In this context, to comply with the second objective, the method selected was to conduct interviews.

To represent the 'YW sector' two groups were considered: YW sector managers (from now, Youth Workers) and policy actors that worked in collaboration with the sector. Although this second group in strict sense does not belong to the 'YW sector', the selected policy participants had roles that were intrinsically linked to YW practice, so they can be considered -in a wider sense- to be part of the sector, or at least close collaborators. The decision to include policy actors came from the idea of incorporating participants that had broader knowledge on educational policy and a wider perspective on how YW was being positioned in the educational system.

In total, nine individual interviews and one joint interview were conducted, coming to a total of eleven participants. These interviews were semi-structured, as this more flexible approach enables interchange and dialogue between the interviewer and participants (Kallio et al.,2016) and promotes more in-depth conversations.

2.2.1. Youth Workers

This sample was selected through a purposive approach, where participants are picked based on their qualities, experiences and/or knowledge (Etikan,2016). In this case the criteria for selection were:

-Work in an 3rd sector organization or LA that have close experience in working in school context, as first-hand experience was considered relevant.

-Be on managerial positions within their organization. It was considered that a broader look at the subject would be beneficial for the research, especially considering that managers might have knowledge on relevant topics, such as policy development, that day-to-day practitioners might not have.

-In the case of LA, as managerial positions often are related to CLD and not exclusively YW, it was also made sure that they had relevant experience within YW.

With these criteria in mind, the first step was to explore the experiences of different organizations and their managers and select a sample for contact. This task was made in collaboration with YouthLink and based on the contacts of the organization. Finally, the sample was made up by six youth workers, from both LA and 3rd sector. Additionally, one participant from the college sector was incorporated, as its experience was considered relevant for the study.

Table 2: Sample of Youth Workers

	Sector	Role	Reason
YW1	3 rd	Head of programme	Established partnership with schools
YW2	3 rd	Attainment and Skills Manager	School-based provision
YW3	3 rd	National Programme Manager	Established partnership with schools
YW4	LA	YW and Wider Achievement Manager	School-based provision in the sector
YW5	LA	CLD Manager	YW and school model
YW6	LA	CLD Coordinator	YW and school model
YW7	College	Curriculum manager	YW outreach programme

According to literature, some of the limitations or disadvantages of purposive sampling can be researchers' bias and difficulty in defending the sample's representativeness (Rai&Thapa,2015). Regarding the first point, it was made sure that the organizations, and their representatives, were selected following the mentioned criteria. Furthermore, the sample was discussed with the team of YouthLink, so several views were incorporated. About the second point, it must be recognized that the selected sample is not representative of the whole YW sector; however, if the limits of the research are clear this should not be a problem. These interviews will represent the view of YW managers, because it was tough best to include participants with wider perspectives; however, this does not mean that for future research it would not be interesting to include the vision of day-to-day practitioners or even of youth workers that are not so involved directly on educational practice.

2.2.2. Policy Actors

As was mentioned, this group of participants was included to incorporate a broader perspective on the topic and a more specialist knowledge of policy frameworks. In this case, the selection of the

sample was also purposive, and the aim was to include policy actors that worked in close collaboration with the YW sector. In that sense, Education Scotland- which is the executive agency charge with supporting quality and improvement of education- was considered a relevant universe, especially the sector connected to CLD. After reaching individuals in different roles of Education Scotland, the final sample included one Education Officer on CLD, one Attainment Advisor, and one Inspector of Education in CLD. It must be mentioned that the interview with the Inspector was individual, but the Attainment Advisor and Education Officer participated through a joint interview. This decision was taken firstly because the participants asked it to be that way, and secondly because their complementary roles within Education Scotland allowed to reach a deeper conversation and contrast and complement their views on the same topic.

As is stated in detail through the project diary, there were some difficulties reaching more policy actors. That is why a fourth actor was considered: the YW in Schools Manager of YouthLink Scotland. Although this last actor cannot be regarded in a strict sense as a policy actor, as it acts as intermediate between Government and the YW sector, its experience managing a programme that focuses on strengthening collaboration between YW and schools was considered relevant and beneficial for the study. Although there were some ethical limitations to be considered - 1)anonymity could not be guaranteed, 2)there was possible interest clash, as YouthLink was the organization that commanded this research-, it was deemed relevant to include this actor.

Table 3: Sample of Policy Actors

	Role	Description
PA1	Education officer on CLD, Education Scotland	Engages with key stakeholders from across LA, the 3 rd sector and national organisations. Part of the role consists of providing improvement to the sector, advising on governmental policies, and establishing partnerships for the delivery of national outcomes.
PA2	Attainment Advisor, Education Scotland	The role involves a range of activities to promote equity and to raise attainment and achievement, and develop partnership between education colleagues, including CLD workers, and in turn youth workers.
PA3	Inspector of Education on CLD, Education Scotland	Inspect CLD provision across Scotland
PA4	YW in Schools Manager, YouthLink	Manages project that is part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and pretends to enhance collaboration between schools and youth work.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that for future research it would be interesting to incorporate the view of policy actors that come from a broader perspective, as this would allow to complement the analysis of policy frameworks.

