



Scottish Youth Parliament
Norton Park
57 Albion Road
Edinburgh
EH7 5QY
www.syp.org.uk

Proposed Youth Work (Scotland) Bill

Scottish Youth Parliament response

Who We Are

Vision

The [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. Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (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.

Our 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 and experiences as clearly as possible. This means that we have numerous opportunities to collect qualitative and quantitative data on a wide variety of issues. 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:

Scottish Youth Parliament Youth Work Campaign

In March 2024, SYP announced “*Invest in and protect youth work services*” as one of our national campaigns for the next two years. This was selected by MSYPs, following consultation with over 4,000 young people. A Campaign Planning Group, made up of 15 MSYPs aged 14 - 25 interested in the issue, was formed after SYP’s 81st Sitting in June 2024. The aim of this group is to design the campaign’s strategy and develop a series of deliverables to encourage young people to engage in the campaign. They delivered two in-person training sessions for MSYPs to increase their confidence in campaigning. In addition, the Campaign Planning Group participated in two online discussions about the proposed Bill on Youth Work, one with SYP staff and the other with Martin Whitfield MSP, the author of the Bill.

Scottish Youth Parliament Policy

At SYP Sitings, the 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 a recent SYP Sitting, SYP79 in July 2023, nearly 5000 young people were consulted before MSYPs voted on Members’ Motions. Throughout this response, we refer to SYP policy on youth work. For more

information on SYP Policy, visit the [Policy Log](#) on our website.

Scottish Youth Parliament Manifesto

The policies in SYP's 2021-2026 Manifesto 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. In the Manifesto, the policy *"local youth work should be invested in by national and local government and protected by law from budget cuts"* received 72% agreement.

Previous Engagement on Youth Work

Young people have previously shared their views with SYP on why youth work is important and what changes they want to see. In our response we reference a number of previous responses and reports produced by SYP and our partners. These include:

- [Youth Work and Me](#). In both 2019 and 2023, SYP produced two respective reports highlighting how youth work has changed young people's lives, and the impact youth work budget cuts were having on young people in Scotland. The 2023 report also highlighted the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- [LockdownLockdown](#). Commissioned by the Scottish Government, SYP partnered with YouthLink Scotland and Young Scot, to deliver 'LockdownLowdown'. This research followed on from two other 'LockdownLowdown' reports completed during earlier stages of the pandemic in Scotland. For this report, over 2,500 young people from across Scotland were surveyed on their thoughts of future job prospects, education and youth work.
- [SYP's Annual Cabinet Takeover](#). Every year since 2017 Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) and Members of the Children's Parliament (MCPs) have joined the Annual Cabinet Meeting with Children and Young People. The meeting gives children and young people the opportunity to bring some of the issues most important to them and their peers directly to the First Minister, Deputy First Minister, and Cabinet Secretaries. In both 2023 and 2024, the MSYPs spoke about youth work and how decision-makers can fund and protect it.
- [SYP's Annual Executive Takeover](#). Every year since 2019 Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) have joined the Annual Executive Meeting with Children and Young People. The meeting gives children and young people the opportunity to bring some of the issues most important to them and their peers directly to the most senior civil servants in Scotland,

including the Permanent Secretary and Directors-General. In both 2023 and 2024, the MSYPs spoke about youth work and how decision-makers can fund and protect it.

Our Response

We confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice on this consultation on Martin Whitfield's [website](#) which explains how the personal data will be used.

We are content for this response to be published and attributed to the Scottish Youth Parliament organisation.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Youth work should be formally recognised as a valuable educational endeavour, investment into which can make genuine positive change for the lives of young people and communities.
2. Local authorities, third sector organisations, and other organisations who work with young people must be equipped with the relevant knowledge, training and resources in order to deliver high quality youth work services.
3. Local authorities and third sector organisations should work collaboratively to ensure that youth work is delivered at a high quality and is accessible to all young people across Scotland.
4. Youth work should be easily accessible, informal and voluntary for all young people involved. It must remain fun, diverse and inclusive, and be a space that empowers young people and provides them with relevant skills and tools grow and flourish within society.

1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill?

