Introduction
YouthLink Scotland welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Education and Culture Committee. In our evidence we highlight our view of the impact of implementing the recommendations of the Wood Commission and youth work’s contribution to developing Scotland’s Young Workforce.

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 youth work in both the voluntary and statutory sectors.

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 that 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 when appropriate 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.

The National Youth Work Strategy 2014-18\(^1\) says that “effective engagement with young people is an empowering process. It offers young people developmental opportunities as well as the ability to lead, take responsibility, make decisions, and make a real and lasting contribution – both economically and socially – to

Scotland’s present and future.”

This outcome is at the core of our ambition for young people in Scotland, and we welcomed the recommendations of the Wood Report and the subsequent publication of Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland’s Youth Employment Strategy.

**Theme A: If the Wood report were fully implemented, what the likely impact on attainment in schools would be and which pupils would benefit most.**

We would welcome full implementation of all the recommendations of the Wood Report. We believe that the impact of such implementation would be wholly beneficial to young people in Scotland. The aspiration of the Wood Report enables young people to follow the learning journey most suitable for their hopes, aspirations and abilities. Whilst employers will have more input into shaping education and ultimately gaining young people into their organisations who are work ready and eager to make a difference. Learning providers (schools, colleges, youth work) will be able to effectively recognise all learners’ achievements and parents will have a clearer understanding of the routes available for their child.

We believe that effective monitoring of the impact of the recommendations over time will be the best measure of success, with particular attention made to those young people where inequalities currently exist due to poverty, health, and the wider protected characteristics of the Equalities Act 2010. This approach must work to reduce inequalities and not act to widen the attainment gap.

We would advocate for frequent and regular opportunities for the sharing of practice which is working well, this should be local, regional, and national and should at its heart be lead from the experience of the young person, as well as from the perspective of the learning provider and employer.

**Theme B: The report aims to significantly enhance vocational content “without splitting young people off into separate streams at school age”. What the disadvantages of such an approach would be and how it could be avoided.**

Our sector supports the enhancement of learning opportunities for all of Scotland’s young people. We do this in an inclusive way which puts the learner at the centre. Youth Work has developed a culture which truly supports and promotes personalisation and choice. This is essential for learning to be inclusive of the hopes and aspirations of each individual learner, and to avoid the need to ‘stream’ young people. Youth Work has a proven track record at delivering group learning environments, in which each learner is working towards their own goals and personalized learning outcomes. The Youth Worker is skilled at supporting reflection of learning and supporting young people to recognise progression and achievement. The success of this relationship is the defining characteristics of youth work: the relationship between the young person and youth worker is a partnership in learning. To achieve a similar ethos within the formal education sector it will likely require a shift in leadership culture and organisational changes within the structure of both schools and colleges.
The National Youth Work Strategy 2014-18\(^2\) is clear in its ambition for the Scotland to be the best place to grow up – but to achieve this ambition is states that “strengthening partnerships between school staff and youth work practitioners remain a priority for Curriculum for Excellence.” Further to this is recommends that we continue to build on the “many good examples where schools and youth work are working collaboratively to plan and deliver personalised learning opportunities.”

Youth Work has a contribution to make within this approach, from our wealth of experience in person-centered learning. The Youth Work ‘curriculum’ begins with the needs of the learner and a programme of learning is developed around this need – creating experiences and outcomes for each learner. There are numerous examples from across Scotland of a youth work and school partnership working to deliver this approach and support young people’s achievement and attainment.

**Example: Callander Youth Project Trust**

Callander Youth Project serves young people in rural Stirlingshire. It is rooted in the community and offers a continuum of services for young people from primary school through to the age of 25. Very good working relationships have been built with key partners including Stirling Council, McLaren High School and the Forestry Commission.

The Project delivers the SCQF Level 4 Steps to Work programme. This opportunity works with young people from the local secondary school who are identified as being at risk of being furthest from the labour market. The youth workers support the young person’s personal development by supporting them to identify their own skills and strengths and to identify areas they wish to improve and develop. From this stage they begin to work on employability skills and preparation for employment. The programme is completed after the young person participates in a 30 hour relevant work experience placement, which meets their needs and vocational interest.

The personalised nature of the programme ensures that the young person can continue to learn in school as well as complete Steps to Work. Learners negotiate their 4 hours each week with Steps to Work to work within their schools timetable.

The Project operates two social enterprises – a 5 star tourist hostel and a successful community café. Each of these social enterprises has created employment and vocational training opportunities for young people in the community as well as generating income to be reinvested in the charity.

**Theme C: Whether any measures other than those advocated in the report are needed to ensure more young people leave school with “high level vocational qualifications which have strong currency in the labour market”**.

