



Access to Facilities Briefing – June 2022

Introduction

Over the last 2 years, YouthLink Scotland, on behalf of the youth work sector, has carried out 5 surveys on the issue of access to facilities.

Lack of access to appropriate facilities has left many youth work organisations still experiencing barriers to the facilities they need to deliver youth work services.

There is a significant improvement on the picture back in June 2021, where the majority of organisations did not have access – but despite the easing of restrictions, challenges remain.

<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/6884/access-to-facilities-headline-survey-nov-2021.pdf>

Our latest survey in May 2022 only received 33 responses so it is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion on such a small sample size, although from this sample it would seem there is a much improved picture.

That said, it's clear that the picture is still challenging for some providers:

- 5 out of 20 of the organisations who want access to schools still say they have no access
- 4 out of 19 organisations who want access to local authority-run venues still say they have no access
- 6 out of 17 organisations who want access to faith-based organisations say they have no access
- 9 out of 13 organisations who want access to leisure centres say they have no access.
- 5 out of 21 respondents say they are not confident that access will soon be back to pre-pandemic levels
- 12 out of 33 respondents say no timeframe has been offered for full access

We know young people are already dealing with the detrimental consequences of the pandemic and two years with severely restricted access to youth work spaces and support have and will continue to have a negative impact.

Access to dedicated spaces for youth work providers has always been an issue, although it reached crisis point during lockdown restrictions. Going forward we need to open a national conversation to bring about policy change that ensures our sector are able to access community facilities and the school estate. There needs to be a parity of value with

formal education, where access is there, without barriers and financial cost. The impact on learning and mental health will only be further exacerbated while the current and systemic challenges surrounding spaces for youth work persist.

We can look to examples across the EU where youth work facilities and dedicated spaces are viewed as essential for the development and education of young people. Finland, a country similar in size to Scotland, has a flourishing youth work sector, and their statistics clearly demonstrate their young people are also flourishing as a result.

There needs to be a policy shift on access to facilities. Our school estate, which is a fantastic capital asset, is still, primarily, accessed by formal education, with no right for youth work organisations to share the benefits of this asset.

Capital investment is required to build/refurbish dedicated youth spaces in communities around the country.

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

It is also worth noting that a very recent survey of the whole CYP sector, carried out on behalf of the Cross Party Group on Children and Young People, has also found systemic issues with facilities which is causing serious mental health consequences for young people.

<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/news/february-2022/cpg-survey-feb-2022/>

Actions required

Ensure all youth work services and organisations, if needed, have access to school facilities to strengthen the positive impact of universal, targeted work and also youth work in schools.

Find a long-term sustainable solution to the lack of access to indoor spaces and facilities for youth work in your council area. Youth work, as part of education, must be prioritised, all youth work in Scotland must be operating at full capacity, in line with schools.

A programme of capital investment in dedicated youth spaces across our communities.

Clear communication with all schools and local authorities, from the Scottish Government and COSLA, reiterating that youth work must be able to operate fully, and any barriers to access must be removed.

Scottish Government to ensure there is an unarguable duty for councils and schools to give access to facilities so youth work can take place.

A clear commitment from each LA to ensure there are spaces open for youth work projects to use and a clear acknowledgement that young people need youth work services, especially given the detrimental impact has had on some of our more vulnerable young people.

Funding made available to assist with any additional costs associated with access for youth work providers for opening centres, schools or facilities managed by local authorities for the purposes of youth work activities. COSLA has also identified this issue.

Timeline

Access to Facilities continues to be a recurring issue. We have taken a number of steps to influence change in this area in the last two years.

