

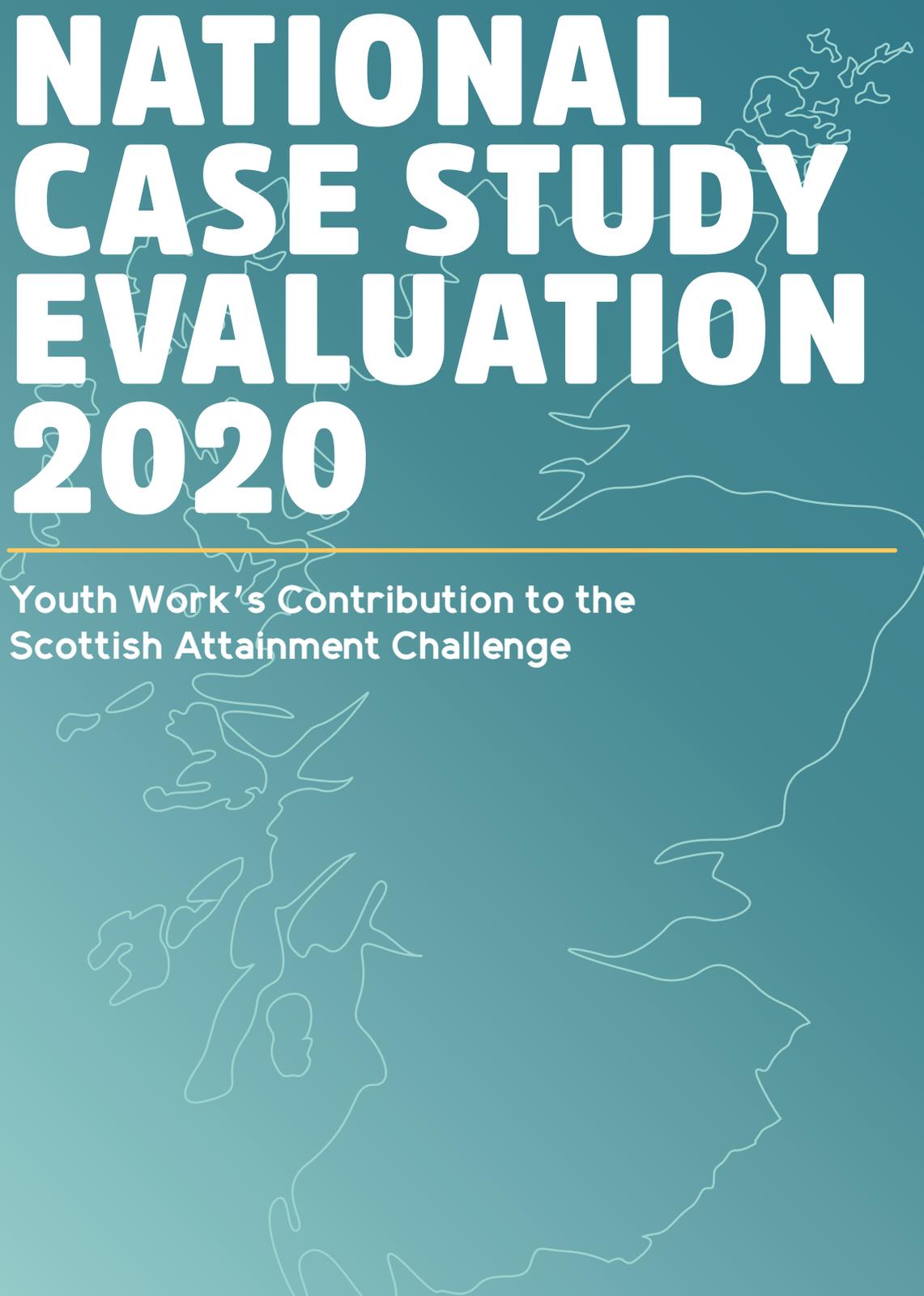
**YouthLink Scotland**

---

# NATIONAL CASE STUDY EVALUATION 2020

---

**Youth Work's Contribution to the  
Scottish Attainment Challenge**



# Youth Work and Attainment

Youth work - taking place in schools and within the wider school community – is integral to the design and delivery of Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence, and plays an important role in the learner journey for many young people in Scotland. Youth work complements the formal curriculum, creating more flexibility and choice for young people and enabling their development as confident, successful learners.

Alongside colleagues across Scottish education, the youth work sector is committed to tackling the Scottish Attainment Challenge and reducing the impact of poverty on educational outcomes for young people. The current public health crisis has reinforced the need to redouble efforts to address the inequalities that still hamper the prospects of too many of Scotland’s young people.

