



Scottish Youth Parliament
Mansfield Traquair
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Community Learning & Development Review

Scottish Youth Parliament response - March 2024

Who we are

Vision

Scottish Youth Parliament (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.

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[@OfficialSYP](https://www.instagram.com/OfficialSYP)

Registered in Scotland: SC227548

Scottish Charity Number: SC032662

- **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.

Introduction

We are a youth work organisation. We use a youth work framework and work with every Local Authority in Scotland and 10 National Voluntary Organisations to support young people to realise their Article 12 right to be heard on decisions that affect them at the local and national level.

While this review refers to Community Learning and Development in its entirety, as a youth-led youth work organisation we'll be highlighting the views of young people on youth work specifically. This will include both Local Authority youth work and voluntary youth work services, which were not differentiated between in the consultations this response is based on. All of the information shared in this response is based on consultation with young people and has been approved by SYP's Convener's Group - a group of Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) who lead all of SYP's Committees, policy and campaigning work.

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 community learning and development, but specifically, youth work. 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:

Youth work and Me reports

In 2019 SYP published our first Youth Work and Me report, outlining young people's experiences of youth work in Scotland. The report highlighted how youth work has changed young people's lives, and the impact youth work budget cuts were having on young people in Scotland.

Since our first Youth Work and Me report was published, the lives of young people have dramatically changed. The next four years included a global pandemic, major disruptions to our education system, increasing concerns about the climate emergency, a growing mental health epidemic, a cost-of-living crisis, and many other changes in our day to day lives. Throughout this time, youth work across Scotland has continued to deliver essential support to thousands of young people, despite increasing funding challenges.

To find out how these changes have impacted young people's lives, we carried out a new Youth Work and Me consultation, with 86 MSYPs who attended our 79th National Sitting in Orkney in July 2023. The findings from this consultation, published on International Youth Day, show the continuing importance of youth work for Scotland's young people.

We refer to data from both of these reports in our 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 youth work and education. In our response we reference previous responses and reports produced by SYP and our partners including our response to the National Discussion for Education.

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.

Our response

1. Awareness and visibility. How visible is CLD, and the positive outcomes it can deliver? (please consider learners/potential learners, decision-makers, and other relevant service providers)

Please give us your views

All young people involved with SYP - as MSYPs or through other avenues such as taking part in consultations, SYP projects, elections, etc... - are taking part in youth work and benefitting from the youth work approaches used. By way of example, in SYP's 2021 elections (the latest we have data for) around 45,000 young people voted. And in the development of our current manifesto, we consulted around 10,000 young people to determine their views on what policies should be SYP's priority. So large number of young people across Scotland engage, in some way, with youth work through SYP.

Despite this and highlighting the challenge, the majority of MSYPs, 62%, who took part in SYP's Youth Work and Me consultation during our National Sitting in Orkney in 2023 disagreed with the statement *"I know where to find out about youth work opportunities."*

In responding to that question, one MSYP highlighted the issue when youth work provision is not visible and the impact that can have on particular seldom-heard groups of young people. They said *"When found, it gives people opportunities that other services can't - young carers and care experienced [young people] are impacted by this a lot..."*

Another theme from the research that highlights the need for young people to be made aware of youth work opportunities was when asked *"If you could change one thing about youth work in Scotland, what would you change?"*, a number of MSYPs reflected that young people needed to be made more aware of the opportunities that youth work can give them. For example, one MSYP said they wanted to see *"More promotion of opportunities related to youth work"*. Another MSYP suggested as a potential solution to this challenge, *"Have one central place you can check where all the opportunities in your local authority."*

2. Awareness and visibility. If you work in CLD or are a local decision-maker, please tell us how you go about making people aware of CLD learning opportunities?

Please give us your views

This was not a question covered specifically in our consultation with young people, and so we are not able to give detailed information from young people's views on this question.

However, referring specifically to SYP's activities, we engage with young people across Scotland. As highlighted in our response to question 1 this includes engaging with thousands of young people through consultations activities and the SYP elections for example.

SYP are promoted throughout Scotland via our partnerships with all 32 local authorities in Scotland and our 10 National Voluntary organisations, who themselves reach thousands of young people to engage them in youth work. These partnerships allow young people from diverse groups across Scotland to access opportunities to engage with SYP while being supported by trained youth work professionals.

As a National youth work organisation we also work to promote opportunities to young people directly. This includes through social media, direct communications, and at events for example.

3. Awareness and visibility . Do you think there are clear career progression pathways in CLD for practitioners or volunteers?