2.2.3. Analysis

All interviewees were given the option to be interviewed online or in person, and only one of them chose to do it in person. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and anonymized. Then, an in-depth analysis of the transcripts was performed with the help of the NVivo software, which allowed to classify the information into relevant categories of research. This

analysis and the general findings will be described in the section 3.1 through a narrative that integrates both the visions of youth workers and policy actors.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. YW in the Scottish Educational Policy Framework

The first objective of this research is to explore the role given to YW within the Scottish Educational Policy Framework. In this context, this section will focus on this objective and discuss the possible challenges that this position can bring to the YW sector.

As mentioned, the bases of statutory YW in Scotland sit within CLD. However, as the aim is to identify the role of YW within the educational system as a whole, this section will start by exploring the general framework of the Scottish Education System. The central frameworks of the Scottish Education System today are: *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC), *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE), *Developing the Young Workforce* (DYW), *National Improvement Framework* (NIF), and the *Scottish Attainment Challenge* (SAC). Given that the reach of this study is limited, the focus of this discussion will be on the CfE -as it sets a broad vision of the expected educational outcomes- and the SAC -as this plan has opened doors for increasing the sectors' funding. Once these general frameworks of the education system are analysed, the report will continue to present an analysis of the *National YW Strategy 2014-19*.

3.1.1. Curriculum for Excellence

The CfE was launched in 2004 and aspired to implement a radical transformation in Scottish education (Priestley & Minty, 2012). From a general perspective, it can be said that the CfE took a turn toward what was recalled in the literature review as the 'new wave' of learning. This turn can be appreciated in the following aspects:

Openness to other spaces: It considers "the totality of experiences which are planned for children and YP through their education, wherever they are being educated" (Scottish Government, 2008, p.11). Learners are expected to experience the curriculum in different contexts and educational settings.

Emphasis on experiences: It recognizes the significance of the learning experience in fostering the development of capabilities and achieving involvement, motivation, and depth of learning. In that sense, it gives relevance not only to outcomes but also to teaching methods, aiming to achieve "more exciting, engaging, relevant learning and teaching" (Scottish Government, 2008, p.4)

Learner-centred: The needs of the individual learner are put at the centre, it "provides a high degree of flexibility...provide a curriculum that is adaptable and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners and reflecting the unique nature of their communities" (Scottish Government, 2021, n.p)

Enhances skill development: relevance is given to wider learning and attainment, especially to skills for learning, skills for life, and skills for work. Qualification adjustments accompany this element.

Partnership: all these elements translate into a recognition of the role of other education partners, "meeting these ambitions involves working in learning partnership with...youth work and the voluntary sector" (Scottish Government, 2008, p.3)

The fact that the CfE approaches learning from a broader perspective and values wider attainment opens a space for YW to formally embed within educational expectations, as its outcomes have

usually been related to this wider perception of learning processes and achievement (Coburn & Wallace, 2011). In this context, the sector has mobilized towards demonstrating how YW practice can contribute to the development of CfE by developing the National YW Outcomes- which are underpinned under the expectations of the CfE-, the YW Skills Framework -which are mapped towards the CfE-, and a series of documents that explain and demonstrate this relationship (YouthLink, 2021). Nevertheless, the most relevant fact is that the move from 'traditional', 'hierarchical' or 'knowledge-guided' views of education, towards more 'holistic' and 'experience-guided' approaches, besides opening a space of action for youth work, opened a theoretical space for overcoming some of the tensions explored in literature. As mentioned, integration of YW within schools has been marked by a tension between what is expected of YW in the formal system and its core elements of practice (Verschland et al., 2009; Coburn & Gormally, 2015; Corney, 2006; Blackham & Smith, 2018). However, the CfE gives relevance to learning processes, has a holistic and flexible approach to learners, promotes experiential learning, and values wider forms of achievement, all elements coherent to YW practice. In that sense, CfE opens a theoretical space where YW can form part of the education system without going against core elements of its identity. Overall, although target-driven expectations persist and more critical versions of YW do not shape into this curriculum, the CfE has moved the educational discourse towards ideas that are more coherent with YW core elements, values, and aims.

Nevertheless, how this rhetoric is translated into practice is a different discussion, as professional capacity, willingness, and material conditions must follow these ideas. This discussion escapes the scope of this research; however, a concrete limitation is that although wider attainment is supposed to be promoted, it has been diagnosticated that the focus is still mainly on academic achievement and that there needs to be a more equitable and wide qualifications system (YouthLink, 2021; Muir, 2022; Audit Scotland, 2021). Regarding specifically about YW, although the CfE encourages partnership, this does not translate into normative expectations or explicit or clear recognition of the role of YW in the educational system. So overall, it can be said that the CfE sets a relevant theoretical framework for YW practice, as it allows to bring closer -in a coherent way- informal and formal forms of education. However, this theoretical framework does not necessarily translate into relevant material conditions for YW to operate within the system in a significant and not-tensioned way.

3.1.2. Scottish Attainment Challenge

The SAC was launched in 2015 to close the poverty-related attainment gap and achieve equity within education. The importance of this framework for YW practice lies in the fact that it has advanced in assuring material conditions for YW to operate in the system. Besides verbally encouraging collective agency (Scottish Government et al., 2022), this challenge presents a funding scheme that has allowed the sector to increase its participation in the educational system. First, the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF), which is a fund given to headteachers to support them in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap, states that headteachers "should endeavor to work in partnership with their local community partners, such as youth work" (Scottish Government et al., 2022, p.8). Additionally, from this year on, the Strategic Equity Funding (SEF) will be delivered directly to LA to "support local authorities in developing and implementing strategic approaches to achieving the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, working with schools, wider LA services and national and community partners, such as youth work" (Scottish Government et al., 2022, p.9). Overall, it can be said that SAC positions YW as a relevant partner in reducing the poverty-related attainment gap and that this positioning is accompanied by a funding scheme that could enhance YW practice in the educational system.

