European and External Relations Committee

The EU referendum and its implications for Scotland

Written submission from YouthLink Scotland

About YouthLink Scotland

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 both 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 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. Youth 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, and democratic participation.

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.

Since the EU Referendum, there has been a focus on the impact to businesses and research. This has meant that the voices and opinions of children and young people have largely been ignored.

The percentage of young people who voted in the EU Referendum was higher than initial estimates at 64%. Of that percentage, 71% voted to remain in the EU. There is a large risk that these young people will be disenfranchised by the result.

Scotland’s future relationship with the European Union

YouthLink Scotland acts as the UK representative on the European Commission Expert Group on young people, digital technology and youth work. This cross-EU collaboration is invaluable to enriching youth work practice in Scotland. We are members of the Sector Consultative Group (Youth) and Country Advisory Group (Scotland) for Erasmus+. YouthLink Scotland has also been a beneficiary of Erasmus+ funding for projects such as Digitally Agile Youth Work in Finland and Scotland. Specific industries and fields in the

1 http://ourinsight.opinium.co.uk/survey-results/did-young-people-bother-vote-eu-referendum
2 Ibid.
private, public and third sector in Scotland, including the youth work sector, contain strong links with relevant EU counterparts. Maintaining these networks would be of great benefit.

We firmly believe that Scotland’s relationship with the EU should go beyond purely market purposes.

For young people, Scotland’s relationship with the EU is most importantly about cultural integration and freedom of movement for leisure, education and work. The current generation of young people have been brought up as global citizens and interaction with the EU is normalised. Global ambitions such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals require individuals to be considerate global thinkers in order to achieve the aims. There is a concern that further narrowing of the UK’s contact with other nation states is a direct threat to achieving these.

Scotland has a strong tradition of international youth work and youth exchanges. International exchanges are beneficial for young people in increasing confidence, resilience and broadening their perspectives. Furthermore, international partnership working provides invaluable CPD for youth workers. A key pillar of the National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19 is to build workforce capacity.\(^3\) It would be difficult, if not impossible, to gain similar CPD opportunities exclusively within the UK. There has been a notable attempt within the sector to build on the number of international exchanges for young people over the past few years. Higher education institutions (HEIs) offering youth work courses have historically utilised Erasmus for international placements and there are currently a number of HEIs in the process of extending international placements, for example the University of Dundee. Brexit is a direct challenge to strengthen these international exchanges.

YouthLink Scotland would strongly encourage a future relationship with the EU that permitted and encouraged international partnership working and freedom of movement to avoid the potential threat of insularity.

**The withdrawal process**

Youth workers will play a crucial role in dealing with the political division the EU referendum has caused across the UK, both across generations and ethnicities. Increasing support for youth work in the lead up to Brexit and afterwards will likely result in increased community cohesion, as well as more tolerant and resilient young people.

Our view is that young people should be involved in making decisions that directly affect them. It is crucial that efforts are made to provide ways in which young people can contribute to the negotiations and that their opinions are listened to, as per the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child article 12 (You have the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously). Far from assumptions that young people are not interested in politics, Scotland has seen a wealth of youth engagement activity since the inception of organisations like the Scottish Youth Parliament in 1999. The further surge in youth participation in past 3-5 years over the Independence Referendum, the UK General Election and the EU Referendum owes credit to such organisations and structures. There must be recognition that young people are choosing to engage in politics in non-traditional ways and new innovative approaches to youth political engagement should be facilitated and supported. Inactivity on this front could result in mass disenfranchisement of young people in

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Scotland. Additionally, for a large group of young people this will be the second referendum in as many years that has resulted in an outcome they did not vote for.

YouthLink Scotland notes that the Scottish Government’s Standing Council on Europe does not have any young people as members. Whilst it is recognised that some members of the Council are advocates for young people, the impact of having a young person directly represented on the group would be positive.

The domestic process for dealing with a withdrawal from the EU

The scale of the task of decoupling EU and UK/Scottish legislation is huge and the full extent unknown. YouthLink Scotland is clear there should be no regression to legislation covering children’s rights, equalities, and worker's rights. In particular YouthLink Scotland would strongly encourage that the expanded voting franchise for young people aged 16 and 17 is kept. We would encourage the Scottish government to carry out Child’s Rights Impact Assessments before choosing not to replace existing EU legislation.

Dealing with the withdrawal from the EU and negotiating a new relationship with the EU for Scotland will consume a lot of officials time. Whilst we acknowledge that this work is important, it is equally important that other areas of work are progressed in parallel.

EU Funding

The third sector generally is concerned about the future funding implications of Brexit and a Brexit-prompted recession. There are a number of YouthLink Scotland members that have benefitted from EU funding. One such example is Xchange Scotland who has received over €900k over the past 8 years through the European Social Fund and Erasmus+. Such programmes now face financial uncertainty and are being pushed to turn to corporate funders to continue to operate. Furthermore, the financial squeeze across central and local government will have a further impact on local youth work services.

The recent report released by UNISON⁴ highlights how severe the cuts to youth services across the UK have been over the past four years. The result of this is that young people miss out and the resulting cost a few years down the line will undoubtedly be greater than any savings made today. The youth work funding landscape in Scotland is more varied but with a further recession forecast, the situation could easily reach a similar state to England and Wales. Research earlier this year into the social return on investment of youth work in Scotland showed that for every £1 invested in youth work, £7 of value was created. This value includes both savings to public spend and economic gains.⁵

We want to further reiterate that young people should play an active part in local budgetary decisions and that youth work services should be protected from budget cuts. The recent UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations highlighted concern that that recent fiscal policies and allocation of resources have contributed to inequality in children’s enjoyment of their rights, disproportionately affecting children in disadvantaged situations.⁶

Recommendations 12 a-e from the Committee set out that the state party should ensure

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transparent and participatory budgeting that includes children and young people alongside child rights impact assessments of budget and economic decision making processes.\textsuperscript{7}

The position of EU citizens in Scotland

The uncertainty for EU citizens about their residency in the UK will cause individual's distress and may also make their employment situation more precarious. As a result the youth work sector may lose some paid staff and volunteers as EU citizens aim to find financial security in permanent, paid work. This evidence is anecdotal as up until this point, there has been no requirement to collect information on youth workers' nationalities if they are eligible to work in the UK.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.