Partially Supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) supports the aims of this Bill, and its recognition of the essential role youth work plays in Scotland. In line with our youth-led ethos, our Members (MSYPs) have told us that they mostly support this proposed Bill as they do want to see more legislation put in place to protect youth work, to ensure it is accessible for all young people, and that it is tailored to the individual needs of the local community. However, they want to see more done to engage with and protect seldom-heard groups of young people, as well as ensure that robust mechanisms are in place for collaborating and co-designing with young people and that the third sector is equally protected by this Bill.

One MSYP said,

“Youth work gives young people a really important alternative to school and formal education, but it has to be done right. It has to be made accessible and better funded”.

The Youth Work Campaign Planning Group reflected on what youth work means to them and how this proposed Bill could create a definition that everyone can understand and apply across any local area. MSYPs want youth work to be *“easily accessible, informal and voluntary for all young people involved. It must remain fun, diverse and inclusive, where it empowers young people and provides them with relevant skills and tools grow and flourish within society”*. The proposed Bill highlights the importance of youth work and addresses the core principles that young people must choose to participate in; youth work meets young people where they are; and is a partnership in learning. These principles were all supported by young people throughout our consultation.

This leads to the question of ‘what is youth work’? MSYPs and young people have told us the various forms that it occurs in their local area. In the Borders, for example, they said that it’s *“any activity you do outside of school including sports clubs, not necessarily because we believe sports clubs are youth work but for a lot of young people that is all they really have access to”*.

During SYP’s [‘Youth Work and Me’](#) campaign (2019 and 2023), MSYPs considered youth work to include:

“Informal education and involvement in the community for young people”; and,

“Creating a safe space for young people to be themselves”; and,

“A way for young people to come out of their shell, express themselves and develop their skills”.

There may be a general consensus on what youth work could be, but there is currently no universally applicable definition for everyone to apply. This may not be a definition to decide now, at least not in the first stage of consultation on the proposed Bill, as it requires much more in-depth consultation and collaboration between young people, youth workers and decision-makers; nonetheless, young people have told us that they do want youth work to consider what young people get out of the experience, whether that be transferable skills or, simply, enjoyment and a space outside of formal education. It is important to young people that youth work be recognised as valuable for those who just want a space to ‘hang out’ and have fun, but also that the qualifications or achievements gained through youth work are given equal weight and respect as the qualifications gained through ‘formal’ education (such as schools). We welcome the proposed Bill’s recognition that youth work is a valuable educational endeavour. Using the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework is fundamental for this recognition.

This applies similarly to youth workers. It is important that youth work is an accessible space for workers to enter regardless of experience or formal qualifications, and that it is equally valued as a professional pathway with opportunities to gain further qualifications, if youth workers wish to do so.

MSYPs did raise questions about the quality of youth work and how effectively it would be delivered under a legal mandate. They are aware of the resourcing and

capacity pressures already facing local authorities and flagged that comprehensive mechanisms would be needed to ensure that youth work could still be offered and invested in at a high quality. The proposed Bill does address this concern and offer mitigations such as comprehensive consultation with young people across all areas of Scotland to identify unique needs, a dedicated Youth Work Fund with specific resource allocation, and an on-going system of accountability - all of which will be important in creating a culture of high-quality youth work. The MSYPs want to see any legislation and future investment into youth work guarantee that local authorities are equipped with - and, critically, *feel* equipped with - the necessary knowledge, resources, funds and training to confidently deliver this kind of youth work. They also asked for specific consideration to be given for what happens if there are multiple youth work projects occurring in a local area or under a local authority competing for the same dedicated pot in the Youth Work Fund; and how this will be decided in a way that is equitable, democratic and recognises the myriad of ways that youth work can exist and operate.

Protecting the third sector's role in providing youth work is a crucial component of any proposed legislation, and the MSYPs asked how the third sector will be funded and what protections will be in place to guarantee it doesn't get forgotten or lost in this important conversation. It was noted that there was a limited focus in the proposed Bill on the role and value third sector youth work organisations and services bring to the lives of young people in Scotland.

An MSYP said, *"Youth work is built around the third sector. What happens if we place the onus only on local authorities to deliver it? Local authorities differ between each other and within themselves. In [my local authority], there's a big rural and urban divide. The third sector helps with this divide through youth work, can we put more funding into the third sector?"*.

2. Do you think legislation is required, or are there are other ways in which the Bill's aims could be achieved more effectively?