However, this funding scheme is not directly addressed to youth work. PEF is administrated by headteachers and working in partnership with youth work is only a recommendation; SEF is given to the LA and does not regulate the role of youth work. In that sense, although the SAC funding scheme gives a step in setting the material conditions for practice -and confronting the historically constrained funding scenario of youth work- this progress is conditioned to the value that headteachers and LA give to youth work. This element can be troublesome if it is considered that historically YW has not been easily understood by other practitioners or sectors (Corney, 2006; Cooper, 2018).

Nevertheless, it must be noticed that other parallel funding initiatives have come through in the last years, such as 3-year funding for the YW and Schools Partnership Programme and YW Education Recovery Fund, which was given in the context of COVID recovery. Both are administrated by YouthLink but have a limited time of action.

3.1.3. National YW Strategy 2014-19

This strategy was developed in collaboration between YouthLink, the Scottish Government, and Education Scotland, and it sets the visions and challenges for the sector. The analysis of this document yielded the following relevant points:

Role: Overall, the strategy presents YW as a practice that supports and empowers YP to allow them to gain confidence, engagement, and develop skills for life. The aim is to give YP opportunities for learning and personal development and, in turn, improve their life chances. Linked to this is the idea of creating a fairer society and active citizenship. Thus, the general rhetoric of this strategy revolves around empowering YP, not as much from a critical agency perspective, but as a possibility to participate in society in an active and equalitarian way and have the opportunities to succeed in life.

Now, explicitly referring to its role in education, the strategy states that "the different strategies for learning, and myriad of learning environments offered by the YW sector, gives opportunities to all while engaging particularly well with those YP who have, for whatever reason, disengaged from more formal education and training" (Education Scotland et al., 2014, p.17) and that YW has a role in "re-engaging the hardest to reach YP" (p.17). On the other hand, it sets an ambition for the sector to be embedded within the CfE and prepare the "CLD sector to focus on preparing all YP for employment" (p.18).

In general, the strategy follows the trends presented in literature by sitting in a positive view of youth and empowering discourses while also adjusting to the need of targeting particular population and complying with economic and labour demands. This aligns with SNP's rhetorical effort to link economic development with fairness aims (Arnott & Ozga, 2010) and with less critical or radical approaches to YW.

Emphasis on measurement and outcomes: One of the five ambitions that are set for the sector is 'ensure we measure our impact' (Education Scotland et al., 2014). However, this ambition is not framed from a managerial perspective -focused on numbers and predefined measurable outcomes- but from a more democratic approach (St.Croix, 2018) that gives relevance to self-evaluation and includes YP's vision of practice. Furthermore, measurement is presented to ensure improvement and reflection regarding YW practice at individual and sector levels. Hence, although the sector

operates on a system that sets targets and expects outcomes, the rhetoric of the strategy demonstrates an effort to address the tension evidenced in literature regarding accountability requirements (Sercombe, 2015; St.Croix, 2018; Coburn & Wallace,2011). In that sense, acknowledging that YW is operating within a system that has traces of managerialism (Coburn & Gormally, 2019; Cairney et al., 2016), the question that seems to be addressed is *how* and *what* to measure to comply with external requirements and at the same time maintain the values and core elements of practice.

Another relevant point to consider is the emphasis that is given to measurement as a way of building a "robust evidence base to demonstrate the impact of youth work" (Education Scotland et al., 2014, p.22), making evident the need of the sector to 'justify' and build the value of their practice.

Shared roles: As was mentioned, this strategy was elaborated in collaboration between the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and YouthLink Scotland. The integration of YouthLink is not strange, considering that policymaking has moved from top-down approaches (Newman, 2001) and that Scottish policymaking has been characterized by consultation and negotiation with different interest groups (Cairney, 2009). However, the central role of YouthLink in the implementation plan comes to attention, especially in gathering funding, promoting understanding, and collecting evidence regarding their value. This, far from being a critique, leads back the perception that the sector -represented by YouthLink- must continuously 'justify' or 'fight' for its space within policy. Furthermore, the revision of several documents and reports that YouthLink has elaborated to 'show the value' of youthwork around CfE, Attainment Challenge, and other policy aims demonstrate that although the policy sector has opened the doors to youth work, the sector has had to be proactive in inserting themselves within the system and being part of the agenda.

