



YouthLink Scotland Youth Work Sector Survey Report

2024

How was the survey developed?

In 2019/20 YouthLink Scotland were provided with support of an analyst from Information Services Division of NHS National Services Scotland, through the Scottish Government Analytical Exchange Programme. Through this programme the analyst provided support in how to frame questions to better understand the youth work sector and their priorities.

In 2023/24 this work was further developed with the support of Evaluation Support Scotland. This support led to the refinement and expansion of the survey to understand how the youth work sector view the impact, values, support and priorities of YouthLink Scotland. This report provides an overview of responses for the period of 2023/24.

About the Youth Work Sector

Responses to the survey were received from voluntary sector organisations, local authority organisations and national intermediaries¹.

Youth Work Workforce Statistics

	Local Authority Youth Services	Voluntary Youth Work Sector
Full Time Paid	403	2,500
Part Time/Sessional Paid	713	4,629
Volunteers	571	44,691
Total Staff/ Volunteers	1,687	51,820

¹ 181 voluntary sector, local authority and associate members of YouthLink Scotland completed the survey. 97% of organisations who completed the survey were existing members of YouthLink Scotland and 3 were new members. For an overview of YouthLink Scotland members visit <https://www.youthlink.scot/our-members/>

Number of Young People currently accessing Youth Work in Scotland

	Local Authority Youth Services	Voluntary Youth Work Sector
Young People	146,611	358,110

Training

This section provides an overview of the training needs of the organisations.

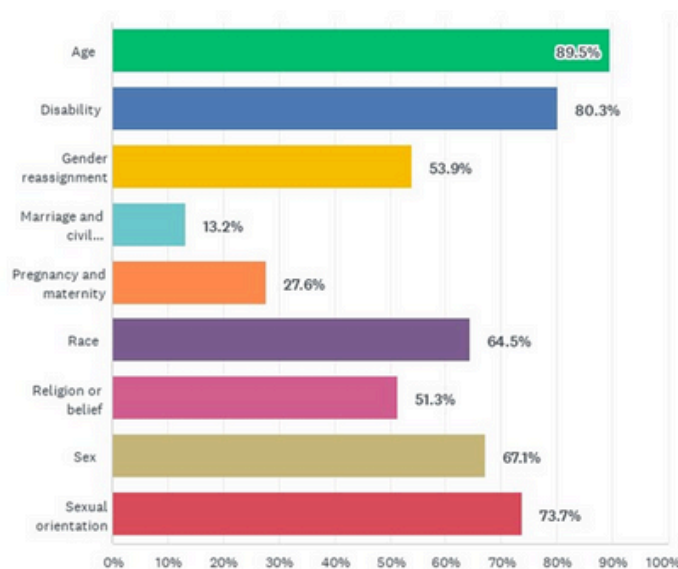
- 78% of organisations offer youth work induction training
- 95% have a training and development process for all staff and volunteers working with young people
- 51% do not have any unmet training needs. 49% do have unmet training needs and these include:
 - Workforce development – including inductions for new staff, food hygiene, leadership, volunteer management, trustee inductions, SQA training, child protection, public speaking and first aid.
 - Health and wellbeing – including vaping, bereavement, trauma informed practice and additional support needs.
 - Youth work practice – including digital youth work, equality, diversity and inclusion, intergenerational work.
 - UNCRC – including youth voice and decision making.
- There were some challenges to addressing these unmet training needs, including:
 - Challenging for sessional staff to attend training as this is an addition to their contract/contact time. Annual budget cuts to sessional youth work budget means it is difficult to provide paid training opportunities to ensure sessional staff skills and training remains up to date.
 - There is an identified need to increase the range of options for accredited courses. Staff in one organisation would like to gain their CLD degrees but as it is not essential they do not have an opportunity.
 - Funding – lack of funding means less opportunity for developmental training. Two organisations stated that they were missing National Voluntary Organisations Support Funding, leading to unmet training needs.

Youth work delivery

Organisations were asked to provide an overview of the type of youth work they are delivering and which young people they are reaching through their practice.

- 76% provides universal youth work, 75% provide targeted youth work
- The table below shows the diversity of young people with protected characteristics who are being reached. Unsurprisingly age is the protected characteristic which organisations are most reaching. This is followed by young people with disabilities (80%), sexual orientation (74%), sex (67%) and race (65%).

Q15 Which of the following protected characteristic group(s) of young people does your organisation (and the groups and organisations you support) work with? (please tick all that apply)



Youth work practice priorities

Organisations shared their top **current** priorities for their youth work practice, these include:

- 1.90% Health and wellbeing
- 2.78% Mental health
- 3.75% Youth volunteering
- 4.72% Participation/citizenship
- 5.68% Employment
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- 68% School-based work

The top 5 priorities for organisations for the **yeah ahead** included:

1. Youth works role in education and employability - youth work and schools, awards, transitions, accreditations, positive destinations, employability, skills for life.
2. Youth voice and participation.
3. Mental health and wellbeing.
4. Workforce development – volunteer recruitment and development, workforce training and development, sustainable funding.
5. Increasing reach of youth work including removing barriers to participation and reaching seldom heard voice, increasing youth work offer.

