**Proposed Youth Work (Scotland) Bill:
Consultation Response from The Young Women’s Movement**

21 February 2025

1. *Are you responding as:*

On behalf of an organisation

1. *Please select the category which best describes your organisation:*

Third sector (charitable, campaigning, social enterprise, voluntary, not for profit)

The Young Women’s Movement is Scotland’s national organisation for young women’s feminist leadership and collective action against gender inequality. Our vision is a fairer Scotland where young women and girls are meaningfully heard, valued and supported to lead collective action and enact transformational change throughout society, systems and structures. We value the power, and recognise the necessity, of working both intersectionally and intergenerationally to achieve change. Young women, girls and non-binary people who recognise themselves within this movement are at the heart of everything we do by co-designing, leading and participating in our research, campaigns and programmes. YWM therefore plays a vital role in amplifying young women’s voices and ensuring their lived experiences are at the core of decision-making in Scotland.

1. *Please choose one of the following:*

I am content for this response to be published and attributed to me or my organisation

1. *Please provide your name or the name of the organisation*

Dr Rebecca Mason, Research and Policy Lead at The Young Women’s Movement

1. Data protection declaration:

I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice on this consultation on my website available at the bottom of the page which explains how my personal data will be used.

***Your views on the proposal***

*Aim and approach*

*1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill? Please explain the reason for your response.*

**Fully supportive**

At The Young Women’s Movement, we are delighted to respond to the proposed Youth Work (Scotland) Bill, which proposes granting all young people aged 11-25 across Scotland a legal right to access high-quality youth work services.

The Young Women’s Movement is Scotland’s national organisation for young women’s leadership and rights. We support young women and girls across Scotland to lead change on issues that matter to them. We believe it is for young women to determine the changes they want and need, and we provide them with resources, networks and platforms to collectively challenge systemic inequality. We are local in action and national in impact. We meet young women where they are at by working in lots of different ways, places and communities across Scotland. We create safe and brave spaces where young women can gather to learn, explore issues that matter to them and lead change.

Each year we work with up to 500 young women and girls from across Scotland, meeting them in local and national settings to develop their leadership skills, knowledge and confidence. We recently evaluated our *Young Women Lead* programme, which began in 2017 as a leadership programme for young women and non-binary people aged 16-30 to meet and discuss issues relating to systemic inequality and reflect on opportunities for further development and change. When asked why they participated in the programme, 85% of participants told us they engaged primarily for professional development, while 60% participated to increase employment opportunities. One young woman recently told us that her participation in youth work “gave me a belief in myself I didn’t know possible”. Another told us she felt “treated like an expert, someone with valuable insights for the first time as a young woman of colour.”

While we primarily work with young women and girls, we recognise the importance of bringing together young people of all genders together to foster healthy relationships. By working together, young people develop into confident young adults, recognising the importance of mutual respect and tolerance. At The Young Women’s Movement, we know that youth work is critical in addressing complex societal challenges, including educational attainment, employability, social injustice and systemic inequality. Our programmes empower young women to safely meet, network and discuss their experiences, which is increasingly needed in our ever-changing, challenging society. Young women value youth workers who listen to them without judgement and offer solutions and advice on issues affecting their everyday lives. We know that access to youth services across Scotland is inconsistent, leaving many young people without the support they need to thrive. Young women living in parts of rural Scotland often tell us that they currently do not feel like they have equal access to opportunities in comparison to those living in urban areas, particularly the Central Belt.[[1]](#footnote-1) By streamlining access to youth work services across Scotland, the proposed Bill would begin to tackle some of the regional inequalities faced by young people, particularly those living in rural and isolated communities.

At The Young Women’s Movement, we believe it is vital that our programmes and projects empower young women to advocate for themselves and positively impacting the world around them. We recognise the value and importance of youth work in empowering young people to develop their skills, confidence and opportunities. Youth work fosters friendships between young people, encouraging them to grow at their own pace in a supportive environment and make lifelong connections with young people from diverse backgrounds and communities. We believe that every young person – regardless of their background, location or circumstances – should be afforded the opportunity to engage in youth work services for learning, development and community engagement. Most importantly, youth work keeps young people safe and healthy, enabling them to thrive and develop into confident young adults.