## Purpose of National Case Study Evaluation

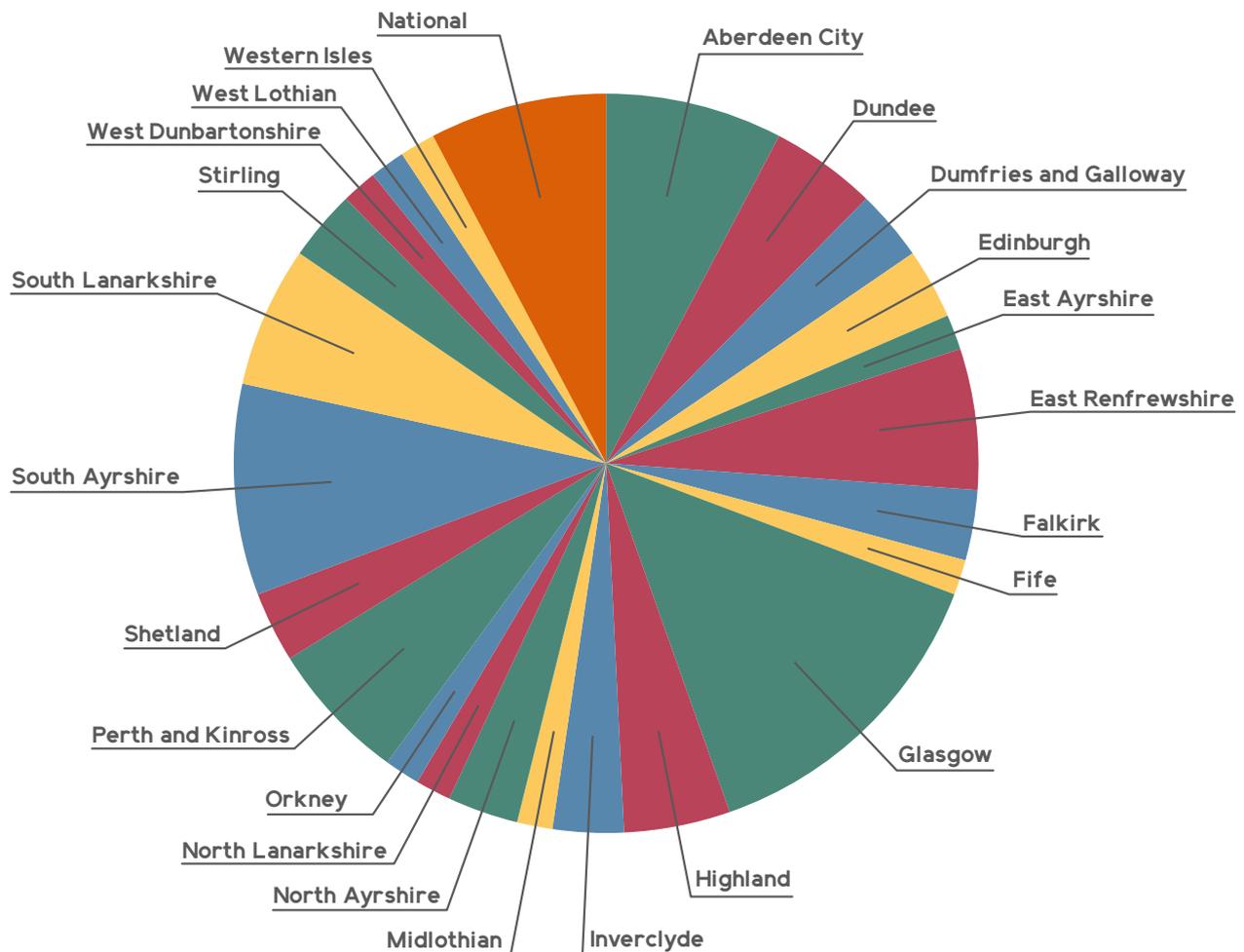
At this critical time for education renewal, YouthLink Scotland’s Youth Work and Schools Partnerships team, funded by the Scottish Government as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, has undertaken a national case study evaluation to review the impact of a cross-section of youth work programmes in Scotland over the last 12 months - including projects delivered in the lockdown period. Our aim was to build a rich picture of the youth work sector’s current contribution to attainment - to evidence what is working, and to inform priorities for support and capacity-building as we move forward.

## Participating Organisations

Youth work organisations submitted case studies of projects that they had delivered over the last 12 months, including a brief description of the project purpose, approach and outcomes achieved. They also outlined the evaluation methods they used to measure outcomes, and the role of young people and other stakeholders in the evaluation process.

- The research encompasses 67 case studies from 23 local authorities.
- 47 case studies relate to work carried out by local authority youth work teams.
- 20 case studies relate to work carried out by voluntary sector youth organisations, of which 5 are national organisations.
- Individual **case studies** from the evaluation can be found on our website here.

