

Introduction

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

Youth work in all settings furthers progress to reduce inequalities of outcome for young people. There has been wide recognition in Scotland that youth work should be an equal partner in young people's learning and personal development. Youth work contributes to positive outcomes in areas including health and wellbeing, employability, youth justice, child poverty and attainment. Youth work advances the Curriculum for Excellence capacities and the GIRFEC model, whilst being underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The response below is comprised of YouthLink Scotland member views following three consultation events with youth work practitioners and decision makers from the voluntary and statutory youth work sectors across Scotland. Their views were wide ranging and the variation in thought is captured in this response. As the national agency for youth work, and in our role as an intermediary we have endeavoured to respond to this consultation 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.

1. What are the strengths of the current governance arrangements of Scottish education?

Our members were positive about the co-production aspects of the National Youth Work Strategy and its implementation with the sector. We would wish to see the continuation and strengthening of recent messages that emphasise a partnership approach to raising attainment and achievement. Members also noted Curriculum for Excellence has been a very useful tool to give teachers and youth workers a common language.

There was agreement across members that schools that are performing best will have youth work partnerships within their development plan. YouthLink Scotland has recently provided

Scottish Government and Education Scotland with over 50 current examples of good practice of youth work in schools.

2. What are the barriers within the current governance arrangements to achieving the vision of excellence and equity for all?

The single greatest barrier to achieving positive outcomes for young people is a lack of recognition of learning in all settings. An ambition shared by YouthLink Scotland members is for youth work to be recognised as an equal partner in the delivery of education. It is clear that children and young people do not cease to learn at the end of the school day or when they go back through the school gate. Learning happens at all times in young people's lives this should be recognised, valued and celebrated. In particular, the contribution of youth work within and outwith schools was of high importance for our members. Through engagement with youth work, young people are more resilient, optimistic for the future, consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control.¹

Schools with the best outcomes for young people are those who look to the wider community for partnership working in order to give young people access to a full and holistic range of learning styles and opportunities. There was a concern that a focus on in-school academic learning presented a risk to yet again excluding those young people who struggle to engage through formal learning and achieve their full potential. Furthermore, youth work plays a substantial role in young people's transitions through education, particularly from primary to secondary school and from secondary school onwards.

There must be recognition that there are elements of Curriculum for Excellence that cannot be delivered by the school and that external partners are necessary for achieving the best for all young people. Whilst some members reported this was the case with some schools, it was not consistently the case across Scotland and more emphasis is required from government policy teams and inspectors to ensure this is the case. Members believed that the principles and values of the Curriculum for Excellence need to be revisited to ensure they are being properly implemented both in schools and in all other educational establishments. Their benefits should also be emphasised to the employers and parents.

Young people learn and develop outside of the classroom and ways of recognising and including this type of learning needs to be further developed (e.g. through Profiling and recognition on the SCQF).

Members felt that often having a single point of contact (usually head teachers) within schools was not the best way of developing partnerships. This was for a few reasons, mainly due to recognition that the head teacher is often too busy to prioritise personally working with community partners and there is a danger that if a head teacher does not understand or value what youth work does, then there is no way into a school.

There was consensus that the current indicators of success for young people and schools are not working. Members reported young people who were under intense pressure to achieve in their academic qualifications and as a result were suffering from mental health problems. It was felt by practitioners that youth workers can build more positive relationships

¹ YouthLink Scotland, *Youth Work Outcomes*,
<http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/webs/245/documents/Outcomes%20January%202016.pdf>

with young people because there is not the pressure to attain a certain percentage of qualifications in the work they do with them, rather they concentrate on building a social skillset to be used throughout life and work.

There was a suggestion that the recently developed youth work outcomes could be used as a tool against which to measure school level improvement of these social skills.

3. *Should the above key principles underpin our approach to reform? Are there other principles which should be applied?*

YouthLink Scotland and our members are broadly supportive of the key principles outlined.

Putting young people at the heart of policy is one of the key ambitions of the *National Youth Work Strategy 2014-2019*.² It is also enshrined in UNCRC Article 12 that specifies every child has the right to have a say in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously. It would be beneficial to clarify this further in the principles, highlighting that children and young people will be supported to shape and improve the education system. By centring young people in education, we felt that this would yield better results for young people, schools and communities.

It would be positive to see the general statement “empowering [...] practitioners” be expanded to explicitly reference the variety of sectors involved in young people’s learning including CLD, health, police and third sector.

4. *What changes to governance arrangements are required to support decisions about children’s learning and school life being taken at school level?*

These are matters to be resolved between local and central government.