While we are fully supportive of the proposed Bill, we ask that the Member ensures robust co-production with young people, youth workers and youth organisations throughout the implementation process. For this proposed Bill to be successful, it is vitally important that we carefully listen to young people about their needs and experiences when participating in youth work services in Scotland today, ensuring that their voices and opinions are heard, respected and embedded in each stage of the development of the Bill.

*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**

At The Young Women’s Movement we believe that legislation is required. The absence of a statutory framework leaves youth work vulnerable to inconsistent funding and service delivery across Scotland. This proposed Bill will ensure that every young person - regardless of location or background - has access to high-quality youth work opportunities. The proposed Bill will begin to address the critical need for sustainable, reliable funding within the sector. Legislation would also make cross-collaboration between statutory and voluntary sectors more consistent. While investment and national strategies are crucial, they are insufficient without legislative backing. In making youth work a statutory service, legislation would strengthen youth work’s relationship with the statutory sector by providing parity of esteem with formal education.

At The Young Women’s Movement we strongly believe in the importance of collaboration between local authorities, voluntary sector youth work providers, and other vital services to support young people, and we do this effectively and consistently and with maximum impact for young people. An example of how we do this is through our long-standing Learning and Development programme, *YEquality.* Our *YEquality* programme is a five-week, youth work-focused schools-based programme delivered to P7 pupils aged 10-12 of all genders in Scottish schools. We work with the pupils to discuss what equality means through a feminist lens, explore and challenge gender stereotypes, raise awareness of systemic inequalities, discuss leadership skills and provide useful tools that can be implemented when transitioning into high school. Since 2023, over 160 young people have participated in this programme across 6 schools in Glasgow.

“I found it fun and interesting and learnt a lot from YEquality like leadership and staying safe online." - YEquality participant

The proposed Bill would strengthen youth work’s preventative role, helping to meet Scotland’s National Outcomes related to health, education, and equality. This is particularly important in the context of preventing and tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender inequality. In recent years we have worked with three local authorities as part of our *Young Women Know* programme, a collaborative project delivered by The Young Women’s Movement and NSPCC Scotland in partnership with three local authorities across Scotland. The programme was designed to tackle unhealthy relationships and peer sexual abuse through peer-led campaigns, working closely with young women aged 16-18. As part of the programme, the young women who participated created toolkits on consent, campaigning and support services, including working with national support organisations such as Hear Me, Rape Crisis Scotland, LGBT Youth Scotland, Childline and Sandyford to create social media content on how to access their support services. The young women also created guidance for professionals, such as teachers and service providers, on how to create safe spaces and deliver sessions on consent sensitively and effectively.

“I feel more confident working with people and going into new environments due to experience in Parliament, Council and with the media. I feel a sense of accomplishment in new skill[s] and that I’ve made a difference.” - Young Women Know participant

“I feel a lot more confident in new situations and meeting new people. I also think it has made me more confident and inclined to get involved in other opportunities even if it’s out of my comfort zone.” - Young Women Know participant

The proposed Bill gives youth work the recognition and legal protection it deserves, ensuring that every young person has equal access to youth work, thus upholding their human rights. As noted in the consultation, the proposed Bill aligns with Scotland’s commitment to uphold young people’s rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Local authorities already have a legal duty to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of young people, ensuring their voices are heard, and their needs are met. In our increasingly digital world, young women tell us that they thoroughly enjoy meeting new friends and engaging with their peers in person. As part of our annual research project *the Status of Young Women in Scotland*, 13.5% of young women responding to our latest survey told us that they look for information about their human rights in community and youth work centres, with young women aged 19-21 most likely to volunteer in local community spaces or youth centres than other age group (Status of Young Women in Scotland, forthcoming). By legislating for youth work, Scotland will further align with its commitments under the UNCRC and ensure equity and accessibility for all young people across urban, rural, and remote areas. The proposed Bill should develop a clear national strategy for youth work delivery, ensuring alignment with Scotland’s National Performance Framework and the UNCRC.