Please give us your views

This was not a question covered specifically in our consultation with young people, and so we are not able to give detailed information from young people's views on this question.

However, SYP provide training and development opportunities for youth workers as part of our small staff team, but also including through our partnerships with all 32 Local Authorities and 10 National Voluntary Organisations.

4. Accessibility and availability . If someone wants to do CLD learning, how likely are they to find the learning they need or want?

Please give us your views

MSYPs in our Youth Work and Me consultation were clear that the most significant challenge facing youth work provision is funding. This is also reflected in our manifesto policy, which was developed through consultation with around 10,000 young people, and includes this policy position: *"Local youth work should be invested in by national and local government and protected by law from budget cuts."* Overall 72% of young people agreed, 10% disagreed, and 18% didn't know.

Additionally, MSYPs in our Youth Work and Me consultation were relatively split on the statement *'I have access to all the youth work opportunities I want'*, with 62% agreeing or strongly agreeing and 38% disagreeing. One MSYP said *"Ensure that young people are supported within their communities and can access opportunities to broaden skills and life experience to the full."*

Together these positions make clear that while many young people feel youth work opportunities are available when they want to find them, the funding challenges facing the sector mean this is not always the case. SYP would this reiterate our call made to Scottish Government at both the Annual Cabinet meeting with children and young people and the Annual Executive Takeover with young people for Scottish Government and Local Government to bring young people, youth workers, and decision-makers together to discuss and agree long-term sustainable funding solutions for youth work in Scotland.

5. Accessibility and availability . Do you have any concerns or hopes about the CLD learning offer in the future?

Please give us your views

As mentioned in our response to questions 4, young people in consultations consistently refer to funding as one of the main concerns they have for equal access to high quality youth work across Scotland and SYP have called on Scottish and Local Governments to address these funding challenges in the long term. This is supported by consultation with thousands of young people through our manifesto, *From Scotland's Young People*, which includes this policy position: *“Local youth work should be invested in by national and local government and protected by law from budget cuts.”* Overall 72% of young people agreed, 10% disagreed, and 18% didn't know.

Mollie McGoran MSYP and Alannah Logue MSYP spoke to the Scottish Government's Executive Team in November 2023 to highlight the importance of youth work and their hope that, if youth work is understood as human rights work and preventative spend, then the future of youth work in Scotland can be positive. They said:

“There are opportunities to ensure young people across the country can access high quality youth work services, regardless of where they live.

The key reason behind this is that youth work spend, is preventative spend. And if we flip the narrative and see youth work as human rights work, instead of something that is nice for young people to do after school, we see the real benefits it brings to our society.

Let's look at mental health for example, where youth work gives young people friendships, trusted adults to speak to, and a safe place to be yourself in your community. One young person in Youth Work and Me report told us “It gives me and other young people the opportunity to express ourselves in a nonjudgmental environment.” Alongside this, 89% of respondents told us that “Youth work has benefited my health and wellbeing.”

So, youth work can help young people before they reach crisis point with their mental health, where support needs to be urgent and often significant. This also helps free up CAHMS and other mental health services to support those that need it most.

Youth work goes further than just mental health support. Unison conducted a survey, where they asked respondents from the youth work sector how they felt cuts in youth services and other relevant services were having an impact on young people. They responded with statistics such as a “77% increase mental health issues among young people, and 70% rise in alcohol and substance use” there was also an 83% reported increase in crime and anti-social behaviour.”

Their speech was informed by evidence from young people and discussions with youth workers and is available in full on the [SYP website](#).

6. Accessibility and availability. To what extent do you feel that CLD learning is available at a time and location that works for the learner?

Please give us your views

While we do not have specific consultation with young people to support if they feel youth work is available at a time and place that works for them, there is rights-based and consultation evidence to support the need to ensure that this is the case for all young people in Scotland.

As a rights-based organisation, SYP reiterate that young people have a right to access youth work as part of an education that develops their personality, talents and abilities to the full as outlined in Article 29 of the UNCRC. Article 31 also protects the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities. Youth work and access to youth work for all young people should therefore be a central part of upholding the UNCRC in Scotland after the passing of the UNCRC (Scotland) Act in December 2023.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s concluding observations - which were developed in consultation with children and young people from Scotland supported by Together: Scotland’s Alliance for Children’s Rights, SYP, Children’s Parliament, and the Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland - make clear that education should include recreational activities and that UNCRC rights should be upheld throughout education. Recommendations include:

- Integrate children’s right to play into school curricula and ensure that children have sufficient time to engage in play and recreational activities that are inclusive and age-appropriate;

- Ensure the teaching of children’s rights and the principles of the Convention within the mandatory school curricula in all educational settings and in the training of teachers and education professionals.