The analysis of these educational frameworks has shown an apparent political will to give YW a more relevant role within the educational system, associating YW with discourses of empowerment and equality and positioning its role especially concerning disadvantaged populations or at-risk groups. However, there is a gap between this willingness and how it is effectively translated into practice. The favorable policy scenario is limited by factors such as the shortage of effective recognition of wider attainment, scarcity of direct funding, and weakness of explicit and clear recognition of the sector. So, while on one hand, the educational framework is rhetorically pushing the YW sector towards education-related activities, on the other, the mentioned limitations perpetuate an auxiliary role of YW- mend to fill in gaps left by other sectors- more than a vision of YW as an educational practice with its own value.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the lack of effective recognition in the educational framework, linked to the fact that the sector does not have a statutory role (outside CLD), can position YW at disadvantage within Scottish governance. Overall, the educational framework is non-binding and only declares broad goals regarding the role of YW, being the details of its implementation within the education system characterized by elements of voluntarism and highly dependent on the vision and understanding of LA and schools. Therefore, if the framework is not clear and emphatic about the role that YW is supposed to have in education, LA and schools can easily overlook it, and the sector can become a victim of the trade-off between national policy and local flexibility (Cairney et al., 2016). On another hand, the rhetoric of the educational framework -which promotes partnership

but does not give enough clear recognition- can leave the sector in an unbalanced relationship with the formal system, perpetuating challenges for effective partnership (Ranade, 1998, in Salmon, 2004; Sloper, 2004; Salmon, 2004) and making the sector vulnerable to external expectations. In that sense, the case of YW can be seen as an example of how practices that do not have a strong position can struggle to engage in effective collaboration and partnership intents that are characteristic of Scottish governance, especially if there is no clear framework to lead this.

3.2. YW according to the YW sector

This section will present the analysis of interviews. The vision of policy actors and youth workers will be presented in an integrated narrative, being distinctions made only when relevant. Also, given space limitations, results will be presented in a concise way, with quotes being integrated only when strictly necessary; however, deeper details of the analysis can be encountered in Appendix 1.

3.2.1. General aims

The first relevant finding is that the discourse of the YW sector regarding the general aims of YW was very much aligned with the one described in the analysis of educational frameworks. Furthermore, it was expected that the discourse of policy actors and youth workers could differ in this aspect; however, no significant difference was encountered. Overall, respondents associated YW with YP's social and personal development and achieving the skills needed to succeed. Linked to this was a discourse of empowerment, which was primarily related to the capacity of YP to do things by themselves and take control of their learning and life. In another line, various respondents acknowledge that although YW was beneficial for all YP, the role of YW was usually associated with helping those who needed it the most and might be encountering extra barriers in life.

Although the discourses of empowerment found in the interviews were associated with giving YP their voice in society and usually came from a critical view of societal arrangements, critical agency was generally not explicitly mentioned in their discourses. Furthermore, YW was explicitly associated with political action by only two actors:

"The system that we've got creates great and grave inequality, and that's why I came into this work because I felt things needed to change. Now, it doesn't mean to say that all has to be political, but it's political with small P, and that's like youth work is political with small P for me, sometimes it becomes a big P" (YW5-LA)

In that sense, it can be said that the general discourse of participants was more directly associated with functional and liberating ideas than critical agency. Thus, their narrative moved away from radical models of YW and closer to vision of empowerment, where it is seen as a means to assure YP has the chance to confront the barriers that unequal societies set in their way, participate, and succeed in life.

Regarding broader societal aims achieved through youth work, the most mentioned were reducing attainment gaps, boosting employability, addressing social inequality, enhancing citizenship, and preventing and addressing risk behaviour. In the same line, it was mentioned that activities were being increasingly targeted to specific issues or groups, mainly because of funding constraints and funders' priorities. Although this point was tensioned in literature (Dunne et al., 2014), most participants argued that targeting was necessary. This justification was made in terms of economic reasons and the social responsibility of YW in helping those who confront different barriers *"I keep*

routinely talking about vulnerable and disengaged, but I think we have to take a more targeted approach to those young people because they've got, they've different barriers" (YW7-CO). However, one youth worker warned about the risk of excessively targeting practice, arguing a possible loss in the holistic approach that should characterize youth work.

In conclusion, it can be said that regarding the general aims of YW, there is coherence between policy and practice discourses. Furthermore, some of the tensions reelevated in literature seem to be minimized by a speech that bridges policy expectation -specific targets and policy aims- with the social purposes of YW.

3.2.2. Role in the education system

Essentials of practice

Before exploring the role that participants reported, it must be noticed that when describing this role, most youth workers started from a critical or conflicted view of the formal education system; this view was especially negative in participants from the 3rd sector. In some cases, the conflict was related to the lack of flexibility of the formal system, which translated into an incapacity to approach the individual needs of YP. In other views, one actor critiqued that *"people think that education was a left-wing agenda in supporting to have better opportunities, and it wasn't, it was a right-wing agenda to get people back to work and around making money. And I think that still is part of the rhetoric as an education system"* (YW3-3rdS); and others that the formal system could be constrictive, unfit, and even damaging for children and YP: *"So they're in a system that doesn't necessarily fit who they are...some of them will be intelligent but not in the way that they're being taught...and some of them are actually actively being demonstrated that they're not very clever"* (YW1-3rdS)

In this context, youth workers highlighted a series of characteristics of their practice that put them in a solid position to approach education in a way that the formal system cannot. Some of the most mentioned were:

Flexibility: The formal sector is constricted to specific settings, methods, and curriculum subjects, whereas the youth workers can develop their practice in different settings and through other methods.

Starting from YP's individual needs: A core element of YW is starting from YP's needs and co-constructing the learning process, whereas the formal sector starts from the demands of a structured curriculum. This allows the sector to adapt better to the demands of individual needs.

Relationship-based practice: Youth workers can engage more personally with YP, diagnose the issues more easily behind their behavior and create 'safe spaces' for YP to communicate.

Holistic: YW allows practitioners to approach the individual and learning, unlike teachers who usually focus on determined subjects.

