



Work of the Scottish Affairs Committee Inquiry

Written Evidence – Scottish Affairs Committee, UK Parliament

August 2015

About YouthLink Scotland

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation, representing over 100 regional and national youth organisations from both the voluntary and statutory sectors. We champion the role and value of youth work and represent the interests and aspirations of our sector.

Scotland's youth work sector is as rich and diverse as the nation itself. Our sector has a workforce in excess of 75,000 – including over 70,000 adult volunteers. We reach in excess of 380,000 young people in youth work opportunities each week. The youth work sector work has three essential and definitive features:

- Young people choose to participate
- Youth work must build from where young people are
- Youth work recognises the young person and the youth worker as partners in a learning process

The activity, venue, and approaches utilised to deliver this are varied – and include youth clubs, youth projects, specialist or targeted provision, social activism, outdoor learning, awards programmes, uniformed organisations, and democratic participation.

YouthLink Scotland champions the role and value of youth work, challenging government at national and local levels to invest in the development of the sector for the benefit of our young people. Our vision is of a nation which values its young people and their contribution to society, where young people are supported to achieve their potential.

We welcome the invitation from the Committee to give our views on your inquiry in to the work of the Scottish Affairs Committee.

What issues do you think the Committee should focus on?

- **What issues should the Committee be examining during this Parliament and why? (these can be narrow issues suitable to a single day's examination as well as larger issues such as aspects of welfare policy or devolution – please note that the Committee does not look into individual cases). Issues can be immediate or longer term**

Democratic Participation of 16 and 17 year olds

We would encourage the Committee to examine the experiences, impacts and lessons learnt from extending the franchise to young people aged 16 and 17. As the national agency for youth work, we have been a long term advocate for votes at 16 – and will continue to advocate for this matter for all 16 and 17 year olds to be able to participate in the General Election and future Referendums. We are committed to ensuring that young people develop into confident, informed and passionate citizens, this is an ambition we know that the Committee will share. There are many challenges for the younger generation across the UK and we know you share our concern at the levels of disengagement in society that some of our young people have. When Scotland extended the vote to 16 and 17 year olds for the referendum there was a general consensus that it was the right thing to do, but what we did not realise was the extent to which that positive civic engagement would continue.

- **Benefit to political participation** - 63% of 16/17 year olds who voted in the referendum said they were certain to vote in the General Election, this compares to 27% of the same age group in England (Edinburgh University)
- **Increased levels of political engagement** - post Independence Referendum - 61% of Scottish young people had talked with family about how the UK is governed in comparison to 37% of their English peers (Edinburgh University)
- **Benefit to lifelong democratic involvement** - 89% of all 16- to 17-year-olds resident in Scotland registered to vote and 75% voted. Importantly, 97% of those who reported having voted said that they would vote again in future elections and referendums. (Electoral Commission)

We would urge the committee to examine this matter within the context of young people's participation in the Westminster Parliament.

Child Poverty and Welfare Reform

YouthLink Scotland, like many other children and young people's charities are growing increasingly concerned about the impact of poverty, welfare reform, and austerity. We would urge the Committee to undertake an enquiry into the impact of welfare reform on Scotland's children and young people. It is our hope of a welfare system where the commitment to alleviating poverty are central to policy and planning decisions, and those working to design and implement policies need to support the most vulnerable in a compassionate and dignified way.

Child and youth poverty means missing out; being hungry, being cold, and missing opportunities to be with friends – it means greater likelihood of chronic illness, poor mental health, delayed educational development and lower educational attainment.

In addition, young people themselves will contribute to the employment market and will be recipient of a range of welfare benefits in a range of circumstances. For Scotland's young people we will continue to advocate for fairness and the removal of discrimination within welfare reforms, and we would ask the Committee to explore the inherent discrimination against young people in the current and future welfare reforms – namely in the minimum wage and housing benefit.

- The Scottish Parliament's Information Centre recent research shows that workers aged 16 and 17 would earn £6,500 less than those over the age of 25 for the same work.
- In the UK around 380,000 people under the age of 25 are supported by housing benefit, of which more than half are parents. Welfare reforms outlined in the Budget will mean that those under 25 would not be eligible for housing benefit.

We would urge the committee to fully explore the impact of welfare reform and poverty on the lives of children and young people in Scotland.

Libor Funds in Scotland

YouthLink Scotland would ask the Committee to conduct a short inquiry in to the use of Libor funds. We would welcome the opportunity that the Committee to take to identify the value of investment in to Scotland from Libor funds and to assess how the Barnett Formula has been applied to these funds. Additionally we would like the Committee to use this opportunity to ascertain Scotland's priorities for investment of Libor funds and to ensure that the administration of Libor funds benefits Scotland's people and its organisations. YouthLink Scotland would welcome the opportunity for discussion with third sector organisations and grassroots community organisations in Scotland to identify priority areas for Libor – to invest in young people through youth work and other non-formal learning activities.

Youth and Europe

YouthLink Scotland would ask the Committee to explore Youth and Europe – this is particularly important in young people being disenfranchised to vote in the forthcoming European Union Referendum. We believe it would be of interest and benefit to Parliament to understand young people's views and experiences of Europe – for their citizenship, services, access to education, funding and social and economic mobility.

