



YouthLink Scotland's position on Post-School Education and Skills Reform

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 and skills reform to drive a transformed 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. This includes equality of access and opportunity within the post-school landscape.

Context

The Scottish Government's education and skills reform programme aims to strengthen the post-school landscape, creating a coherent and accessible system that supports individuals in reaching their potential. As such the initial priorities set out in the Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills¹ are designed to focus on ensuring there is:

- Access to holistic person-centred support.
- The opportunity to develop the skills needed to secure and sustain a positive destination.
- Equity of access and opportunity.

To do this, the Scottish Government acknowledges the need to change how we view, fund, and structure the system. This includes ensuring a diverse system that provides opportunities young people need, collaboration across the system, and parity of options and pathways.

These priorities are reflected in recent independent reviews, such as the Independent Review of the Skills Delivering Landscape². The final report '*Fit for the Future:*

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/post-school-education-research-skills-purpose-principles/>

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fit-future-developing-post-school-learning-system-fuel-economic-transformation/>

developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation' called for parity between all learning and pathways contributing towards a positive destination. This need for parity is also reinforced in the report of the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD)³, which highlights the critical role of CLD in improving outcomes as part of the lifelong learning system.

The role of youth work in delivering a strengthened system

A diverse system

A diverse system is required to provide the opportunities needed. In a diverse post-school system, individuals need to be aware of and able to access the opportunities offered through youth work (as part of CLD). Youth work helps to deliver the key principles for post-school education, research and skills⁴, supporting young people to develop the skills, knowledge, values and attributes to fulfil their potential. With services rooted in communities, youth work strives to provide learner-centred and equitable services at the right time and place for the individual. Its role can be particularly vital for those facing the greatest barriers. Youth work can be a bridge for those re-engaging with education, providing a more flexible and supportive environment and tailored pathways, such as working with youth awards to deliver opportunities for recognition of achievement. This can prove essential to widening access to post-school learning for young people with few or no formal qualifications.

However, the role of youth work is not sufficiently included, resourced, understood, or valued. Young people, therefore, do not currently have equitable access to the learning opportunities needed to achieve the vision for post-school learning.

The Independent Review of CLD highlighted the need to fully recognise 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 should be reflected in the balance of funding across the lifelong learning system, acknowledging the ability of CLD to help tackle a wide range of social and educational challenges. This need for recognition is also reflected in the Post-School Purpose and Principles.

Access to holistic-person centred support

Youth workers provide practical and emotional support to progress and sustain participation in the post-school ecosystem. This includes working collaboratively at critical transition points, offering broader support, such as housing and finances, and developing life skills like independent living. Youth work's ability to provide and sustain relationships and consistent support across the learner journey is unique and vital. Engagement and attainment during school education impacts post-school decisions

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/learning-life-report-independent-review-community-learning-development-cld/>

⁴ <https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/YLS-response-interim-purpose-and-principles.pdf>

and opportunities⁵. Youth work has been described as a ‘safety net’ for more disengaged or vulnerable young people, either supporting reengagement with formal learning or post-school pathways, and/or providing wider skills that can be of value to future employers⁶.

*‘Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation’*⁷ recommends that this kind of tailored support becomes an embedded resource within local communities and a more clearly defined element of the learning system. Greater recognition of this is vital to ensuring we deliver a supportive and equitable post-school experience, supporting individuals and their different needs to access and complete journeys through the ecosystem.

Careers

The Career Services Collaborative⁸ is working to communicate a clear national narrative and operating model to facilitate and support local partnership and person-centred delivery. Youth work is embedded within the careers ecosystem and will continue to play a crucial role in further strengthening the quality and clarity of our careers offer in Scotland⁹.

Youth work contributes across Scotland’s Career Services landscape, particularly:

- Career information and advice.
- Experiential career learning – including volunteering, work experience.
- Skills development and recognition of achievement.
- Flexible and tailored pathways to progress towards and into work.

These services are critical in helping young people navigate the challenges of transitioning from education to employment, addressing issues such as youth unemployment and skills mismatches in the job market.

