



Regional Centre of  
Expertise on Education for  
Sustainable Development

## Responding to the Proposed Youth Work (Scotland) Bill

Response submitted by Learning for Sustainability Scotland

February 2025

### Aim and approach

**1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill? Please note that this question is compulsory.**

Fully supportive

**2. Do you think legislation is required, or are there are other ways in which the Bill's aims could be achieved more effectively? Please explain the reasons for your response.**

Yes

Our response is on behalf of Learning for Sustainability (LfS) Scotland, Scotland's United Nations University-recognised Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). LfS Scotland is an open pan-sectoral membership network of more than 1,000 organisations and individuals working to harness the full potential of learning to create a flourishing, sustainable world. (<http://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org>).

This proposed new law has the potential to support and strengthen Scotland's commitment to 'Learning for Sustainability' (LfS), making the entitlement to LfS a reality for all learners.

Internationally known as Education for Sustainable Development, LfS *'teaches individuals to make informed decisions and take action, both individually and collectively, to change society and protect the planet. It equips people of all ages with the knowledge, skills, values, and ability to tackle issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, overuse of resources, and inequality that impact the well-being of people and the planet. ESD is a powerful strategy to transform education, covering what we learn, how we learn it, and the environment in which we learn. It is a lifelong learning process that is an integral part of a quality education.* (<https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/need-know>). Since 2013 in Scotland, LfS has been defined as 'a cross-curricular approach which enables learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society.' (Scottish Government, 2013).

This response is a synthesis of inputs from staff and from:

- participants at a facilitated online session ‘Learning for Sustainability and the proposed Youthwork (Scotland) Bill’ organised by LfS Scotland and YouthLink Scotland to examine and seek feedback on the proposals.
- an in-person event for 40 change makers held in November 2024 and focused on ‘[Harnessing the power of Partnerships in LfS](https://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org/2024/11/28/harnessing-the-power-of-partnerships-in-learning-for-sustainability/)’ <https://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org/2024/11/28/harnessing-the-power-of-partnerships-in-learning-for-sustainability/>
- facilitated online ‘Learning for Sustainability and Youth work’ workshops for youth work practitioners organised by YouthLink Scotland and Learning for Sustainability Scotland in 2023/2024.
- 168 participants (our members from schools/ELC, NGOs, further & higher education and communities) at two facilitated online workshops by ‘Learning for Sustainability Scotland in response to the ‘National Discussion on Scottish Education 2022’.

Quotes from participants are in italics.

There was overall agreement that legislation is needed to enable equitable youth work access for all young people, with youth work as a resourced statutory service complementing formal education provision and ensuring equitable partnerships between voluntary and statutory sectors.

- *Fantastic Bill*
- *Make a requirement for workforce development statutory.*
- *Important that this is statutory provision for all, not just ‘hard to reach’ young people.*
- *The Bill has the potential to support partnerships which provide the conditions for genuine engagement, supporting young people in a well-intentioned way*

### Financial implications

**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?**

We anticipate that there will be some increase in costs.

Contributing effectively to the 2023 Learning for Sustainability Action plan ‘Target 2030: a movement for people, planet, and prosperity’ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/target-2030-movement-people-planet-prosperity/> to ensure that that all Scottish learners receive their ‘entitlement’ to LfS through youth work services, will require funding to ensure a sufficiently large and skilled workforce.

Participants at our online event about the proposed Bill commented:

- *Funding will be needed for Local Authorities.*
- *Support for professional learning pathways for practitioners is needed, making sure that there are enough youth workers to deliver the statutory requirement and that they are competent. Currently there is no clear career progression.*
- *The current workforce is ageing and lacking in diversity. This Bill is an opportunity to commit funding to the modernisation of pathways into youthwork and providing a skilled workforce*

- *Needs to be funded and resourced to support that entitlement by qualified youth workers*

Support needs identified by youth work practitioners in our workshops included:

- *Youth work budgets have been cut, lack of resources, funding and capacity*
- *Desperate need to resource this work in a meaningful sense and ensure it becomes more central to the initial education of teachers and CLD staff – current and future*
- *Where does LfS sit within initial youth work training? (Youth Work NOS)*
- *Upskilling of the youth work sector and greater expansion of toolkits*
- *Enhanced CLD professional education so everyone understands obligations*
- *More time to engage with other practitioners, share ideas and learning*
- *A professional learning plan alongside a resource to support this*
- *Realism about what we can do within limited time*
- *More training and empowerment of staff to build confidence and push boundaries*

## Equalities

**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?**

No view expressed.

## Sustainability

**5. Any new law can impact on work to protect and enhance the environment, achieve a sustainable economy, and create a strong, healthy, and just society for future generations. Do you think the proposal could impact in any of these areas?**

This new law has the potential to support and strengthen Scotland's commitment to social, cultural, economic, and ecological sustainability; as outlined in the [National Performance Framework](#). A key aspect of this is the ongoing commitment to 'Learning for Sustainability' (LfS), which is an entitlement for all learners in Scotland.