Role

As was mentioned in the previous section, in general terms, the sector associates its practice with empowerment, personal development, and equity. Now, when talking specifically about the role they comply in the educational system, several perspectives were mentioned. Although these

perspectives are usually mixed, complementary, and occasionally overlap, it seems relevant to classify them to understand further the different values that the sector attributes to their practice. These ideas can be broadly qualified as:

YW as alternative: This discourse was widespread among the interviewers. It starts from the perception that the formal education system is not fit for everyone and that YW -because of the characteristics mentioned- can provide alternative routes for YP to engage in learning. This view is also associated with the possibility of offering alternative accredited learning and recognition of these varied routes and achievements. In that sense, most interviewers mentioned that part of the work conducted by their organizations was related to certifications, different types of qualifications, Youth Awards, and others: *"But for that young person, you looking at the attainment or the accreditation that they could achieve...because they maybe would have left school with nothing, but instead they came and have done a qualification or an award with us"* (YW6-LA)

This last idea evidences an intent of the sector to link core elements of their practice with the formal requirements of the system they operate in; by providing formal qualifications through informal education. On the other hand, it returns to the discussion regarding the recognition of wider attainment, as some of these Youth Awards are formally embedded within the Scottish Qualification System, but many are still not recognized (YouthLink, 2021); besides attainment that goes beyond formal qualifications still struggles to be considered (YouthLink, 2021).

YW as support: This discourse positions YW as a support for the formal system. This goes from direct approaches such as *"alleviate some of the pressure on teaching staff"* (YW3-3rdS) to the capacity of YW to prepare YP for learning, re-engage them into the formal system, support attendance, mentoring, dealing with behavioural issues, and others. This approach is usually linked to the idea that, unlike teachers, youth workers can reach YP on a more individual basis, delve deeper into the issues they are confronting, and come to individualized plans to help them.

"The teachers will want to come in and for them to be ready to learn, and that's not feasible for some young people... what youth work offers to schools is about that support in terms of...working with communication, working with stress management, get young folk better equipped to learn before they go into the classroom" (YW6-LA)

YW as complement: This discourse goes deeper than the vision of 'YW as support'. Although YW is executing a series of activities that support the formal system, YW must be seen as more than that; it is an educational practice with its own methods and value *"we don't become school staff in the sense that, like people support assistants or anything like that, youth work is an educational approach with its own values, its own principles, its own outcomes"* (YW4-LA). In the same line, it was warned that not recognizing this identity can lead the sector to be seen just as service provider instead of a valid educational practice.

Related to this is the recognition that the outcomes that can be reached through YW not only are essential for reaching academic achievement, but also have an intrinsic value: *"YP needs to develop these key skills as much as you need to know about French and English...They need to be able to interact with their peers, and they need to be able to communicate effectively...they need to have the confidence to stand up for themselves"* (YW4-LA). Furthermore, there is a recognition that YW complements the formal education system in reaching national educational outcomes. The

interviewees see YW practice as highly aligned and necessary to achieve the capacities of the CfE, the aims of the SAC, and in general, the visions of the NIF: *"We very much share the purpose of Scottish Education, and I don't think that we can deliver on YP's entitlements and deliver the transformation in education that the OECD report and all that are calling for us to make, without youth work."* (PA4). Furthermore, some youth workers mentioned that they were making an intrinsic effort to align with these frameworks: *"we do pay particular attention to all the frameworks to make sure that it meets what we are trying to achieve"* (YW2-3rdS).

YW as antidote: This discourse was less common. It comes from a highly critical perception of the formal system, as not only does it not fit everyone, but it can be disempowering. YW has the role of fixing this and creating consciousness regarding this damaging structure: *"We're helping some of the kids deal with the mental health and welfare issues that are produced by being in the school environment...and helping them realize that...a lot of them are in schools, there is a kind of educational sausage machine"* (YW1-3rdS). Thus, exhibiting elements of critical pedagogy and more linked to models of advocacy and radical empowerment (Cooper, 2012).

Although these different approaches are complementary -and usually overlap- they allow getting a general vision regarding the value that youth workers attribute to their practice in the education system. It is interesting to highlight that although there is a critical vision of the system, the general wish is to contribute to its improvement by becoming a recognized part of it. However, for future research, it would be interesting to analyse the perceptions of day-to-day practitioners, as two policy actors mentioned that they had seen youth workers that positioned against collaborating with schools, as was also mentioned in literature (Coburn & Gormally, 2015; Corney, 2006; Blackham & Smith, 2018).

On the other hand, it must be noticed that -in line with the nature of YW- the descriptions of the activities and roles that they acquired in the system were very wide, which allowed them to provide broad evidence (examples) of their value. Although this can be seen as a benefit, as it shows the importance of practice to government, it also made harder to grasp the essence of these roles; which could hinder the understanding of other sectors (Cooper, 2018) and the capacity to establish a determined identity within the system.

3.2.3. Challenges

This section will present the issues and challenges that participants identified regarding executing their role in the education system. Being the most repeated:

Recognition

Most participants acknowledged progress in recognition, which was expressed in how teachers and schools valued the sector's contributions and the number of partnerships performed. Furthermore, some participants claimed that they could see the government's willingness to further promote and recognize YW: *"There is a willingness, as I said, in the Scottish Government level you get a community education, you get think tanks...and there is a willingness and an understanding that we need to work better together"* (YW3-3rdS). Nevertheless, there was also consensus on the fact that there is still work to be done, and several ongoing issues were identified.

