Inquiry on the Educational Attainment Gap - Role of the third and private sectors - Education and Culture Committee

Written Evidence from the Scottish Youth Parliament

Background to the Scottish Youth Parliament

The Scottish Youth Parliament is the democratically elected voice of Scotland’s young people. Our vision is of a stronger, more inclusive Scotland that empowers young people by truly involving them in the decision-making process.

Among the strongest youth representatives structures of its type, we provide young people with a democratic platform to affect change, based on a mandate, by facilitating engagement with key decision makers.

In working towards our aims, we support the following values:

- **Democracy** - All of our plans and activities are youth-led, and we are accountable to young people aged 12-25. Our democratic structure and the scale of direct participation across Scotland give us strength and set us apart from other organisations.

- **Inclusion** - We are committed to being truly inclusive. The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that all young people have a right to a voice; it doesn’t matter who we are or where we come from. We celebrate our diversity.

- **Political independence** - We are independent from political parties. Only by working with all legitimate political parties can we make progress on the policies that are important to young people.

- **Passion** - We believe that drive and energy are key to successful campaigning. We are passionate about issues and believe that young people are part of the solution, not the problem.

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1. The Scottish Youth Parliament is comprised of 160 Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament who meet three times a year in national sittings to represent the views of their constituents by selecting campaign priorities, formulating policy and participating in Subject Committees. In the last Scottish Youth Parliament national elections, 67,000 votes were cast. In addition, there were almost 43,000 responses to the consultation on your 2010 youth manifesto, “Change the Picture”. You can find out more information about SYP here: [http://www.syp.org.uk/who-we-are-W21page-66](http://www.syp.org.uk/who-we-are-W21page-66).

Summary of Recommendations

- The Scottish Youth Parliament places significant value on the involvement of the third sector and the private sector in relation to achievement and attainment. We believe that the third sector in particular provides significant opportunities for achievement and attainment outwith the formal curriculum.

- The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that, while there are excellent examples of best practice across Scotland, the relationship between the third sector and education authorities could be significantly strengthened, with the third sector having more involvement in schools for the purposes of improving achievement and attainment.

- The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that the implementation of the recommendations from the Commission for Strengthening Scotland’s Young Workforce presents a real opportunity for a strong partnership approach to delivery, which, we believe, will remove barriers to participation and achievement.

- The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that there is a need to address the perception of wider opportunities for achievement and attainment, and that such opportunities need to have a parity of esteem with the formal curriculum.

- The Scottish Youth Parliament would support the development of a robust system for reporting and measuring attainment and achievement through a wider range of opportunities, which we believe would have a positive effect on attainment.
Introduction

The Scottish Youth Parliament welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Education and Culture Committee’s inquiry into the educational attainment gap in Scotland. In addition, we further welcome the Committee’s decision to give specific focus to the role that the third and private sectors play in closing the educational attainment gap.

Educational attainment, and its impact on child and youth poverty, is a key area of focus for our current national campaign, POVERTY: See It Change It. We fundamentally believe that addressing the current gap in educational attainment is crucial to eradicating child and youth poverty.

In our view, the nature of the relationship between education authorities and the third sector, including elements of youth work delivered through other local authority structures such as Community Learning and Development, should be one of collaboration and mutual respect. Young people need to be exposed to variety of opportunities and experiences alongside their formal education. Such experiences support their wider development, and have a positive impact upon attainment and achievement. This was heavily emphasised in the School Education report from Audit Scotland that noted that the factors that impact on attainment and achievement have expanded considerably beyond formal education.

Fundamentally, we believe the third sector and the private sector play a significant role in the delivery of these opportunities, as well supporting the delivery of other elements of the formal curriculum. For example, we believe these sectors should play an important role in the delivery of the Wood Commission proposals.

We note the recent report published by Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People, entitled “How Young People’s Participation in School Supports Achievement and Attainment,” which acknowledges the positive impact that pupil

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involvement and participation have on achievement and attainment. This report provides an empirical evidence base to support the view that participation and involvement in a wider range of opportunities have a positive impact on attainment and achievement, particularly where strong links with the community, facilitated by the third sector, exist. However, deprivation can act as a significant barrier to the ability of young people to avail of these opportunities.

As such, we believe the third sector is well placed to work in partnership with education authorities and schools to tackle the educational attainment gap by providing more structured and effective links with the community. However, we believe the relationship between education authorities and the third sector could be significantly strengthened and made more systematic so that this potential is fully realised, especially in light of the challenging funding situation faced by local authorities.

The scale of the third and private sectors’ involvement in schools, in terms of improving attainment and achievement, and the appropriate dividing line between their role and the role of education authorities

It is difficult to assess the scale of involvement of the third and private sectors in schools given the decentralised nature of decision making and resource allocation in relation to education in Scotland. However, we note from the evidence submitted by YouthLink Scotland that National Youth Work Voluntary Organisations, including the Scottish Youth Parliament, work with 385,000 young people across Scotland, 53% of whom are aged between 11-25.

The level and the nature of engagement between schools and the third sector varies considerably across Scotland, ranging from national engagement programmes such as the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Social Enterprise Academy, to local authority commissioned services and formal partnerships with accreditation.

The Scottish Youth Parliament engages with schools and other institutions that provide informal education as a core part of our youth engagement and outreach programme, which involves delivering sessions around rights, participation, and citizenship. Young people who become Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament, most of whom stand for election due to their engagement with us through school or local youth services, have the opportunity to undertake an SQA accreditation through their work with us.

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While there are many examples of good practice of strong partnerships between the third sector and schools, we believe there is significant scope to increase the scale, consistency, and quality of this engagement.

