



Education (Scotland) Bill – Stage 1

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. As the collective voice of the youth work sector, we represent its policy and practice needs, including supporting the sector's contribution to delivering Scotland's national outcomes.

Our ambition is for a nation that values its young people and their contribution to society, supported through access to high-quality youth work for all young people. 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

Outcomes of the Bill

The Education (Scotland) Bill intends to support the wider suite of education and skills reforms being delivered by the Scottish Government to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people through Scottish education. The Bill's outcomes must, therefore, help to improve equity, strengthen collaboration and collective responsibility across the system, and increase the involvement of young people in decision-making. This includes paying particular attention to how the Bill will uphold the rights of children and young people as described in the UNCRC. We believe that in considering the Bill, the Scottish Parliament needs to explore how the specific provisions being proposed may impact delivering an equitable, rights-based system.

YouthLink Scotland has responded¹ to all aspects of lifelong learning and skills reform from a rights-based position, seeking changes to structure, process, and culture to ensure that every child and young person can secure their right to an education

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

(UNCRC Article 28) that helps them develop their personality, talents, and abilities to their fullest potential (UNCRC Article 29). As such, we believe an equitable and rights-based learning system must include access to youth work.

The Education (Scotland) Bill must also 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 wellbeing². To do this, it states, we need to value collaboration “*with all those working in, or connected to, the education system*”³. The need to strengthen youth voice and ground the work in equality, opportunity, and community is also recognised. The Bill should, therefore, seek to unify the education system, reinforcing youth work as a fundamental element of the Scottish learning system and ensuring youth workers are key stakeholders engaged in decision-making.

The Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment⁴ determined that a broader range of opportunities should be part of the curriculum offer. One of the Bill’s objectives should be to achieve equality of access to a range of qualifications pathways for young people, placing equal value on attainment and achievement. The proposals with respect to Qualifications Scotland and His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education should be considered in relation to how they will enable parity across all settings and approaches to learning that contribute to helping young people develop their knowledge, skills and experiences.

Proposals for Qualifications Scotland

The Bill reinforces the need for Scottish education to offer a range of learner-centred qualification pathways with parity of esteem and to achieve equality of access between different qualifications. This will necessitate interaction with the broader education and skills system, including youth work.

Every young person should have equitable access to a curriculum that meets their individual needs. This includes opportunities open to those in Senior Phase. Youth workers, including youth award providers, design and deliver learning and provide tailored pathways towards accreditation. This includes awards not devised, assessed for and awarded by SQA that should be equally recognised. Greater collaboration with youth work would address the concerns raised in Professor Muir’s report around inconsistent approaches to offering a curriculum that meets the needs of all learners and enhances and maximises their learning journey. Youth work can support the increased attention to be placed on ensuring the needs of individual learners are met. Indeed, Professor Muir highlighted the positive increased engagement of youth work in offering broader curriculum and learning opportunities.

Youth work must be included in the governance structures of Qualifications Scotland.

² [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/vision-values-all-learners-in-scotland-matter-national-discussion-on-education-summary-report-gov.scot/)

³ *ibid*

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

The Bill proposes how the new body will include more representation from and accountability to all learners, practitioners, and the stakeholders with whom it engages. Youth workers' knowledge and expertise are integral to the excellent learning and teaching required to close the attainment gap. Therefore, the new qualifications body must establish representation from the youth work sector.

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 within the governance structures of Qualifications Scotland. They can advocate on behalf of young people, bringing expert knowledge and experience to support decision-making through, for example, the Learner Interest Committee. It will also be important to create pathways for all young people to exercise their right to be heard in decisions that affect them in relation to their education. This is also where youth work can support, including engaging with those who are seldom heard.

Proposals for His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland

We support the Bill's intention to ensure HMI can independently evaluate the quality of education in Scotland. To do this effectively, we believe its approach to inspection, support, and improvement activity should better reflect the breadth of Scottish education.

Scottish education is broader than schools and other formal settings for learning. This has been reinforced through the various reports contributing to education reform. Additionally, the recent report from the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD)⁵ recognises that the classroom doesn't work for every learner. It highlights the role of youth work and wider CLD partners in providing tailored learning pathways and approaches, skills development, and support for those who need it. This is all part of Scottish education and, as such, should be included in activities that evaluate and report on the quality of education in Scotland. To deliver the vision for Scottish education and realise every child and young person's right to access a broad range of learning experiences that help them fulfil their potential, we must shift the focus of inspection from 'school education' to 'learning'. Fully incorporating the UNCRC into Scottish education requires us to look beyond the statutory duties of education. The definition of "relevant educational establishment" should be extended from "schools and other places where school education is provided"⁶ to 'where learning is provided'.

Not all youth work organisations are included in HMI activity to understand the quality of education in Scotland. HMI can currently inspect youth work delivery in grant-funded

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/learning-life-report-independent-review-community-learning-development-cld/>

⁶ <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/s6-bills/education-scotland-bill/introduced/explanatory-notes-accessible.pdf>

national voluntary organisations and CLD services⁷. The inspection provision for national voluntary organisations has not been provided for a number of years. The Bill should ensure the reinstatement of inspection for grant-funded national voluntary organisations. HMI should also have the power to undertake a proportionate evaluation of third-sector youth work organisations not currently subject to inspection. This could be achieved through a ‘learning community’ approach, as opposed to the current one that focuses on individual establishments and services. It would also reinforce the intentions of education reform to improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people across settings – helping the system to work ‘as one’.

Summary

Alongside the structural changes proposed in the Education (Scotland) 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. The proposals contained within this Bill must be assessed in this regard.

We believe it is essential that the Education (Scotland) Bill seeks to further strengthen 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. This includes sustained and equitable investment and stronger coordination, to ensure young people can access the support they need, where and when they need it.

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⁷ <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/s6-bills/education-scotland-bill/introduced/policy-memorandum-accessible.pdf>