The first issue mentioned was a lack of understanding -on part of teachers and schools- regarding the role of YW. In this line, many respondents claimed that they often had to 'pitch' their role to schools and explain to teachers what YW was. Policy actors contended that there were efforts being

made in this regard -especially in collaboration with YouthLink- and some youth workers explicitly valued the role that YouthLink has been playing in this issue. Nevertheless, both groups claimed that there is still lack of clarity regarding the role of YW in the policy field, a factor that is contributing to enhancing the confusion that exists in the formal system. Furthermore, one actor mentioned that the fact that YW is embedded within CLD could sometimes aggregate to this tension and confusion, as policies generally do not give a clear message regarding which practice they are referring to. In that sense, it could be argued that the generalized lack of understanding regarding YW practice is further enhanced by an educational framework that is unclear regarding its role and position.

Linked to this lack of understanding is the perception that sometimes, the formal system does not see YW as a profession. As mentioned, YW workforce is compounded by volunteers and professionals who come from different professional paths and have varied qualifications. According to some interviewees, this confuses teachers, who do not understand how individuals that do not have the formal qualifications they have can be seen as educational partners. Furthermore, some mentioned that even when they have professional qualifications -usually a Community Education degree- teachers do not fully understand what that means. In that sense, the recommendation of some policy actors was to start integrating a more holistic view of education from initial teaching training and enhance integration between formal education programs and programs such as Community Education. Going beyond formal qualifications, respondents claimed there was a generalized ignorance regarding the fact that youth workers -being under the wing of CLD- have professional standards and are guided by a CLD Standards Council.

Another reported issue was that, although the CfE has moved towards the recognition of wider attainment and different methods of learning, these ideas are not always embedded within the formal system; making their role not equally valued in school contexts. Participants saw this in how teachers approached learning and in the unwillingness to value different pedagogical approaches. Besides, it was claimed that the demands of the context keep moving education in directions that go against wider attainment: "*If a young person achieves wider achievement, that's not seen as valid as standard grades...And I think that's not just the education systems fault...but it's also employers who say if you get six standard grades... you're a better person than someone with six wider achievements*"(YW3-3rdS). Overall, it could be argued that recognition is further hindered when interacting in a context with different ideas -teachers' traditional views of education and lack of recognition of wider attainment.

The fact that YW lacks recognition as educational practice leads back to some of the tensions presented in literature. First is the fact that partnership and collaboration can be hindered without understanding, respect, and common language (Sloper, 2004; Salmon, 2004; Harris, 2005); leading to unbalanced relationships (Ranade, 1998, in Salmon, 2004). Regarding this point, it was mentioned that sometimes schools saw YW more as a service provider than as an educational partner, which translated into lack of effective collaboration and joint planning; failing to achieve the degrees of effective partnership mentioned by Cheminais (2009): "*And I think what has not changed is the ability to design opportunities with education partners... that's not changed, that's the biggest issue. And if we had the opportunity to co-create solutions for young people...strategically*"(YW3-3rdS)

In a more practice-related view, some youth workers said that unbalanced relationships made their identity and forms of operation to be questioned when operating in formal settings. Making a claim for the sector to keep in mind the identity of their practice: "*even if we're working in educational settings, we need to hold on to that identity, and accept what it is that makes us different...They*

can't dictate to youth workers what they can and can't do here, as there has to be a parity of esteem"(YW4-LA)

Funding

Funding was a topic that came up in every interview, and from a few different perspectives. First, there was the general mention regarding the lack of funding that the sector confronted, being often unable to come up with the funding to operate or face demand. Secondly, there were various mentions regarding the lack of 'long-term vision', as usually funding is given for determined purposes and is short-term, hindering long-term planning capacity. Thirdly, there were references regarding the need to assure more 'protected funding' for the sector, as often the capability of operation of the sector is linked to decisions of other sectors. In this line, there were a few statements regarding how the PEF had opened a window of action for the sector, but this was limited by the decisions being made by headteachers on how they wanted to spend funding. As a positive example, some claimed that the Education Recovery Fund -administered by YouthLink- had allowed promoting partnership between schools and YW in a more balanced way; however, this funding is still considered very limited.

These issues in funding were also associated with recognition issues, as the absence of funding for the sector was seen as a way of perpetuating a secondary role and unequal relationships between education partners: *"...COVID recovery money, it was like 1% of what schools got...that in itself breeds an inequality that creates a feeling from YW staff that they're not as valued as schools are"(YW5-LA)*. Furthermore, some actors referred to the fact that if the willingness of the government to enhance YW practice in education contexts were not followed by funding, the sector would always keep struggling; showing once more a gap between discourse and implementation.

Implementation

A final issue that came up in the interviews, which has already been teased, is that the nature of partnerships and collaboration was very dependent on the visions of headteachers and authorities in LA. In that sense, it was claimed that implementation was very 'patchy' between LA and schools. This issue was associated with a *"lack of central push from the government"(YW1-3rdS)* and a lack of clarity regarding the role of YW in policy framework. At the same time, the lack of statutory condition was tensioned as, although CLD has statutory position, how this is delivered -and in turn, the position that YW takes in schools- is not normed. In that sense, several actors claimed that in the future, they would like the sector to gain a statutory position and YW to have an established role within schools.

