



## **Report: YouthLink Scotland's Policy Convention (28/08/24)**

### **Youth Work and Civic Engagement: International Policy Perspectives**

#### **Introduction**

Youth work needs effective local, national, and international policies and legislation, coupled with a supported youth work workforce, so young people gain the knowledge and skills they need to thrive.

We learn through sharing local, national, and international perspectives, reconnecting and building new international friendships, supporting the youth work movement, and learning and building a united future for youth work.

So, in 2024, we were delighted to host an international policy summit on Youth Work and Civic Engagement: International Policy Perspectives, highlighting how young people develop civic engagement and social action through engagement in youth work, aiming to do just that!

#### **Event History**

The [Policy Planning Group](#) facilitates networking and collaboration among key stakeholders through key supported meetings and events. It has also been instrumental in delivering thematic policy seminars and reframing this to culminate in the refreshed sector-led policy conventions we have seen in recent years.

The group facilitates critical reflection time, helping to create policy positions reflecting the needs and aspirations of young people and youth work leaders. It promotes national and international good practice and has become synonymous with YouthLink Scotland's Annual Policy Convention.

The event in 2024 benefited from collaboration and support from YouthLink Scotland's Policy and Research and Workforce Development teams with the unified ambition of using the event to close the policy and practice gap.

## Event Recommendations

- We require stronger legislation to support and deliver upon a right to youth work opportunities in Scotland and build a cross-sectoral, cross-party, civic society coalition to make this happen.
- The impact of international youth exchange is most significant for minoritised young people and those with fewer opportunities. The youth work sector needs to grow to provide these opportunities for young people. This includes the exchange itself, preparation, and follow-up support.
- We must help the sector to develop and innovate its practice through international inspiration and collaboration. International collaboration allows for developing and improving our practice in Scotland and opportunities to share expertise from our high-quality youth work offer.
- Investment in maintaining, training, and recruiting crucial volunteers is essential to building long-term youth work infrastructure that best supports young people in every local authority in Scotland.
- We encourage local and national governments to support us with the above aims.

## Presenters

The international policy convention (28/08/24) featured significant contributions from around the world.

We are grateful to the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, Angus Robertson MSP, for explicitly recognising youth work as a significant contributor to public policy and supporting young people in developing their civic engagement. In particular, he spoke about the phenomenal impact of youth work and the confidence and agency it gives young people the place of youth work in protecting our democracy through the many innovative ways the sector supports the rights of children and young people across Scotland.

This theme was picked up later by the Scottish Labour Party Spokesperson on Children and Young People, Martin Whitfield MSP. Martin described youth work as a “*solution*”, not an “*add-on*” to the many societal policy issues we face as a country. Martin reiterated the sector’s call for a right to youth work and youth work’s explicit recognition and crucial role in implementing The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to ensure the Scottish Government’s flagship policy is delivered.

We heard from Sarah McDermott of Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights), drawing attention to their #RightsOnTrack campaign and how they are working with their members to support the implementation of the UNCRC into Scots Law, providing suggestions on how youth work can help make that happen and the opportunities for

youth work to take a more central role in the rights-respecting education system. We look forward to youth workers being part of the plan for success in advocating for young people and actively delivering treaties on the ground.

Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP) Isla Grant and Beth MacKay deserve great credit for their engaging presentations on the integral role of role work in support of youth voice at local and national level and its crucial role in civic engagement and as part of the fabric of the Scottish Youth Parliament itself. We received an on-point pre-record video featuring MSYPs Olivia, Marcus, Karley, Shafas, Daniela and Jack - a credit to the Scottish Youth Parliament and their constituents. One of the delegates said through the event evaluation, *"It was fantastic to hear directly from the young people at Scottish Youth Parliament about the work they do - it is always beneficial to include young people in events like this ('nothing about us without us!') - more of this please!"*

Olalekan Oshunkoya, Executive Director of Citizen Commons from Nigeria, challenged us all to do something to extend enfranchisement to younger adults and the need to provide spaces for young people to create changemakers and support local democracy.

Pooja Jain and Kanika Sinha, Co-Leads, Communications and Visibility at CoMmutiny, The Youth Collective from India, spoke to their pioneering new eco-system, supporting youth work organisations and youth work allies to plan educational pathways for over 600 million young people. They believe narrative-building strategies and efforts towards establishing youth-centric development must be the norm and delivered through safe, enabling spaces, focusing on the role of youth workers in nurturing youth leadership. They are spearheading efforts to promote the 5th Space approach to youth development – putting power in young people's hands to help them drive the change they want to see. One delegate said, *"I enjoyed hearing about the different international projects and their approaches to youth work / young people's participation and hearing about the similar challenges they face to us in Scotland!"*. Another stated, *"Amazing, inspiring work!"*.

We welcomed Lemmy Koivunen from Children of the Station in Finland, working with young people at the margins through detached youth work. We learned about the *"walkers bus"*, operating in the metropolitan area of Helsinki and their discovery method of youth work, which comprises street-level encounters and their organisation's approach to cross-sectoral cooperation and the particular benefit to those young people in contact with the law. Lemmy highlighted the legislative protection of youth work in Finland through their Youth Work Act and how it helps preserve and enhance youth work services.

We were delighted to hear from Morgan Moore, Planet Youth Delivery Lead from Winning Scotland and Zahra Hedges, CEO of Winning Scotland, Ellysse from YSortit (one of the six youth work pilot groups in Scotland), a dedicated youth work group in West Dunbartonshire and Margret Lilja Gudmundsdottir and Iryna Nerubaieva from

Planet Youth Iceland., The combined team shared the transformative power of the Icelandic Prevention Model, which has successfully reshaped policies and revitalised communities worldwide. They explored examples of how this model can enhance the Scottish youth work context and empower the next generation to create lasting positive change.

## **Summary**

When asked in the post-event evaluation what they liked most about the event, one delegate said, "All of it!" which is a testament to the agenda's relevant and high-quality inputs throughout the day. We are grateful to the presenters and observers for giving up their time to be with us and contributing to many fruitful discussions.

The platform connected youth work practice to relevant areas of public policy, sharing and learning lessons from our international colleagues. We thank our friends and youth work advocates for making this happen. We look forward to continued discussion on youth work's role in supporting young people's civic engagement as we continue to build the global youth work movement.

YouthLink Scotland believes in working with our diverse membership and partners to recognise youth work and promote international friendship, learning, and collaboration. This event was one small part of that process. The organisation remains focused on garnering more robust recognition in critical public policy strategies and legislation at home and abroad.

## **Contact**

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