- Replies from some Local authority CEO's on the issue
- Letter from COSLA Children and Young People's Board (previously circulated) demonstrating their support for youth work, but outlining key barriers, including funding for cleaning.
- Publication of the report with support of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, Bruce Adamson <https://bit.ly/3rREd1y>
- Media coverage on BBC Radio Scotland and STV <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=618426869494408>
- Meeting with COSLA officials, who subsequently raised the issue in evidence at Education, Children and Young People Committee of the Scottish Parliament. <https://bit.ly/3BmEFbr>
- Survey of members of Cross-party Group on Children and Young People concerning access to facilities.
- We continue to raise the issue with CLD colleagues in the Advanced Learning and Science Covid recovery group. The issue of ventilation and other associated costs had also been highlighted.
- Meeting with the Minister, Jamie Hepburn MSP on 2nd February. The minister agreed to a meeting with sector leaders around this and other issues affecting youth work's recovery from COVID.
- Motion submitted on the issue in the Scottish Parliament which gained cross party support [S6M-03041 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)
- Dedicated CPG with Education Secretary, Shirley Anne Somerville held in May, where she heard the views of a range of organisations on Covid challenges, including the issue of access to facilities.
- Fifth survey on Access to Facilities carried out in April/May 2022.

Headlines from the youth work sector survey – December 2021

329 responses to the survey, which came from all 32 council areas in Scotland. It is the biggest response of our 4 surveys to date – almost 50% up on the returns in June 2021 when we had 220 completed surveys. Response suggests this is still an issue of urgent concern.

As ever, it's a complex picture. Whereas in June the biggest issue was local interpretation of national guidance, the most commonly cited reason for lack of access is that 'local authorities are not providing lets'. This doesn't necessarily mean lets are closed across the board. More often, the data suggests that some facilities are open, but a combination of staffing issues (and associated opening hours), social distancing and cleaning requirements is limiting access to some facilities - and other facilities remain closed, increasing the pressure on those that are open, and creating logistical issues such as young people having to travel further to venues.

Decisions on school access vary school by school in a number of areas. Even where services are happening, they are often compromised – for example shorter / fewer sessions; cooking and eating not possible where this was previously an important element of support; it is still difficult to offer drop-in support.

Levels of need remain high – and young people are being impacted in a number of important ways, most particularly in terms of support for health and wellbeing. The pressures on indoor facilities will only increase as the weather gets colder and the nights draw in.

Overall

The picture across the board is improving:

- Only 54% of total respondents have access to the facilities they need, compared to just 22% in June
- 78% of respondents who have their own premises (respondents) now have full access, compared to only 29% in June

Whilst things are moving in a positive direction, the survey suggests that significant issues remain:

- 44% of organisations wanting access to schools have no access of any kind (76% had no access in June)
- 41% of organisations wanting access to local authority lets have no access of any kind (83% had no access in June)
- 47% of organisations wanting access to leisure centres have no access of any kind (88% had no access in June)
- 30% of organisations wanting access to faith-based centres have no access of any kind (74% had no access in June).
- 20% of organisations wanting access to other community venues have no access of any kind (65% had no access in June)
- 28% of those wanting access to outdoor centres have no access of any kind (69% had no access in June)

The third sector youth work providers who would normally operate in schools and local authority facilities continue to find it more difficult than local authority youth work services to access these facilities:

- 21% of LA youth work services have no access to schools compared to 48% of local 3rd sector providers who want access to schools, and 57% of national third sector organisations who want access.
- 14% of LA youth work services have no access to local authority facilities compared with 60% of local 3rd sector providers who want access.

Reasons for restricted access

'Local authority not yet providing lets' is still the most commonly cited reason for issues around access (58 respondents still highlight this as an issue).

Reasons given for restricted access	Number of responding organisations affected
Local authority not yet providing lets	58
Building not open due to guidance / restrictions	37
Building not open due to prohibitive cleaning / maintenance costs	21
Building not open due to volunteer committee hesitancy about cleaning	15
Limited access due to restricted numbers in buildings	11
Limited access due to competition in relation to use of venues	10
Limited access due to lack of staff	7
Building being used as vaccination centre	7

There is some anecdotal evidence that paid lets are being prioritised over lets that have historically been offered free of charge/at a reduced cost.

22% still have no clarity at all about when they will have access to some of the facilities they need.