We do not necessarily believe that there is a dividing line between our role and the role of education authorities. Like many other organisations, our work feeds into the following National Outcome:

“Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors, and responsible citizens.”

In addition, our work aligns with many of the principles outlined in the Curriculum for Excellence. While there is an obvious division of responsibilities in relation to the formal curriculum, there is scope for a more fluid partnership in relation to the delivery of the wider aspects of the learning experience, where the third sector is more likely to be involved. This should be based on the needs of the young people and the local community, as well as the education authority and the third sector organisations involved.

Whether their approaches have been particularly successful in improving achievement and attainment for school pupils. If so, whether their methods could be more embedded in the curriculum.

The report from Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People provides evidence that pupil involvement and participation in the “Extended Curriculum,” or opportunities outwith the formal curriculum, have a positive impact on achievement and attainment. This report, based on research with school pupils, highlights the positive impact of engagement with the community and wider development opportunities for increasing attainment and achievement.\(^8\)

We are pleased that the opportunities for achievement, through various awards mechanisms such as Youth Scotland’s accredited Youth Achievement Awards and various other recognised awards from the Awards Network, have demonstrated an increase in uptake and successful completion.

We believe that awards of this nature should receive further recognition at a local level, and schools should be further supported to offer these opportunities to pupils on the grounds that such awards represent a much wider and holistic conception of attainment and achievement than that which is often portrayed. However, we are

\(^8\) SCCYP (2015), (n7)
aware that there needs to be corresponding increase in the value and currency of this achievement.

This parity of esteem between the formal curriculum and wider learning experiences was raised as a key point in our submission to the Committee in relation to the implementation of the Wood Commission proposals as an issue that needs to be addressed.

**Whether the full potential of the third and private sectors in helping to improve children’s attainment and achievement is being realised.**

There are many examples of excellent practice across Scotland where a strong partnership between schools and the third sector deliver excellent opportunities for young people. However, we believe that this could be more widespread and more consistent across Scotland, affording such opportunities to all young people while appreciating the need for local flexibility.

The third sector provides considerable opportunities across a wide range of areas including employability and training, social enterprise, democracy and citizenship, and many others. More importantly, the sector is committed to removing any barriers to participation, including deprivation. For example, we note the exemplary work of our colleagues at Who Cares? Scotland, who are well placed to remove barriers to participation for care leavers.

Therefore, we believe there is further potential to expand the role of third sector in the delivery of opportunities that exist outside of the formal curriculum. We believe that this partnership working is crucial in a time where local authorities are facing budgetary pressures.

However, in order to realise the full potential of this work, there needs to be further recognition and value placed on the achievement and attainment outside of the formal curriculum by education authorities, employers, and colleges and universities.

There is a particular opportunity to involve the third sector and the private sector in the implementation of the recommendations made by the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce, an issue we highlighted in our submission to the Committee previously.

We wish to reiterate that the involvement of young people, and organisations in the third and private sectors that work with young people, in the implementation of the recommendations are crucial to their success. Indeed, successful implementation of the recommendations is important for reducing the educational attainment gap.
As mentioned previously, the third sector is an important stakeholder in reducing the barriers for participation that could arise from the Wood Commission recommendations, such as the burdensome cost of more vocational subject choices.

How successful schools have been in reporting on pupils’ wider achievements (i.e. not just examination results) such as those the third sector helps to deliver. Whether such achievements are valued by parents, employers and learning providers as much as formal qualifications.

We note the lack of comparable performance measures for assessing pupils’ wider achievements is mentioned as a key issue within the Audit Scotland report. In our view, the lack of a strong reporting system that supports opportunities for wider achievement is a key barrier to ensuring such achievements gain the credibility and recognition they deserve.

Furthermore, we share the concern raised by YouthLink Scotland in their evidence around the senior phase benchmarking tool, Insight, and its limited scope to sufficiently recognise the wide range of opportunities as an indication and measure of attainment.

The Scottish Youth Parliament would support the development of a robust system for reporting and measuring attainment and achievement through a wider range of opportunities. We believe this would have a positive impact on attainment.

We believe there is considerable potential to increase the value and standing of wider achievement and attainment among parents, employers, and learning providers. In our view, this involves fundamentally shifting perceptions of these achievements to create parity of esteem between these opportunities those within formal education.

This shift in culture is similar to that which we recommended was required in relation to vocational and academic pathways in our previous submission on the implementation of the Wood Commission.

However, as well as proactively changing and challenging perceptions, we believe that a better system for reporting and demonstrating the value and impact of these opportunities would also have a positive impact in this regard.

Given the strong policy focus on the early years, whether the third and private sectors have been able to work equally effectively with pupils of all ages.

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9 Audit Scotland (2014), n6, pg. 17-18
As an organisation that works primarily with young people aged between 12-25, we are not in a position to comment on early years provision.

Although we welcome the Scottish Government’s focus on early years and prevention, we share the concern of other organisations that there is potential for the importance of older young people, especially those transitioning into the workforce, to be forgotten when it comes to resource allocation.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, the Scottish Youth Parliament places significant value on the involvement of the third sector and private sectors in relation to achievement and attainment. We believe that the third sector especially provides significant opportunities for achievement and attainment outwith the formal curriculum.

Although there are some excellent examples of best practice across Scotland, we believe that the relationship between the third sector and education authorities could be significantly strengthened. We believe that the implementation of the recommendations from the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce presents a real opportunity for a strong partnership approach to delivery and the removal of barriers to participation and achievement, particularly for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that there is a need to address the perception of wider opportunities for achievement and attainment. Such opportunities need to be valued so there is parity of esteem with opportunities within the formal curriculum.

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