Introduction

The Wood Commission interim report highlighted the need for those in education, particularly in schools, to understand and consider the delivery model of Activity Agreements and their possible role in the school setting for those under 16 who have disengaged from education or who are at high risk of doing so.

It is suggested that the key principles of the Activity Agreement approach could be easily transferred to a school setting, contributing to the successful implementation of Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce.

YouthLink Scotland asks that this be considered in the context of the discussions taking place as part of this inquiry. This submission is being made alongside but separate to the main YouthLink Scotland response because the evidence for consideration by the Committee extends beyond the youth work sector.

Background

Activity Agreements provide support, post-school, to young people (16-19) who have been identified prior to leaving school, or who are already not in education, employment or training and whose learning and skills needs have been assessed as requiring first step engagement support and tailored learning in order to make a successful transition toward and into further learning or training and ultimately employment. Integral to the Scottish Government’s Opportunities for All Commitment they provide a key intervention for those young people furthest from the labour market and for whom this is the most appropriate offer of further learning or training.
The Activity Agreement approach has been developed and delivered through local authority partnerships across the 32 local authority areas in Scotland since 2012. The skills, expertise and knowledge of a wide range of partners, including youth work, third sector providers and employers offers young people attractive and meaningful pathways for those at greatest risk of disengagement. From 2012 to date over 7,000 of Scotland’s most vulnerable 16-19 year olds have been supported through Activity Agreements, with 70% making a successful onward transition to further learning, training or employment.

The Scottish Government appointed YouthLink Scotland as the host organisation for the Activity Agreement National Development Manager. YouthLink Scotland provides support for this role and the wider development of Activity Agreements.

**Activity Agreements and Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce**

Activity Agreements play an important role in delivering the *More Choices More Chances* recommendations of the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce; providing early intervention and wide ranging, sustained support for young people at risk of disengaging from education and for those who have already done so. With a clear focus on preparing young people for employment, education or further training, Activity Agreements seek to address the inequalities different groups of young people experience, which impact on their choices and chances, as they move from school towards economic participation.

The focus on a young person’s skills and experience coupled with the person centred learning approach has allowed Activity Agreements to accurately identify supported routes into work, further education or training. It also allows for the undertaking of certified training and qualifications relevant to the individual.

Schools have been a key partner in the identification and referral of those likely to be in need of Activity Agreement support post school. The Wood Commission’s interim report highlighted the opportunity for schools to learn from the whole person Activity Agreement approach for those under 16 who have disengaged from education or who are at high risk of doing so.

The key principles of the Activity Agreement approach, focusing on individualised learning and person-centred attainment, offer a clear framework to support the wider development of flexibility and choice in senior phase learning and pathways pre-16, enabling all young people to realise their potential.
Key principles

**Early identification**
Activity Agreements focus on early intervention. Local planning with key partners enables early identification of those young people likely to require Activity Agreement support. This approach allows preparation and assessment to be undertaken while the young person is still at school. This has helped reduce the number of young people lost at point of transition.

**Strengths-based assessment**
Each young person receives a robust assessment of their strengths, needs and interests. This identifies their current skills and experience and what is needed to help them engage in and sustain learning, moving towards more formal engagement and ultimately employment. This forms the basis of the programme of activity and support they will receive.

**Tailored/flexible programme of learning and activity**
Each young person is supported to create an individual Activity Agreement learning plan. This will start from their expressed interests and be tailored to their needs including flexibility of duration and frequency of participation. The activities and learning which make up a young person’s Activity Agreement are related to the local labour market and form a clear pathway towards more formal engagement with learning, further training or employment.

**Consistent one-to-one support**
Consistent personal support underpins the Activity Agreement approach and its success in helping young people engage with and sustain participation in the opportunities it offers young people to continue to develop their skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work and in moving them into positive and sustained destinations.

Activity Agreements offer young people regular one-to-one support from a consistent professional, throughout their period of engagement. These professionals are referred to as Trusted Professionals. Trusted Professionals come from a range of professions, including community learning and development/youth work, education, health and careers. Each local authority area has developed a Trusted Professional workforce to meet the needs of young people.

**Strong partnerships**
Activity Agreements recognise that senior phase support cannot and should not be delivered in isolation. Activity Agreements are planned and delivered through strong partnerships, with a shared vision about how to best support young people. The need for strong partnerships is evident across the Activity Agreement model. At a strategic level Opportunities for All staff work alongside business and industry,
colleges, school, and training providers to ensure that young people have access to meaningful opportunities within a local pipeline of delivery, and that this is linked to real opportunities within the local labour market. Operationally, Activity Agreement partnerships harness the willingness, skills, expertise and knowledge of a wide range of partners, including youth work, the third sector and employers, to offer young people attractive and meaningful pathways for those at greatest risk of disengagement. For example, in partnership with third sector providers and colleges young people are able to achieve vocational qualifications relevant to the local labour market. Staff also work in partnership with the young person to plan, review and evaluate their Activity Agreement.

**Access to financial support**
Young people who are participating in Activity Agreements have access to financial support in the form of an Education Maintenance Allowance in the same way as young people learning in more formal settings. This is an important part of meeting those young people’s entitlement to support, set out in Building the Curriculum 3.

**Case study example**

The East Ayrshire Council model for senior phase transition support allows young people in need of support to be identified early in-school and to receive consistent and sustained support post-16.

The Council have put in place a School Transitional Support Team to work with young people at risk of disengaging from education and those who have already done so. Young people receive one-to-one support from the team, building a trusting relationship through which they can co-design a senior phase to meet their individual needs. The team works in partnership with schools and other local partners offering young people an alternative, informal, environment in which to engage in relevant and meaningful activities. This continues post-school in the form of an Activity Agreement.

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