On other hand, some policy actors expressed that the 3rd sector usually confronted more issues in collaborating with schools: *"They have to navigate an extra level of going through LA, CLD people, before getting to the schools, or only being able to get to the door of some schools"(PA1)*. Furthermore, it was stated that, although CLD has a partnership focus that is supposed to integrate 3rd sector in planning and delivery, how the sector is included is highly varied between territories, and the *"the voice of the third sector are one step removed sometimes"(PA4)*

These implementation issues can be related to the discussion had in section 3.1, where it was stated that lack of clarity regarding the role of YW in educational frameworks, linked to a lack of statutory position, and the local flexibility implemented through Scottish Governance, could position YW in a weak spot. Now, if we add what interviewees experience in practice -a lack of understanding

regarding YW on part of formal system actors- this position can be even more variant and feeble, and effective partnership harder to reach.

Overall, it could be argued that all reported challenges go back to recognition and the need to position YW as an educational practice with its own value. Interviewees relate funding to recognition, and implementation issues are also linked back to a lack of clarity regarding the role of YW. This seems interesting because both interviewees and the analysis of educational frameworks reported that there was a willingness of the government to promote YW within education, implying that government sees the value of YW practice; however, this willingness is not effectively translated into practice. Besides material or governance factors that hinder this translation into practice, a factor that should be considered is how the government perceives youth work. In that sense, although demonstrating the value of practice is always relevant in an outcome-guided context, in this particular case, it seems equally relevant to promote a common identity and get this translated into educational frameworks.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

The research question of this paper was: *How is the role of YW in the Scottish Educational System being understood and translated into practice?* In that sense, regarding the first element of this question, it can be concluded that the role of YW in the Scottish Educational System is understood from a wide range of perspectives; however, there is a lack of clarity that has led the sector toward a secondary role and hindered its recognition as an educational practice with its own value. First, the analysis of the educational framework showed that there was a willingness to position YW as a partner in the educational process, giving particular relevance to the role it could comply with disengaged, at-risk, or disadvantaged YP; however, the framework was not sufficiently clear or explicit about it, impeding comprehension in the education system. On the other hand, YW sector reported on a series of roles -like providing alternatives, providing support, complementing, and being an antidote to the formal system- and activities they supplied in the education system; however, at least for an external observer, it was challenging to grasp the essence of these roles. So overall, it can be said that although YW is certainly complying with a variety of roles within the system and government is encouraging partnership, the role of YW in the educational system is unclear and diffuse, being relegated to a secondary position.

Another conclusion regarding the role of YW is that the visions exposed by the YW sector were coherent with those encountered in the educational framework, and in turn, with the education rhetoric of SNP (Argott & Ozga, 2010). Overall, YW was positioned in the role of empowering young people and supporting them in achieving personal and social development and skills necessary to succeed in life. Linked to this is an emphasis on achieving equality, educational outcomes, promoting citizenship, supporting labour, and others. The relevance of this lies in the fact that the sector's focus on approaches that bridge policy expectation with liberational practice. Although it must be acknowledged that this could be a specific characteristic of the considered sample, this evidences that the sector has moved towards complying with contexts of operation; which is also seen in its approach to measurement, targeting, and general willingness to collaborate with the formal system. However, the limits of these adjustments must be considered, as maintaining identity and the nature of YW has been reelected as one of the main challenges for the sector. Moreover, for future research, it would be interesting to explore the discourse of a wider sample and analyse to what extent the changes that YW is experiencing are related to new necessities of YP or other factors such as policy context or budget constraints.

Regarding the second element of the research question, it can be concluded that several factors have hindered the translation of this role into practice and that there has been a gap between the willingness of the government to position YW as an education partner and its effective implementation. First, as was mentioned, the fact that YW's role in the educational system is unclear in the framework and diffuse in YW discourse obstructs comprehension of schools and LA regarding this role. Furthermore, YW integrates into a system that has traditionally been guided by different pedagogical approaches and attainment ideas, making the validation of its pedagogical approach more difficult. Without comprehension and validation of this role, partnership can hardly be effective (Sloper, 2004; Salmon, 2004; Harris, 2005), and youth workers might be embedded within unbalanced professional relationships, where schools make decisions, and youth workers provide services. This not only makes the sector vulnerable to external expectations and struggle with boundaries of its identity, but also impacts the aim of government of making different actors partners in policy implementation and producing shared purposes between them (Cairney et al., 2016; McMulling et al., 2021). A second factor that has challenged the execution of the role of YW

in the education system is related to context of operation. YW does not have a statutory position within education, and its implementation is dependent on visions of schools and LA; which, as was mentioned, not always understand this practice. Hence, the mere fact of 'getting to the door' of schools gets more challenging. The last factor is that the sector is still struggling to get the necessary funding, which is not only affecting its capacity of operation, but is also seen as a perpetuation of a secondary position; being a gap between the discourse and the material conditions that follow it.

Overall, these findings could be summarized in two concrete challenges. First, there is a need to keep working on recognizing and understanding YW. But not only from the perspective of showing the value that practice has on education -showing outcomes- but also of creating a shared understanding and identity that external observers can easily identify. As the issue, in this case, is not only getting into schools, but also being perceived as an educational practice that has its own value, and maintaining the core elements of practice that make it unique. Acknowledging that YouthLink has been working on this topic, it would be recommendable to commission a wider study regarding the different perceptions that can be encountered in the system regarding the role of YW in education, including the perspectives of a broader sample of youth workers, teachers, LA authorities, policymakers and YP. A general view of the scenario will make it easier to make the decisions needed to construct a common understanding of this role.