To support this, young people in our Youth Work and Me report highlighted the importance of ensuring that youth work is accessible to all young people, particularly highlighting youth work in communities being important, and the need to consider rural areas. For example, one MSYP said: *“Equal opportunities for everyone, in rural areas and cities”*.

Another MSYP said: *“More local youth forums / groups in villages / towns”*.

Finally, another MSYP said: *“Ensure that all schools and public youth environments are encouraging kids to go into youth work, as all kids deserve this opportunity”*.

7. Accessibility and availability. Are you aware of any financial costs for learners in accessing CLD learning?

Please give us your views

This was not a question covered specifically in our consultation with young people, and so we are not able to give detailed information from young people’s views on this question.

However young people did highlight during our Youth Work and Me consultation the importance of removing financial barriers, including often ‘hidden costs’ such as transport, to taking part in youth work. One MSYP said: *“Costs should be completely subsidised so it is accessible for all”*.

8. Support and learning. Are CLD staff and volunteers trained/qualified to support a learner’s journey towards achieving high-quality positive outcomes?

Please give us your views

MSYPs regularly highlighted the youth workers in both national and local authority organisations as key support to them achieving positive outcomes.

For example, one MSYP in our 2019 Youth Work and Me report when speaking about a youth worker who supported them said: *“She was there when I needed to share my problems with or cry about things. Without her, I don’t think we would have been able to do what we do right now.”*

Another MSYP answering the same question said: *“I was trying to find my place in the world and they gave me the confidence to make a difference locally.”*

9. Support and learning. From your experiences, is learning taking place in a safe and welcoming environment?

Please give us your views

This was not a question covered specifically in our consultation with young people, and so we are not able to give detailed information from young people's views on this question.

However, we can share information on SYP's approach to delivering youth work in a safe and welcoming environment to learn. SYP's internal policies and procedures are designed to ensure we respect, protect and fulfil the rights of all young people we work with. This includes our organisational Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) and our policies to uphold the highest standards of child protection and safeguarding. Systems of continuous improvement and self-reflection in our staff team ensure that policies and procedures are followed and regularly updated.

Our engagement approaches are co-designed and delivered by young people, with support from SYP staff, to ensure engagement is safe, inclusive and accessible for participants. This approach creates spaces and engagement that cannot be achieved without youth-led participation. An MSYP involved in a recent SYP project said of this approach: *“Co-design of a process like this is a great example of Article 12 of the UNCRC taking place. I also think that peer led research on [young people's mental health] is a good way to make sure there are safe and comfortable spaces for young people to discuss their experiences.”*

10. Support and learning. Are learners encouraged to give and receive regular feedback on their learning, and if it is meeting their goals?

Please give us your views

As above, this was not a question covered specifically in our consultation with young people, and so we are not able to give detailed information from young people's views on this question.

However, we can share information on SYP's approach to delivering youth work which gives young people the opportunity to reflect on their learning and skills development, which is in line with the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework used across the sector.

MSYPs are supported to use “SYP & Me” - a digital tool where young people can record what activities they have taken part in and the skills they have developed while doing so. The skills are taken from the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework and MSYPs are given time and support from youth workers to ensure they have time to ask questions and engage with the resource. Alongside this SYP also value the importance of evaluation through

activities such as reflective conversations to encourage young people to consider their achievements and what they have learnt throughout.

11. Support and learning. How 'joined-up' are CLD services to other related services, such as schools, mental health support, benefits/money advice, employability services, etc?

Please give us your views

SYP have previously called for youth work to be given greater recognition within Scottish education. In consultation to respond to the National Discussion on education, young people in focus groups told us that education is about a lot more than just school. The role of youth work is critical. Young people mentioned that ensuring there is a wide variety of extracurricular activities is important for individuals. They found that when you have more opportunities to try different activities individuals could explore what they enjoy and in return learn more about themselves, their own needs and develop their individual skills through the activities they enjoy most. Critical to this is the role of youth work in providing young people with opportunities for an education that develops all of their skills and personality.

Alongside this, young people in our Youth Work and Me report called for better support for youth work, including improving collaboration. For example, one MSYP, when asked what one thing they would like to see improved about youth work in Scotland, said: *"More collaboration across councils and National Voluntary Organisations"*.

