

Finance Committee

Inquiry into preventative spending

Submission from Youthlink Scotland

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. As a membership organisation, YouthLink Scotland represents the interests of the whole youth work sector, both voluntary and statutory. We welcome this opportunity to provide evidence on how public spending can be focused on preventing negative social outcomes.

Our mission is for Scotland to develop a dynamic and accessible youth work sector which supports our young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. We work closely with the Scottish Government, Scottish local authorities and other key parties to achieve this aim.

1. How can public spending best be focussed over the longer term in trying to prevent, rather than deal with, negative social outcomes?

YouthLink Scotland believes that youth work should be a key focus of public spending.

We need to invest in our young people, and to support them to achieve their full potential. Youth work builds young people's personal and social development, and can help ensure young people are seen as an asset to their communities, and not a problem. Youth work delivers positive outcomes in terms of young people's health and well-being, supports their learning, helps keep them safe and facilitates a positive engagement with and contribution to society. In a time of economic hardship when many of our young people face unemployment, it is particularly important that we try to ensure that social inequalities and divisions do not become entrenched. For these reasons we believe that all young people should be entitled to youth work provision, and that the Scottish Government should invest in the youth work sector and develop a Youth Work Act in order to achieve this goal.

Evidence from our membership organisations tells us that diversion, prevention and early intervention work, and are cost-effective. In comparison to the modest level of investment required by youth work, the costs associated with dealing with crime and its consequences are extremely high. To keep a young offender accommodated and educated in an institution out-with local authority provision costs on average £700 per day, or approximately £5,000 per week, which amounts to £250,000 per year for a single placement¹. This is in addition to the costs associated with vandalism, anti-social behaviour orders, Fire and Rescue service costs for malicious calls/secondary fires/open hydrants and NHS costs for admissions for underage alcohol misuse. One major study found that, in total, crimes committed by 10-20 year olds cost the UK a staggering £7bn per year.² The report estimated that £2,300 could be saved each time

¹ South Ayrshire Youth Forum petition to the Scottish Parliament (unpublished)

² Preventative Strategy for Young People in Trouble. Coopers & Lybrand, 1994.

a youth crime is prevented. Aside from crime, there are also clear economic advantages to a range of different youth work interventions, for example preventing a pregnancy to someone in their early teens, or helping a young person resolve drug or alcohol problems.

A good example of the cost-effectiveness of youth work is the CashBack for Communities Grant scheme, administered by YouthLink Scotland, which funds youth work programmes for over 40,000 young people per year using funds recovered from criminals. This cost an average of just £9.50 per young person in 2008-9. We believe this represents excellent value for money and that there is a huge demand from the youth work sector for further funding to support similar activities. The CashBack funding programme is of course not necessarily permanent which underlines our concern about lack of ongoing, sustainable support for youth work.

If we do not support and invest in youth work, the cost to the tax payer could potentially be very high. Young people in Scotland are increasingly affected by unemployment and underemployment, with the number of young people aged 16 to 24 classed as NEET (not in education, employment or training) in Scotland rising by 2% to 13.8% in 2009, which represents the highest increase of the decade³.

We need to act now to ensure that unemployment does not become a generational problem, as research shows that young people who grow up in workless households are far more likely to end up living on benefits themselves, and are trapped in a cycle of dependency and deprivation which they feel unable to break free from.⁴ A Scottish Government study⁵ estimated that a single generation of young people who are NEET will cost £228 million in lower taxes and national insurance contributions, and £742 million in unpaid tax and benefit costs per year. Youth work can help prevent such outcomes by supporting young people, particularly those within in the More Choices, More Chances framework, to gain skills and qualifications, to boost their self-esteem and confidence levels and enable them to feel equipped to cope in an extremely competitive labour market.

2. What evidence can you provide from the UK and abroad to show that promoting preventative spending has been effective?

There are numerous examples of the benefits of youth work from Scotland and further afield. For example, one of YouthLink Scotland's membership organisations, The Prince's Trust, runs a range of programmes to support young people into education or employment. Of the 40,000 young people throughout the UK supported by the Trust in

³ Annual Population Survey, Chief Statistician for Scotland

⁴ Destined for the dole? Breaking the cycle of worklessness in the UK. The Prince's Trust, 2010

⁵ Estimating the Cost of Child Poverty in Scotland – Approaches and Evidence. Scottish Government Social Research, 2008

2006, three quarters went on to education, training or employment on completion of the programme.⁶

Evidence from England suggests that youth work is effective in promoting positive outcomes for young people, and helps them to be healthier, keeps them safe, promotes participation and supports learning⁷. To cite just one example, the teenage conception rate in South Tyneside has fallen faster than the national average due to successful partnership working between the youth service, Primary Care Trusts and schools.⁸

A review⁹ of effective practice in youth justice interventions highlighted the benefits of prevention work targeted at young people who are most at risk of offending. It cited the example of the Youth Inclusion Programme (YIP) in England and Wales, aimed at 8-17 year olds identified as being at high risk of offending or anti-social behaviour. An evaluation¹⁰ of the YIP found that arrest rates for the 50 young people most at risk had reduced by 65%.

Even if youth work interventions only succeed in preventing a small number of offences, this still represents a massive saving to the tax payer. A report into the costs of youth crime in England evaluated four youth projects, in Manchester, Walsall, Newcastle upon Tyne and London, and concluded that in order to be considered cost-effective, each project only needed to prevent one young person in 75 from committing a single offence each year.¹¹

Youth work can provide a route back into the mainstream for the most excluded young people. A study of detached youth work found that street-based youth work was more effective at reaching excluded young people than any other approach currently available.¹² Of the disadvantaged young people who engaged in the youth work projects reviewed, school attendance improved and temporary exclusions were reduced, anti-social behaviour fell by 75% and offending by a quarter.¹³

3. The Finance Committee has recommended that the Scottish Government continue to direct its spend towards preventative programmes. Which programmes should be prioritised?

