Introduction

YouthLink Scotland welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Education and Culture Committee on the Scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2015-16. In our evidence we demonstrate the contribution youth work makes to the education of our young people and their future life chances and opportunities.

Background to YouthLink Scotland

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 for the benefit of our young people.

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.

The Value and Purpose of Youth Work

Youth work is an educational practice contributing to young people’s learning and development. Youth work engages young people as learners in their community and at times within their school. The purpose of youth work is to:

- Build self-esteem and self-confidence
- Develop the ability to manage personal and social relationships
- Create learning and develop new skills
- Encourage positive group atmospheres
- Build the capacity of young people to consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control
- Develop a world view which widens horizons and invites social commitment.
Overview of youth work success within the Curriculum for Excellence

Youth work changes young people’s lives, in particular those for whom formal education has not inspired or reached them. Youth work is firmly rooted in an ethos of health in body, mind and spirit. The Scottish Government’s ambition to make Scotland the best country to grow up in is one that we as a sector want to see realised. What lies at the heart of Minister’s ambitions is GIRFEC.

Getting it right for every child is based on the core principle that a child or young person is safe, achieving, active, responsible, healthy, nurtured, respected and included. That principle however has been embedded in the bread and butter of youth work for over a century.

Youth workers can often succeed in working with those young people hardest to reach where formal education has not managed to. There are countless examples across the country of where a youth work approach has opened that locked door for a young person, given them the respect, responsibility and the feeling of being included for the first time.

It is a very different approach but one that works for young people as it is led by them and they choose to participate, this for many who have struggled with the formal structures of the education system, can be the catalyst for positive change.

Youth work plays and will play a pivotal role in delivering the Government’s ambitions and we hope to see an increase in the number of young people engaged in programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and other projects that encourage leadership skills, volunteering and citizenship.

But there also has to be a transparent and unambiguous relationship between the youth work sector, national government and local government with the clear value of what youth work delivers understood and valued on a permanent basis.

There are still some ‘good things’ in this world and youth work is one of them. It clearly delivers on a wide range of national outcomes including those linked to Curriculum for Excellence and GIRFEC.

We understand the current economic landscape that both national and local government are working within but the value of youth work to enhance a young person’s life chances cannot be underestimated and we would urge all local authorities and the Scottish Government to recognise our sector’s role through their forthcoming budgets as cuts to youth work provision could result in pressure on other services.

It is clear from the overwhelming support from some 40 MSPs at our parliamentary reception last year that politicians from across the parties do understand the contribution youth work makes to their local communities. Where youth work thrives, anti-social behaviour diminishes. Through funding from Cashback for Communities the Jack Kane centre in Edinburgh have been able to
deliver youth work programmes, and state “there has been a reduction in youth related incidents during the days and times activities were provided by Jack Kane.”

Almost a third of the MSPs across all parties at Holyrood signed our pledge for sustained and long-term investment in youth work. That understanding needs to be enshrined in government and party policy across the political spectrum if the sector is to ensure a meaningful future.

**Impact on Young People**

Youth work makes a positive impact upon the lives of young people, by building skills and confidence. The youth work sector supports the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence.

- National Voluntary Youth Work Organisations are working with over **385,000** young people across Scotland
- This amounts to **31%** of the overall population of 5-25 year olds AND **53%** of young people
- The majority of these young people **92%** are 17 and under.

HMIe inspections have picked up that where schools are working in partnership with voluntary youth work organisations and with their own local authority youth work services, then the school and the pupils within it are greatly enriched. The youth work approach can bring benefit to all young people, and can work very well for those young people for whom school is not working.

Youth work enables young people to learn in a new way and extends young people’s appetite for learning beyond the formal curriculum. This is achieved through the delivery of targeted interventions such as youth work in schools programmes, the delivery of outdoor education, youth awards programmes, employability, and citizenship education. Case-Studies of such interventions are contained as an appendix to this submission.

YouthLink Scotland knows that these programmes are the result of effective partnerships, often with teachers and youth workers co-delivering interventions. We are concerned that reduction in real terms to the schools budget could well put programmes such as these at risk. As an organisation we aim for “all young people to have access to high quality youth work; and that Scotland’s ambition for its young people is supported by sustainable investment in youth work.”

We therefore call on the Scottish Ministers to support local authorities to take cognisance of the contribution that youth work makes alongside and in partnership with schools and to ensure that funding is allocated accordingly.

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2. National Voluntary Youth Work Organisations (Scotland) Survey 2012
Youth Work as Early Intervention and Prevention

We believe that youth work makes and can continue to make a contribution to prevention work and the reduction of inequalities. We wish to support our membership to be engaged in community planning and to advocate for the value of youth work in preventing problems; such as low school attendance, low aspirations, and youth unemployment. This is achieved by making use of youth work’s ability to:

“build an in-depth understanding of people’s needs, strengths and aspirations through sustained dialogue; identify issues and solutions at an early stage; and identify barriers to participation and strategies for overcoming these.”  

