



Full Time Social Action Review – Call for Evidence Submission to Youth Policy Team, UK Government

October 2017

About YouthLink Scotland

YouthLink Scotland is Scotland's 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. 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.

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.

Qu. 1 What experience have you had of full time social action/volunteering?

YouthLink Scotland is a strong advocate for young people volunteering in their communities (social action). We are interested in this review, in particular due to our strategic role within the #iwill campaign in Scotland. A UK-wide social action study¹ found that Young people who participated in social action in the past 12 months report higher levels of life satisfaction than those who have never done any social action. We have evidence which shows growing numbers of young volunteers in Scotland: with now more than half (52%) of all young people volunteering in some capacity². With nearly 1 in 5³ young people who volunteer doing so more than once each week. Volunteering has become part of youth culture in Scotland.

Whilst we do not directly provide full time volunteering experiences, we have within our membership organisations that do. Youth work is a voluntary activity, and many of our youth work organisations are reliant on dedicated and committed volunteers to provide meaningful experiences and opportunities to young people every day in Scotland. Some of our members broker volunteer experiences for young people with other third sector/charitable organisations – often on a full time

¹ Cabinet Office, (2016) *Youth Social Action in the UK –2016* <http://www.iwill.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/2016%20National%20Youth%20Social%20Action%20Survey%20-%20Headline%20findings.pdf>

² Volunteer Scotland, (2017) *Young People and Volunteering in Scotland 2016*, <http://www.volunteerscotland.net/policy-and-research/research/young-people-and-volunteering-in-scotland-2016/>

³ *ibid.*

basis as a route to employment. We also have members who facilitate full time volunteering opportunities overseas – including for gap year volunteering or through European Voluntary Service. We would recommend that the review considers within its scope the opportunities for full time volunteering in other countries, particularly through Erasmus+: we would urge you to read Calum’s story: <https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/stories/erasmus-volunteer-calum-barron>

Case Study – Project Scotland and PEEK, Glasgow

Ian is a former ProjectScotland volunteer and is now an Active Play Ranger at Possibilities for Each and Every Kid (PEEK) in Glasgow. PEEK support young people aged 5-25 living in the East End and North of Glasgow. Through the use of play and creative learning provision, they provide children and young people with the motivation, self-confidence and skills they need to change their lives.

At 15 Ian had to leave school due to ongoing problems. He was classed as an early leaver and therefore required by law to be in an ‘educational programme’ for a further three months. He began looking into various options and ended up volunteering with Save the Children through ProjectScotland.

Volunteering, and indeed youth work, was something he fell into by accident. “I always thought I would go and work in construction, that’s what everyone else was doing. But I started volunteering in the YES project working with young people and it just came naturally. I didn’t know I wanted to do this job until I started doing it.”

Through his volunteering placement, Ian realised he was a natural when it came to youth work and his confidence grew as he managed to achieve more, receiving positive feedback throughout. He now works with PEEK and has never looked back: “I wouldn’t be here if I hadn’t volunteered. I came here as a kid, so it’s great to be back and helping other young people. It just shows you how important this place is.”

Credit: Project Scotland <https://www.projectscotland.co.uk/volunteering-led-me-to-the-right-career/>

Qu 2. What impact does full time social action/volunteering have on young people and providers in comparison to part time social action/volunteering?

We know of no specific research which has studied the different outcomes of part time versus full time volunteering. However we have included in our evidence a case study from full time volunteering provider the Project Trust, an international development organisation based on the Isle of Coll that facilitate full time volunteering experiences for school leavers to undertake a ‘gap year’ before further/higher education or employment.

Case Study : Project Trust

Project Trust empowers young people to be confident, effective, creative, independent and resilient through a challenging volunteering experience overseas. Acting as responsible global citizens, Volunteers make a positive difference to their overseas host communities and share their learning and understanding when they return home. Our volunteering experience is open to all young people with the desire, motivation and aptitudes required to succeed.