Unemployment is clearly a priority area given the current economic climate, and we believe that there should be investment in guaranteed work experience placements for

⁶ The Cost of Exclusion – Counting the cost of youth disadvantage in the UK. The Prince's Trust, April 2007, p.24

⁷ The Benefits of Youth Work, Lifelong Learning UK and Unite, 2010

⁸ Ofsted, The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2006-07

⁹ Education, Training and Employment Source Document, Youth Justice Board 2008

¹⁰ Evaluation of the Youth Inclusion Programme, Morgan Harris Burrows 2003

¹¹ Preventative Strategy for Young People in Trouble. Coopers & Lybrand. 1994

¹² Reaching Socially Excluded Young People: a national study of street-based youth work. NYA, 2004.

¹³ Reaching Socially Excluded Young People: a national study of street-based youth work. NYA, 2004.

all young people, as well as volunteering opportunities, paid internship programmes, apprenticeships and adequate funding and places for further and higher education.

While early intervention and diversion are high priorities, we also want to see sustainable, dynamic and accessible opportunities for all young people, whatever their circumstances.

We propose that all young people should be entitled to access youth work provision, no matter where in Scotland they live. At present, youth work provision across Scotland is very inconsistent, with wide geographic variations. Whether or not a young person has any access to youth work services depends on whatever local arrangements have been made, with factors such as accessibility, staff capacity and funding dictating provision. Unfortunately, it is often the most deprived areas - where young people have the most need of support - where youth work provision is simply not available. The 2009 Scottish Household Survey found that young people living in the most deprived areas of Scotland are far less likely to participate in youth work and other leisure, sport and cultural activities, and evidence from our membership tells us that this is in large part due to a lack of facilities.¹⁴

Moreover, the recession has had a devastating impact on the youth work sector. A survey of YouthLink Scotland's members found that 65% of respondents reported being significantly or very significantly affected by the recession, with three quarters (75%) of organisations reporting that they are losing money.¹⁵ The effects of this are that youth work providers are cutting back their services or delaying the delivery of new programmes. A third of organisations in the survey were reducing numbers of staff and cutting staff hours.

It is important to note that youth work is at present not statutory. We believe that recognising youth work to be as equally important to the personal and social development of young people as education or social work, will enable a fully comprehensive, relevant and effective youth work service to be delivered. Therefore we call on the Scottish Government to develop a Youth Work Act in order to achieve this goal of entitlement.

Research by the National Youth Agency in England for Lifelong Learning UK and the union Unite estimated that for about a pound a day for each young person per annum, all young people in England could access a minimum level of youth work provision¹⁶. We recommend that the Scottish Government undertakes a survey to estimate costs for Scotland, and would suggest a task force approach involving partnership working.

Perhaps most importantly, entitlement to youth work is advocated by young people themselves. At the 2010 Festival of Politics Young People's Day, school pupils from across Scotland debated the motion that all young people aged 18 and under should

¹⁴ Scottish Household Survey 2009.

¹⁵ Youth Work and the Recession. YouthLink Scotland, 2009.

¹⁶ The Benefits of Youth Work, Lifelong Learning UK and Unite, 2010.

have free access to at least one youth facility in their local area. The motion was strongly supported, with 67% of the participants voting in favour. Indeed some young people argued that there should be at least three dedicated youth facilities in each local area, and made the point that a lack of a safe place to go leads to young people hanging about in the streets, drinking alcohol and getting into trouble, through a lack of anything constructive to do. As one of the young people from South Lanarkshire Youth Council argued, access to youth facilities is 'not a can be, it's a must'.

4. To what extent is preventative spending effective in addressing the financial impact of demographic change?

The number of young people in Scotland is in decline as the overall population ages. In the 10 years from 1999 to 2009, the number of children under 16 reduced by 8% and the number of people aged 75 and over increased by 14%. The impact of this in financial terms is that there will be fewer young people working and paying tax and national insurance contributions. Moreover, the effects of the recession mean that we may face the prospect of a generation of young people who struggle with unemployment and underemployment. It is therefore vitally important to support young people into work and routes into work, such as training schemes, work experience placements, apprenticeships and internship programmes. We also need to ensure that young people attain relevant, high-quality qualifications and that places, and funding, are available to them in further and higher education.

5. What are the main barriers to trying to focus spending on preventing, rather than dealing with, negative social outcomes? Is a focus on preventative spending less likely in the current financial climate?

The main barriers to preventative spending in terms of youth work largely stem from the perception that as a non-statutory service, youth work is not seen as a priority and may be seen as an easy target in budget cuts. Our argument is that by raising youth work to the same status as education and social work through a Youth Work Act, we would enable the service to be protected, developed and sustained.

6. How do we ensure that we monitor the impact of preventative spending over the longer term and shape budgets accordingly?

Evaluation and monitoring is built into youth work programmes as standard, and YouthLink Scotland provides support to the sector to develop the skills and knowledge needed in order to ensure that all monitoring is effectively and robustly managed.

7. Is the effectiveness of a preventative spending programme influenced by whether the relevant services are provided by the public, private or voluntary sector?

Youth work is delivered by both public and voluntary sector providers and we do not believe that there is any variation in the quality of the service provided by the different

sectors. However the voluntary sector does currently face a number of issues which may impact on its ability to deliver effective services. There is increasing pressure on the third sector to deliver services at a time of public sector cut-backs, yet at the same time sources of income are dwindling due to reductions in the funds available from the public sector and grant-making trusts. Income generation has also been badly affected due to the effects of the recession. This in turn affects workforce development and retainment, as staff are made redundant or face reducing their hours.

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