



## **Consultation on the provisions of the Education Bill**

### **YouthLink Scotland response**

#### **Introduction**

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation, representing local, regional and national youth organisations from the voluntary and statutory sectors. Our aim is for a nation that values its young people and their contribution to society, supported through key relationships with youth workers to achieve their potential. As the collective voice of the youth work sector, we represent their interests, policy and practice needs. We campaign for equality of access to high-quality youth work for all young people, supported by a workforce that is confident, skilled, well-led and effective while playing an essential role in delivering Scotland's national outcomes. As part of this process, we have been calling for Education Reform to drive a transformed education system that seeks to address the purposes described in Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). We believe the renewed vision for Scotland's children and young people's education can only be achieved by ensuring that youth work is included as a fundamental entitlement in the learning system.

#### **Response**

Proposals contained within this consultation seek to support the wider suite of education and skills reform, intended to improve outcomes and experiences for learners.

YouthLink Scotland has responded<sup>1</sup> to all aspects of lifelong learning and skills 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 learning system must include access to youth work.

All aspects under reform must be driven by a stronger and clearer narrative that reinforces youth work as a fundamental element of the Scottish learning system. This includes recognition within the Education Bill that youth work is part of Scottish education and youth workers are key stakeholders engaged in the learning and teaching process.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youthlink.scot/education-skills/education-reform/>

## A holistic system

Proposals contained in this consultation must reinforce how we will collectively deliver the vision for education. The renewed vision for education places children and young people at its heart. It calls on the system to ensure all learners are supported in inclusive learning environments that proactively address barriers to learning and ensure their achievement, progress and wellbeing<sup>2</sup>. To do this, it states, we need to value collaboration “*with all those working in, or connected to, the education system*”<sup>3</sup>, strengthen youth voice and ground the work in equality, opportunity and community.

Youth work is part of Scottish education. Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence is intended to be a holistic experience, encompassing learning across four contexts and different educational settings. This includes youth work. Youth workers design and deliver learning experiences for young people across communities, schools and colleges. This helps to maximise opportunities for learners to develop the four capacities and a broad range of skills that allow them to achieve and succeed.

The Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment<sup>4</sup> determined that a broader range of opportunities should be part of the curriculum offer. This includes opportunities for personal pathways and project-based learning as an entitlement for all, across all educational settings. These individually tailored approaches are where youth workers and youth work organisations are already skilled and delivering. It will be essential to embed youth work into such curriculum developments, ensuring young people can access opportunities in school and youth work settings. Improving collaboration between schools, young people and youth work providers would benefit all involved. We believe it will be a key component for the success of the ambitions stated around personal pathways and project-based learning.

The ambitions to strengthen the post-school learning landscape also acknowledges the need for greater collaboration and coherence. This will improve how we support transitions and deliver the learning and experiential opportunities that enable young people to reach their potential.

Youth work delivers the key principles for post-school education, research and skills<sup>5</sup>. It provides opportunities and experiences for young people to develop and demonstrate skills and achievements and explore and progress through personal pathways including pathways to employment. Youth workers also play an essential role in supporting transitions into other parts of the ecosystem. Reform and the associated work around Post-school Purpose and Principles<sup>6</sup> provide an opportunity to strengthen understanding of and support for youth work in the post-school system,

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<sup>2</sup> [3. Vision and Values - All Learners in Scotland Matter - national discussion on education: summary report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/future-report-independent-review-qualifications-assessment/pages/interim-purpose-and-principles/pages/interim-purpose-and-principles/#:~:text=Research%2C%20teaching%2C%20innovation%20and%20knowledge,live%20and%20work%20in%20Scotland)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/future-report-independent-review-qualifications-assessment/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/YLS-response-interim-purpose-and-principles.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/post-school-education-research-and-skills-interim-purpose-and-principles/pages/interim-purpose-and-principles/#:~:text=Research%2C%20teaching%2C%20innovation%20and%20knowledge,live%20and%20work%20in%20Scotland>

and the potential for this to improve collaboration and support for learners. This should be strengthened by the Education Bill.

Skills are a golden thread across education reform – including considering how we define and celebrate success. It provides us with a common language across the system, to create a coherent and connected experience for learners. Youth work provides meaningful and relevant opportunities to develop and articulate skills and achievements. The sector's National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework<sup>7</sup> has been highlighted as an important part of a future system for understanding and recording a young person's progression<sup>8</sup>.

Embedding youth work as an essential element of the learning offer will enshrine the importance of all learning and deliver the vision for education. This must be the driver for the proposals contained in the Education Bill.

