



Introduction

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation, representing over 100 regional and national youth organisations from the voluntary and statutory sectors. We champion the role and value of youth work and represent the interests and aspirations of 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 reaches 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, and youth work recognises the young person and the youth worker as partners in a learning process.

While the activities, venues, and approaches utilised to deliver youth work are varied, including youth clubs, youth projects, specialist or targeted provision, social activism, outdoor learning, awards programmes, uniformed organisations, and democratic participation – youth work in all its forms provides fundamental support to young people across the length and breadth of Scotland.

YouthLink Scotland is responding to the Scottish Funding Council call for Evidence on A Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in Further and Higher Education. However, we support the submission made by Community Learning and Development Standards Council Scotland (CLDSC).

As integral partners in the Scottish education and skills system, the youth work sector works collaboratively with schools, employers and colleges to best support the needs of learners and communities. YouthLink Scotland believes that such a collaborative response will be essential to ensure tertiary education continues to respond to people and communities and provides the skills required to promote economic recovery.

What do you think works well in the current further and higher education arrangements that we should keep in order to secure Scotland's inclusive social and economic recovery from the current pandemic? How can we best preserve and strengthen those features of education, research and innovation in Scotland that we most prize, in a very challenging funding environment?

A focus on widening access, including arrangements for care-experienced students, those with disabilities and students from the lowest SIMD data zones and BAME communities, is likely to be increasingly important in recovery from the current pandemic. Greater flexibility in delivery, including increased community-based youth work provision and measures to address digital exclusion should be considered, to ensure that learners in deprived and rural communities have equal opportunity to access learning.

It is noted that a quarter of school leavers go into FE. An additional and often more vulnerable cohort of young people will progress to FE following participation in post-school employability support through youth work (including No One Left Behind programmes). The partnership between post-school employability support and colleges generally works well. This provides learning opportunities, progression routes and helps prepare young people for the transition to college. Learning from these good practice examples should be shared to strengthen a cohesive and connected tertiary education eco-system.

In January 2020, YouthLink Scotland, Northern Star, University of Edinburgh and Dumfries and Galloway Council published a report examining the Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Dumfries and Galloway¹. This study collected 100 co-authored significant change stories from young people and youth workers. These stories revealed the importance of universal youth work to young people and its value in supporting young people to develop and grow in the following areas – confidence and self-esteem, skills development, equality and inclusion, realising potential, broadening horizons, improving health and wellbeing and increased readiness for the employment market.

68% of young people were able to clearly describe the progression routes open to them with one third of young people ending up in a positive destination, such as employment, through their engagement with universal youth work. A number of young people credit the youth work intervention for securing successful employment and finding their chosen career path.

It can be seen youth workers develop trusting relationships with young people. Therefore, greater partnership working and collaboration with youth work in both Local Authority and Voluntary sector, in delivering student support, could strengthen this aspect of college. A youth work curriculum delivered by CLD practitioners

¹ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/4312/final-report-dg-community-based-universal-youth-work.pdf>

enables schools to support the progression of young people who they would otherwise not be able to engage. The same approach should be adopted by colleges in order to improve retention and completion.

What do you think colleges, universities and specialist institutions should stop doing, or do differently, in order to contribute effectively to an inclusive social and economic recovery? (You may wish to comment on teaching and skills development, sectoral and employer needs and employability, research, innovation and knowledge exchange, widening access and equalities issues).

The SFC's briefing note for this Review states that lifelong learning and learners' interests should remain central. To achieve this, communities and the people who are part of them, must play a greater role in shaping outcomes and provision, alongside employers and local authorities. This would strengthen the role of colleges and universities as civic anchors.

One of the drivers for this Review is greater systemic articulation between colleges and universities, and credit for prior learning. The youth work sector has encouraged educators to look differently at the shape of the learner journey and employers to give more consideration to skills and achievements derived from a much broader range of experiences than those of the formal curriculum. The Review affords an opportunity for the tertiary education sector to place greater value on the learning and skills developed through wider learning and personal achievement, rather than formal qualifications alone.

As stated above, YouthLink Scotland believes that there is much to be gained from partnership with and learning from successful youth work approaches. A youth work curriculum delivered by CLD practitioners enables schools to support the progression of young people who they would otherwise not be able to engage. This is especially important as COVID19 remains unpredictable and so the good practice and versatility illustrated by the youth work sector during the pandemic should be carried forward into all forms of education.

How can colleges, universities and specialist institutions best support Scotland's international connectedness and competitiveness in the post-pandemic, post-EU membership environment?

Not applicable

What opportunities and threats does the post-pandemic environment hold for colleges, universities and specialist institutions? For institutional leaders, how are you planning to address these challenges and opportunities?

Not applicable

What forms of collaboration within the tertiary education eco-system would best enable a coherent and effective response to these challenges and opportunities?

The Review is driven by recognition that partnerships and collaboration can deliver significant benefit. YouthLink Scotland strongly supports the Community Learning

and Development Standards Council Scotland (CLDSC) response which urges greater recognition that *“the “tertiary system” consists not only of institutions but the current and potential students, businesses and communities that they interact with”*.

Collaboration with the youth work sector is a critical partner in working with and in communities - widening access and developing learning pathways. There have been strong examples of partnership working during the pandemic, with colleges playing a central role within community responses to the needs of individuals and local communities. This Review should therefore seek to build on this, working with the youth work and CLD sector to empower communities to become active partners in the tertiary education system.

In commenting on the role of colleges and universities as anchor institutions, YouthLink Scotland supports the view of CLDSC that this important role can and should be developed further. *‘In order to ensure that deprived areas and communities benefit from the anchor role of colleges and universities, skilled support is needed to enable them to develop their capacities to engage as active partners. CLD practitioners have a key role in providing this support, and so in ensuring that colleges and universities can develop their anchor role, and do so in ways that support the widening access agenda.’*

How can SFC, alongside government and other enterprise, skills and education-focused agencies, best support colleges, universities and specialist institutions to make their full contribution to Scotland’s inclusive, green and education-led recovery?

A comprehensive framework for guiding an effective green recovery in Scotland should include all phases of education as a key component. Green recovery including environmental sustainability is intrinsically linked with social justice, human rights, global citizenship and democratic participation. Sustainable development education must be integrated into all forms of learning across people’s lives, including through informal learning such as youth work. Using the Learning for Sustainability model is shown to increase attainment and have positive mental and physical health benefits².

A shift towards long-term positive behaviours cannot be achieved without widespread, organised and comprehensive sustainable development education. Young people should be informed about the impact of their individual behaviours, as well as being prepared for future employability in low carbon industries.

While there are enormous challenges brought by Coronavirus there is a strategic opportunity for SFC, Government, and other agencies, to build a greener, fairer and more inclusive society in Scotland. We know from our Universal Youth Work Research³ that youth work contributes to a growing body of evidence developing in Scotland, making a significant contribution to young people’s lives through providing opportunities to lead and help others as well support to become more active citizens,

² Education Scotland, *Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland*, p. 8-10

³ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/3183/impact-of-community-based-universal-youth-work-in-scotland-november-2018.pdf>

broadening their horizons and realising their potential⁴. We need to see greater recognition of the benefits of youth work as a form of informal education in a post-COVID19 landscape that views “*blended*” learning as the new normal. This should be available to all young people to help support a green recovery. This should be promoted as key elements of the recovery for younger people and adults and as a way to widen access to education.

⁴ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/4312/final-report-dg-community-based-universal-youth-work.pdf>