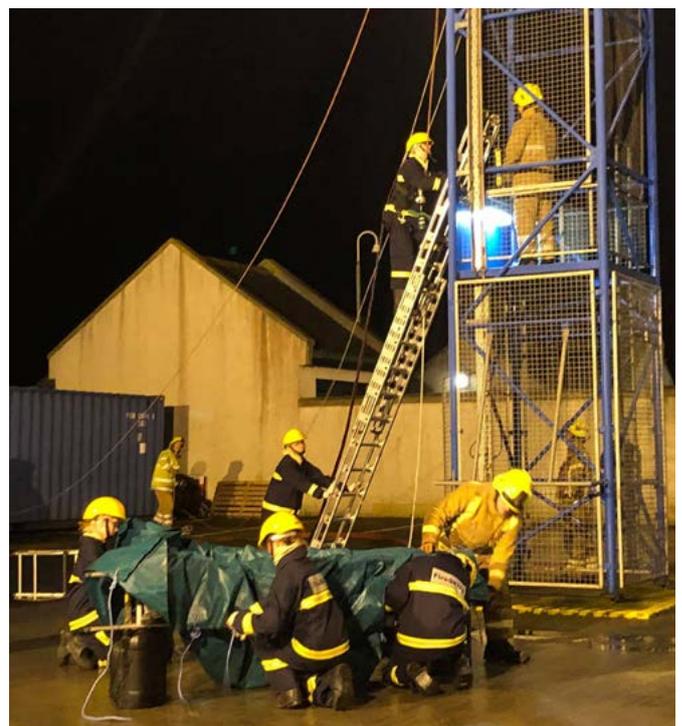
## Geographical Distribution Of Projects



## Participating Young People

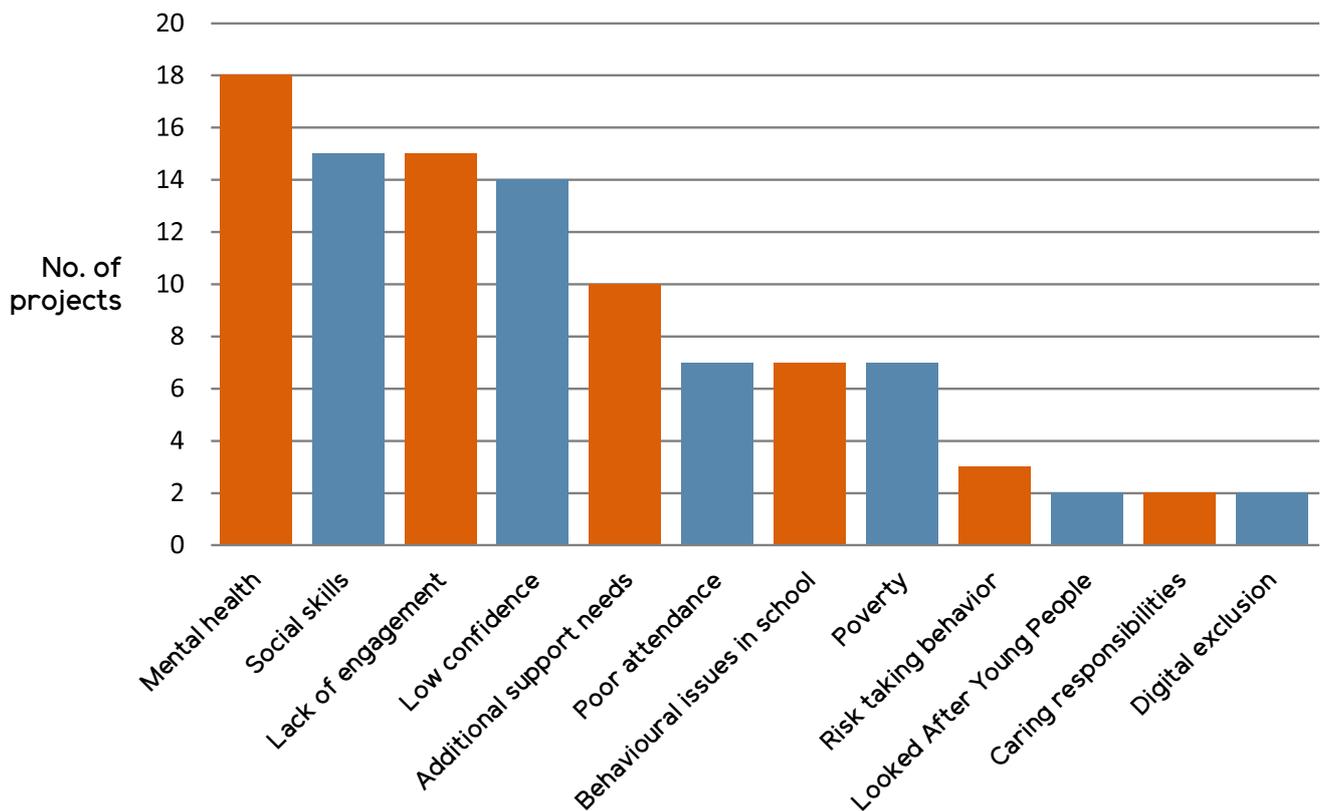
Nearly 3000 young people were involved in the projects featured in the National Case Study Evaluation. Seventeen per cent of participating young people were aged 8-11, 43% were aged 12-15 and 40% were aged 16+.