*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? 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.*

**Some reduction in costs**

At The Young Women’s Movement, we believe that the proposed Bill will ultimately reduce costs and public spending in the long-term. Research shows that youth work reduces anti-social behaviour and crime – including violent crime – by providing young people with trusted mentors and safe spaces. Young people who participate in youth work report feeling happier, healthier and wealthier adults than those who do not.[[2]](#footnote-2) Youth work offers an exceptional return on investment: for every £1 spent on youth work, up to £7 is saved in future public spending.[[3]](#footnote-3) These savings arise from lower crime rates as youth work provides positive outlets and interventions for at-risk young people, and reduced demand on health services due to improved mental and physical wellbeing.

At YWM we believe that youth work offers young women and girls, particularly those with multiple and challenging needs, a safe space to discuss their unique needs and experiences. Young women have told us that youth work has helped them feel more confident and settled in school. Youth work ensures high educational attainment and employability as they develop into young adults, reducing dependency on unemployment benefits and other state support.

“It’s made me believe that my opinions can be heard not only in school but further afield.” - Young Women Know participant

“I have learnt that going to high school is not that bad and we all have a support network to help us.” - YEquality participant

The proposed Bill will financially benefit the public sector through a reduced demand for reactive services. Businesses and the wider economy would also benefit from a skilled and engaged workforce. Young people will also experience improved wellbeing due to the support youth work offers them, particularly for those who don’t have strong support networks at home. We ask, however, that the proposed Bill prioritises collaboration between voluntary and statutory sectors, ensuring resources are maximised. When establishing the Youth Work Fund, we ask that the Member considers ensuring flexibility in funding allocations to support tailored approaches for local contexts, ensuring efficiency and reducing duplication.

*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? If you do not have a view skip to next question. Please explain the reasons for your answer and if there are any ways you think the proposal could avoid negative impacts on particular people.*

At The Young Women’s Movement we believe that the proposed Bill will have a positive impact on young people, particularly those with multiple and intersecting identities.

Young women and girls face a multitude of barriers to participation, often due to their daily exposure to everyday sexism and the pervasive nature of misogyny in society. Youth work plays a critical role in addressing gender inequality, which primarily affects young women and girls in Scotland. Research shows that young women and girls face a lack of adequate support to resolve conflicts, and that social media can play a key role in perpetuating violence.[[4]](#footnote-4) As a result of this research, we worked with a group of 14 young women aged 15–18 in Glasgow to develop a toolkit to help address violence between girls, as well as a campaign to support young women experiencing bullying and violence online.[[5]](#footnote-5) The GirlPower toolkit helps youth workers and practitioners safely facilitate conversations with young women and girls experiencing bullying and violence from other girls, encouraging them to build trust and promote safe, healthy environments. The co-design framework implemented throughout this project enabled the young people to address their needs themselves and shape how they could be best supported by youth practitioners.

A member of the GirlPower group wrote a poem about her experiences in the project. We are including her words in our consultation response to highlight the power of youth work in fostering creativity and positively transforming young people’s lives in Scotland:

*Girl Power*

They say you’re too loud, too bold, too much,
Like your fire is something to hush.
But don’t you dare make yourself small
You were born to stand up tall.

If they push, if they stare,
If they act like you don’t care,
Know this truth: you have a choice,
You are strong, you have a voice.

No one should make you feel less,
Or dim the light inside your chest.
You don’t have to change your name,
Your dreams, your heart—don’t hide in shame.

When the weight feels hard to bear,
Pause and breathe—fill the air.
Write your story, dance it out,
Let your power drown their doubt.

Find the people who lift you high,
The ones who see the fire inside.
Speak your truth, take up space,
The world will learn to know your grace.

A friend, a teacher, a helping hand,
There’s love and strength—you’ll understand.
Helplines wait with open ears,
To guide you through the toughest years.

Storms will pass, you will remain,
Rising up through hurt and pain.
You’re a fighter, strong and free—
Girl power lives in you and me.