Since 2013 in Scotland, LfS has been defined as 'a cross-curricular approach which enables learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society.' (Scottish Government, 2013).

The Scottish Government's current national LfS Action Plan 2023-2030 - 'Target 2030: a movement for people, planet, and prosperity' <https://www.gov.scot/publications/target-2030-movement-people-planet-prosperity/> –sets out actions for stakeholders and delivery partners to achieve two key aims; namely that all Scottish learners receive their 'entitlement' to LfS and that all 3-18 learning establishments become 'sustainable learning settings' by 2030. A Sustainable Learning Setting is about every aspect of the learning context: culture, community, curriculum and campus.

For young people, LfS is not only learning **about** 'sustainability', but also supports the development of a suite of competencies that include knowledge, skills and capacities that enable everyone to fulfil their own potential, contribute to society and pursue ecologically, economically, culturally, and

socially-sustainable futures in an uncertain, changing world. These resonate across youth work values, ethics and competencies as well as those for formal education.

LfS approaches open opportunities to everyone; providing engaging options for those disenfranchised or struggling with education, such as marginalised groups or neurodiverse young people. There is evidence that LfS in youthwork has the potential to result in high-quality positive outcomes for learners, and in learner engagement that leads to improved life chances. Making learning relevant and contextualised by using and applying values, skills and knowledge is motivating, meaningful, inspiring and results in improved attainment and achievement (Scottish Government 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/educational-outcomes-learning-sustainability-brief-review-literature/pages/3/> ).

Youth Work practitioner engagement with Learning for Sustainability responds to the needs of young people. Participants at workshops for youth work practitioners organised by YouthLink Scotland and Learning for Sustainability Scotland in 2023/2024 said the benefits are:

- *'Making sure young people are listened to and have their voices heard – they must be at the centre'*
- *'There is more freedom within the youth work sector to cover what young people want to know about vs within formal education settings'*
- *'Children and young people can exercise their agency'*
- *'Children and young people are being heard'*
- *'Working in partnership with education to accredit young people from their learning'*
- *'Green jobs and employability for young people'*
- *'Utilising the Youth Work Outcomes and Skills to measure the impact'*

Young people's views on the importance of sustainability and climate change can be traced as a 'golden thread' across much of the educational policy reform recommendations in recent reports. Examples include:

- Referencing the concerns of young people regarding climate change and human rights, and including statutory legal requirements such as [Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) as a key element of the vision for Scottish education (Professor Ken Muir's *'Putting Learners at the Centre'*: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/putting-learners-centre-towards-future-vision-scottish-education/pages/2/>)
- "Overall, the most powerful message emanating from the National Discussion is the need to educate **all** learners in Scotland for an uncertain and unpredictable future..." (*'All Learners in Scotland Matter – national discussion on education summary report'*: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/learners-scotland-matter-national-discussion-summary-report/pages/4/> )
- "Scotland's qualifications and assessment system should...Reflect the Scottish curriculum whilst being responsive to the changing needs of individual learners and of society, creating a positive and sustainable future for learners, their communities and the wider world." (*'It's our Future'*: independent review of qualifications and assessment. '):

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/future-report-independent-review-qualifications-assessment/pages/5/> )

- “The transformation facing our economy and society is enormous as changing technology, changing demographics, and a changing climate act as catalysts for the emergence of new industries and the reinvention of others.” ([Fit for the Future: review of the skills delivery landscape: https://www.gov.scot/publications/fit-future-developing-post-school-learning-system-fuel-economic-transformation/](https://www.gov.scot/publications/fit-future-developing-post-school-learning-system-fuel-economic-transformation/))

## General

### 6. 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)?

We fully support this proposal to make it a statutory requirement to provide youth work services that ensure the holistic development, well-being, and social inclusion of all young people, and equal opportunities for all, regardless of background or circumstance. The Bill should include a clear commitment to supporting the entitlement of Scottish learners to ‘learning for sustainability’; enabling young people to fulfil their own potential, contribute to society and pursue ecologically, economically, culturally, and socially-sustainable futures in an uncertain, changing world. It should complement existing and developing education legislation and frameworks such as:

- Scotland’s National Performance Framework
- UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024
- Education (Scotland) Bill
- Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill

Key additional considerations highlighted by participants were:

- *‘This requires a collaborative approach across sectors – teachers, youth workers, other partners’*
- *‘How to link with education reform to have a more holistic approach to education?’*
- *‘Teaching professionals would welcome more YW collaboration with schools. This requires time and funding to share ideas ‘*
- *‘Could be really exciting, especially if it linked with the Outdoor Learning Bill’*

Learning for Sustainability Scotland

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[www.learningforsustainabilityscotland.org](http://www.learningforsustainabilityscotland.org)