Where SIMD data was gathered (in nearly two thirds of the projects) 60% of participating young people were reported to live in SIMD deciles 1 & 2. In almost all of the projects, youth workers highlighted that some or all of the young people they worked with faced barriers to learning.



## Barriers to learning

The chart below shows the ten most common barriers to learning experienced by young people participating in the projects featured in the case study evaluation, based on feedback from youth workers. In reality, many of these barriers are interrelated.



## Outcomes for young people

We asked youth work organisations to tell us which outcomes relating to attainment they measured on the programmes, and the percentage of young people who made progress in relation to each of these outcomes.

The most frequently measured outcomes were skills development and health and wellbeing in 94% and 91% of projects respectively. The least frequently measured outcomes were literacy and numeracy and school attendance in 25% and 41% of projects respectively. Positive destinations were only measured in a small subset of projects involving young people aged 16+.



86%  
↑

of young people improved their health and wellbeing.

85%  
↑

of young people developed their skills.

77%  
↑

of young people became more engaged in learning.

72%  
↑

of young people took steps to overcome barriers to learning.

66%  
↑

of young people built skills and confidence to transition into employment.

65%  
↑

of young people improved their literacy and numeracy.

53%  
↑

of young people moved on to sustainable positive destinations\*.

44%  
↑

of young people made improvements in school attendance\*.

\* The nature of the projects in the sample included did not always allow improvements in school attendance or transitions to positive destinations to be precisely measured.

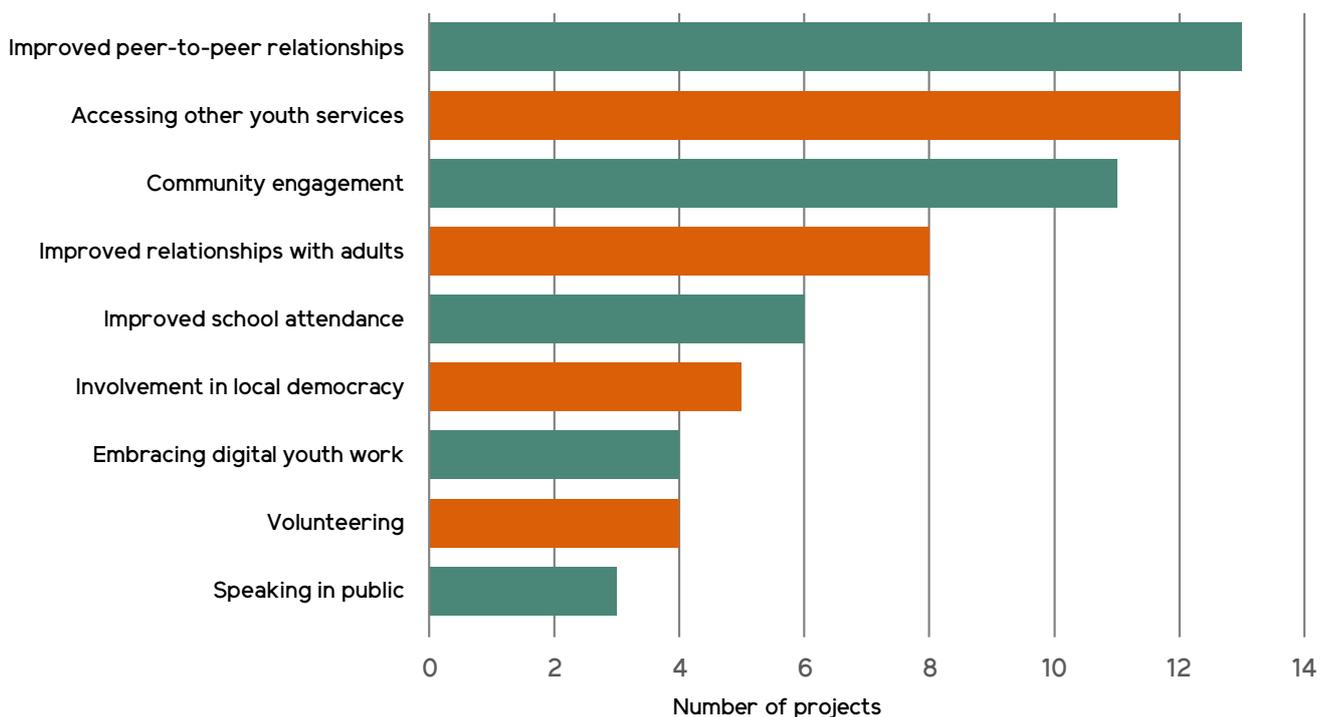
### Youth work awards:

64% of the projects in the study offered young people opportunities to gain accredited youth work awards or qualifications. 1080 young people in the sample group attained at least one accredited youth work award or SCQF qualification through their involvement in youth work.