The proposed Bill should include a strong statutory framework that streamlines compulsory active bystander training for all youth workers, as well as active bystander training sessions with youth groups. Young people from marginalised backgrounds are more likely to need safeguarding intervention, and if these young people interact with more than one statutory body that has a safeguarding function, safeguarding issues are more likely to be recognised and reported and potentially at an earlier stage. It is therefore crucial that the proposed Bill outlines a clear and consistent safeguarding framework and function for all youth work sectors and practices. Collaborative, cross-sector approaches, such as working with the third sector with specific expertise on marginalised groups, will help to build an intersectional approach to the national framework. Third sector provision of youth work is particularly strong in targeted youth work, improving the lives of the most vulnerable. Participatory work with marginalised groups will help to ensure that the proposed Bill does not provide any additional barriers for them.

At The Young Women’s Movement, we believe that the proposed Bill will also positively impact the lives of young people from low-income backgrounds. Youth work plays a critical role in addressing the inequalities caused by poverty, which disproportionately affect young people in Scotland. Young people experiencing poverty often face multiple barriers, including lower educational attainment, limited access to extracurricular activities, and mental health challenges. By providing accessible, inclusive and often free services and spaces, youth work helps to break the cycle of poverty by offering a safe, supportive environment where young people can meet and develop their potential, regardless of financial barriers. The proposed Bill has the potential to have a transformative impact by ensuring equitable access to youth work services, particularly in disadvantaged communities, where the need is greatest. To mitigate negative impacts, the proposed Bill should explicitly consider how funding models and resource allocation address poverty-related inequalities. This includes prioritising support for organisations and programmes that directly benefit young people in low-income families.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the Bill will also positively impact young women with multiple layers of marginalisation; for example, young women with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ young women, and minority ethnic young women. The Young Women’s Movement runs 30 under 30, our annual campaign to celebrate young women, girls and non-binary people in Scotland who are making changes in their lives, communities and wider society. We established the list in 2016 to address the lack of diverse representation of young women in Scotland on other 30 Under 30 lists, and the campaign regularly features up-and-coming broadcasters and journalists, artists and writers, athletes and sportspeople, community organisers and advocates, charity workers and volunteers, and campaigners working across areas such as LGBTQIA+ rights, disability rights, and the prevention of VAWG. The campaign is an opportunity to champion the achievements of young women in Scotland, a platform to increase the reach and breadth of the young women’s work and the annual 30 under 30 launch party is an opportunity for the young women on the list to network and celebrate with each other. The campaign also amplifies young women’s voices by commissioning written articles from the annual cohort. For example, this year we had articles on the topics of: finding belonging as a care experienced young woman; how young autistic women and non-binary people feel about their late diagnoses; how the delay of the Human Rights Bill for Scotland impacts young women’s human rights.

Youth work has a key role in increasing employability and leadership skills in young people and is especially adept at providing targeted approaches to these services that are catered to the needs of marginalised young people. In 2018/2019, we worked in a targeted way with a cohort of minority ethnic young women through Young Women Lead, our leadership programme in partnership with the Scottish Parliament, to lead on an inquiry on the “gaps” in policy and practice in relation to young BAME women moving into sustained employment. One of the participants from this cohort explained that “it was hard to relate to the career advisors at school because they didn’t consider or weren’t educated enough on how being a minority will affect my career aspects. They didn’t know or weren’t aware of any resources that could be of help to me as a minority". Through this programme, the cohort received specialised mentorship, training and support from minority ethnic leaders and specialists to undertake their learning and research.

We ask that the Member considers how the legislation will cover the different needs and requirements of young people participating in youth work across the age range. It is vital that local authorities work closely with third sector organisations to ensure young people’s varying needs are met at the different life stages in which youth work finds them. Ensuring mandatory support and training for youth workers surrounding Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI), trauma-informed practice and mental health support is embedded into funding streams is vital to ensure young people of differing ages and backgrounds are adequately supported when participating in youth work services.