5. *What services and support should be delivered by schools? What responsibilities should be devolved to teachers and headteachers to enable this? You may wish to provide examples of decisions currently taken by teachers or headteachers and decisions which cannot currently be made at school level.*

Members were clear that local services developed by local people through local decision making are needed and this in turn would feed into decision making at all other levels. There must be a clear line of sight from local to national decision making for young people.

Devolving further decision making powers to headteachers was seen as problematic unless guidelines were in place, which included the need for head teachers to consider non-formal approaches to learning. There was a feeling that headteachers were often the gatekeepers to schools and relationships between youth work and schools relied too heavily on personal relationships. Members appreciated the workload for headteachers may be a barrier to them working with the wider community but felt partnership should not be dependent on a single person and that it required emphasis and a place within any guidelines issues at a local/school level.

² YouthLink Scotland, *National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19*,
<http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/Index.asp?MainID=19180&UserID=1479>

We would reiterate our concerns that delegation of powers without proper guidance, guidelines and training could be counterproductive.

6. How can children, parents, communities, employers, colleges, universities and others play a stronger role in school life? What actions should be taken to support this?

As previously mentioned, youth work and the wider community are key players in young people's learning, therefore working with the wider community must be a priority for all schools. Developing community partnerships requires appropriate resources (staff time, financial input, space allocation) and as such, schools should be allocated resources in order to achieve this.

Greater inclusion of community partners like youth work in the formal education system as a right would ensure that complex societal issues such as poverty and equality are tackled with all available approaches and with a nuanced understanding of the needs of young people and families.

Members reported that it was often hard outcomes like qualifications that schools were looking for, taking priority over soft outcomes. This was seen as a significant barrier to youth work services being in partnerships with schools. Although some elements of youth work result in qualifications for young people, there is a need for schools to comprehend the other benefits of youth work. A shared understanding of the value of learning in all settings for young people would be of huge benefit to youth work playing a stronger role in school life.

When taking a whole school approach there is the opportunity for wider CLD to support the engagement of families in school life. Family engagement is a crucial element to raising attainment but schools are not often parent/carer friendly, particularly for parents/carers who themselves had a negative school experience.

7. How can the governance arrangements support more community-led early learning and childcare provision particularly in remote and rural areas?

8. How can effective collaboration amongst teachers and practitioners be further encouraged and incentivised?

Member practitioners spoke about utilising CPD training sessions to engage with teachers even when those sessions were not relevant or useful for the practitioners. This highlights how few opportunities there are currently for engagement between the two professions.

The shared language of Curriculum for Excellence was cited as a benefit for interacting with teachers. There was a suggestion of an annual meeting to bring together professionals working with young people in a local community that does not rely on existing partnerships, rather is open to new partners and those who have not been involved previously.

Members said that when head teachers and teachers were informed about the youth work offer in their area and understood the impact for young people, they were more likely to actively work with youth workers. We suggest that sessions on CLD practice could be included in the CPD diet for school and early years sectors.

9. What services and support functions could be provided more effectively through clusters of schools working together with partners?

It would be more cost effective to provide shared posts to develop the youth and community aspects of the learning programme.

10. What services or functions are best delivered at a regional level? This may include functions or services currently delivered at a local or a national level.

It is difficult to say but CPD, procurement and financial systems could figure in the equation.

11. What factors should be considered when establishing new educational regions?

We felt that although open to the idea of educational regions, there was not sufficient information provided to thoroughly understand how new educational regions might operate. It is unclear whether the new regions would be loose federations or something concrete established in legislation. Consideration should be given to the cost effectiveness of establishing new educational regions.

A new regional structure would have to facilitate existing successful partnerships between schools and the wider community. Members were encouraged to hear from Scottish Government colleagues³ that regions could be aligned by curriculum area and were not limited to geographical connections.

Examples were given about successful local youth alliances (cf. West Dunbartonshire⁴) through which CLD partners come together to co-ordinate the provision of youth services and to reduce duplication of work. Representatives from formal education are often not included in these groupings which members thought would make a positive difference in the co-ordination of life-wide learning for young people.

It should be considered if forming new groupings that corresponding national voluntary organisations may require subsequent reorganisation to link effectively to the new grouping. This would likely require additional financial resource.

12. What services or support functions should be delivered at a national level?

At a strategic level YouthLink Scotland and Education Scotland work to a Memorandum of Understanding but there is a recognition that the structure of Education Scotland is very difficult to navigate for outside agencies. Some members, in particular youth work practitioners, were familiar with the work of Education Scotland but unaware of how to influence or be involved in the work.

There were questions posed around the function of advising ministers and writing policy. If these were not done by Education Scotland, we would presume these roles would revert to the Scottish Government Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate.