We send 300 school-leavers overseas each year, allowing the volunteers to get to know our staff

team on a personal level. Through our staff's knowledge of each individual volunteer, our intensive pre-departure training course and our three-tier support system, our volunteers head overseas with the confidence that they are embarking on the adventure of a lifetime, with any assistance they need easily available. When volunteers return from their Gap Year they attend a debriefing course and join Project Trust's network of almost 7,000 Returned Volunteers. All our Gap Year placements are long-term, with volunteers staying in project for 12 or 8 months. All Project Trust volunteers have the opportunity to receive a Level Three Foundation Year in Global Volunteering and Citizenship, accredited by [One Awards](#), for completing our Volunteering programme.

“A long-term volunteering placement makes you grown into a whole new person and gives you experiences to treasure for a lifetime.” (Matthew, India Project Trust Volunteer)

“It gives you the chance to live a completely different lifestyle that you wouldn't normally be use to, to experience another culture, make friends and family and help to make a difference; something you just can't put into words.” (Holly, Chile Project Trust Volunteer)

Credit: Project Trust www.projecttrust.org.uk

Qu 3. What are the barriers to full time social action/volunteering opportunities for young people, and can you give examples of how these might be overcome?

The barriers to full time social action/volunteering we would assume are similar to those of part time social action/volunteering but exacerbated by the amount of time required to volunteer full time and how this is balanced with other commitments (personal, work, study, family, health) and the pressure to be able to secure some form of income to live.

The Volunteer Scotland⁴ research showed that the biggest influencers to volunteering were friends who also volunteered and career aspirations. It is our view that for full time social action/volunteering to be expanded and developed then the value of the experience must be understood better and better researched in a systematic way. We know that volunteering rates vary by social economic status⁵ – and young people who are living in the most deprived areas are least likely to volunteer. Therefore we must remove any class barriers to volunteering, and to level the playing field with regards to cost of volunteering. Without any income how can a young full time volunteer survive (with housing, food, energy, transport costs etc.) unless they are in a fortunate position to have family to provide financial support? We would be interested in the review giving consideration of models of full time volunteering which was also accredited or where the young person had routes towards qualification and could perhaps then continue to access Education Maintenance Allowance, Job Seekers Allowance or other social security supports, or bursaries. The relationship between social security and full time volunteering must be reviewed, as we know that young people have experienced a loss of income from social security when they engaged in volunteering activities which were greater than 16 hours each week, despite being unpaid and increasing their employability skills.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Qu 4. Should there be an expansion of full time social action/volunteering opportunities for young people, and do you have any evidence of unmet need or demand?

YouthLink Scotland believes that there is value in providing young people with an increased range of post-school choices for learning and personal development, which should include full time social action/volunteering. We would want to ensure that any route of full time volunteering was not viewed by organisations as an easy/cheap route for unpaid labour – and for it become problematic like unpaid internships have become as a route to exploit young people’s skills and talents. Full time volunteering should be a considered and respected option post-school and for young people who are navigating their way in to employment or enterprise. Consideration should be given to the support that organisations may require to support a full time volunteer and to meet their personal development needs and any additional supports that need to be put in place. Full time volunteering should be altruistic but there must also be equity of the opportunity and experience for young people of all socio-economic backgrounds.

Qu. 5 If you were to propose up to three things to enable more full time social action/volunteering, what would they be?

1. **Valuing Volunteering:** We believe that full time volunteering as a route to employment or continued learning/education should be better understood and valued. The benefits of full time volunteering should be researched and an evidence base shared with young people and their family, with employers, colleges, and universities.
2. **Financial Support:** We believe that for full time volunteering to be an equitable option and experience for all young people then financial support must be made available. Young people should not experience a loss in their income because they are full time volunteers. Full time volunteers should have access to subsidised transport or the volunteering organisation should meet these expenses.
3. **Organisational Support:** We believe that organisations must not exploit the skills and talents of young people as full time volunteers. They are not free labour and full time volunteers should not replace previously paid for roles within organisations. Organisations should be supported to enable their volunteers to be supported, developed and recognised.

*For more information please visit our website www.youthlinkscotland.org
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