### Excellence in learning and teaching

Youth work is an education practice that facilitates the personal, social and educational development of young people. It is part of the wider professional practice of Community Learning and Development (CLD). Youth workers are educators. The workforce includes professionally qualified youth work/CLD practitioners, and other experienced practitioners, including volunteers, who hold a range of competency-based qualifications and skills to practice youth work. Youth workers are based in the third sector and local authorities.

A focus on improving the quality of learning and teaching must demonstrate parity by ensuring that all educators, across every sector and setting, are valued, supported and have the capacity to deliver. The consultation proposes how the new body will include more representation from and accountability to all learners, practitioners and the stakeholders with whom it engages. The knowledge and expertise of youth workers are integral to the excellent learning and teaching required to close the attainment gap. The new qualifications body must therefore establish representation from the youth work sector. This could include within the Board alongside the proposed teacher and college lecturer.

The Bill should also seek to continue to build capacity for collaborative leadership across learning communities. By working as a collaborative learning community, youth work and schools can together deliver a coherent curriculum experience for learners, across contexts and settings. Greater alignment between community, school improvement and local authority strategic equity planning ensures that effective decision-making takes place benefiting children and young people's outcomes. It will also be a vital approach to deliver a transformed education system being driven by the current education and skills reforms.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youthlink.scot/education-skills/youth-work-outcomes-skills/>

<sup>8</sup> Professor Louise Hayward at the National Youth Work Conference, November 2023 and Education Scotland Forth Valley and West Lothian Regional Improvement Team Achievement Project Interim Report

## Involving young people in decisions that affect them

The consultation asks how best to ensure the views of pupils, students and other learners are appropriately represented within the new qualifications body. Young people must be at the centre of decisions around education, including being heard within the new qualifications body. Youth workers are in an ideal position to engage with young people and ensure that their voice is heard in ongoing discussions and decisions around lifelong learning and skills reform. YouthLink Scotland will continue to elevate their voice. In a system that places children and young people at the heart, education must hear the voices of those who are seldom heard, including those who engage and learn through youth work.

As part of the national discussion over 700 young people worked with their youth workers to respond collectively from youth work<sup>9</sup>. Young people spoke about the transformative impact of youth work. How it helps them engage in learning, develop skills and achieve. Many said without youth work they would not have remained in education.

Young people identified the key principles of youth work that support engagement and positive outcomes. The relationship with a youth worker was highlighted as vital to their ability to feel safe, trusted, supported, respected and heard. Building confidence and resilience and accessing the support they need can help young people feel ready to learn. The provision of an informal, safe, nurturing environment in which to learn also made them more likely to engage. Young people could see the connection between engaging through youth work and their ability to achieve and attain. They also spoke about the broad range of experiences, choices and pathways offered by youth work that meet their individual needs and aspirations.

Young people stated that youth work supports them to develop important, life-relevant skills and to understand their relevance to their learning and life now and in the future. This is seen as an essential element of what they need from education. A total of 83% of young people said their skills and achievements through youth work are very important or important to their future, with 88% saying they should be recorded and acknowledged alongside formal qualifications.

Young people identified what needs to change across education, calling for Education Reform to ensure that every young person can access youth work as a fundamental element of their education.

Research evidence<sup>10</sup> and impact data<sup>11</sup> also demonstrate that the key principles of youth work support engagement and positive outcomes - the trust-based, voluntary

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/views-of-young-people-participating-in-youth-work\\_web.pdf](https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/views-of-young-people-participating-in-youth-work_web.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youthlink.scot/policy-influence/research/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youthlink.scot/education-skills/scottish-attainment-challenge/attainment-good-practice/>

relationship formed between a youth worker and young people, the safe spaces youth workers create and the non-formal, person-centred learning opportunities and experiences.

*“The people that make the decisions need to know that it's not just the teachers who help us. It's all the other people who really help when it's hard”* (young person responding to the extended consultation).

*“Combining formal and informal education will allow for the school environment to be more inclusive to the needs of young people. Furthermore, the presence of youth workers in school will boost young people's sense and understanding of a community”* (young person).

*“Teachers teach us the set curriculum, youth workers walk beside us through life”* (young person).

## **Summary**

Alongside the structural changes proposed in the Education Bill, and across wider reform, achieving the renewed and shared ambition for Scottish education will also require a significant cultural shift. We need to transform the way we think about learning and what the education system looks and feels like and consider every learner's journey holistically, through a coherent and integrated system from early years, through adolescence and beyond. We should demonstrate parity across all settings and approaches to learning that contribute to helping young people develop the knowledge, skills and experiences to thrive and reach their full potential.

It will be essential that the Education Bill builds on the current role and impact of youth work across the learning system – building on the other aspects of reform that reinforce the need for youth work in an interconnected education and skills landscape. In this regard, we look forward the forthcoming CLD Review. This includes sustained and equitable investment and stronger coordination, to ensure young people can access the support they need, where and where they need it.

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