About Us

Impact of YouthLink Scotland

This section outlines organisations views of the impact of YouthLink Scotland in relation to capacity building, influence and investment.

Capacity building

- 92% agreed that YouthLink Scotland’s training, events or toolkits have helped enhance my organisation’s youth work practice.
- 83% agreed that YouthLink Scotland has provided tools / resources / training to help us evaluate the impact of our work.
- 92% agreed that YouthLink Scotland helps me and my team be better connected to others in the youth work sector.
- 95% agreed that YouthLink Scotland is a trusted source of research, information and advice about policy and practice for my organisation.


Influence


- 95% agreed YouthLink Scotland effectively gathers evidence of impact and learning from the youth work sector to influence policy and practice.
- 78% agreed YouthLink Scotland helps my organisation and our young people be heard by decision-makers.
- 92% agreed YouthLink Scotland is providing strong leadership for the youth work sector to enable cross-sector collaboration (e.g. with Education and Health).
- 96% agreed that YouthLink Scotland’s research on the role and impact of youth work is valuable and useful.

Investment


- 74% agreed that they had accessed funding administered by YouthLink Scotland.
- 36% agreed and 43% disagreed that as a result of accessing funding through YouthLink Scotland, I have been able to secure additional funding from other sources.
- 59% agreed that the information and support provided by YouthLink Scotland has helped me secure funding from other sources.
- 56% agreed that YouthLink Scotland's promotion of youth work and its impact has helped me leverage funding.


Why it is important to have a national youth work agency


"In the current political, social and economic landscape we require: A strong, clear and authentic voice. Promotion of the impact of youth work. A clear point of contact for government and other stakeholders to reach out to. A space held within the national conversation, which celebrates, promotes and dignifies youth work as a skilled profession and agent of change." 


"It is vital that there is a national youth work agency to avoid duplication of services, to provide Scottish Government with a clear link to the third sector and to provide a central source of information for members." 


Organisations shared their views on why it is important to have a national youth work agency. Here is a summary of their views:


Strong, collective voice for the sector *"As a voice and champion for the sector to ensure every young person has access to quality youth work."* 


Ensure that youth work is recognised, valued and understood nationally *"It emphasises the important of having youth workers across the country and highlights why our job is worth doing."* 


To advocate and influence policy *"Influence policy based on research."* 

Promote and support collaboration and partnership working *"It is vital to have a youth work agency that can advocate and promote collective and partnership working on a national level."* 

"The bridge between public sector, third sector agencies is invaluable, as is the bridge to decision makers, other sectors and stakeholders." 


Driving force for positive change in young people's lives *"A national youth work agency serves as a driving force for positive change in the lives of young people. It ensures that youth work is recognised and valued, provides a framework for effective practice, and promotes the voices and needs of young people. By supporting youth work, a nation invests in the well-being, development, and future of its young people."* 


One place for all information *"It is also an excellent hub for bringing the sector together across Scotland."* 


Provide access to high quality resources, training and research *"YLS are a great support for providing relevant training, and bringing the sector together for events / training, provide funding / research opps."* 


What YouthLink Scotland could do more of or better


"I think you are doing a grand job in trying circumstances." 


"I find this hard as they have done so much to promote the sector over the year." 

Influence policy and funding decisions *"At this time, funding is on the minds of every youthwork organisation. We need a national campaign to ensure society understands the impact youth work has on young people, our society and on the greater good."* 

Putting pressure on the Scottish Government to launch the National Youth Work Strategy *"Put pressure on the Scottish Governments for a national youth work strategy. Word's are cheap. We need concrete action and commitment from the Scottish Governments. This should include protected funding and a statutory basis for youth work."* 

Ensuring support meets youth workers needs across all of Scotland in diverse ways *"(e.g. in person, hybrid, downloadable toolkits, out with Edinburgh and Glasgow, connecting to non-national voluntary sector)."* 


Ensuring equality and diversity is at the forefront *"We would value equalities being more at the forefront of youthwork practice recognising the intersectional identities all our young people have."* 


Enhancing communication and collaboration within and out with the sector including to funders *“Enhancing the communication and collaboration with other sectors and stakeholders, who have an indirect influence and relationship with Youth Work such as education, employability, health services, social work etc. to promote the value and impact of youth work on a wider scale.”* 


Other suggestions include:


- Consider running annual workshops for decisions makers.
- Promote the unique role of YouthLink Scotland.
- Stronger links to CLD Standards Council.
- Better discounts for training and conferences for members.
- YLS staff would benefit from being part of the delivery within the sector to understand issues affecting the sector now.
- Continue to make opportunities for young people to be part of and gain experience from YLS. As being connected to a national organisation is good for their self-esteem.


How well YouthLink Scotland is meeting it's values

“Youthlink is a vital to the present and future development of youth work in Scotland. and in partnership with other nations.” 

“I believe that Youthlink is constantly improving it's approach, listening to members and really responding to needs.” 

“There is practice and evidence to demonstrate that YouthLink has a consistent approach to being inclusive, accessible, ethical, equitable and diverse.” 

