



Call for evidence on the draft Budget 2017-18 – Local Government budget

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 both the voluntary and statutory sector. 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.

Scotland's youth work sector is as rich and diverse as the nation itself. Our sector has a workforce in excess of 80,000 – including over 70,000 adult volunteers. We reach in excess of 380,000 young people in youth work opportunities each week. Youth 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. Youth work through local authorities can also be found in schools across the country, giving a holistic, whole school approach to learning and achieving.

As the national agency for youth work, and in our role as an intermediary we have endeavoured to respond to this response in the best interests of the youth work sector, however the views contained within this response may not be held by each of our individual members.

Value of Youth Work

The *National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19* has a core ambition that all young people, in every part of Scotland, should have access to high quality and effective youth work practice,¹ contributing to making Scotland the best place to grow up. Through engaging in youth work, young people are more resilient, optimistic for the future, consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control.² Youth work contributes to a number of agendas including health and wellbeing, employability, youth justice, child poverty and attainment.

¹ YouthLink Scotland, *National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19*, <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/Index.asp?MainID=19180&UserID=1479>

² YouthLink Scotland, *Youth Work Outcomes*, <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/Index.asp?MainID=20153>

Recent research into the social value of youth work in Scotland is estimated at a return of £7 for every £1 of public cash.³ Investment into youth work is preventative spend and can result in public savings in numerous areas (see *table 1*) as well as providing an intrinsic value to society, for example through increasing soft skills of young people and improving the wellbeing of youth work volunteers.

Youth work also contributes to fulfilling international treaties including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).⁴ In particular UNCRC articles 15, 28, 29, 31 have relevance to youth work. Youth work contributes holistically to the full set of Sustainable Development Goals and contributes more directly to the following goals:

- No poverty
- Quality education
- Decent work and economic growth
- Climate action
- Good health and well-being
- Gender equality
- Reduced inequalities
- Peace, justice and strong institutions⁵

Table 1 Costs and values of longer term outcomes⁶

Youth work outcomes	Costs and Values
<i>Better literacy, numeracy & language</i>	Reduced costs to education system
<i>Attaining qualifications</i>	Personal earnings from better qualifications
<i>Engaged in education</i>	Reduced costs to education system
<i>In employment or training</i>	Personal earnings from being in employment
	Reduced wage scar from youth unemployment
<i>Positive health behaviours</i>	Reduced incidence of depression
	Reduced incidence of obesity
	Reduced incidence of STIs
	Greater productivity due to reduced absences
<i>Less offending</i>	Reduced costs of criminal justice interventions
<i>Less dependent on welfare</i>	Savings on welfare payments
<i>Positive parenting</i>	Reduced risk of children going into care

It would be prudent to conduct Child Rights Impact Assessments at both a national and local authority level on budgetary decisions. The UNCRC has already recommended an introduction of statutory obligations to produce such assessments when developing laws and policies.⁷

³ Hall Aitken, *Social and economic value of youth work in Scotland: initial assessment*, January 2016, <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/index.asp?MainID=21159>

⁴ YouthLink Scotland, *Youth Work Outcomes*, <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/Index.asp?MainID=20153>

⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

⁶ Hall Aitken, *Social and economic value of youth work in Scotland: initial assessment*, January 2016, <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/index.asp?MainID=21159>

⁷ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding observations [CRC/C/GBR/CO/5]*, p. 2-3, http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=987&Lang=en

YouthLink Scotland would be particularly supportive of co-production with young people for local level budgeting processes. This would be in line with the UNCRC Article 12 that children and young people have a right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously.

In 2009 YouthLink Scotland surveyed members as to the impact of the recession. Findings showed that 65% of organisations were being affected significantly or very significantly by the recession with over half expecting their financial situation to deteriorate further.⁸ Seven years later we find ourselves once again in a challenging fiscal climate. It is difficult to measure the full impact of cuts on youth work services due to the difference across local authorities of the departmental positioning of youth work. It is clear that youth work adds huge value to Scottish society and investment in youth work provided through local councils should be protected and built on. The unintentional cost consequences of cutting local authority youth work services would outweigh current investment. YouthLink Scotland would urge the Committee to consider further research into the full extent of youth work cuts at local authority level.