• Should the Committee consider the impact of the devolution of powers?

YouthLink Scotland would welcome the Committee's interest in considering the impact of the devolution of powers on outcomes for young people. We are particularly interested to consider how young people are impacted by reserved policy and how this contributes/impedes the achievement of Scotland's National Outcomes. The suggested areas of inquiry outlined above are all areas which illustrate the intersection of powers held by the two Parliaments.

• What are your views on the effectiveness of the Scotland Office? What could it do better?

Post-Devolution we have had limited engagement with the Scotland Office. We do however subscribe to the Scotland Office mailing lists for notifications, we note however that that Office have not published any public consultations¹ since 2012.

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/publications?departments%5B%5D=scotland-office&publication_filter_option=consultations

We would welcome the Scotland Office undertaking work which would create policy briefings on reserved matters which impact on Scotland, Scottish organisations/businesses/communities. We would welcome increased partnership and collaboration between civil servants in London and Edinburgh - to ensure that policy areas can work together for the best outcomes for young people in Scotland.

We would ask the Scotland Office to consider its engagement with other Parliament functions – particularly Education Services and Parliamentary Outreach to ensure that these services are meeting the needs of children and young people in Scotland; as well as the professionals who work with them. For example – the Education Services resources are mapped to Key Stages for the English Curriculum, but not for Curriculum for Excellence.

What are your views on the Committee’s ways of working?

- **What are the best ways for the Committee to engage with organisations in Scotland and the Scottish public?**

As a national intermediary organisation we would like the Committee to engage with us on a regular basis, we would welcome a regular e-bulletin of your work and calls for evidence. We are then able to share this information with our members. We would like the Committee to consider its online presence and outreach approach to engage with both national and local organisations across Scotland.

We would like evidence sessions to be held when appropriate and where practical in Scotland. This was well demonstrated in the Committee’s previous work on the Borderlands Inquiry, when representatives of the Committee met with local representatives and community members to explore an issue or topic.

We would particularly like the Committee to give consideration of the ways in which it can create opportunities for young people to participate in its work and the work of the UK parliament more generally. As the national agency for Youth Work in Scotland we would be delighted to work with the committee to facilitate such opportunities with our member organisations. It would be particularly refreshing if the committee could take evidence and engage specifically with young people on a topic or matter. We draw your attention to the ongoing work of the Scottish Youth Parliament and the development of their Lead the Way² Manifesto, this would perhaps be an excellent starting point to identify a topic or enquiry.

- **How should the Committee engage with organisations across the United Kingdom and on what issues?**

As an organisation that is based in Edinburgh and covers Scotland, we would consider that the work of the Committee should concentrate on building relationships with Scottish organisations. However, we are aware from our partner organisations and our counterparts in other parts of the UK that they are interested in the devolution arrangements for Scotland, Scottish Politics, and more generally Scottish affairs. Therefore we would not want the committee to preclude its relationship building with such organisations.

- **Where should the Committee meet and what type of meetings (e.g. formal evidence sessions, informal discussion panels, etc) would be useful?**

We would urge the Committee to meet when practical and the agenda requires in Scotland, particularly for

² <http://www.syp.org.uk/syp-s-youth-manifesto-2016-2021-W21page-609->

evidence sessions and discussion panels. We believe that the type of meeting should be characterised by values of equality, inclusion, and fairness. We would welcome a balance of both formal and non-formal approach to the Committee's meetings, dependent on the topic of inquiry.

We believe an outreach model would result in greater engagement with the Committees work – particularly to remove costs to third sector organisations to represent their views to inquiries without the costs of travel and accommodation in London. This is particularly important for organisations such as ours which are wholly based in Scotland; we would not want to be at a disadvantage to other Third Sector organisations who are part of UK organisations with staff and resources in London. This outreach approach to engage communities has worked effectively for the Scottish Parliament and their Cabinet tour.

- **How can the Committee make sure it engages effectively with the work of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Parliament Committees?**

We are currently involved in the work of the Scottish Parliament and its Committees, and regularly receive calls for evidence and opportunities to work with the Parliament – including its outreach services.

We would like to see a closer relationship between the Scottish Affairs Select Committee and Holyrood, a more integrated and co-ordinated approach on issues that have an impact on Scotland. We would like to see consideration given to joint inquiries, evidence sessions, Holyrood committees, where appropriate, taking evidence sessions at Westminster and vice versa.

We would like the Scottish Affairs Committee to be aware of the programme of work of the Scottish Parliament Committees – we would also hope that any reserved matters that are raised in Scottish Parliament Committees can be deferred to the Scottish Affairs Committee for future consideration. Whilst typically the areas of interest to the Scottish Parliament are devolved – the responses made by organisations like ourselves are often cross cutting.

Closing Remarks

YouthLink Scotland looks forward to working with the Scottish Affairs Committee. We are happy to assist the work of the Committee in the years ahead and if we can be of any assistance to the Committee at this time or in the future please do not hesitate to contact us.

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