



# Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill

## Scottish Youth Parliament consultation response

### Who we are

#### Vision

SYP is the democratic voice of Scotland's young people. Our **vision** for Scotland is of a nation that actively listens to and values the meaningful participation of its young people. Our goal is to make this vision a reality, in order to ensure young people in Scotland grow up loved, safe and respected, and able to realise their full potential.

#### Mission

SYP's **mission** is to provide a national platform for young people to discuss the issues that are important to them, and campaign for changes to the nation that they live in. We support our members in their work by training them, supporting their personal development and empowering them, using a youth work ethos.

MSYPs listen to and recognise the issues that are most important to young people in every community across the country and ensure that decision-makers listen to their voices.

#### Values

- **Democracy** - We are youth-led and accountable to young people aged 14 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 rights-based organisation. We are passionate about making young people aware of their rights, and ensuring that local and national governments uphold their rights.
- **Inclusion and Diversity** - We are committed to being truly inclusive and work tirelessly to ensure policymakers and politicians hear the voices of young people from every community and background in Scotland.
- **Political Impartiality** - We are independent from all political parties. By working with all stakeholders, groups, and individuals who share our values, we deliver the policies that are most important to young people.

## Our approach

As a youth-led organisation, we are constantly seeking the views of our MSYPs and other young people to ensure our policy positions represent their views as clearly as possible. This means that we have numerous opportunities to collect qualitative and quantitative data on a variety of issues underneath the umbrella of education. To ensure our response can accurately reflect the views of our members and the young people they represent, we pulled our information from various sources. These included:

### Focus Groups

To help respond to the consultation SYP held a focus group with MSYPs and young people who attended SYP's project's residential in January 2024. The group used interactive, youth work activities to engage with the questions in the consultation. Their views form significant parts of this response.

### Previous responses and consultations

Young people have previously shared their views with SYP on the changes they would like to see in relation to sustainable development and wellbeing. In our response we reference previous responses and reports produced by SYP and our partners.

### SYP's 2021-2026 Manifesto

The calls in SYP's 2021-2026 Manifesto (available [here](#)) came directly from young people aged 12-25 across Scotland. The consultation was led by MSYPs and supported by the staff team. Due to the innovative and multifaceted approach we took to this manifesto, we do not have the exact number of young people engaged throughout this process. However, we estimate this to be around 10,000.

### SYP Policy passed as a Members' Motion

At SYP Sittings, the membership gets together and MSYPs have the opportunity to propose Member Motions that will become SYP policy statements. To submit a motion, they will have consulted with young people in their constituencies to demonstrate it is an issue important to young people. At the Sitting, the membership then votes on whether the motion should pass, again based on consultation of the proposed Motions with their constituents. By way of example, at the last SYP Sitting, SYP79 in July 2023, nearly 5000 young people were consulted before MSYPs voted on Members' Motions.

# Response to consultation questions

## 1. Is a statutory definition of 'wellbeing' required?

Don't know

## 2. Do you have any views on how 'wellbeing' can be clearly defined in legislation?

Young people in our focus group session took part in a word association activity to understand what young people in Scotland understand 'wellbeing' to include.

The below information is not to indicate what should or should not be explicitly included in legislation, instead to give Scottish Government an idea of the types of things young people would associate and expect a definition of wellbeing to include. The feedback has been grouped into themes:

### Physical Health

Young people in our focus group felt that wellbeing encompassed good physical health. For example, in their word association young people included words such as Movement and healthy balance.

This is supported by SYP policy which has regularly highlighted the need for policies to encourage good physical health. These include:

*The Scottish Youth Parliament calls on the Scottish Government to eradicate poverty induced hunger and ensure that all of Scotland's young people have reliable access to the food they need. Passed in 2020 with 99% agreement.*

*The Scottish Youth Parliament calls on decision makers to learn from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by investing in and improving outdoor learning, whilst also recognising the benefits of outdoor learning for the mental and physical well-being of young people. Passed in 2021 with 95% agreement.*

*Funding for sports and leisure facilities and programmes should be protected from budget cuts and supported through a dedicated COVID-19 recovery fund to ensure all young people can continue to participate in activities, regardless of where they live or their household's income. Manifesto policy passed with 80% agreement.*

### Mental health

Focus group attendees also highlighted that they felt wellbeing definitions would have to encompass mental health. Words and phrases that came up in the activity included: Healthy mind, Growth mindset, and Mental health.