*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? If you do not have a view then skip to next question. Please explain the reasons for your answer, including what you think the impact of the proposal could be, and if there are any ways you think the proposal could avoid negative impacts?*

At The Young Women’s Movement we believe youth work contributes to a sustainable future by promoting environmental awareness through outdoor learning, community action projects, and sustainability-focused programmes. In our outreach work, young women expressed feeling demoralised about the state of the planet and the general lack of progress in tackling the effects of climate change in Scotland. In 2021, as part of our *Young Women Lead* programme, we worked with young women in Glasgow on feminist town planning, exploring how improving Glasgow’s transport system and reducing carbon omissions might mitigate the effects of climate change.[[6]](#footnote-6) Young people have historically been the leaders and activists in the environmental justice movement. Across Scotland, young women and girls are tirelessly advocating for systemic changes to ensure the survival and flourishing of people and planet. We ask that the Member embeds sustainability principles into the Bill, ensuring youth work programmes align with Scotland’s environmental and social justice goals. The Youth Work Fund should therefore provide a dedicated funding stream to youth-led initiatives focused on sustainability, empowering young people to take action on climate change and community resilience.

*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)?*

The youth work sector is a widely varied sector and includes the third sector. It is important that legislation provides clear accountability for who is responsible for ensuring that access to youth work is delivered fairly and in a streamlined way for young people across Scotland from all different backgrounds. Funding must be clearly marked out with funding earmarked for third sector organisations working with marginalised groups of young people, as well as national and local authority youth work organisations.

We also ask that the Member carefully considers how a youth work workforce will be effectively funded, including strengthening the workforce and ensuring fair pay. Research shows that women outnumber men when it comes to working with children and young people in youth work settings. Women are also more likely to earn less than men and are underrepresented in management roles within the Community Learning and Development (CLD) sector in Scotland.[[7]](#footnote-7) Young women working as youth workers have told us that they have considered retraining due to low pay and/or precarious working conditions. One young woman responding to our cost-of-living survey stated: “I've realised that I need to retrain in a new career if I ever want to own a house and be more financially independent. I'm currently a youth worker, an industry predominantly worked in by women. Typical 'women's roles' pay very little, despite being essential work.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Finally, we ask the Member to ensure robust co-production with young people, youth workers, and organisations throughout the implementation process. The proposed Bill should recognise the full breadth of the youth work sector, including voluntary organisations, uniformed groups, and specialist services.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

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**ABOUT US**

The Young Women’s Movement is Scotland’s national organisation for young women’s feminist leadership and collective action against gender inequality. We value the power, and recognise the necessity, of working both intersectionally and intergenerationally to achieve change. Young women, girls and non-binary people who recognise themselves within this movement are at the heart of everything we do by participating, co-designing and leading our research and programmes.

1. The Young Women’s Movement (2024), [Young Women Lead Evaluation Since 2017](https://www.youngwomenscot.org/research-reports/young-women-lead-evaluation/). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Institute for Government (2021), [Youth Work and Prevention](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/youth-work-prevention#:~:text=Youth%20work%20is%20proven%20to,than%20those%20who%20do%20not.). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Youth Link Scotland (2021), [Youth Work Manifesto](https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/youth-work-manifesto_final.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. No Knives Better Lives (2024), [The Lassies Are No Feart](https://www.youthlink.scot/news/the-lassies-are-no-feart-launch/). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Young Women’s Movement and No Knives Better Lives (2025), [GirlPower: A toolkit for practitioners about violence between girls](https://www.youngwomenscot.org/resources/girlpower/). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Young Women’s Movement (2021), [Young Women Lead 2021, Glasgow: A Feminist City?](https://www.youngwomenscot.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/YWLGlasgow.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Community Learning and Development (2018) [Working with Scotland’s Communities 2018: Workforce analysis of community learning and development (CLD) in Scotland](https://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WorkingwithScotlandsCommunities2018SummaryReport.pdf),p.18. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Young Women’s Movement (2024)[, “I’m just keeping my head above water”: Young women’s experiences of the cost-of-living crisis](https://www.youngwomenscot.org/research-reports/cost-of-living-crisis/). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)