



CONSULTATION ON MEASURING THE ATTAINMENT GAP AND MILESTONES TOWARDS CLOSING IT Response by YouthLink Scotland, November 2017

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, democratic participation, and youth work in schools.

This response has been informed by YouthLink Scotland members, following a membership discussion session in early November 2017. The response may not reflect the view of individual members of YouthLink Scotland.

Questions

Q1: Have we based these proposals on the right principles?

YouthLink Scotland agrees and support some of the principles set out in the consultation document; namely the focus, credibility of measures, avoiding perverse incentives, and use of multiple measures. We have a number of concerns about the limitations of some of the other principles. In particular we are concerned about:

- The use of SIMD as the organiser of the differentials in attainment – we believe that SIMD is being used in the absence of a more appropriate organiser which would reflect individual experiences and circumstances in addition to poverty/income/deprivation. For example SIMD does not sufficiently account or

accommodate for young people experiencing poverty but living in more affluent areas. An attainment gap which is experience related (rather than poverty related) will not be captured, measured or closed using SIMD. For example: Care Experienced Young People; Young Carers; Young people with additional support needs: Young people affected by family imprisonment; young gypsy travellers. We would welcome further exploration of a new organiser which was reflective of the circumstance of individual children and young people. However we do agree with the consultation paper that SIMD is preferable to the use of FSM as a principle.

- Stopping measuring the gap at 18 – we would welcome the extension of this principle to age 25, particularly for care experienced young people. Extending the age of the measures beyond 18 would allow for progress to be tracked for young people who may re-engage with learning through non traditional routes, such as youth work, volunteering or enterprise.
- Whilst it is pragmatic to seek an approach which is ‘simple to measure and report’, it is our belief that that this should be an opportunity to be ambitious and to work collectively to develop appropriate and perhaps complex measures and indicators which are more reflective of a holistic education system. For example this could include youth awards, skills for life and work, self-reported measures of wellbeing at more regular intervals.

Q2: Do you agree with having a basket of key measures to assess the progress made?

YouthLink Scotland supports the principle of having a basket of multiple measures to assess progress. We would like to have measures for literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing equally included i.e. to have the same number of measures for each area where we are trying to close the gap; it would also be beneficial to have measures at more regular age/stage milestones; and measures that can be gathered beyond school (non-formal learning, and post-16 alternative provisions).

Q3: Are the proposed key measures the right ones?

We are concerned that the key measures, as shown in Table 1, do not adequately address or measure the gap in health and wellbeing; as the only measure of wellbeing happens in the early years.

The measures of literacy and numeracy seem appropriate, however we do not want this to be a missed opportunity to add additional measures which would provide a truer picture of young people’s learning experience as set out in the principles and ethos of Curriculum for Excellence – the current measures do not adequately the entirety of the learning experience beyond school (post and after-school).

Young people (16+) who are no longer on the school role can still be achieving and attaining through other routes – their achievements will not be included in the measures up to age 18.

Q4: Will this approach avoid the introduction of perverse incentives?

There is concern amongst our sector that this approach may create a culture of ‘what gets

measured gets done'. This is particularly concerning as the current measures do not give equal value to health and wellbeing as they do to literacy and numeracy. This could in turn mean that efforts to close the gap prioritise literacy and numeracy over health and wellbeing – which is counter to the principles of the National Improvement Framework and Curriculum for Excellence.

Q5: Is 3rd level the right measure to use of attainment at S3?

No Response

Q6: Does the use of SCQF levels reflect a sound approach to measuring senior phase attainment? Are there other options such as Insight tariff points?

If the task is to measure attainment with respect to formalised learning only, SCQF levels may be as good a measure as any. The consultation document conflates and confuses the use of the terms 'attainment' and 'achievement'. These are not the same thing. SCQF levels reflect attainment insofar as the subject matter/qualification has been 'levelled'. They do not, however, fully embrace the 'wider achievement' of young people as envisaged by Curriculum for Excellence, which can include e.g. the attainment of non-levelled youth awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award / Queen's Scout Award; development of leadership skills through volunteering / community action / youth awards; employability skills developed through e.g. youth awards and work experience.

Insight only captures formal learning and levelled awards. For an award to be included in Insight it must already be rated on the SCQF. Thus it similarly excludes the 'wider achievements' of many young people as outlined above. It should be noted that Insight only captures attainment secured within Senior Phase. It does not include pre-senior phase attainment, and thus does not necessarily reflect the highest level of 'qualifications achieved by young people at the point which they leave school'.

Where 'wider achievement' awards are included on Insight, there remains a concern over equity between formal and ungraded awards. The latter includes youth awards levelled on the SCQF, which are acknowledged to help young people develop the 'soft skills' that employers identify as important to their (future) workforce. However, the tariff points attributed to such awards can be significantly lower than those attributed to more academic learning and so create a perverse incentive that can result in lower tariff options being closed off to young people, even when these might present more suitable learning pathways. Choosing Insight tariff points as a measure of attainment could reinforce such an approach.

Whilst acknowledging the development challenge it would present, a measurement of attainment that includes 'wider achievement' in its fullest sense would better reflect the learner journeys of all young people and be more likely to support personalisation of learning. The fact that it is challenging should not deter you from a commitment to pursue such an approach.

Q7: How best we can give more meaning/clarity to the terms "SCQF 5" and "SCQF 6" so they are accessible to all?

SCQF levels are understood by those familiar with accreditation and qualifications, however we have anecdotal evidence that they are not widely understood by employers or parents. If SCQF levels are to be the measure of choice going forward then we would support the principle that further awareness-raising of the terms and the framework more widely is

understood by a range of key stakeholders (including children and young people). It should also be recognised that not all achievements are, can or should be rated using the SCQF framework as outlined in Question 6.

Q8: Are these the right sub-measures? Are there others that should be included?

As in our response to Question 2, it our view that the sub-measures should reflect the three areas (literacy, numeracy, wellbeing) in equal balance and should be at more regular age/stage intervals. We would also view the sub-measures as a space where further development to make efforts to measure and develop indicators of more complex or non-traditional measures could take place going forward. This should be an opportunity to strive to improve our data sets and measures - including measuring what is harder to count. Additional measures the youth work sector would like to see included are:

- S5/S6 'staying on rate' – young people who are low attaining are being encouraged out of the school system and then their data/learning gap will not be measured as they are out with the school role.
- Wider Achievement indicator – although this is might be more challenging this would be a good opportunity to set the challenge to develop a useful and meaningful measure (see Question 6).
- New measures of self-reported health and wellbeing at more regular intervals; particularly at times of transition. This could also include attitudinal indicators about engagement and enjoyment of school; participation in non-formal learning activities in the wider community.
- Need to set a threshold for attendance; particularly when young people are on individualised timetables – 100% attendance could be given for as little as 1 learning day each week.

Q9: Is the use of stretch aims, by SIMD quintile, the right way to set milestones?

YouthLink Scotland supports the use of Stretch Aims as a methodology for measuring improvement. As in our response to Question 1 we are concerned about the use of SIMD as the organiser due to its limitations. However until a more appropriate index which accounts of individual experience and circumstances is developed then SIMD milestones would be acceptable.

Q10: Are the stretch aims set at the right level?

It was the view of the youth work sector who attended our session that the stretch aims should be more ambitious for all young people including those in the highest SIMD areas – especially by 2024; and that this could be achieved by greater recognition and investment in to non-formal or traditional routes to attainment. Youth work organisations all over Scotland are working with innovative approaches to close the gap – and it is our belief that systematic investment, research and evaluation in to their methods, impact and outcomes would help Scotland close the gap more quickly.