YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation, representing 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 our sector. Youth work is part of the wider grouping of informal and non-formal learning which is known as Community Learning and Development. 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

YouthLink Scotland contributed to the consultation process to shape the revised National Outcomes and we welcome this opportunity by the committee to comment at this stage.

Q1. What do you think about the changes to the National Outcomes?

YouthLink Scotland welcomes the update to the National Outcomes; in particular we welcome the effort which has been made to make the Outcomes inclusive of Scotland’s people and to reach into areas which are shared responsibilities of Government, communities and interest bodies. We particularly support the inclusion of ‘wellbeing’ in to the purpose of the National Outcomes as this engages directly with what youth work can contribute to Scottish society. It is important that the National Outcomes extend beyond economic outcomes and truly reflect the human rights and wellbeing of Scotland’s people and our place in the world. We strongly support the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals in to the National Outcomes.

We also believe real progress has been made in the effort to simplify the language of the Outcomes without removing their meaning. However it is important that in the next stages, such as in creating the policy framework for each Outcome and their indicators that there remains specificity of action, contribution, responsibility and accountability; whilst also maintaining this commitment to simplicity and accessibility.

We strongly support the approach to mainstreaming of equalities which will be adopted within this revised model. We would seek assurance that due attention will be paid to the indicators which provide evidence of the Outcomes, and to ensure that they are also include this mainstreaming approach.
Q2. What do you think of any new Outcomes?

Whilst we respect the committee has chosen 3 of the new outcomes as the focus of the inquiry, we have chosen to respond to those of interest to the committee plus one which is of particular importance to our sector.

We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally

This Outcome must take account of tackling poverty in a way which does so without stigmatising individuals or communities. The language of ‘sharing power’ could be problematic as it suggests something being given away rather than supporting individuals and community to be empowered and claim the powers, rights and entitlements they have as citizens including participation in democratic processes etc. Youth work and Community Learning and Development is well positioned to support this to happen.

We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe

We welcome the reframing of this Outcome to reflect the values of inclusion and empowerment.

We grow up loved, safe and respected, so that we realise our full potential

This new Outcome is a welcome revision to the previous outcome which focused specifically on children and the early years. It is our view that this Outcome is much more inclusive of the love, safety, nurture and respect that children of all ages require, in to and including young adulthood. This Outcome has capacity to include the range of needs that specific populations of children and young people require beyond any arbitrary age.

We would encourage that the indicators of ‘safe’ within this Outcome include the risks that young people may be exposed to or the harm they require to be protected from – including alcohol, tobacco, drugs, exploitation, trafficking, domestic abuse, sexualised behaviour etc. which can impact on the safety of children and young people.

It is important that the indicators of this outcome are justifiably measuring data from children or from young people. The indicators included in the consultation document use children, young people or children and young people interchangeably for different indicators. There must be a clear and just reason for why certain indicators only apply to certain ages. The indicators must measure what matters to achieve the Outcome, not what is easy to count or gather.

We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society

This new Outcome removes the only previous outcome which specifically mentioned young people; we can assume, as it is not explicitly referenced in the consultation document that this is as a result of the presumption of equalities mainstreaming.
We support the ambition of this reworded Outcome, and believe it has the capacity to transcend age or stage, and which will recognise education and learning as a lifelong activity. We also hope that it will embrace the totality of individuals’ education, including formal, informal and non-formal learning and that the National Youth Work Strategy would be well reflected within the policy description.

We would encourage the inclusion of an indicator regarding volunteering rates showing a means by which many individuals, including children and young people, contribute to society to share or to develop new skills.

Acknowledging that the design of the National Outcomes is only in draft format, we would like to raise at this time that the use of a Mortar Board to represent education aligns this Outcome in to the domain of formal education and academic achievement – which will exclude much of the achievements and education and learning which takes place out with formal education, such as through volunteering, youth work, and community learning.

Q3. What do you think about the Scottish Government’s consultation on these changes?

It is apparent that significant efforts took place to engage with communities and with stakeholders in shaping these changes. However, in reading the summary of the consultation process it shows that young people aged 12-16 were not included directly in the consultation process; nor were children under the age of 7. There is also limited evidence of direct engagement with members of equalities and minority groups across all age groups – except when speaking to bodies who represent their interests as ‘experts’. It is important that children and young people of all ages and from all backgrounds can experience Article 12 (right to have your say on matters which affect your life) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child and to do so without discrimination (Article 2).