## Unintended Outcomes for Young People

Youth workers also noted a range of outcomes that they did not set out to measure, but that became evident as young people engaged in youth work programmes – the ten most commonly reported ‘unintended’ outcomes are as follows:



## Reflections of Young People, Teachers and Parents

As well as providing numerical data and information about their evaluation process, youth work organisations shared young people's reflections on their learning experiences. Viewed collectively, the young people's feedback offers some thought-provoking perspectives on youth work approaches to support achievement and attainment. Sometimes their views are echoed by teachers and parents too:

### Young people value the conditions that youth work creates for learning

#### Safe space to grow

"I really liked that we didn't argue."

"I really liked [that] you don't judge me and accept me."

"I have had the opportunity to feel calm in the group."

"Being able to talk in the comfort of my own home has made talking a lot easier."

Parents notice this too:

'Summer sessions have gave [my daughter] back that safe place that all children need'

#### A different approach

"Everyone contributes their ideas and everyone's heard equally; it's just amazing."

"Being treated as an equal allowed me the opportunity to take part in a programme and enjoy it."

"I liked how I could choose the things that interested me to learn."

#### Space to build social skills - with peers, siblings and adults

"I enjoyed having time to myself with my brother."

"It was really good to see my friends."

"I created friendships I didn't think I would."

"I have made new friends and learned new skills. I can speak now to people I didn't know and when I go to college I will feel more confident."

Teachers affirm this too:

"Social skills are a huge part of the programme. It is really important to learn to work together through collaboration and communication and a sense of achieving something together is a wonderful outcome."

"Pupils have shown kindness, looking out for people they normally wouldn't be around."

"The young people improved their social skills and tolerance level towards others in the group that they might have been in conflict with before."

## Youth work experiences help to build readiness to learn in school

"I am now good at planning my work and identifying what needs done first. I'm not worried about school anymore."

"I've improved my attention span not just in the group but in other classes"

"I feel more confident working with others and focusing in class."

"I've improved my research skills."

"Ever since I started breakfast club I have been able to concentrate more in class."

Teachers remark on this too:

"Individual children from my class who attended Holiday Matters came back to school really positive, motivated and ready to learn – they wanted to share their Holiday Matters experience."

And parents notice a shift in engagement:

"Initially he was quite reluctant to do the work, however he now sees the benefit and engages much more. Previously he at times got frustrated. Now, rather than getting angry he asks for help. He is much more motivated."

"I have noticed a great change in [my son's] attitude to learning."

## Youth work helps to build positive relationships that provide a secure basis for learning

Alongside outcomes directly related to attainment, youth workers notice young people improve peer-to-peer relationships and relationships with adults (teachers and youth workers) as a result of participating in youth work. Youth work organisations and teachers reported improved relationships with families too.

"I trusted [my youth worker] at the start, but not that well and by the end I feel she is like my second mum and can talk to her like I would my mum."

"From completing this programme I have taken these skills home which has led to a better home environment as I can help out my Dad around the house more – we have cooking competitions and have a better relationship now."

"Home is a calmer happier place now."

## The youth work approach nurtures mental health

"I can cope with situations better now. The sessions have made me feel calmer and I have got some useful coping strategies."

"The mental health champions group gave me the chance to discuss my feelings with other individuals that felt the same, this made me feel I wasn't alone. It also made me feel part of a group which made my school experience a lot better."

"It helps me to open up a lot."

"I think [now] it's ok to put yourself first sometimes, it's OK to say how I feel and it's OK to have negative emotions because they are part of your entire life. These lessons are ones I am going to carry with me."

"I am more able to identify when I feel stressed or overwhelmed and how to deal with it."

## Youth work experiences grow young people confidence and develop their skills and resilience

### Building confidence

"The staff really listen and it made me more confident."

"I feel more confident coming to the group and within myself."

"I have built up more confidence and talk to people a bit and express my feelings a bit better than I did before."

"I feel more confident communicating in groups and in games."

#### Parents and teachers notice this too:

"Since he started his activity agreement he has become more confident... before he was quite isolated in his room. He was quite shy due to his anxiety and was nervous about his literacy skills and talking to people – now after this he has something he's excited about – he talks about it a lot and is really passionate about it."

"Pupils were learning valuable skills and it is visible that their confidence has grown in the body of the school."

"The experience has given her the confidence to pursue college, apply, make the decision to leave school and follow a career path."

"Confidence levels improved immensely. They all took part in all activities even if they were apprehensive or reluctant beforehand."

### Leading change

"We had so much fun while learning about our society and what we can do to help. The most amazing thing being to make a change."

"Everything we did was so fun and when the plans were taken forward you could really tell the difference!"

### Relating learning to life – and thinking about the future

"I really liked being part of the pupil focus group that made the film...It made me think about what I want to do in the future."

"It was so...valuable. There is so much to learn and it has been very useful with my day-to-day life."

"I realised what I really want to do with my life!"

"I'm a totally new person now. I realise have to do well at school if I want a good job in the future."

#### Teachers value this too:

"This was all about learning in a real life setting...supported by experts...we saw such a difference in our pupils."