Direct impacts on young people

- Half of local authority youth work services and community-based third sector organisations continue to report that some young people are unable to access important relationships with peers and youth workers due to restricted access to facilities.
- More than 40% of these organisations also highlight that limited access to facilities means that young people are unable to access much-needed support with health and wellbeing.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT/COSLA

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

JOINT STATEMENT ON THE RESUMPTION OF INDOOR YOUTH WORK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tim Frew

Chief Executive

YouthLink Scotland - The National Agency for Youth Work

COSLA RESPONSE – December 2021

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT

YOUTHLINK SCOTLAND AND THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMISSIONER ISSUE JOINT CALL FOR URGENT ACTION OVER LACK OF ACCESS TO YOUTH WORK SERVICES

NEWS RELEASE Immediate Release: Tuesday 14 December 2021

Today Scotland's National Agency for Youth Work, YouthLink Scotland have released the latest survey of the youth work sector, detailing the ongoing lack of access to facilities the sector faces to deliver essential services and support.

As we move further into winter, YouthLink Scotland's CEO Tim Frew and Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland warn that a lack of access to youth work services threatens to leave young people in Scotland without vital support.

The latest survey of the sector shows that, as we move into our second winter under Covid-19 restrictions, still only 54% of youth work have access to the facilities they need.

If we are to ensure that young people have access to the support they need, it is essential that safe spaces for youth work are made available – as a matter of urgency. We know that youth work is key to reaching and engaging young people, to providing mental health support, signposting other services, tackling isolation and helping young people re-engage in learning. It is therefore imperative that these services are made available in the community.

With increasingly cold weather, opportunities to conduct youth work activities outdoors will no longer be option. This situation is urgent and critical, solutions to the current barriers need to be brought forward now.

It's clear from survey respondents that lack of access is impacting on young people's mental health and support:

"We often have to meet with young people in public places such as cafes where confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. As a result, workers are not able to provide the same level of focused support as pre-covid. Young people don't want to talk about their private lives in public."

"The lack of routine for many has provided a lot of isolation for young people. Young people want to engage but we are usually an afterthought or priced out by an external organisation out with the community. The importance and need for the local community organisations have been huge from schools, police, young people and families. However, we are trying to do our work with both hands tied behind our backs!!!"

"We previously supported breakfast clubs and lunchtime activities in schools. No access to school permitted to continue this support. Our young people are struggling in school and tell us they need safe spaces to seek support. We are unable to offer this at the moment."

The survey does show an improved picture with 54% of total respondents having access to the facilities they need, compared to just 22% in June 2021.

However, while things have improved in the past year, 46% of youth work providers are not able to access the facilities they need and the survey suggests that significant issues remain:

- 44% of organisations wanting access to schools have no access
- 41% of organisations wanting access to local authority lets have no access
- 47% of organisations wanting access to leisure centres have no access
- 30% of organisations wanting access to faith-based centres have no access
- 20% of organisations wanting access to other community venues have no access
- 28% of those wanting access to outdoor centres have no access

The wider issue of the ongoing lack of permanent facilities has been highlighted through the survey, with 78% of respondents who have their own premises now having full access.

Tim Frew, CEO YouthLink Scotland said:

“We have serious concerns around the lack of vital youth work support and the impacts this will continue to have. We know young people are continuing to deal with the detrimental consequences of the pandemic. The impact on learning loss and mental health will only be further exacerbated while the current challenges surrounding access persist.

“If children and young people are our priority then an urgent solution needs to be found. We simply cannot have a situation where many young people are struggling to access essential youth work services. If this same situation was happening in schools, there would quite rightly be a national outcry.”

Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People’s Commissioner:

“Youth work plays a significant part in ensuring children and young people can access their rights to good mental and physical health as well as their educational, social and recreational rights. It’s particularly important to children and young people who experience disadvantage, including those living in poverty, young carers, disabled children and young people, LGBT and minority ethnic communities.

“Youth workers play a hugely important roles as trusted adults, providing safe spaces and support for children and young people outside of their family relationships. The pandemic has highlighted and further entrenched existing inequalities and providing vital youth work services with access to community spaces to work directly with children and young people over the winter months and beyond must be a priority. The Scottish Government and COSLA must take a proactive approach to increase access so that children and young people’s rights are protected and promoted.”

Graeme Luke, CEO of Scouts Scotland says his organisation nationally is experiencing significant challenges with access to facilities:

“It is essential that local authorities and the Scottish Government remove existing barriers and provide access to indoor facilities so that organisations like Scouts Scotland and other youth work providers can deliver our proven programmes of activity. Youth work sits alongside schools to engage young people in developing life skills, support personal development and positively improve mental health and social isolation.