Question 1: We want to hear your views on the impact of budget reductions to date on local services, etc.

Research released earlier this year showed that youth work budgets have been cut in a majority of local councils over the past few years.⁹ A major consideration is the impact of budget cuts on youth work staff and volunteers. Cuts in some local authorities have resulted in job losses but have not corresponded with decreased demand for services. The additional pressure has an impact on staff morale. Recent figures from UNISON show over 70% of youth workers surveyed described their morale as low or very low.¹⁰ One of the four key pillars of the *National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19* is building workforce capacity to ensure that Scotland has well-motivated, well-trained and well-supported practitioners.¹¹ It is clear that continued budget cuts are not conducive to achieving this ambition.

Local authorities are also facing budget reductions to capital spend to maintain and improve buildings. Our members' experience is that schools and sports centres are prioritised for investment resulting in community facilities being over-looked. Furthermore, community facilities are being rationalised meaning single focus premises, such as youth centres, are targeted for not generating income for the local authority. This has resulted in either closure of provision or relocation to schools. The school environment is not suitable for all forms of youth work delivery and as such young people can be deterred from attending and do not experience the same feelings of ownership over the venue.

With limited resources, third sector youth work organisations cannot be expected to pick up the additional demand as a result of local authority closures or activity reductions.

⁸ YouthLink Scotland, *Youth Work and the Recession*, 2009, <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/webs/245/file/Recession%20report.pdf>

⁹ UNISON, *Growing Pains – A survey of youth workers*, May 2016, p. 9, <http://www.unison-scotland.org/2016/05/11/growing-pains-a-survey-of-youth-workers/>

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 17

¹¹ YouthLink Scotland, *National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19*, <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/Index.asp?MainID=19180&UserID=1479>

Local authority Community Learning and Development (CLD) Plans were written with particular budgets and there are now many local authorities who are still trying to enact their plans with decreased budgets.

Members felt that although youth work is often stated as a priority by the Scottish Government, the budget cuts at local authority level do not allow these strategies be realised. It was felt that local authorities see youth work services as discretionary services, making them even more vulnerable to cuts.

Question 2: We want to hear your views on the extent to which local authority spending decisions prioritise funding for policies that are likely to reduce inequalities.

Quality youth work can play a significant role in reducing inequalities amongst young people in relation to socio-economic equality, youth justice and LGBT communities. For example, young people who attend an LGBT-specific youth group at some point in their lives are more likely to say they are 'very happy' with their lives compared with those who had not.¹² A youth work programme focused on emotional health and wellbeing with young men in HMYOI Polmont resulted in 93% of participants making changes to improve their physical health.¹³

Members told us of two distinct scenarios of spending decisions that do not promote the reduction of inequalities: where investment is only available to small pockets of young people, and where funding is being cut that previously targeted vulnerable young people.

The previous examples of targeted provision must be combined with universal provision for all young people in order to reduce inequalities. Limited investment results in concentrated provision for small groups, thus having little impact on reducing wider inequalities. For some local authorities, little attention is being paid to the results of Poverty and Equalities Impact Assessments and budgets are being cut that previously targeted vulnerable young people. This is reducing the ability of youth work to reduce inequalities for young people. It is also in direct contradiction to the Community Empowerment Act which specifies partnerships must act with a view to reducing inequalities.¹⁴

Question 3: We therefore invite written evidence on how General Fund Balances are used by local authorities and in particular the extent to which the General Fund Reserves are being used being used to offset savings in the short to medium term.

Some members have reported that local authorities have used General Fund Balances to offset cuts within wider CLD but that using these reserves is not an option for the forthcoming financial year.

¹² LGBT Youth Scotland, *Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People: Community & Identity*, 2013, p. 4, <https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/policy-consultations>

¹³ Barnardo's Scotland, *Outside In Youth Work: Annual Report 2012-2013*, p. 7, http://www.barnardos.org.uk/2012-2013_outside_in_annual_report.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6/section/5/enacted>

Question 5: In particular we want to hear your views on how well the centrally managed funding programmes are managed, what outcomes they deliver and do they represent value for money?

There was general consensus amongst our members that centrally managed funding programmes have not been positive to the youth work sector as most funding is targeted at schools or social care. No central funding has been protected for youth work services.

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