



Education and Culture Committee

Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future

YouthLink Scotland

March 2014

Introduction

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. It is a membership organisation and is in the unique position of representing the interests and aspirations of the whole of the sector, both voluntary and statutory.

YouthLink Scotland champions the role and value of youth work, challenging government at national and local levels to invest in the development of the sector.

Our vision is of a youth work sector for Scotland which offers sustainable, dynamic and accessible youth work opportunities that support young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

This response reflects the views of YouthLink Scotland's membership organisations who responded to our request for information. Individual organisations may hold views which differ from the opinions presented here.

This evidence focuses on Theme 2: Early years, childcare and employability, as this is of most relevance to our work.

Early years and childcare

We welcome the Committee's decision to hold this inquiry, and believe that this represents an excellent opportunity to consider Scotland's educational future in the broadest sense, by looking at issues that have perhaps not received as much attention to date. While the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act's extension of early learning for some 2 year olds and 3 and 4 year olds is welcome, we believe that this needs to be seen as the first stepping stone in the journey towards a fully integrated, universal approach to childcare and learning opportunities for children and young people of all ages.

The case for change

At present, the situation is complex, expensive, piecemeal and, we would argue, underfunded. Families face a range of barriers and challenges when it comes to finding, and making decisions about, childcare and out-of-school options. Some afterschool provision is massively oversubscribed, with children having to be placed

on waiting lists – yet at other schools (which in the case of some cities are not geographically far away from the oversubscribed schools), the afterschool provision is underused and there are plenty of places available. Young people face a ‘postcode lottery’ when it comes to accessing youth work opportunities in their local area. For instance, the range of youth work opportunities available to a young person in Orkney may be unavailable to a young person in Dundee.

There is a need for a new approach which takes an overarching view of the needs of children, young people and their families, encompassing early years childcare, afterschool provision and youth work opportunities. All of these are important, all of them meet children and young people’s needs, and all of them support parents’ needs for safe, appropriate childcare and learning opportunities. This universal approach would have the benefit of helping to remove barriers to parents’ participation in the labour market.

Entitlement to youth work opportunities

At the launch of the State of Children’s Rights in Scotland 2013 report launch on 20th November, the Minister for Children and Young People emphasised the good work being delivered by youth work and reiterated that the Government’s support for the early years should not be taken as a lack of commitment to older children and young people. However we feel that the Children and Young People Act missed an opportunity to support older children and young people. It is important that 8-15 year olds are not forgotten about in legislation and policy, not least because this age range encompasses crucial transition periods.

A truly preventative approach needs to support children and young people throughout their lives, not only in the early years, otherwise there is a risk that early gains could be put to waste through a lack of support. The teenage years are a period when key neurological developments take place. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that if young people experience a negative and stressful environment at this time, this may lead to negative repercussions in terms of the neural pathways that are strengthened or ‘pruned’, which in turn effects the potential for optimal adult brain development, as the structure of the adult brain is laid down during this period.¹ For this reason, it is important that young people are supported and have access to a range of positive activities that develop their interests and skills.

Supporting youth work also supports parents. The economic arguments for pre-school provision also apply to school-aged children. Subsidising out of school care and youth work can help parents access and sustain employment. In terms of child development, children from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly benefit from the social and developmental opportunities presented by high quality out of school care and youth work opportunities.

The Parliament’s Equal Opportunities Committee recommended that childcare for school aged children should be available, on a statutory basis, for children up to the age of 15. Equality of access to youth work opportunities would also meet parents’ needs too, by providing young people with safe, appropriate informal learning

¹ Sercombe, H and Paus, T (2009) The teen brain research: implications for practitioners. *Youth and Policy*, 103, pp25-38

activities outside of school hours. Learning doesn't stop at 4pm, and young people only spend around 15% of their waking hours in formal education.² It is crucial that the remaining 85% of their time is not wasted, but can be spent enjoying the range of positive learning opportunities that youth work offers.

