



YouthLink Scotland Stakeholder Engagement on Youth Work (Scotland) Bill

November 2024

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Introduction

Scottish Labour MSP Martin Whitfield has launched a public consultation on his Member's Bill, A Legal Right to Youth Work. [The Youth Work \(Scotland\) Bill](#) proposes granting all young people a legal right to access high-quality youth work services.

YouthLink Scotland will host network and member events to support this consultation, providing opportunities to discuss the Bill's proposals and share sector intelligence. The consultation will close on **February 21, 2025**.

Engaging young people and youth workers in this process is crucial. It is a nationwide consultation dedicated to youth work, allowing all voices to be heard. While the recent CLD review helped explore the skills landscape, this bill represents an unprecedented opportunity to influence the full scope of youth work in Scotland.

We have created a framework to facilitate the participation of the sector and young people, and we encourage all youth work organisations and youth workers to respond.

Stakeholder Engagement Events

Join us for a series of free online engagement events to explore the Youth Work (Scotland) Bill consultation. This legislation proposes granting all young people aged 11 to 25 a legal right to access high-quality youth work services.

These sessions are designed to support youth workers, organisations, and sector stakeholders in understanding the Bill's proposals, its potential impact on youth work across Scotland, and how to effectively participate in the consultation process.



We have three sessions available:

- Tuesday 10th December 2024 – 10.00 – 11.30
- Tuesday 14th January 2024 – 16.00 – 17.30
- Wednesday 22nd January 2024 – 18.00 – 19.30 (Young People’s Session)

[Book your stakeholder engagement session here.](#)

Throughout December and January all YouthLink Scotland Networks will have the opportunity to discuss the bill proposals and the consultation. We will inform members of the dates of these meetings.

In addition, YouthLink Scotland will produce a toolkit and session plan for engaging young people in the consultation, this will be available to all youth workers throughout the country.

How You Can Have Your Say

You can share your thoughts on this Bill by responding to the consultation. Here’s how you can get involved:

- [Read the proposed bill and respond to the consultation](#)
- **By Email:** Email your answers to:
Martin.Whitfield.msp@parliament.scot
Make sure you include your answers to the consultation questions and any other thoughts you have.
- **By Post:** You can write down your answers and post them to:
Martin Whitfield MSP
Room M1.07
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh EH99 1SP

The Aims of the Bill

The Youth Work (Scotland) Bill proposes establishing a legal framework that would guarantee young people aged 11 to 25 across Scotland have equitable access to high-quality youth work services. It seeks to address the disparities in youth work provision. By making youth work a statutory



service, the Bill aims to support an inclusive environment where every young person, regardless of their background, has the support they need to thrive.

Key Points of the Bill

The Bill mandates that local authorities develop comprehensive Youth Work Strategies that align with a National Youth Work Strategy and address the specific needs of their communities.

These strategies must:

- Reflect the voices of young people, involving them directly in shaping services.
- Respect young people's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by ensuring their right to participate, develop, and access support.
- Integrate youth work with broader community services, including education, health, and social care, for a holistic approach.
- Establish sustainable funding models to maintain resilient and adaptable youth work services.

Establishing a Legal Obligation

The statutory basis for youth work currently sits within the Community Learning and Development (CLD) Regulations (2013), created under s.2 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 – placing a legal requirement on local authorities (through the education authority) to secure the delivery of CLD. However, it does not provide a legal right to deliver youth work services, nor is it strong enough to stop cuts to youth work provision. The Bill seeks to address this gap by obligating local authorities to ensure that youth work services are available in their area.

Creation of a Dedicated Youth Work Fund

The Bill proposes the establishment of a Youth Work Fund, which will provide sustainable, long-term funding for youth work services. This fund aims to

reduce the financial instability that has impacted voluntary and local authority-led youth work, which often relies on short-term grants and faces budget constraints. With this fund, youth work providers will be better equipped to deliver continuous, high-quality services to young people across Scotland.