The second challenge concerns a broader reflection regarding the partnership approach promoted through Scottish governance. This approach has allowed practices -as YW- and sectors -as the 3rd sector- that have been historically less embedded within governmental action to gain more relevance; however, this also brings challenges. The challenges related to practice have already been discussed; however, from a policy perspective, there are also relevant points. Acknowledging that the end of governance is to distribute central-power to local territories, and give more relevance to different actors in policy process, it should also be recognized that different actors and practices will intrinsically have different degrees of power and recognition. This will affect the conditions of partnership and, eventually, its effectiveness. In that sense, if there are 'weaker' practices or sectors that the government wants to effectively integrate into policy delivery, some extra measures should be taken. In the case of YW, if the government wants it to engage in, for instance, effectively reducing attainment gap, a basis would be to clearly state this role in the educational frameworks and favour the means for translating this role into practice. In that sense, it seems essential that education policymakers -not only from CLD- collaborate with the sector to define and understand this role, and translate it into an effective communication through all territories.

Recommendations for YouthLink Scotland

Although some of these recommendations have already been mentioned, this section intends to resume the main suggestions.

- ❖ **Regarding research:** As understanding and recognition seems to be one of the main challenges that the sector confronts it seems essential to understand how this practice is perceived by different actors. This research advanced in presenting the view of a determined group of youth work managers; but it is very relevant to see how a wider sample perceives this topic. Exploring the vision of day-to-day practitioners seems relevant as the challenges they confront and the ideas they might have may be different from those who are in managing positions. Also, to explore the perspective of those youth workers that are

not necessarily engaged in school-based or school-related provision, could provide a wider perception regarding how this integration between schools and YW is perceived. Overall, the aim is to generate enough knowledge to be able to diagnose the general state of practice and how this role is perceived, as only with that knowledge is possible to advance to generate a common understanding.

On the other hand, and acknowledging that work has been done in this regard, it seems essential to investigate the side of teachers and other school professionals. As diagnosing which is effectively the understanding and appreciation they got regarding YW -beyond the perception of youth workers- could help clarify which are the gaps of understanding that need to be filled.

Finally, a relevant focus on research would be specifically on the challenges youth workers are confronting to engage in effective partnership working, both from the perspective of 3rd sector and LA. Not only from the possibility of engaging with schools but also how is this engagement being carried on. The questions that need to be answered are related to the challenges the sector confronts to 'get to the door' of schools, how the work is being carried -if there is joint planning, effective collaboration, sharing of information, etc-, which are the facts that are hindering effective collaboration, and how effective/non-effective collaboration relates to general outcomes. Having this information, would probably allow to further promote and communicate the need to enhance the role of YW within frameworks and promote further understanding of practice.

- ❖ **Regarding strategy:** As mentioned proving the value and outcomes that can be achieved through YW is essential. However, it is also essential to create a common discourse or identity regarding the role of YW in the educational system. Understanding that there exists the 'Statement on the nature and purpose of Youth Work' and that guides have been made to promote partnership work within schools and YW, for instance 'Youth Work: a guide for schools'; it seems relevant to create a framework that can effectively explain the essence of the role of YW in the education system, going beyond outcomes and practical elements, and focusing on the identity that makes YW unique and necessary to complement the education system. For this, the best scenario would be to work in collaboration with a wide range of representatives of the sector. Also, it would be essential for this understanding to be translated into more general educational frameworks, thus, the incorporation of policy actors would be fundamental.

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Appendix 2: Interview analysis

Topic	N° of repetitions				
	Total	3rd sector	Local Authority	Policy Actors	College
I.General aims					
I.1 Core aims					
Empowerment	5	2	2	1	
Personal Development	6	1	2	2	1
Political action	2	1	1		
Character building	1	1			
I.2 Social aims					
Education	11	3	3	4	1
Employability	7	2	2	2	1
Inequality	6	2	2	2	
Citizenship	3	1	1	1	
Risk behaviour	2	1			1
II.Role in the education system					
Conflicted view of formal education	5	3	2		
II.1 Characteristics of YW					
Relationship based	7	2	3	1	1
Start by needs	6	3	2		1
Flexibility	5	2	2	1	
Holistic approach	3	2		1	
Experiential learning	2	1	1		
II.2 Role					
Alternative	9	3	3	2	1
Complement	7	2	2	2	1
Support	6	2	2	1	1
Antidote	2	1	1		
III. Recognition					
Progress in recognition	11	3	3	4	1
Willingnes from government	6	2	1	3	
Lack of understanding	8	3	3	2	
Lack of clarity in policy	4		1	2	1

Lack of recognition as profession	6	2	1	2	1
Lack of recognition of wider attainment	6		2	2	2
Difficulties in collaboration	8		2	3	3
Identity	5		2	2	1
IV. Funding					
Struggle with funding	11		3	3	4
Lack of long-term vision	5		1	2	1
Protected funding	7		3	3	1
PEF	5		2	1	2
Education Recovery Fund	3		1	1	1
Unequal funding	7		3	3	1
V. Implementation					
Patchy implementation	6		2	1	2
Statutory position	6		3	2	1
Difficulties 3rd sector	4			1	3
VI. Others					
VI.1 Targeting	6		1	2	2
VI.2 CfE	9		2	3	4

