



Martin Whitfield MSP: Proposed Youth Work (Scotland) Bill

Submission

17.02.25

About the Open University in Scotland

The Open University in Scotland supports people across Scotland to develop their knowledge, acquire new skills and achieve life-changing qualifications.

In 2022/23 we were proud to help over 19,500 students study around their professional or personal life at a pace and level that worked for them. The recently published HESA data (2022-23) shows that apart from The University of Glasgow we teach more Scottish students than any other university in Scotland and are by far the largest provider of flexible, part-time study.

Flexible study is core to our offer with 73% of our students working either full-time or part-time in 2022/23.

Most of our graduates (85%) remain in the location where their study is undertaken, which means their talent and skills benefit local communities.

We offer high-quality distance learning to students, lifelong learners, communities, employees and businesses. Our students range from school age to 92. We have formal partnerships with 16 regional colleges and collaborate with local authorities, the NHS, social care, the third sector and employers across Scotland. Our innovative national schools programme, Young Applicants in Schools Scheme, helps S6 pupils access a broader curriculum and bridge school to university level study.

We are committed to widening access to higher education building on our founding principle of being open to everyone, regardless of age, income, geography and background. The majority of our undergraduates in Scotland are eligible for a part-time fee grant to help towards their tuition fees. In 2022/23 28% of our undergraduates in Scotland declared a disability and 22% live in remote or rural areas. In the same year, 23% of our undergraduate entrants joined with qualifications below standard university entrance level and 21% were resident in the most deprived areas of Scotland.

As part of the UK's only four nations university, we are funded to teach students resident in Scotland by the Scottish Funding Council. Over 150 staff operate from our Edinburgh offices with over 400 associate lecturers working across the country. Our student experience is rated the best in Scotland (National Student Survey 2024).

OU research ranks in the top third of UK universities according to the Research Excellence Framework and we are a trusted partner of many leading organisations for teaching and research including the BBC, NASA, and the United Nations. We received a Gold Rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework 2023. Our free platform, OpenLearn, reaches over 300,000 learners in Scotland.

Find out more: open.ac.uk/scotland

Introduction

This response is being submitted on behalf of The Open University Scotland. We have direct experience of providing continuing professional development opportunities to the Community Learning and Development sector workforce. It has been made in collaboration with colleagues from the Faculty of Business and Law whose students, through the Open Justice Centre, compiled a comparative policy research report 'The Right to Youth Work in Scotland' for Youthlink Scotland which underpins the proposed Member's Bill.

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
- ☒ **Partially supportive**
- ☐ Neutral (neither support nor
- ☐ oppose) Partially opposed
- ☐ Fully opposed
- ☐ Do not wish to express a view

Please explain the reasons for your response.

We support the principles behind the proposed Bill however we have some questions as to how it will operate in practice. We don't believe they are insurmountable and look forward to them being addressed as the proposed Bill is developed.

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**
- ☐ No

Explain:

The current arrangements within Community Learning and Development do not require consistent provision of youth work services across Scotland. We therefore believe that legislation is required in order for youth work to become a statutory service.

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?

- ☐ a significant increase in costs
- ☐ **some increase in costs**
- ☐ no overall change in costs
- ☐ some reduction in costs
- ☐ a significant reduction in costs
- ☐ skip to next question

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.

At this point we believe it is difficult to quantify the costs of implementing the proposed legislation. This is something which can be explored in more details as the proposed Bill is developed.

We would envisage an additional cost in legislating for a statutory service, including the provision of continuing professional development for both paid and volunteer youth workers. Opportunities may exist for the funding of the service with an integrated approach within Community Planning Partnerships.

The Scottish Parliament was supportive of the recommendations of the 2011 Christie Commission and the proposed Bill is in that spirit with its emphasis on preventative spending and cross-functional collaboration.

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.

N/A

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?

The comparative research undertaken by students from The Open Justice Centre demonstrated how a statutory service in Sweden and Germany assists in the collaborative partnership approach to addressing complex social issues facing young people. We believe that the proposed legislation can positively contribute to creating a strong, healthy and just society for future generations.

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 Open University in Scotland's experience of delivering a pilot workforce offer for community learning and development practitioners gives us a perspective on what could be achieved via the proposed legislation.

We worked in partnership with Education Scotland and the CLD Standards Council for Scotland to address skills gaps identified during the pandemic. We delivered an online skills development portal, 200 funded microcredentials supporting CLD practitioners, and the development of a network of regional champions to deliver workshops and learning clubs. All of which was achieved with only six months funding from the Scottish Government