Yes

Please explain the reasons for your response

As mentioned above, the MSYPs expressed concern about the impact that legislation may have on delivery given the capacity and resource pressures that local authorities are currently facing. Nonetheless, they overwhelmingly told us that they do still support legislation for the right to youth work and are excited at the prospect of it being accessible to all young people across Scotland. This view is supported through SYP's 2021 - 2026 Manifesto, which sets out a policy on youth work: *"local youth work should be invested in by national and local government and protected by law from budget cuts"*. This was agreed upon after consultation with over 10,000 young people across Scotland. The Manifesto policy is the foundation for one of SYP's current national campaigns on 'invest in and protect youth work services' which was formed following consultation with 4,000 young

people, demonstrating the wide-spread support for protecting youth work. During SYP's Annual Cabinet Takeover, during which MSYPs presented on the three National Campaigns to the First Minister and their Cabinet, the selected MSYPs called on decision-makers to *"introduce a Right to youth work and to commit to protecting the sector from financial cuts"*. Similarly, at the Annual Executive Takeover earlier in 2024, when MSYPs met with the leading Scottish Government Civil Servants and Director-Generals, they asked that *"statutory obligations for youth work be strengthened"*.

All of this support for legislation is founded on the assumption that youth work services will be co-designed with young people and for young people, ensuring that a range of opportunities and models are available because a 'one-size-fits-all' approach does not work.

Legislation may not be the only option, but it is one of the most effective so long as it is done in partnership with all the people and organisations that it will impact. MSYPs did express concern that we have reached a point where legislation seems to be the only viable way to achieve universally accessible youth work, saying *"legislation seems to be the only option now as youth work is so underfunded and vulnerable. We have to ask the question as to why and how we have let it get to this point where we can only fix it with a law"*.

- 3. Any new law can have a financial impact which would affect individuals, businesses, the public sector, or others. What financial impact do you think this proposal could have if it became law? Would this save money or cost money?**

A significant reduction in costs

Please explain the reasons for your answer, including who you would expect to feel the financial impact of the proposal, and if there are any ways you think the proposal could be delivered more cost-effectively

When discussing the Bill, MSYPs focused on the benefits - social, mental and financial - of youth work, highlighting how it helps to prevent anti-social behaviour in young people, as well as improve mental health, confidence and other critical transferable social skills. One MSYP, in particular, reflected that for every £1 invested into youth work, it creates a return of £7 and helps set young people up for life. Youth work can help reduce spending on tackling intra-youth violence and anti-social behaviour. It can also help support young people with their mental health and reduce pressures faced by mental health services such as CAMHS.

"It may cost more money in the short-term, but it saves so much money in the long-term. It will build up life skills and improve job opportunities. [There's] less pressure on schools to deliver all the necessary curriculum requirements as instead young people can learn and be equipped through youth work", said one of the MSYPs within our Youth Work Campaign Planning Group.

Another MSYP similarly said, *“It will take pressure off the police, NHS, health and social care. Putting measures in place to improve youth work and a service that already exists can only result in everyone benefiting.”*

In 2023, SYP’s Chair also spoke to decision-makers about funding for youth work and how valuable it was to society and young people because youth work *“it is a route out of poverty and a support mechanism for our most vulnerable young people in, but it is also a critical part of our education system and empowers our future work force”*.

Such cost-saving preventative action could be achieved through more funding for youth work, but MSYPs were quick to point out in response that they did not want other sectors - especially formal education - to suffer as a direct consequence. Instead, they would like to see, at least at the start, the current funding streams from the top-down to be maintained and directed more appropriately and effectively, recognising areas of need and through listening to where young people are asking for better investment and improvement. Young people have consistently told us that they want to work in collaboration with other key decision-makers to decide how funds could and should be spent to provide the best youth work possible. They also want to see funding spent on upskilling young people in financial decision-making so that they are confident and well-equipped to engage meaningfully on the topic of youth work investment. This funding could go to knowledge-building, and it could go to protecting dedicated time, spaces and resources to enable young people to meet directly with decision-makers about youth work.

A re-occurring question that the MSYPs presented was on the issue of multi-year funding. They asked if this proposed Bill could lead to a much larger conversation about consistency and continuity for youth work - and by extension, third sector - funding. They also wanted to build on the conversation around human rights budgeting and what is in place for guaranteeing that the needs of young people are put first when allocation resources or making decisions, as set out by the recently incorporated UNCRC. Multi-year funding would further enable youth work to be a viable, long-term profession and sustainable career option, which will improve the continuity, and with it the standard, of youth work that is provided by dedicated experts in the field.