“Our amazing volunteers have excelled in creatively delivering services throughout the pandemic but can’t go through another winter in outdoor spaces with lack of access to basic facilities and our vital services are at real risk of permanent disruption when they are needed more than ever. Our organisation has worked tirelessly throughout the past 19 months to keep our members safe and our most recent membership survey has shown that we are well on track to returning to pre-pandemic numbers and this lack of access really threatens this achievement as our volunteers are frustrated and feel undervalued by this lack of progress.”

Both the Children’s Commissioner and YouthLink Scotland are clear that it is not acceptable to leave many vulnerable young people without access to vital support at a time when youth work is needed more than ever, as we face an increasing youth mental health crisis as a result of the ongoing pandemic.

Almost two years on from the start of the pandemic, and some youth workers are still having to deliver services outdoors, in parks, school grounds and on the streets.

The following are the most commonly mentioned barriers to access to facilities (ordered by frequency of mention):

1. Local authority not yet providing lets
2. Building not open due to guidance / restrictions
3. Building not open due to prohibitive cleaning / maintenance costs
4. Building not open due to volunteer committee hesitancy about cleaning
5. Limited access due to restricted numbers in buildings
6. Limited access due to competition in relation to use of venues
7. Limited access due to lack of staff
8. Building being used as vaccination centre

Some other comments from survey respondents

"We cover a massive area with many isolated villages within that. Due to not being able to look at community settings centrally, it means that multiple families living in poverty will have to look at 2/3 buses to access our face-to-face activities."

"We are starting to see a rise in ASB in some communities. Reduced access to opportunities for young people could be seen as contributing to this. Whilst Detached Youth Work has offered some opportunities for young people we are keen to have young people back in buildings especially in the face of inclement weather."

"We are struggling to keep motivated with the lack of guidance on when we can get access to the school. The head teacher has been fantastic and allow us to use the school grounds, but no access to running water or toilet facilities. Our leaders are drained. We cannot spend another winter delivering scouting purely outdoors."

"We often have to meet with young people in public places such as cafes where confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. As a result, workers are not able to provide the same level of focused support as pre-covid. Young people don't want to talk about their private lives in public."

"The lack of routine for many has provided a lot of isolation for young people. Young people want to engage but we are usually an afterthought or priced out by an external organisation out with the community. The importance and need for the local community organisations have been huge from schools, police, young people and families. However, we are trying to do our work with both hands tied behind our backs!!!"

"Working within local authority guidelines we have been locked out all our buildings and have been doing street work to support young people. Though the street work is going well, it doesn't offer opportunity to work on any accreditation or give clear structure to our delivery. Partner agencies have opened their doors and been very reactive throughout the pandemic, and deserve praise for their amazing contribution. This however makes local authority look useless in comparison, as we have no buildings, our hands are tied with red tape through our own management. Working closely with voluntary organisations is the only way I have been able to support young people."

"The young people with additional support needs who were unable to access our online service during the pandemic - have been waiting 20 months to re-join our sessions. They are now almost two years older! We are not sure if they can wait for our services to reopen."

"Young people have NO access to any building-based youth work. Therefore, we are not able to maintain regular contact with the majority of our young people. We are also not able to keep in contact with parents and families - we are a well-established service provider and are a first port of call."

"Massive impact on the older teen's mental health which impacts physical health, future options, aspirations and general feeling of not belonging or not being supported. We have funds from grants but our council will not release building to us despite our agreement to pay for everything and having had private rental before. The local council do not see this as a priority. So disrespectful to our young people and volunteers who take time out from their own lives."

"As a CLD Worker, I feel like I cannot offer the services to young people that they need most due to budgeting and staffing constraints which are led by the priorities of another service who are only willing to open a building if it will make a profit for their service."

"Since lockdown and restricted access to our meeting place we have lost half our volunteer leaders and around half our members. As a charity who have sole responsibility for the management and upkeep of our premises, we may soon find it uneconomic to continue with a group that has provided vital youth development services for 81 years since its formation."

"In all honesty, as part of the recovery process we have been really lucky in accessing safe spaces for young people by working in partnership and collaboration with colleagues in culture and leisure and the community based voluntary sector so that access and safe spaces was created."

Ends