12. Support and Learning. What role do Colleges and Universities play in CLD?

Please give us your views

As above, this was not a question covered specifically in our consultation with young people, and so we are not able to give detailed information from young people's views on this question.

However, SYP work with colleges and universities to deliver youth work activities including consultation with young people on the issues most important to them and the SYP elections for example.

13. Pathways and progression. How are learners made aware of opportunities to take their learning to the next stage e.g. volunteering, more advanced learning, employability support, etc?

Please give us your views

As above, this was not a question covered specifically in our consultation with young people, and so we are not able to give detailed information from young people's views on this question.

However, referring specifically to SYP's approach - in line with SYP's youth work ethos, young people are supported to develop and can take advantage of opportunities as they become more confident and develop their skills. For example, MSYPs may choose to stand for election to our youth-led Board of Trustees or as a Convener of one of our subject Committees, roles which include further responsibilities and development opportunities.

In line with our youth work ethos, we also support young people to go onto other volunteering roles and to refer to the skills they developed throughout their time at SYP including in applications to education, training or employment. For example - and in addition to the SYP & Me resource referred to in our response to question 10 - at the final Sitting of our membership SYP run workshops on writing a CV, interview skills and joining a Board of Trustees.

14. Pathways and progression. How are learners supported with their learning to transition to the next stage?

Please give us your views

As detailed in our answer to questions 10 & 13, SYP support young people to track their skills development and learning as well as to refer to their experiences in interviews, applications and more.

15. Pathways and progression. How do we know if CLD learning is delivering positive/good outcomes for the learners?

Please give us your views

Under the UNCRC, young people have the right to be heard and taken seriously on matters that affect them. SYP uses this as the basis when reviewing the outcomes of youth work activities with young people. This means ongoing evaluation of activities, with young people's voices to determine the efficacy of activities and to learn and improve for the future. We believe this approach should be taken by key decision-makers nationally and locally with decisions therefore, including on budget setting, being made considering young people's views on what services they want to see protected and properly funded and supported.

Our Youth Work and Me reports from 2023 and 2019 provide overwhelming evidence to support the statement '*youth work changes lives*' and that young people involved in youth work often credit youth work as a significant positive influence on their lives.

For example, in our 2023 Youth Work and Me report, All MSYPs agreed (45.2%) or strongly agreed (54.8%) with the statement 'youth work changes lives'. One MSYP said *“Youth work turned my life around, coming out of covid lockdown my life wasn't going in the greatest direction, and getting involved changed my life. It's something that is so important to me and my constituents, and is also my job.”*

Another MSYP said *“It gave me the opportunity to express myself, become confident, make friends, help others through volunteering and youth voice groups, and improve my future greatly.”*

When asked what would happen if there was no youth work in their area, MSYP highlighted a number of problems. They include:

- **Loneliness and isolation** - one young person said: *“Many young people would suffer from loneliness and feel like they don't belong because they don't get to socialise with like-minded people”*.
- **Mental health problems** - another MSYP said: *“There would be a lot more issues regarding mental health and young people would struggle to accept themselves and may not learn positive attitudes”*.
- **Crime and anti-social behaviour** - a young person said: *“Young people would engage in anti-social activity to entertain themselves”*.
- **Discrimination** - an MSYP said: *“Young people would be hugely discriminated against and blamed for anti-social behaviour”*.

MSYPs also told us in response to this question positive impacts of youth work would be lessened in communities with no access to youth work. These included:

- **Opportunities** - an MSYP said: *“No upskilling, no confidence, no community, no volunteering, no vibes”*.
- **Youth participation in decision-making**: - a young person said: *“There would be no pressure for adults to consider the opinions of young people”*.
- **Support** - an MSYP said: *“Young people wouldn't have the support they desperately need”*.
- **Confidence** - another MSYP said: *“Many young people wouldn't develop into the powerful, confident, and change-seeking young people they are now”*.
- **Sense of belonging** - another young person said: *“Loss of community, especially for rural and [seldom heard] young people”*.

16. Please use the space below to provide any further thoughts or evidence about Community Learning & Development.

Please give us your views

To sum up our response, SYP's Chair, Mollie McGoran MSYP said in her speech to the Scottish Cabinet at the Annual Cabinet Takeover with Children and Young People in June 2023 *“I implore you to get ministers and local authorities into a room with the youth work sector and of course young people, to come up with funding and long term solutions. Time is running out for our youth work sector and we need a collaborative approach to deal with these challenges head on and before it is too late.”*