The opportunity to develop the skills needed to secure and sustain a positive destination

The youth work sector in Scotland recognises the vital importance of skills development and the need for young people to understand the transferable nature of skills across the learning journey. It developed The National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework¹⁰, which is used by youth workers to help children and young

⁵ [Diversity of Provision: A Brief Description of the Post-School Education, Research and Skills System in Scotland](#)

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fit-future-developing-post-school-learning-system-fuel-economic-transformation/>

⁸ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/career-review/delivering-careers-by-design/the-career-services-collaborative>

⁹ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/xvync3xg/career-review-final-report-230306-final.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.youthlink.scot/education-skills/youth-work-outcomes-skills/>

people develop, recognise and articulate their skills. It also facilitates self-evaluation for quality improvement and understanding impact.

Equity of access and opportunity

To achieve our collective ambitions for post-school learning and those of the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation¹¹, there must be a greater focus on equity of access and opportunity. The post-school purpose and principles acknowledges the 'significant role' of CLD, including the third sector, particularly in providing opportunities and support for those furthest from the labour market¹².

Collaboration

The ambitions to strengthen the post-school learning landscape acknowledge the need for greater collaboration and coherence. A more coherent and interconnected post-school learning landscape will also help tackle the broader priorities around tackling poverty, building a wellbeing economy, delivering on the recommendations of the Careers Review¹³ and reflect the priorities around delivering the no-wrong-door approach set out in the Employability Strategic Plan 2024-2027¹⁴.

To support collaboration, there is a need for a greater understanding of the role of youth work, a demonstration of parity with other elements of the system and further support to build on integrated delivery models. This will support the Scottish Government's desire for the system to operate 'as one'.

Youth work often involves partnerships with schools, colleges, employers, and other stakeholders. These collaborations enhance the support network available to young people, providing a more comprehensive approach to their development and transition into adulthood.

Supporting continuous improvement

YouthLink Scotland, the national agency for youth work in Scotland¹⁵, provides resources, professional learning, and networking opportunities to support continuous improvement, including strengthening collaboration across the system. It is responsible for coordinating the youth work sector change plan to embed recommendations from the Careers Review and working alongside the youth work sector to support continuous improvement, including developing a consistent approach to impact measurement and fostering a valued workforce. YouthLink Scotland will continue to engage with all aspects of lifelong learning and skills reform,

¹¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation/>

¹² [Diversity of Provision: A Brief Description of the Post-School Education, Research and Skills System in Scotland](#)

¹³ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/career-review>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/no-one-left-behind-employability-strategic-plan-2024-2027/>

¹⁵ <https://www.youthlink.scot/>

to achieve our ambition for youth work to be included as a fundamental entitlement in the learning system. This includes equality of access and opportunity within the post-school landscape.

Summary and Recommendations

Youth work in Scotland's post-school landscape provides critical support to young people, enabling them to develop holistically, navigate the complexities of adulthood, and contribute positively to society. It acts as a 'safety net' for the most vulnerable, offering access to holistic person-centred support and the opportunity to develop the skills needed to secure and sustain a positive destination. This is vital to deliver the ambition for equity of access and opportunity.

The Scottish Government acknowledges the need to change how we view, fund, and structure the system. We believe that a critical component of this is strengthening access to and recognition of youth work. The following actions are recommended to deliver the ambitions for post-school learning, tackle poverty and build a more resilient, fair, and green economy:

Recommended actions:

- A new funding model for post-school learning provision should equitably resource youth work, so tailored support and learning pathways are embedded within local communities as a more clearly defined element of the learning system.
- Take a rights-based approach to change, recognising the need for young people to access youth work as part of the diverse system to provide the opportunities needed to achieve our ambitions. This will align with emerging priorities identified in the Independent Review of CLD.
- The Scottish Government should lead the way in demonstrating parity of options, pathways and qualifications by changing the traditional assumptions, structures and delivery models to embed youth work as a vital element of the post-school system.
- Work with the national agency for youth work to ensure the youth work workforce is valued within the system.
- Work with the national agency for youth work to build capacity for collaboration with youth work to get it right for every learner, including supporting more integrated models of delivery that build on existing good practice.

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