

Policy Convention: A Right to Youth Work

Exploring Current Policy Opportunities

Thursday 7th December for YouthLink Scotland's Annual Online Policy Convention

This convention discussed the policy roadmap to securing a right to youth work for young people in Scotland.

The programme galvanised youth workers, managers, and the broader sector by showcasing progress in Scotland's youth work policy agenda and building and creating a movement for all those passionate about youth work's transformative power.

The Minister for Further and Higher Education, responsible for youth work, kicked off the day by updating current governmental perspectives and actions regarding youth work and education, including the importance of the sector engaging and responding to the independent review of Community Learning and Development (CLD).

This was followed by perhaps one of the most popular and engaging interactive panel discussions featuring MSPs from various political parties. It was a vibrant space for a spectrum of viewpoints from **Meghan Gallagher MSP, Deputy Leader of the Scottish Conservatives** and **Shadow Minister for Children and Young People, Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP**, representing labour and holding critical roles in Education and Skills across the party and parliamentary landscape, **Fulton MacGregor, MSP from the SNP** and members of the **Cross Party Group (CPG) on Children and Young People**. on education reform.

The attendees could engage directly with policymakers through an open and in-depth Q&A on education reform. While the MSPs clarified their party positions, they agreed on the need to focus and invest in youth work. We were delighted to see all representatives refer to the event and youth work's role as part of a debate on incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in the Scottish Parliament later the same day.

Head of Skills Review in Scotland, James Withers provided passionate and considered input on his vision for a transformed learning and skills system – setting out the case for transformational change and the role of youth work, citing it as part of the “recipe” for future success in learning.

Shirley Doneghan, a prominent academic from TU Dublin analysed the Youth Work Act Ireland (2002), exploring how legislative advancements in Ireland have yielded significant benefits for the sector. There was a great appetite from delegates for exploring this in approach in Scotland, leading to requests for more comparative analysis across different countries, highlighted as an opportunity while education is being reformed and while the CLD review in Scotland is live.

We discovered how youth work strategies and partnerships are being shaped and implemented across the UK. **Leigh Middleton, Chief Executive of the National Youth Agency (NYA)** for England, on the strides towards a National Youth Work Strategy for England and their engagement with local councils on how to map and convey the impact of youth work in the regions.

Marielle Bruce of YouthLink Scotland, examined how youth work is being integrated into Scottish education and employability frameworks.

Shannon Boston offered perspectives from the OPEN Project on local youth work innovations and impacts, sharing personal experiences from her journey to becoming a researcher at OPEN Space in Shetland and the significant impact of supportive youth workers in skill-building and learner journeys.

With expertise in leveraging the law for societal benefit, **JustRight Scotland** led an engaging discussion on the legal frameworks supporting youth work and their essential work alongside migrants in Scotland, with examples of campaigning and legislative victories to support often marginalised communities.

Vikki Carpenter, illustrated how the CLD Standards Council champions the values and benefits of CLD, the current professional pathways, and what membership of the CLD Standards Council does to protect and enhance CLD practice standards.

This was complemented by **Sarah Latto**, from **Volunteer Scotland**, who spoke to recent research showing the role of volunteering in supporting learning pathways and the need to maintain and support this part of the sector which is also so crucial to youth work activity in local authorities and across the Third Sector.

Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Matt McDonald, completed a fascinating and passionate event, presenting alongside an MSYP on SYP's findings on the role of youth work in the education landscape from the perspective of the youth parliament.