



Scottish Government Interim Purpose and Principles for post-school education, research and skills

YouthLink Scotland response

Introduction

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation, representing over 100 regional and national youth organisations from the voluntary and statutory sectors. Our vision is for a nation that values its young people and their contribution to society, supported through critical relationships with youth workers to achieve their potential. As the collective voice of the youth work sector, we support and represent their policy and practice needs, including their essential role in delivering Scotland's national outcomes. We campaign for equal access to high-quality youth work for all young people, supported by a confident, skilled, well-led and effective workforce.

We have responded to all aspects of Education Reform from a rights-based position, seeking the reforms to ensure that every child and young person can experience their right to an education which helps them to develop their personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential (UNCRC Article 29). An equitable and rights-based offer for all learners around education must include access to youth work. This includes post-school.

Youth work and post-school education and skills

Youth work is an integral part of Scottish education¹. Its role in Curriculum for Excellence is outlined in [Youth work: a guide for schools](#). This explains how youth work learning in the community, school, and college provides opportunities for young people to develop the broad range of skills, capacities and achievements needed to reach their potential in learning, life and work. Youth work's contribution to achieving equity in education is also increasingly understood. The Scottish Attainment Challenge highlights that youth work builds health and well-being, readiness to learn and improves educational outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty and other inequalities.

Within the post-school education and skills landscape, youth work provides opportunities and experiences for young people to develop and demonstrate skills and

¹ <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/scottish-education-system/>

achievements and explore and follow tailored pathways towards and into employment. Youth workers also play an essential role in supporting transitions into other parts of the ecosystem.

Delivering the key principles

As part of the national discussion², young people identified that supportive relationships with youth workers, combined with the non-formal youth work approach, help them to engage in learning and work towards positive outcomes.

Young people told us that the relationship with a youth worker was vital to their ability to feel safe, trusted, supported, respected and heard. This helps them to learn, develop and grow. In particular, young people feel cared for by their youth workers, who understand what they need and can respond appropriately.

Youth workers can be especially important for young people facing significant barriers to education and learning, such as those impacted by poverty, or other inequalities. This includes working collaboratively at transition points to ensure young people receive the support they need. Youth workers provide practical and emotional support to progress and sustain participation in the post-school ecosystem. It can include working with youth awards to deliver opportunities for recognition of achievement. This can prove essential to widening access to post-school learning for young people with few or no formal qualifications. It can also involve providing broader support such as housing, finances and developing life skills such as independent living. We know that the relationship with a youth worker can be key to accessing support. A relationship with a trusted adult is vital to ensuring we deliver a supportive and equitable post-school experience, supporting individuals and their different needs to access and complete journeys through the ecosystem.

Young people also described the impact of learning through a non-formal youth work approach. This helps them engage in learning and achieve through a broad range of experiences, choices and pathways to meet their individual needs and aspirations. Young people spoke of the experiential nature of learning through youth work and the tailored opportunities to develop and apply relevant skills that they feel are important for their future.

Opportunities for change

Youth work's experience of delivering within the post-school education and skills landscape has generated the following areas where there is an opportunity to build on good practice and drive improvement.

² https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/7719/views-of-young-people-participating-in-youth-work_web.pdf

Improved support for collaboration

The ecosystem needs to be better connected and collaborate more. We know young people want those who support their learning to work better together³. The recent report *Tertiary Education Futures*⁴ also identified collaboration as a critical element of a future-proofed post-school ecosystem. There are many examples of effective partnerships between youth work and formal education in the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) context⁵, including strong youth work and college partnerships. Professional learning through YouthLink Scotland's SAC national programme⁶ may also help support the collaboration required within the post-school ecosystem.

A better understanding of roles and responsibilities

There needs to be more understanding regarding what youth work delivers in the post-school landscape and the benefits and outcomes for learners. We know that a shared understanding is important for effective collaboration⁷. It can include knowledge of whom to connect with locally to signpost or support young people. There is a role for the Scottish Government, local government and national agencies to generate greater inter-professional understanding and build relationships through more regular conversations and connections nationally and locally.

Improved support for learners

Collaboration is vital to ensure that young people receive the right support when and where they need it. Strengthened collaboration would help ensure that young people likely to leave school with few or no formal qualifications could engage with, for example, youth workers and youth awards. This has been highlighted as a concern in particular for the 'Christmas leavers' cohort who may be unable to access '16+' support. There are good examples of college/youth work partnerships helping young people transition to college – including supporting the development of new relationships with college staff. But overall, there is a sense that transition support is not consistent. A supportive and equitable system must first understand what it delivers and value the different pathways and practitioners who are part of the picture. This includes the role of youth work.

Summary

YouthLink Scotland believes youth work must be a fundamental component of the post-school ecosystem. This will require the following:

³ [ibid](#)

⁴ [Tertiary-Educations-Futures-online-report-2023.pdf \(rse.org.uk\)](#)

⁵ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes/youth-work-and-the-attainment-challenge/sharing-good-practice/>

⁶ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes/youth-work-and-the-attainment-challenge/building-capacity-for-collaboration/resources/>

⁷ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes/youth-work-and-the-attainment-challenge/building-capacity-for-collaboration/resources/lost-in-translation/>

- Formal recognition of the integral role of youth work in Scottish education
- A right for all young people to access youth work opportunities
- Sustained investment in youth work services

ENDS

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