This is also supported by significant SYP policy, which highlights the strength with which young people feel policy needs to address the mental health epidemic in Scotland. These policies include:

*There should be more investment in college and university welfare services, such as mental health support, pastoral care, advice services, and housing support. Manifesto policy with passed with 86% agreement.*

*The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that local and national governments should invest more in infrastructure and opportunities for young people in rural communities, to help tackle rural isolation and improve mental health outcomes. Passed with 91% agreement in 2020.*

*The Scottish Youth Parliament recognises that there is an increased risk of poor mental health among LGBT young people, and therefore calls for more support to be made available by the private and public sector to ensure that all LGBT young people in Scotland are supported. Passed with 91% agreement in 2019.*

*The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that high quality, robust training on how to identify and support young people experiencing mental health difficulties should be a mandatory component of teacher training. Passed with 87% agreement in 2018*

### **Confidence**

Finally, focus group attendees considered that confidence was another theme highlighted throughout the discussion on wellbeing. These included phrases such as Self-confidence, self-awareness - knowing your boundaries, and self-respect.

This theme is less-prevalent within SYP policy than the first two, but the focus group activities and discussion highlight that this is an area young people see as part of a general definition of good wellbeing.

### **3. Is a statutory definition of ‘sustainable development’ required?**

Don't know

4. Do you agree with our proposal that any definition of sustainable development should be aligned with the common definition: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”?

Don't know

5. Do you have other views on how ‘sustainable development’ can be clearly defined in legislation?

As with our response to question 2, young people in our focus group session took part in a word association activity to understand what young people in Scotland understand ‘sustainable development’ to include.

The below information is not to indicate what should or should not be explicitly included in legislation, instead to give Scottish Government an idea of the types of things young people would associate and expect a definition of sustainable development to include.

They have been grouped into themes.

#### **Climate change**

Young people in our focus groups highlighted the connection between sustainable development and climate change, which should be reflected by any definition in law. This included phrases in a word association activity such as: Environmental sustainability and earth.

Climate change is also a significant theme throughout SYP’s policy, particularly including:

*The global climate emergency is an issue of climate justice, where those who contribute least to greenhouse gas emissions are most impacted. Countries most responsible for greenhouse gas emissions must: compensate loss and damage incurred in less developed countries as a result of climate change by contributing finances to a global fund, supporting research, and working on international cooperation. Manifesto policy passed with 70% agreement.*

*The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that there is a global Climate Emergency and calls on local and national decision-makers to prove that they*

*urgently giving priority to tackling climate change.* Policy passed with 94% agreement in 2019.

### **Sustainable solutions**

The second theme highlighted by our focus group attendees is sustainable solutions. Phrases and words in the activity included: solar energy, electric cars, wind energy, water energy, and recycling.

As above, this is a theme within SYP policy highlighting the need for decision-makers to have strong legislative abilities to implement these solutions. For example,

*Alongside potential additional charges on single-use items that could burden lower-income households, the Scottish Government should also do more to make alternative sustainable options more affordable and high-quality as well as encourage the culture in Scotland to change from a throw-away society.* Recommendation from our response to the Circular Economy Bill consultation

*The food and retail industry should make it possible for people to rely less on packaging made out of plastic.* Manifesto policy passed with 89% agreement.

### **Nature**

A third theme that emerged is the importance of nature in sustainable development. Evidence from our focus group includes young people using the following in the word association activity: Trees, parks, urban planning, and bio fuel.

SYP has policy supporting action to protect nature, which again should be linked to sustainable development solutions:

*The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that, in order to ensure the future of young people everywhere, decision makers should take more action to protect Scotland's natural environment and biodiversity.* Policy passed with 96% in 2022.

### **Education and learning**

The final theme around sustainable development highlighted the importance of education and learning in considering a definition of sustainable development. Focus group members mentioned schools as an example of this.

SYP policy has previously highlighted the need for effective education that covers responsible citizenship, which would closely relate to sustainable development. For example,

*All pupils should have access to up-to-date and effective PSHE (Personal, Social, and Health Education) from a primary age, which addresses lifestyle, health, relationships, equality, social justice, and citizenship. Manifesto policy passed with 79% agreement*

## **6. What future wellbeing issues or challenges do you think legislation could help ensure we address?**

We asked young people in our focus group to consider what wellbeing issues they would like to see tackled in the next 5, 20 and 50 years in Scotland. While not commenting on if legislation would help to address these issues, Scottish Government should consider how this legislation will work with other programmes to tackle the challenges highlighted in these areas.

The same themes as below are prevalent in our manifesto which was developed following consultation with around 10,000 young people and throughout our Motions, which have all been debated and voted on by MSYPs following consultation with young people. This indicates that young people support both legislative and non-legislative action to tackle these issues.