Aileen Campbell MSP, Minister for Children and Young People said on 6th May 2014:
“youth work represents the ultimate form of preventative spend.”

Reduction in budgetary spend on Education would place a negative impact on the early intervention and preventative approaches that youth work offers. For example the work of Home-School link partnerships where youth workers engage with the most vulnerable of young people to support their school attendance which in turn raises attainment.

Specific programmes such as the “The Rock Challenge” (an educational performing arts initiative attended by 800 young people in Aberdeen) evaluated that following young people’s involvement in the programme of the 66% of young people who previously played truant from school, 17% have stopped their truanting behaviour.

Whilst this preventative approach is beneficial for society as a whole, the impact that youth work makes on the individual young person is often immeasurable, but we know that youth work changes lives.

The Scottish Government has set out its ambitions for young people in the National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19. To achieve the ambition, ensuring Scotland is the best place to be young and grow up in; the budget allocation must reflect this and go beyond learning just within the school. The recent trend, as identified by Audit Scotland, identifies that local authorities have seen a 5% reduction in spend in real terms, this has largely been achieved by reducing staff. It is our concern that further reductions could well see vital youth work opportunities put at risk - rather than being recognised for their added value and preventative approach.

We would support the use of existing national and local strategies and the national outcomes framework as an approach for schools, local authorities and government for preparing to deal with these spending pressures. We would support an approach which engages directly with the experiences of service users and their families in decision-making.

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**Engaging with Young People as decision-makers**

YouthLink Scotland would welcome the opportunity for young people including school pupils to have the opportunity to contribute to discussions on budget allocations nationally and locally. We believe that our membership is well placed to facilitate dialogue between young people and decision-makers on this matter. Specifically from our membership of local authorities we know there to be a network of youth voice organisations working locally who could meaningful engage in such discussion alongside pupil councils or other appropriate bodies. Nationally the track-record of participation and rights work undertaken by ourselves and our members, Young Scot and Scottish Youth Parliament, could further the dialogue and meaningful engagement between the sector, young people and Ministers.

There is a network of young people with expertise in grant-making who are skilled in prioritising funds and monitoring impact of resource. These young people are part of the YouthBank Scotland network. YouthBank is a community enhancing, youth-led decision-making model that involves young people working with partners to establish a grant fund that is distributed to other young people for community benefit. There are 400 young people who are grant makers and decision makers in Scotland’s 19 YouthBanks, most of whom are aged 12-19. They will give over 117,000 volunteer hours while distributing £113,000 to community initiatives run by other young people in their community. YouthBank inspires volunteers to see beyond community problems and create solutions; make a difference in their own community for the benefit of others; develop new skills and experiences; and share their skills and knowledge with others.

**Closing Remarks**

Youth work changes young people’s lives, in particular those for whom formal education has not inspired or reached them. We believe that youth work makes and can continue to make a contribution to prevention work and the reduction of inequalities. For this reason the Scottish Government’s ambition to make Scotland the best country to grow up in is one that we as a sector want to see realised.

**Case-Studies**

_Case-Studies_ Extracted from “*Building Capacities through Experiences and Outcomes: Youth work and schools partnership – Curriculum for Excellence*”. Published by YouthLink Scotland in September 2011.

**YMCA Mentoring Programme**

YMCA delivered a mentoring programme for high-risk young people in three local authority areas seeking to build the four capacities of curriculum for excellence in partnership with schools, social work and police. The programme recruited, training and matched 60 volunteer mentors with young people aged 8-14 years who were at risk of moving deeper into the criminal justice system. A third of the referrals came from schools.
A majority of the referrals have either been excluded regularly from school, were demonstrating aggressive and disruptive behaviour, or were on an alternative education programme. Twenty-one had poor attendance records, with some only engaging with school on a very limited basis.

An evaluation by Dundee University found that 86% of the young people had significantly improved their behaviour and attitudes. The researchers concluded: “The evidence is that this works in many cases, and that attendance levels have improved, pupils have returned to normal timetables, disruptive behaviour in schools has reduced and exclusions have fallen.”

The YMCA was found to have generated a social value of £1.05 million for an investment of just under £108,000 across the three locations.

South Ayrshire Council – Positive Attitudes to Alcohol Peer Education Project

This CLD (community learning and development) and school Peer Education Project is part of a partnership response to young people’s alcohol misuse within South Ayrshire. Teams of S6 pupils were trained in:

- Team Building and Leadership
- Alcohol Awareness
- Confidence and Resilience
- Child Protection
- Classroom Management

The young people then develop and deliver a four week interactive programme to S1 pupils within the curriculum for excellence framework covering personal safety and health, coping strategies to deal with peer pressure, exam stress, and family issues.

The programme consistently receives positive evaluations from the S1 pupils who enjoy the interactive teaching style and demonstrate retention of learning six months and one year after the programme has been delivered. The S6 pupils can incorporate the Platinum Youth Achievement Award (SCQF Level 7) to their learning achievements.

For further information please contact Susan Hunter, Senior Policy and Research Officer. shunter@youthlinkscotland.org or 0131 313 6815.