Collaboration and Holistic Support

The Bill emphasises the importance of collaboration between local authorities, voluntary sector youth work providers, and other vital services to support young people. By creating strong and lasting partnerships across various sectors, the Bill aims to address the needs of young people more effectively and cost-efficiently, creating a unified, cross-sectoral approach to youth support.

Accessibility and Equity

A core objective of the Bill is to remove barriers to access, particularly for under-represented communities, ensuring that all young people can engage with youth work services. This includes supporting informal education in diverse settings, such as community centres and schools, contributing to young people's social, emotional, and educational development.

Strengthening Communities

Beyond individual benefits, the Bill highlights the role of youth work in strengthening communities by promoting social inclusion, mental wellbeing, and civic engagement. By investing in youth work, the Bill envisions a future where Scottish communities are resilient and inclusive, with young people actively contributing to and shaping their local environments.

Summary

The Youth Work (Scotland) Bill aims to recognise youth work as a vital service for young people and communities across Scotland. By ensuring

robust support and legal backing for youth work, the Bill seeks to empower young people, create a level playing field, and build stronger, more resilient communities for the future.

Key Considerations for the Youth Work (Scotland) Bill Consultation

Question 1: Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill? Please note that this question is compulsory.

1. *Fully supportive*
2. *Partially supportive*
3. *Neutral (neither support nor oppose)*
4. *Partially opposed*
5. *Fully opposed*
6. *Do not wish to express a view*
7. *Please explain the reasons for your response.*

Key Considerations:

- Youth work is a cornerstone of Scotland's approach to empowering young people, developing their personal and social development, and enabling them to thrive in life.
- The Bill ensures youth work receives the recognition and protection it deserves, safeguarding its future in a time when many sectors face uncertainty. By legislating for youth work, Scotland will further align with its commitments under the UNCRC and ensure equity and accessibility for all young people across urban, rural, and remote areas.
- Youth work is critical in addressing complex societal challenges, including mental health, educational attainment, employability, and social inequality. The proposed Bill would reinforce its vital role, making it a statutory component of Scotland's education and public health landscape.

The absence of a statutory framework leaves youth work vulnerable to inconsistent funding and service delivery across Scotland. This legislation will ensure that every young person, regardless of location or background, has access to high-quality youth work opportunities.

Question 2: Do you think legislation is required, or are there other ways in which the Bill's aims could be achieved more effectively?

- Yes
- No
- *Please explain the reasons for your response*

Key Considerations:

- Legislation is required. While the sector has been effective in delivering transformative outcomes, it currently relies on low, inconsistent and short-term funding which varies significantly by local authority area. Legislation would address these inconsistencies by:
 - Securing long-term, sustainable investment.
 - Ensuring collaboration between statutory and voluntary sectors.
 - Creating a stronger national standard for youth work provision.
 - Providing parity of esteem with formal education by making youth work a statutory service.
- The Bill would also strengthen youth work's preventative role, helping to meet Scotland's national outcomes related to health, education, and equality.

While investment and national strategies are crucial, they are insufficient without legislative backing. Experience from other sectors shows that voluntary measures often lack the necessary longevity and enforcement to drive systemic change.

Question 3: What financial impact do you think this proposal could have if it became law? Would this save money or cost money?

- *A significant increase in costs*
- *Some increase in costs*
- *No overall change in costs*
- *Some reduction in costs*
- *A significant reduction in costs*
- *Please explain the reasons for your answer, including who you would expect to feel the financial impact of the proposal, and if there are any ways you think the proposal could be delivered more cost-effectively.*

Key Considerations:

- Youth work offers an exceptional return on investment: for every £1 spent on youth work, £7 is saved in future public spending. These savings arise from:
 - Reduced demand on health services due to improved mental and physical wellbeing.
 - Lower crime rates as youth work provides positive outlets and interventions for at-risk young people.
 - Higher educational attainment and employability, reducing dependency on unemployment benefits and other state support.
- Implementing the Bill would ensure resources are directed toward preventative initiatives that address issues before they escalate, saving substantial public funds and reducing costs in areas like justice, health, and social care.