"The project brings learning into the local community and by making the learning practical allows the learner to see real world applications."

### Learning new skills and resilience

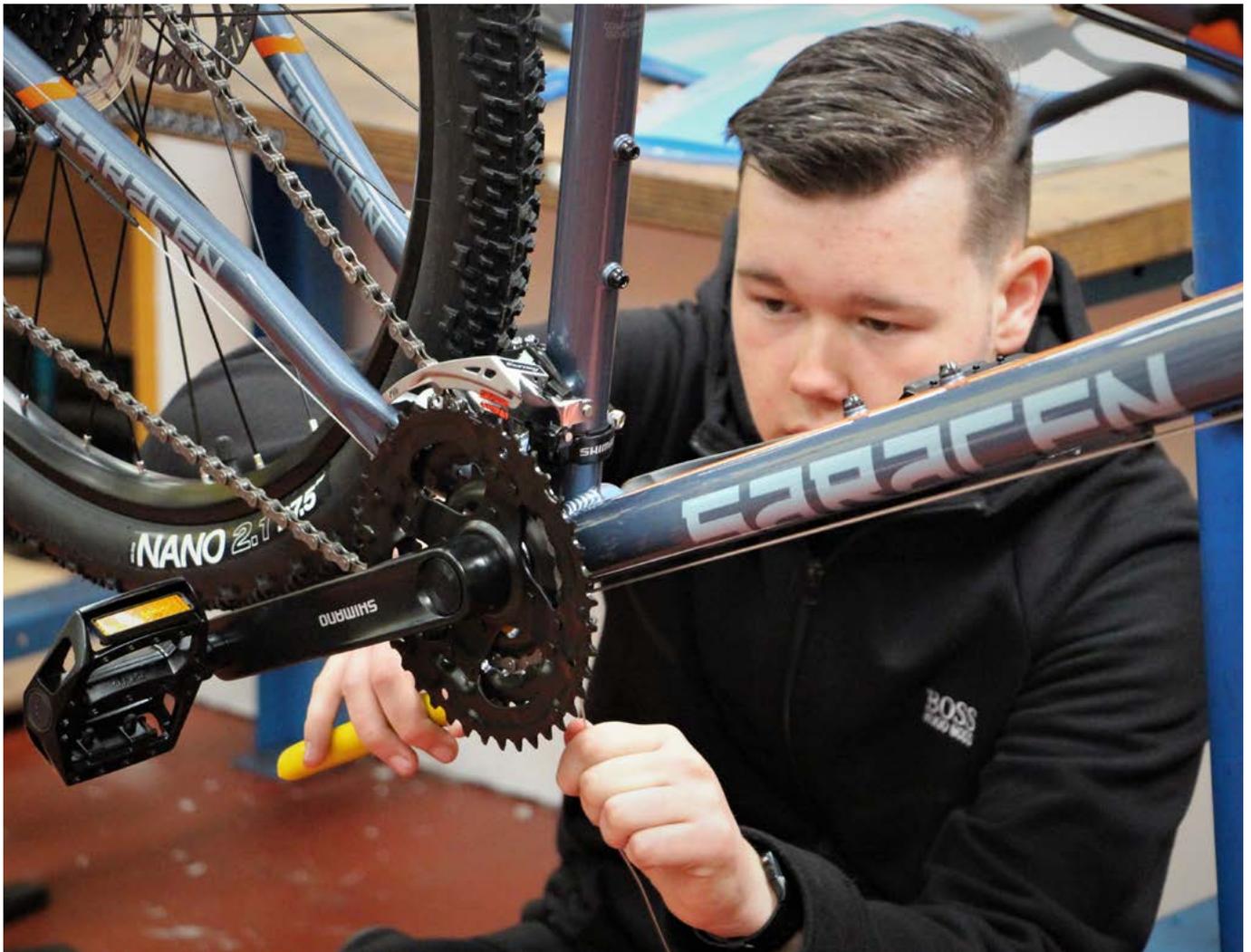
"I learned to take everyone's opinion into consideration as it might be the best way."

"I got to learn new skills you don't normally get the chance to do."

"I enjoyed working outside my boundaries doing things I normally wouldn't...!! Felt! Amazing!"

"I am less nervous about starting new things and I have learned that coming out of my comfort zone can be the best thing."

"I personally learned more about being a leader – what it meant and how to improve as one. I would love to keep improving as well next year, with the new first years!"



## Youth work awards motivate young people to continue learning

"I am going to get involved in new things now. I have done my John Muir and Dynamic Youth Award, joined new groups and got involved in online projects. I hope to volunteer soon."

"I got a certificate for Princes Trust Development and Employability Award and I would not have got that if I did not come to school... I went from not coming into school at all to like coming in every day mostly."

"It's good to be recognised for the work we carried out and it gave me confidence."

"I did a Bronze Youth Achievement Award... I have achieved more than just school work and I'm proud with my folder."

"It has been good to take part in a fun programme like StreetwYze and get a qualification from my own work."