³ At the YouthLink Scotland Joint Network meeting on 23rd November 2016

⁴ <http://www.wdcp.org.uk/key-information/youth-alliance/>

There was a strong feeling that the inspectorate function of Education Scotland should be a separate agency with a clear inspection cycle set out in advance whilst also allowing for necessary interventions. It was felt there should be a continued drive towards partnership working with the institutions it inspects, rather than enforcing changes on them.

Members agreed the current inspection model could be improved by centring young people's experiences and outcomes. Suggestions included shared indicators for schools, CLD providers and third sector organisations which contribute to young people's learning, for example measuring how good activities are for children/young people. Another aspect that members thought should be key in demonstrating good practice was partnership and close working with the community. It was universally felt that those schools achieving the best outcomes for young people were already working to these standards.

There was agreement that improvement frameworks should be set nationally. YouthLink Scotland believes partnership should be included as a key driver in the National Improvement Framework. Shared indicators for inspections of schools and youth work services were also spoken about, for example measuring how good activities are for children/young people in and out with schools.

Member organisations with an equalities focus were clear there should be improved emphasis on strengthening the implementation and promotion of the Equality Act 2010 within Scottish schools. This should be monitored and directed by the Scottish Government and reinforced by the inspection agency.

13. How should governance support teacher education and professional learning in order to build the professional capacity we need?

Members suggested that CPD within both education and CLD sectors should be opened up to the wider community. This would allow all professionals working with young people to have a shared understanding, as well as providing a vital space for discussion. It would also provide a useful framing of each professional as one element of a wider experience in young people's lives. Members thought this was important to demonstrate learning in all settings in line with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence. There are also areas wherein youth workers would be well placed to impart their best practice, for example in inclusion and equality.

YouthLink Scotland would like to see fairer distribution of resources for CPD across all learning professions. In order to meaningfully expand CPD opportunities across the learning sector, there needs to be strategic coordination and oversight. At the moment strategic CPD oversight is carried out by different national bodies aligned to sectors. There is a question about who takes this role on if it is expanded to include all professionals.

14. Should the funding formula for schools be guided by the principles that it should support excellence and equity, be fair, simple, transparent, predictable and deliver value for money? Should other principles be used to inform the design of the formula?

A challenging aspect of funding identified by members was the amount that schools had remaining to allocate to youth work to complement formal learning. The amount that each school had to allocate varied widely and this was seen as a problem by members. Members

emphasised the wish to see increased funding weighted to schools located in deprived areas.

There was, however, recognition from members that working differently to incorporate community partners does not always necessarily require more or different funding. It was suggested that some CPD for secondary schools could include the identification and practice of youth work approaches that would enhance their ability to work with more challenging pupils.

YouthLink Scotland also wants to highlight that there is a lack of funding for equalities mainstreaming work. Inclusion is built into youth work by its very nature and thus youth work organisations and practitioners are important partners for equality work in schools. Often this work requires additional funding and this has been lacking. When funding is available, a single issue approach is often taken, meaning that intersectional practices are not encouraged. Intersectional working would yield better results for all young people, particularly those experiencing multifaceted discrimination.

15. What further controls over funding should be devolved to school level?

There were some hesitations amongst members to devolve further funding to school level without further checks and balances in place.

There is a concern that if funding is devolved to school level, there may not be the holistic community oversight required to ensure equity for all young people. Currently local authorities have the strategic oversight and community mapping to assess what is required. They also have access to information from a range of services supporting young people that enable decisions to be made in the best interest of the young person.

16. How could the accountability arrangements for education be improved?

Members emphasises that CLD interventions were subject to the same inspections and scrutiny as the formal school curriculum.

For schools to successfully be held accountable by local communities there must be a shared understanding and buy in of the measures used to indicate success,

17. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the governance of education in Scotland?

There was a consensus that the definition of education offered in the consultation is far too narrow and not aligned with the principles underpinning Curriculum for Excellence.

YouthLink Scotland believes that young people's achievement and attainment cannot be measured through academic qualifications alone and there should be an improvement in the way this information is captured. Young people's involvement in youth work, achievement of youth awards, work experience, social action and volunteering all contribute to their achievement and personal development. Recent research has shown that a high majority of employers value soft skills as much as academic qualifications.⁵ The existing tools (Profiling and Insight) are not designed for young people to have ownership over their own records at

⁵ https://www.britishgas.co.uk/media/r/1419/job_candidates_lose_out_through_lack_of_soft_skill#

all stages and do not record the full picture of wider achievement. Certification of young people's wider achievement as standard for all leaving secondary education would be a positive step to recognising young people's development in school and in their community.

For further information please contact Emily Beever, Senior Development Officer (Policy and Research) ebeever@youthlinkscotland.org or 0131 313 6815.