Access to appropriate leisure and cultural opportunities, including youth work, is a right under the new United Nations General Comment No.17: The right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (Article 31 of the UNCRC). This General Comment places an obligation on governments of countries that have ratified the UNCRC, which includes the Scottish Government, to respect, protect and fulfil young people's right to participate in appropriate leisure and cultural activities. It calls for legislation to guarantee access for every child to Article 31 opportunities.

We believe that universal youth work is the best and most cost-effective means of supporting young people. Youth work represents excellent value for money with some interventions being proven to have a social return on investment of £13 for every £1 spent¹. Yet youth work cannot continue to deliver these positive outcomes if its role is not adequately recognised and protected in legislation, and if it does not have sufficient core funding to operate.

Youth Guarantee

We support the proposal for a Youth Guarantee as a constitutional right. This would demonstrate the importance of young people to Scotland's economy and would place young people's rights and needs at the forefront of Scottish policy. It would be in line with the EU's Youth Guarantee, which aims to stimulate job growth and training opportunities. We support the Minister for Youth Employment's decision to write to the UK Government urging cross-party support for the EU Youth Guarantee.

It is vital that youth work is fully involved, recognised and valued in the development of the Youth Guarantee. Youth work makes a massive contribution to the employability agenda. It supports young people's transitions as they move through the school system and into the world of further education, training or work. Youth work provides the platform on which the Activity Agreement Programme is delivered. A recent study which looked at the destination of those young people who completed the programme showed that 79% of young people sustained their progression to employment, education or training. In terms of delivering Curriculum for Excellence outcomes, youth work has demonstrated that it has a key role to play in the social, emotional and intellectual development of young people and has developed ways in which the outcome of the work can be accredited and recognised by the formal education system and employers.

Young people should be placed at the centre of the Youth Guarantee policy. Many local youth work providers already incorporate all three elements – job matching, employability training and career guidance - into their one-to-one work. In our view, this is preferable to taking an agency-based approach, whereby young people have to deal with perhaps three different service providers, which means they have to

² Education without Failure, Tim Brighouse, RSA, 2008 cited in The Benefits of Youth Work (LLUK and Unite) http://www.cywu.org.uk/assets/content_pages/187799973_Benefits_Of_Youth_Work.pdf

explain their story from scratch each time. This is inconsistent with the GIRFEC Named Person provisions, which provide one key point of contact for all young people aged up to 18. Youth work's strength is that it can provide an individualised package, based on the long-term relationship between the young person and the youth worker, which is founded on mutual trust and respect. Youth workers can support young people in terms of pushing open the doors and facilitating a 'soft entry' into employment, which in turn helps both the employer and the young person to sustain the placement. The Youth Guarantee should not take a top-down, prescriptive approach. It will work best if it takes a localised approach based on an assessment of needs.

Case studies – how youth work contributes to employability

Quarriers' work exchange programme was delivered with partners in the Netherlands. The young people who participated in the programme were very far from the labour market due to various issues in their lives, and an international work placement presented an opportunity for the young people to get out of their environment and away from the personal and social problems they were experiencing. It involved an eight week preparation programme prior to going abroad, and a nine week placement in a factory in the Netherlands. The young people had access to a life coach for the duration of the placement. All the young people lived and worked together. They gained certificates on completion of the placement, and once back in Scotland they were referred to employment buddies/mentors.

One of the young people became involved in the programme through Stopover, Quarriers' project for homeless young people. Although he had some work experience, he had been unable to find a job. Following the placement, he gained good references and was subsequently offered a job.

[Curriculum for Excellence, Transitions, Youth Unemployment and Equalities]

Prince's Trust Scotland Young Ambassadors One of the Ambassadors undertook a 12-week programme with the Prince's Trust, having faced difficulties in her life due to homelessness and addiction. Through the programme, she gained an interest in a career in youth work, something she had not previously heard about. The programme gave her a sense of well-being and helped her to find employment. The Young Ambassador believes that volunteering empowers young people and helps them get into education or find a work placement.

[Youth Unemployment, Equalities and Transitions]

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ⁱ YMCA Scotland Plus One Peer Mentoring Programme, evaluated by Dundee University and Haldane Associates http://www.plusone.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/YMCA_MW_lores.pdf