- 4. Any new law can have an impact on different individuals in society, for example as a result of their age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. What impact could this proposal have on particular people if it became law? Please explain the reasons for your answer and if there are any ways you think the proposal could avoid negative impacts on particular people.**

During the consultation, MSYPs asked what protections or guards were being put in place to ensure that seldom-heard groups not only continue to have equal access

to youth work but also have equal representation in decision-making on youth work. The MSYPs welcomed the Bill's recognition for the importance of legal frameworks that protect and promote access to youth work for seldom heard young people and those furthest from their rights. A common thread of consideration for young people is the accessibility of youth work, and how even something as simple as hosting a group online can make it difficult to be fully included. They also commented on the physical location of some youth workspaces, noting that council buildings can be intimidating and inaccessible - or that some religious spaces (such as a room within a Church) may not seem welcoming to young people outwith said religion. When setting out the expectations for youth work, it's important that this Bill makes clear what high quality looks like when accessed by any young person. Within the 'Youth Work and Me' report, one MSYP commented that youth work needs to do more to *"eliminate the discrimination that is present for rural communities in the youth work sector"* and it should look to break *"institutional and cultural barriers that work against people of colour and minority groups"*.

Another MSYP expressed concerned for what happens to youth work groups who support specific communities across Scotland (for example, working with young carers), rather than being situated within an individual local authority or by a geographical region - and how they will be guaranteed the same provisions, support and funding as set out in the proposed Bill for local authorities.

5. Do you have any other additional comments or suggestions on the proposed Bill (which have not already been covered in any of your responses to earlier questions)?

It is vital that any proposed Bill and future work on this topic recognises and embraces the integral role of the third sector in delivering youth work when considering the responsibilities that local authorities will have, in law, for delivery of youth work services in their area. It is not the sole responsibility of local authorities or the central Scottish Government to provide and deliver youth work, and there must be continued scope for the third sector to be meaningfully involved in all conversations about improving the system, the legal protections, the funding and the support.

The first youth groups in Scotland were all created and run by voluntary organisations. The third sector is full of established bodies with valuable knowledge and expertise, alongside the relevant drive and passion for delivering strong and effective youth work. The invaluable contribution of the third sector organisations to youth work must be acknowledged and where possible local authorities and schools should continue to work collaboratively in a way that supports and empowers these existing services, without overburdening workers, teachers or staff.

Participation in third sector organisations - in this case the Scottish Youth Parliament - has a direct pathway to broader participation in youth work across

local communities. Many of our MSYPs have reflected on how standing for SYP led them to be more involved in the youth work in their area:

“I got involved in youth work in the Highlands after standing for SYP. [It’s] really good to have a collective group of young people in the area and across Scotland and recognising the difference that we can make”.

Another said,

“I don’t really know what I would have done without SYP and youth work. I would probably still be involved in activism but through youth work I have the opportunity to make meaningful change”.

And,

“Growing up I didn’t have an opportunity to get involved in a lot of youth work. However, actually since becoming an MSYP I have got involved in a lot of youth work organisations in my local authority. I realise how much of an impact youth work has and how much it can influence the lives of young people”.

Overall, we welcome the recommendations put forward in this proposed Bill and are excited for more protections to ensure the continued delivery of youth work across all of Scotland. Article 29 of the UNCRC sets out the ‘Goals of Education’, emphasising that learning and development is about more than just attending school - and a young person’s education must develop their personality, talents and abilities. This can be realised through youth work, and we are pleased to see a larger conversation taking place between decision-makers on the value of youth work.

We want to see youth work offered through the Third Sector protected and invested in as much as youth work through local authorities, and all decision-making on delivery needs to be made locally to ensure it is tailored for the needs of those in the area and of a high quality.

Contact

If you have any questions regarding our response, or would like to learn more about our ‘Invest in and protect youth work’ national campaign, please contact: Philippa Balshaw, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, at Philippa.b@syp.org.uk

You can also find out more information about Scottish Youth Parliament at: <https://syp.org.uk/>

Registered in Scotland: SC227548

Email us at hello@syp.org.uk or find us on social media @OfficialSYP

Scottish Charity Number: SC032662