“YouthLink staff knows Scotland and it's areas, groups and agencies so well and values all youth work equally.” 


“The youth work sector as a whole is lacking in diversity, there's more we can all do to take an intersectional approach to youth work and create spaces for a more diverse and inclusive workforce.” 


- 98% agreed that YouthLink Scotland believes in young people and prioritises their needs and rights.
- 97% agreed that YouthLink Scotland is committed to the highest standards of protection and safety for young people.
- 94% agreed that YouthLink Scotland is a learning organisation promoting innovation and change.
- 95% agreed that YouthLink Scotland represents our members with integrity and values collaboration with partners.
- 93% agreed that YouthLink Scotland is inclusive, accessible, ethical, equitable and diverse.


How YouthLink Scotland can support its members work

There were 70 responses to how can YouthLink support your work, and half of these responses stated that they wanted YouthLink Scotland to “carry on”, to “continue to” and “keep doing”. These responses focused on **continuing** to:




- Champion and value youth work.
- Lobby elected members and other services to see the benefits of youth work.
- Offering training and networking opportunities.
- Lead on behalf of the sector.
- Advocate for investment.
- Supporting the sector with data and research.
- To push for the sector to be recognised across policy areas.
- Keep members updated with opportunities – funding, training and sharing their updates.
- To push for the National Youth Work Strategy to be published.

“By continuing to act as the collective voice for youth work in Scotland and champion the value of youth work to wider stakeholders, local and Scottish Government.” 

“Continue to be the strong voice for youth work that you have always been.” 

“The organisation and colleagues from the LAYWM network have continued to be a really fantastic resource for information sharing, good practice and general support as and when it is needed. the training opportunities that are offered have supported my youth work team and sessional staff greatly and allowed us to develop aspects of our work.” 


Other areas where organisations felt that YouthLink could support them included:


- **Access to, securing and advocating for funding for the sector (particularly long term, sustainable investment. Also, a call to reinstate Cashback for Communities fund)** - *"I realise you don't have this but money would make the biggest difference right now: demands have only grown while financial resources have both shrunk and become more unpredictable. Leading a shift of mindset to mature, stable investment in YP and communities, as opposed to an interventionist, fire-fighting funding model would be the holy grail".* 
- **Promoting and providing training opportunities** - *"Offering training and professional development opportunities for youth workers"* 
- **Amplify the value of youth work through comms and lobbying decision-makers at local and national level** - *"It would be good to show the impact of youthwork from small to large organisation and the impact it would have if it wasn't around/is cut across Scotland".* 


Other suggestions included:


- More joint working.
- Showcasing good practice examples.
- Understanding vulnerability of small youth work organisations and smaller local authorities.
- Being able to link in on a more regular, informal basis.

What YouthLink Scotland's top priorities for the year ahead should be


Funding and investment – *"Promoting increased investment in youth work - particularly multi-year funding."* 


Promote, campaign and lobby for the impact of youth work – (including lobbying for sector to become statutory, a right to youth work) *"Campaign to raise awareness of the positive impact of youthwork", "Convincing the Scottish Government of the value of youthwork", "Raise the profile of the value and impact of youthwork in supporting young people to achieve their potential."* 


National Youth Work Strategy – *"Ensure that a new Youth Work Strategy is true to core youth work principles and practice and that the sector is clearly and unashamedly professional; and is jargon free", "Youth Work Strategy - keep fighting for this."* 


Training and workforce development – *“Support development and delivery of effective training to the youthwork sector workforce”* 


Provide networking and collaboration opportunities - *“Develop a hub where workers can Sharing their knowledge, expertise and resources through structured networking and monitoring”, “Providing opportunities for members to share best practice and innovate”, “Continuing to promote a collaborative environment where we can work together and feel part of a wider sector despite the competition for limited resources (e.g. peer review funding mechanisms!)”* 


Prioritising the voice and needs of young people - *“Ensure yp are at heart decision making”, “A national model for youth voice.”* 


Influence the CLD Review and Education Reform – *“Influencing the CLD review and other key areas such as education reform”, “Representing views of network within the Review of CLD.”* 


Support for young people including mental health and cost of living crisis - *“how it can be used to support young people at this critical time for them.”* 

Influence policy - *“Policy work - challenges of different approaches per local authority.”* 

Inclusion, diversity and intersectionality - *“Becoming a champion for equalities to be embedded across the youth work sector”, “To engage with the harder to reach (easy to ignore) young people.”* 

Voice of the sector – *“Voice of the sector”, “Make the youthworks voice heard in government.”* 

Promote a rights-based approach to youth work through UNCRC – *“Ensure the UNCRC is a springboard for change for young people and youth work.”* 

Research - *“Research - engaging and influencing at gov level”, “Continued research into current needs of YP (Youth Voice)”, “Data gathering and impact measurement across the sector.”* 

Other priorities included:

- Encourage and support volunteering.
 - Ensure communication avenues are reviewed and improved.
 - Connecting with other sectors to grow opportunities.
 - Focus on community-based youth work.
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