Who Benefits Financially:

- The public sector would see significant savings through reduced demand for reactive services.
- Businesses and the wider economy would benefit from a skilled and engaged workforce.

- Families would experience improved wellbeing due to the holistic support youth work offers to young people.

Delivering Cost-Effectiveness:

- The Bill should prioritise collaboration between voluntary and statutory sectors, ensuring resources are maximised.
- Flexibility in funding allocations can support tailored approaches for local contexts, ensuring efficiency and reducing duplication.

Question 4: Any new law can have an impact on different individuals in society, for example as a result of their age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. What impact could this proposal have on particular people if it became law?

- *If you do not have a view skip to next question. Please explain the reasons for your answer and if there are any ways you think the proposal could avoid negative impacts on particular people.*

Key Considerations:

- Youth work plays a critical role in addressing the inequalities caused by poverty, which disproportionately affect young people in Scotland. By providing accessible, inclusive, and often free services, youth work helps to break the cycle of poverty by:
 - Building young people's confidence and skills, enabling them to access opportunities that improve their life chances.
 - Offering a safe, supportive environment where young people can develop their potential, regardless of financial barriers.
 - Providing practical support, such as signposting to services, access to food programmes, and opportunities for free or affordable activities.

Poverty and Equalities:

- Young people experiencing poverty often face multiple barriers, including lower educational attainment, limited access to extracurricular activities, and mental health challenges. Youth work is uniquely positioned to mitigate these effects by engaging young people where they are, helping them to build resilience, and building a sense of community and belonging.
- The Bill could have a transformative impact by ensuring equitable access to youth work services, particularly in disadvantaged communities, where the need is greatest.

Positive Impacts of the Bill on Poverty:

- By embedding youth work in legislation, the Bill can help ensure resources are directed toward areas of high deprivation, reducing geographic inequalities in service provision.
- A strong statutory framework would strengthen the ability of youth workers to advocate for young people experiencing poverty and connect them to opportunities and support systems.

Mitigating Negative Impacts:

- The Bill should explicitly consider how funding models and resource allocation address poverty-related inequalities. This includes prioritising support for organisations and programmes that directly benefit young people in low-income families. While making sure that all young people across the country can access youth work.

Question 5: Any new law can impact on work to protect and enhance the environment, achieve a sustainable economy, and create a strong, healthy, and just society for future generations. Do you think the proposal could impact in any of these areas?

- *If you do not have a view then skip to next question. Please explain the reasons for your answer, including what you think the impact of the*

proposal could be, and if there are any ways you think the proposal could avoid negative impacts?

Key Considerations:

- Youth work contributes to a sustainable future by:
 - Promoting environmental awareness through outdoor learning, community action projects, and sustainability-focused programmes.
 - Supporting economic sustainability by equipping young people with skills, confidence, and pathways into employment or further education.
 - Building social sustainability by empowering young people to address social inequalities and build more inclusive communities.

Embed sustainability principles into the Bill, ensuring youth work programmes align with Scotland's environmental and social justice goals.

Provide funding to support youth-led initiatives focused on sustainability, empowering young people to take action on climate change and community resilience.

Question 6: Do you have any other additional comments or suggestions on the proposed Bill(which have not already been covered in any of your responses to earlier questions)?

Key Considerations:

- Ensure robust co-production with young people, youth workers, and organisations throughout the implementation process.
- Recognise the full breadth of the youth work sector, including voluntary organisations, uniformed groups, and specialist services.

- Develop a clear national strategy for youth work delivery, ensuring alignment with Scotland’s National Performance Framework and the UNCRC.

Final Call to Action

- **To the Sector:** Share these messages widely to ensure a unified voice during the consultation. Engage with young people and youth workers to emphasise the importance of this Bill and its potential to secure a thriving future for youth work.
- **To Decision-Makers:** Recognise that youth work is not an expense but an investment. The proposed Bill represents a vital step toward achieving a healthier, fairer, and more prosperous Scotland for all young people.

#InvestInYouthWork



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