"It's made me feel like I've actually achieved something. It's made me want to do better in school."

## What teachers value about youth work's unique contribution to attainment.

### ***The diverse range of learning opportunities youth workers can offer – creating alternative pathways for young people***

"The YFCL approach is a really good fit... The range of programmes and supports on offer has already enhanced the school... and experiences for the kids are becoming richer and more diverse as this service develops."

"They [the youth work team] have delivered a resilience programme which has been effective in supporting schools to deliver an alternative curriculum for a targeted group of children. The team built up strong positive relationships with children and families which was pivotal in raising self-esteem and self-worth. This then impacted positively on their engagement in class which led to raised attainment."

### ***The trust relationships youth workers build with young people families which in turn supports learning***

"G was a school refuser who had real anxiety over attending school and classes. Due to the trusting relationship [the youth worker] developed with G, she supported her all the way through her work placement. Had it not been for this strong support I don't think G would have attended. G was kept on at the [work placement] for a longer term due to her positive experience and this in turn increased her attendance at school. She is now staying on for S5... I am now confident she will go on to further education / training after school."

"Liaison between EAL teachers and Youth Development Workers has been crucial... supporting both primary and secondary Syrian New Scots with appropriate English Language learning materials and following this up when there have been cases of non-activity or pupils needing additional support."

### ***Youth workers' expertise in discovering the root causes of challenging behaviour in school and working collaboratively to address this***

"Noticed an improvement in young person's attitude... she was far less confrontational and more responsive to feedback. She also engaged in restorative dialogues in a much more positive way."

### ***Youth workers' support to create a more inclusive and empowered school community***

Many pupils that before perhaps didn't feel they had a voice now have one and [the school] is more inclusive for all."

"Youth work has been really transformative for the school as we develop wider opportunities, pupil voice and LGBT+ education in our school improvement planning."

### ***The impact of the youth work approach and values on learning ethos***

"Youth workers bring strong local networks and important knowledge of young people and their families. I value their flexibility and creativity, always bringing 'what ifs' to the table. More than anything, however, youth workers model an impressive kind of resilience in their support of young people – especially those whose behaviours are challenging. A bad day can be a bad day, but they never let that define a young person, or their relationship with them."



## Partnerships with Schools

YouthLink Scotland's Youth Work and Schools Partnerships team aims to strengthen collaboration between the youth work sector and formal education. The research has offered some helpful insight here too:

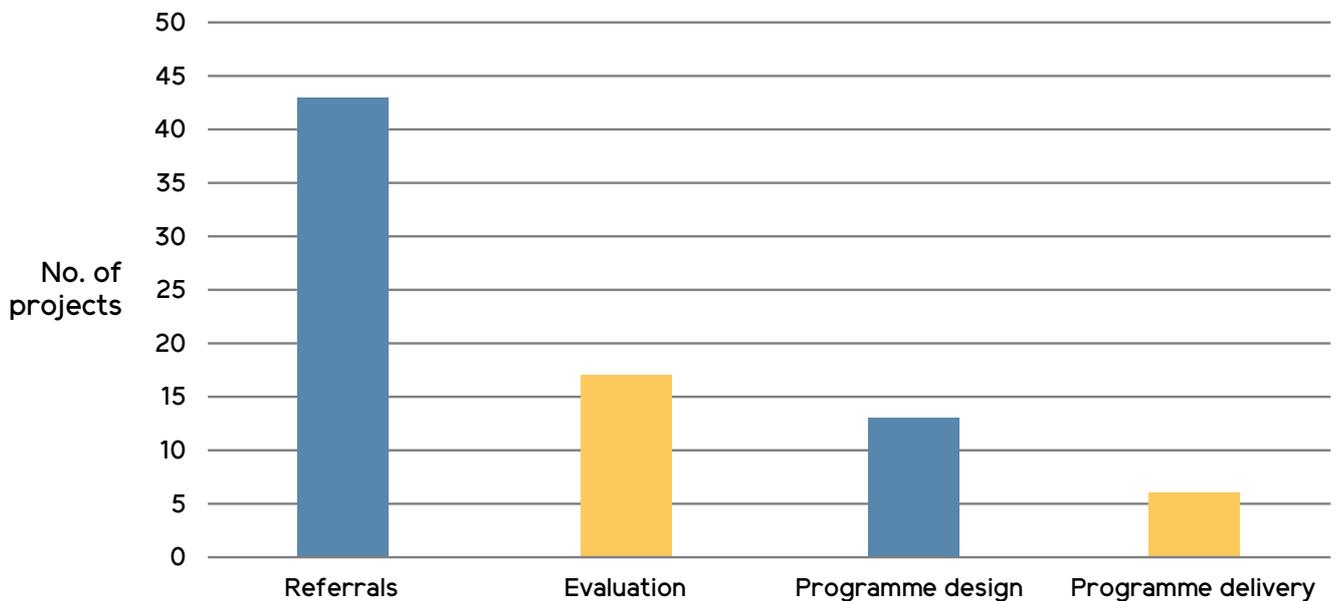
Sixty four per cent of the projects submitted were delivered in partnership with schools, but only 28% of these were delivered exclusively in schools. The rest of the projects in the sample offered learning opportunities in the community, outdoors or through 'learning away' on residential programmes. It's clear from feedback that teachers and young people understand the benefit of accessing learning in a different environment, as these reflections from a young person and a Depute Head Teacher in Edinburgh highlight:

"I stopped attending classes as early as second year, didn't think school was for me and wasn't getting on with my teachers. I was offered the chance to go to 'Give it a Go' at Valley Park. I used to go to clubs there when I was a kid so I thought I would see what it was like. I felt so much better going to the centre. It was kind of like I was in control and I liked that."

"Being located at Valley Park community centre is a massive positive for the school because the young people know the centre and know the staff members who work there. This takes away...anxiety from the pupils and increases their ability to engage in the programme. Many of the pupils who attend Give it a Go are school refusers or pupils with very low attendance. It is testament to the staff and the range of activities that the same pupils who find it so difficult to attend school will often attend Give it a Go on a very regular basis and often go to the centre on other days because they enjoy it so much."

## Collaborative Activity with Schools

The nature of partnership also varies from school to school. The chart below shows that collaboration is most often focussed on recruitment and referrals for projects.



Around 30% of the youth work programmes included in this study were funded / part funded by schools. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there was a strong correlation between deeper partnership working and funding arrangements. In this sample of projects, schools who fully / partially fund youth work projects were more likely to have engaged in co-design and joint evaluation.





## Questions Raised by the National Case Study Evaluation

The National Case Study Evaluation is not an end in itself, but a starting point for further exploration:

- It's clear that youth work programmes with a focus on literacy and numeracy can enable young people to make significant progress. However, literacy and numeracy are much less frequently a focus than, for example, health and wellbeing. Is there more that youth work could be doing to support young people in these crucial curriculum areas? Is there a need to build more confidence and capacity in the sector to develop these approaches, and share good practice?
- Joint evaluation of programmes with schools is still the exception rather than the rule – 25% of projects took a collaborative approach to evaluation. How can we better support a more integrated approach to collaboration, where appropriate? What gets in the way of doing this at the moment?
- Thirty per cent of the youth work programmes in this study are funded, at least in part, by schools. How can we continue to build more awareness of the value of youth work across the formal education sector and the contribution that it can make in terms of Interventions for Equity, inclusion and engaging learner voice?
- Continuing to widen access to accredited youth work awards and qualifications is clearly important – young people value and are motivated by these. How can this best be achieved?
- It's noticeable that teachers who work directly with youth workers value the difference they bring. How can we create more opportunities for teachers and youth workers to work alongside and learn from one another? Where can we create more opportunities for collaborative enquiry? Could we design experiential learning experiences involving students of Community Education and Initial Teacher Education?
- Youth work creates opportunities for leadership and citizenship – how can we more effectively measure the value of these in relation to attainment?

This National Case Study evaluation is not a comprehensive review of youth work's contribution to the poverty-related Attainment Challenge in Scotland. However, as a snapshot of the diversity, creativity and effectiveness of the opportunities that the sector provides, as it works alongside young people, families and formal educators to support learning, it makes a compelling case for youth work as a key partner in that endeavour.



## Acknowledgements

With thanks to the following organisations who contributed to the case study evaluation. For more information about YouthLink Scotland's Youth Work and Schools Partnerships programme or to read some of the individual case studies that relate to this study, please visit our [website](#).

### Youth work teams in:

Aberdeen City Council  
Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar  
Dumfries and Galloway Council  
Dundee City Council  
East Ayrshire Council  
East Renfrewshire Council  
City of Edinburgh Council  
Falkirk Council  
Glasgow Life  
Highlife Highland  
Inverclyde Council  
North Ayrshire Council  
North Lanarkshire Council  
Orkney Council  
Perth and Kinross Council  
Shetland Islands Council  
South Ayrshire Council  
South Lanarkshire Council  
Stirling Council  
West Dunbartonshire Council  
West Lothian Council

### And

Alternatives Dundee Youth  
British Red Cross  
Castlemilk Youth Complex  
Dunedin Canmore Youth Projects  
FARE Scotland  
Jack Kane Community Centre  
Light Up Learning  
Lochalsh Youth Community Trust  
Mark Scott Leadership for Life Award  
Outward Bound Trust  
PKAVS  
The Corner Dundee  
The Sound Lab  
Venture Scotland  
Venture Trust  
Yipworld  
YMCA Kirkcaldy



YouthLink Scotland, Rosebery House, 9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5EZ

T: 0131 313 2488 E: [info@youthlinkscotland.org](mailto:info@youthlinkscotland.org) W: [www.youthlinkscotland.org](http://www.youthlinkscotland.org)

YouthLink Scotland is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in Scotland No: 164547. Charity Ref: SC003923