YouthLink Scotland would recommend greater recognition of the need for the use of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) within the implementation of the Wood Report. This established Framework is already a nationally available tool which enables parity of esteem or comparability of

vocational and academic qualifications. This is vitally important to learners particularly for those who are most suited to the vocational route. Every qualification on the SCQF is underpinned by a set of descriptors which set out the competencies that all learners should be able to demonstrate regardless of whether the qualification is academic or vocational. This allows comparability of all qualifications whilst accepting that they may be very different forms of learning utilised to achieve the qualification. This Framework has the potential to be at the heart of many of the recommendations in the Wood Report and provides a valuable tool for both learners and employers – creating a common currency for achievement and attainment. The youth work sector has developed the Amazing Things\(^3\) publication which sets out a suite of learning awards for young people, many of which are SCQF credit rated. In addition the newly developed Insight system allows any learning programme which has been credit rated onto the SCQF and which meets certain other criteria, to be recognised in school statistics.

**Theme D: Whether the report – which includes a section on improving equalities – places enough emphasis on pupils’ socio-economic inequalities and how these could be overcome.**

The inclusion of recommendations which advance equalities is greatly welcomed by YouthLink Scotland. We would welcome additional emphasis on socio-economic inequalities to be considered, in particular to give consideration to how poverty and inequality can impact on aspiration and choice. Particularly for successful implementation of these recommendations there must also be a commitment to remove any barriers (such as cost, transport, specialist equipment) to young people having a full choice and personalisation of their learning for employability.

We are concerned that the experience of young people in rural and urban areas may differ, and that opportunities for vocational and academic progression may require the movement of young people. We need to ensure that young people in rural areas are supported to make choices that meet their needs now and in the longer term. Rural economies must be supported to develop and to avoid saturation of certain vocations as a result of shortage of options made available to young people whilst at secondary schools. The diversity of vocations must be made full accessible to ensure that rural communities can flourish and that young people see these as an attractive place to remain or return to should they choose.

We bring to the attention of the Committee the work of Save the Children and Scotland’s Commissioner for Children (2014), *Learning Lessons – Young People’s Views on Poverty and Education in Scotland*\(^4\). In this report attention is drawn to the experience of pupils who are concerned about extra costs for subject specific equipment – this effected subjects such as design & technology and home economics. YouthLink Scotland would impress upon the committee that the cost of materials associated with vocational subjects must be addressed nationally to ensure that further disadvantage and inequality is not faced by learners and their families.

YouthLink Scotland is committed to valuing young people. We see an inherent discrimination against young people in the workplace due to the current minimum wage legislation. The minimum wage currently differs

\(^{4}\) Elsley, S (2014), *Learning Lessons Young People’s Views on Poverty and Education in Scotland*, SCCYP and Save the Children: Edinburgh
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for different ages, creating an inequality of value of young employees – giving the impression that their work and contribution is of a lesser value than their older colleagues. The Wood Report and the Youth Employment Strategy must be proactive in supporting employers to recognise the value of young people as equal employees in their organisation and where possible to be a proponent of the living wage. This becomes an important prevention measure to break the cycle of poverty in Scotland. Creating a young workforce which can live free of poverty.

**Theme E: Whether there would have to be significant reorganisation in schools to accommodate all the proposed changes (for example, to enable more links with colleges/ to have a greater focus on work placements).**

YouthLink Scotland’s members work on a daily basis in partnership with schools. This is set out in Building the Curriculum 3, which places importance on partnership working and curriculum planning for each individual learner. Youth Work provided by the both statutory and third sectors is well placed to continue to achieve this aim, and with the right ethos and funding relationship can do more. The key to this success is the opportunity for joint planning between professionals in schools, youth work and colleges to ensure that the learner need is met. Our members tell us that such opportunities for joint planning are diminishing due to wider pressures on school teaching staff.

The Youth Work sector has a contribution to make as an employer as well as a learning provider. The sector is widely committed to the ethos of ‘growing our own’ youth workers, and supporting young people to transition from service user to service provider. The Modern Apprenticeship in Youth Work is one way in which this can be achieved. However due to the nature of funding, particularly for the third sector, we require a commitment from funders to invest in young people as Modern Apprentices in our sector.

**Theme F: What action and resources would be required to deliver the specific recommendations aimed at schools and teachers.**

YouthLink Scotland would encourage the committee to consider the equality of the relationship between partners involved in young people’s learning for employment. Whilst schools are naturally well placed to lead as the universal provider of education, the learning partners of colleges, employers, and youth work should be considered as equals by this committee and the Scottish Government when discussing this matter in the provision of resources and actions.

For our sector, we would call for sustainable and longer-term funding to third sector youth work providers who are contributing to the employability of young people both in partnership with schools and post-16. There is also a need to protect and maintain the level of provision for youth work and schools work which is planned and delivered by local authority youth work services. We would call for funding to evaluate the impact of existing youth work and schools provision for employability to be able to influence the development of practice across Scotland – ensuring that we achieve our ambitions for all of Scotland’s young people.

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