



INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONAL ADVISER – FUTURE SCHOOL REFORM

Scottish Youth Parliament response

February 2026

This response has been reviewed by Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) in SYP's Education and Lifelong Learning Committee.

Quotes in this response are direct quotes from young people involved in SYP's Education Reform Project.

Improvement

What actions or additional support could be put in place to help schools improve?

High-quality education should support the holistic development of the full potential of the child, including development of respect for human rights, an enhanced sense of identity, socialisation with others, and respect for the environment as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 29. With the interdependency of rights, the right to express views and have them taken into account (UNCRC Article 12) is crucial to respect and fulfil this. At SYP, we refer to the fulfilment of Article 12 as meaningful participation.

Young people's meaningful participation is a crucial component of both understanding and delivering high-quality education. The meaningful participation of young people requires robust infrastructure and processes to achieve and sustain, including but not limited to:

- School-level pupil councils/parliaments
- National involvement of young people in education bodies
- Fast, full, youth-friendly, followed-up feedback loop

SYP's policy on Pupil Councils, as agreed by 86% of SYP's membership, sets out that:

"every school in Scotland should have a pupil council, which is democratically elected, youth-led and adequately supported by school management."

For Pupil Councils to be effective in supporting empowered learners, they need to be led by young people; have real responsibility; and involve a diverse range of young people. Young people also want a two-way discussion about their learning though they perceive teachers



and school staff to be reluctant to engage with young people as teachers “think they’ll be lectured to.”

Beyond local participation, young people are prepared to take on a more significant role at a regional and national level. Young people were of the viewpoint that the work of national educational bodies, like Qualifications Scotland and Curriculum Scotland, affected them very deeply and therefore they arguably should have the most say in the work of the organisation. They felt, at a minimum, young people’s views should be given equal weight in decisions.

A lack of meaningful participation is a barrier to young people’s reaching their full potential. Young people feel that opportunities to shape their learning and education more broadly would promote positive education experiences.

Are there any additional comments you would like to share that have not been covered above?

Young people have been involved in major reviews on education, including the Muir and Hayward Reviews, the National Discussion, and most recently in a project on Education Reform. Despite the reviews recommending significant change, young people have not experienced a different educational experience. MSYPs think it is crucial to demonstrate “how things in education are changing as a result of young people’s participation.” How will this review process be different and enact the reforms required to improve education for Scotland’s young people?

Feedback is an important component of meaningful participation. Young people want feedback that follow Professor Laura Lundy’s model of Four F’s of Feedback:

- Fast – Acknowledgement of young people’s contributions should come shortly after they have shared their views. Decision-makers should clarify who the views are going to be given to and the next steps.
- Full – If possible, young people want to hear specific details of how their views have been understood and considered.
- (Child/Young Person) Friendly – Feedback should be accessible and understandable to young people, for example avoiding acronyms and jargon. Decision-makers may also want to consider the format of feedback, for example short videos.



- Followed-Up – Young people understand that change takes time to implement and they want to be kept up to date on how their views continue to shape decisions.

Funding

Do school leaders receive the funding they need to deliver high-quality education for all learners?

As outlined in Article 4 of the UNCRC, governments shall undertake all appropriate measures to ensure budgets are sufficiently planned, enacted, implemented and accounted to realise children's rights (UNCRC General Comment No. 19). This applies at a Local Authority and individual school level.

Young people were aware of the local authority-level budget cuts negatively affecting educational experiences. For example, young people highlighted that limiting or removing funding for libraries or library staff within schools would have a significant impact for LGBTQ+ young people who often use libraries as a safe space.

Young people think schools should have the autonomy to tailor solutions or pilot innovations locally.

As outlined above, meaningful participation is a critical part of high-quality, rights-based education. School leaders should ensure that there is sufficient budget to ensure participation structures like pupil councils or parliaments have the resources to run.

What changes, if any, would you recommend to make school funding more effective?

Young people should be involved in school funding decisions to ensure that budget decisions consider pupils' perspectives and learning experiences. In order to do this, school budgets should be transparent and accessible to young people.

Governance

How well do learners, parents and communities influence school decisions that result in high quality education for all?

Young people told us that meaningful participation of young people to shape their learning and education more broadly would promote positive education experiences, but that



opportunities to participate in decisions made about their education and their school are inconsistent between individual schools and Local Authorities.

Formalised democratic structures like Pupil Councils were seen as one important part of achieving meaningful participation and integrating young people's views. Whilst MSYPs agreed that Pupil Councils were good in principle, the reality of what they achieve was less positive, with schools reported as hierarchical and restrictive. Whilst some young people report positive engagement with their Pupil Council, other young people shared examples of tokenistic engagement with young people. One MSYP shared an example of a Pupil Council being shut down because pupils raised the same issues consistently (because the issues were not fixed).

“Pupil councils not a silver bullet BUT do provide a network for [young people] to advocate within their school. When teachers (rather than [young people]) set the agenda, it's meaningless.”

“In my constituency [Pupil Councils are] often tokenistic with young people looking over policies, but not creating them or their feedback not being taken seriously. I'd rather see young people pick their priorities then negotiate with SLT or whoever is in charge of that policy.”

For Pupil Councils to be effective in supporting empowered learners, they need to be democratically elected; led by young people; have real responsibility; involve a diverse range of young people; and be supported by school management. This requires robust infrastructure, guidance and funding to achieve.

Additionally, young people thought it would be a good idea to have Pupil Council representatives at Parent Council meetings. This would both provide transparency for young people on the work of the Parent Council and would also enable parents to take forward young people's concerns.

Are there further considerations for the governance of schools and school education?

Young people were clear that schools need autonomy to make positive changes for their pupils. Young people felt in some instances that decisions made at a Local Authority level restricted the choices individual schools were able to make.