

# Response to the Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee Inquiry: Attainment and achievement of school aged children experiencing poverty



Submission from the Scottish Youth Parliament  
March 2018

## Introduction

The Scottish Youth Parliament represents Scotland's young people. Our vision for Scotland is of a nation that actively listens to and values the meaningful participation of its children and young people. Our goal is to make this vision a reality, in order to ensure Scotland is the best place in the world to grow up.

Our democratically elected members listen to and recognise the issues that are most important to young people, ensuring that their voices are heard by decision-makers. We exist to provide a national platform for young people to discuss the issues that are important to them, and campaign to effect the change they wish to see.

SYP's Values are:

**Democracy** - We are youth-led and accountable to young people aged 12 to 25. Our democratic structure, and the scale of our engagement across Scotland, gives us a mandate that sets us apart from other organisations.

**Rights** - We are a fundamentally rights-based organisation. We are passionate about making young people aware of their rights, and ensuring that local and national government deliver policies that allow those rights to be upheld.

**Inclusion** - We are committed to being truly inclusive and work tirelessly to ensure the voices of every young person from every community and background in Scotland are heard.

**Political Impartiality** - We are independent from all political parties. By working with all stakeholders, groups, and individuals who share our values, we can deliver the policies that are most important to young people.

## Our approach

SYP welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry into poverty and attainment.

As a youth-led organisation whose mission is to ensure that the young people of Scotland's voices are heard, our response is focused on question 4: 'What else could be done to support the attainment /achievement of children and young people from families affected by poverty?'

Unfortunately, given the timescales of the consultation and SYP's capacity, it was not possible to fully consult the membership on this particular inquiry. The response is based on SYP's report [Child Poverty Bill for Scotland: young people's views](#); SYP's Youth Manifesto [Lead the Way](#)<sup>1</sup>; and official [SYP Policy](#) which comes from the collective voice of Scotland's young people.

SYP's report on Child Poverty was the result of consultation with young people on the topic of child poverty in Scotland, based on the proposals of the Scottish Government set out in 'Consultation on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland'. The SYP staff team facilitated two small discussion groups on the 23rd

---

<sup>1</sup>*Lead the way* received 72,744 consultation responses from young people all over Scotland, and provides SYP with an incredible mandate to represent the views of young people. The Manifesto itself can be found [here](#).

September to carry out this consultation. These groups made up of 15 young people between the ages of 14 and 25, with mixed experiences of poverty. The SYP Advocacy and Campaigns and Youth Engagement teams worked with the Scottish Government to develop an agenda and session plan for the focus group.

For more information on the demographic of SYP's current membership, please see [here](#). Our members represent all 32 Local Authorities across Scotland as well as 11 National Voluntary Organisations, and therefore, we have a unique democratic mandate to create SYP Policy and influence change. In this light, this response is fundamentally shaped by the genuine views of young people. It should be noted that, however, as our membership represents young people aged 12-25, SYP's response is not representative of children below the age of 12.

#### **Question 4: What else could be done to support the attainment /achievement of children and young people from families affected by poverty?**

SYP welcomes this inquiry into the issue of attainment and poverty, as this is an issue which has been raised with us in several ways, including in our Manifesto where 69% of the 72,744 responses agreed that

*The educational attainment gap needs to be narrowed. To support this, the impact of poverty on pupils and students should be minimised, financial barriers to participation should be removed, and the cost of the school day should be addressed.*

From our current policy and our research into young people's views on poverty, young people have highlighted the following area that they believe work well in tackling this issue as well as making several suggestions as to what other support could be offered:

##### **Removal of financial barriers at school**

Participants from our poverty focus groups noted that high costs of education and associated resources presented a major problem - including textbooks, school meals, uniforms, and trips<sup>2</sup>. Additional monetary support or cost reduction in these areas would help to ensure that those who experience poverty do not let their financial position effect their ability to engage in education.

This is backed up by SYP policy which states:

*The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that the price of school meals should be maintained at an affordable level. (Policy Statement, 83% agreement, October 2017, Members' Motion by Ryan Kelly MSYP).*

*The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that the SQA policy to charge a fee for exam re-marking and full reviews should be reviewed to ensure that young people from all socioeconomic backgrounds have equal access to the appeals process. (Policy Statement, 93% agreement, March 2016, Committee Motion by the Education and Lifelong Learning Subject Committee).*

It is important again emphasise our Manifesto statement on the importance of reducing the cost of the school day as well:

*The educational attainment gap needs to be narrowed. To support this, the impact of poverty on pupils and students should be minimised, financial barriers to participation should be removed, and the cost of the school day should be addressed. (Manifesto commitment, 69%, March 2016).*

##### **Provision of correct support at school**

---

<sup>2</sup> The Scottish Youth Parliament, *Child Poverty Bill for Scotland: young people's views*, 2016; p4

Participants from our poverty focus groups also highlighted the issues surrounding the ability of schools in deprived areas to recruit and retain teachers, as well as to provide guidance and pupil support (including mental health support)<sup>3</sup>. Young people also asserted that it is important that schools can provide this additional support to those experiencing poverty.<sup>4</sup>

### **Use of schemes such as the Social Mobility Program**

MSYPs passed the following policy after consulting with their constituents and hearing of the benefit of this scheme to constituents in Glasgow:

*The Scottish Youth Parliament supports the work of the Social Mobility Foundation which provides academic opportunities to young people from low-income backgrounds. (Policy Statement, 93% agreement, October 2017, Members' Motion by Jack Campbell MSYP and Danyaal Raja MSYP).*

We recommend the committee considers this programme, its benefits, and how it or projects like it could be utilised more widely in this inquiry. More information on the Social Mobility Foundation can be found [here](#).

### **Equal Access to Internet for all Pupils**

MSYPs passed the following policy, with several members citing that many of their constituents may not have any/reliable internet access at home and therefore be at a disadvantage when carrying out work:

*The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that all high school pupils in Scotland should be able to access fast and reliable WiFi in school to allow them to access and complete their homework, resources and exam coursework. (Policy Statement, 79% agreement, October 2017, Members' Motion by Adam Paton MSYP and Caitie Dundas MSYP).*

### **Availability of training and work experience programs**

SYP also believes that vocational training, modern apprenticeships and other work experience opportunities have a role to play in helping those of a school age improve their attainment:

*Youth unemployment should be tackled through job creation and access to training programmes, modern apprenticeships, vocational training, work placements, quality work experience, and paid internships. (Manifesto commitment, 78%, March 2016).*

*The Scottish Youth Parliament believes more effort and resources should be dedicated to ensuring an equal gender balance in the promotion and allocation of modern apprenticeship places. (Policy Statement, 56% agreement, March 2015, Committee Motion by the Jobs and Economy and Equalities Subject Committees).*

### **Contact**

Kirsty Morrison, Administration and Policy Assistant, [Kirsty.m@syp.org.uk](mailto:Kirsty.m@syp.org.uk) , 0131 557 0452

### **Visit us:**

[www.syp.org.uk](http://www.syp.org.uk)

Follow us on Twitter: @OfficialSYP

---

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*; p6

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*; p10