It is important to note that the below is not an exhaustive list of young people's views on future wellbeing issues, but are just examples to highlight the themes from our focus group attendees.

They have been grouped into themes:

### **Equality**

Young people highlighted equality issues the which they think needs to be addressed in the next 5, 20, and 50 years in Scotland. These included:

- Good Education for all
- Reducing violence towards women
- Better job opportunities
- Reduction in rural deprivation

### **Healthy environment**

They also highlighted environmental issues the which they think needs to be addressed in the next 5, 20, and 50 years in Scotland. These included:

- Ban Disposable Vapes
- Legal protection for the built environment
- free bus travel expanded 26 and under
- A hundred percent carbon free
- 100% renewable energy

### **Human rights are respected**

Attendees also highlighted Human rights issues the which they think needs to be addressed in the next 5, 20, and 50 years in Scotland. These included:

- All rights protected in law
- UNCRC rights feeling real for everyone under 18

### **Healthy both physically and mentally**

Next, focus group members highlighted health issues the which they think needs to be addressed in the next 5, 20, and 50 years in Scotland. These included:

- Better mental health strategies
- More awareness about body image issues
- No stigma around contraception
- Women's health representation

### **Free from poverty**

Finally from the themes from our focus group, young people addressed poverty and the issues that would need to be addressed in the next 5, 20, and 50 years. These included:

- Social housing
- High minimum wage
- No cost of living crisis
- A reduction/end to homelessness

**7. We are aware that the term 'sustainable development' has been set out in various legislation of the Scottish Parliament since devolution in 1999, and that careful consideration will need to be given to how any new definition will impact on these. What impact, if any, would the proposed definition have on other areas of legislation?**

N/A



**8. How should a legal duty be defined to ensure that public authorities uphold sustainable development and the interests of future generations?**

N/A

**9. Are there specific areas of decision making that should be included or excluded from the Bill?**

N/A

**Areas of decision making to exclude:**

N/A

**10. What issues, if any, may result from strengthening the requirement to have regard to the National Outcomes?**

N/A

**11. Should any duty apply to the Scottish Government?**

N/A

**12. Do you have any views on the range and type of organisations that any duty should apply to?**

N/A

**13. Do you have any views on how we can better report the achievement of wellbeing objectives which supports clear accountability and scrutiny of public bodies in Scotland?**

N/A

**14. What additional steps are needed to ensure collaboration and working across boundaries?**

N/A

**15. Do you have any views on whether any duty related to ways of working could create conflicts with duties currently placed on you?**

N/A

**16. Do you have any views on the additional resource implications necessary to discharge any wellbeing duty in your organisation?**

N/A

**17. Should Scotland establish an independent Commissioner for Future Generations?**

Don't Know

**18. In what ways could an independent Commissioner for Future Generations increase the accountability, scrutiny and support for decision making?**

Young people at our focus group did not take a view specifically on if a future generations commissioner should be established. Instead, young people took part in a debating activity where one group of young people gave arguments for a Future Generations Commissioner and the other gave arguments against. Scottish Government should consider the arguments in both sides of this debate before coming to a conclusion on establishing a Future Generations Commissioner.

When determining arguments for, young people in our focus group argued:

- It would be beneficial to have not just 1 person looking after the future - their teams could look at now and the future to help understand potential current and future impact. They thought a Future Generations Commissioner would be able to focus on ethics and sustainability plans.
- If no one is doing this role there won't be anyone looking forward to the future because a lot of politics and decision-making can be short term.
- In Wales, the Future Generations Commissioner did lots of really good things, including:
  - o Looks out for the future issues that may not be considered by other decision-makers.
  - o 2023-30 new strategy outliners changes they want to see over 7 years.
- We are currently spending money on less important issues which should be filtered into new Commissioner's role to make sure it was good value for money.

However, considering arguments against, young people in our focus group argued:

- There are already some mechanisms for taking into consideration the views of children and young people, which should look to the future, such as the children and young people's Commissioner for Scotland and the Scottish Youth Parliament. They also mentioned that bodies like the
- It could take money away from other policy areas during a time when money is really tight.

- It is often really difficult to look too far into the future (for example, very few people predicted the Covid-19 pandemic) so that may limit the work of a Commissioner.
- Commissioners can be ignored by Government, so even if they did good work, it still would only lead to change if Scottish Government listened to their views.

**19. Are there alternative ways we can increase the accountability, scrutiny and support for decision making?**

N/A