

# Youth Work Bill

## consultation response

### Girlguiding Scotland's response

13 March 2025

## 1 Guidance

[YouthLink have created a guide to responding](#), and you can access the survey template, the online link and a young person-friendly guide to be used with young members.

We've included our response below, but here are our key points to think about:

- Children's Rights – how does this Bill support young people's rights under the UNCRC (Scotland) Act.
- Universal Access – how will universal access to youth work help member organisations like us raise awareness about the youth work we provide.
- Funding – making sure that member organisations have accessible funding, particularly at unit level to support our youth work
- Impact – how will this support young people's development, skills, wellbeing, and access to youth work.
- Volunteers – how can this help us to spotlight the amazing work of our volunteers. Showing that voluntary youth work comes from highly skilled and trained volunteers, and the benefits that volunteering can bring.

## 2 Our response

### 2.1 Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill?

Fully supportive.

We believe that every girl can benefit from the opportunities that come with being a part of Girlguiding Scotland. We are for all girls, whatever their background or circumstances. Our 9000 volunteers across Scotland run our youth work activities every week, offering fun, adventure and the chance to make lifelong friends. This Bill would further Scotland's commitments on upholding children's rights, as started by Scotland's landmark piece of legislation incorporating the UNCRC into Scots law. Building on the UNCRC (Scotland) Act to underline the value of non-formal education as part of a holistic approach to making Scotland the best place to grow up.

In a time of economic uncertainty, we work hard to make sure any girl who wants to join Girlguiding Scotland can, by legislating youth work, it is protected from inconsistent funding across Scotland, ensuring that every young person has access to high-quality youth work opportunities. Whilst our youth work is volunteer led and provided for low cost on the ground, the Bill needs have robust mechanisms to ensure that the financial implications of universal youth work are acknowledged, not just targeted youth work.

### 2.2 Do you think legislation is required, or are there other ways in which the Bill's aims could be achieved more effectively?

Yes, we think legislation is required.

As the leading charity for girls and young women in Scotland, the rights of children and young people are at the heart of what we do. We believe that every girl has the right to reach their full potential in accordance with the UNCRC. Legislating youth work aligns Scotland with its commitments under

the UNCRC, ensuring that youth work is equitable and accessible for all young people. We passionately believe in the value of high-quality youth work, but the sector faces challenges like variable, short-term funding, legislation would address this issue. This Bill would ensure that youth work receives the recognition and protection that it deserves.

Legislating is the most effective way to strengthen the validity of universal youth work. We want the provision from Third Sector organisations to be recognised and valued. A universal offer in communities raises the profile of Third Sector contributions to youth work for every young person. As set out by recent education reviews, and the UNCRC, a holistic approach to young people's education is vital. Legislating for youth work takes us one step closer to parity with formal education.

At Girlguiding Scotland, we are currently funded through the Scottish Government for our Generation CashBack programme and through the Children and Young People's Early Intervention Fund. While we hugely appreciate this funding, we recognise the need for more longer term, easily accessible funding particularly for our local (grassroots) levels who are unable to access previous local authority funding and have suffered from other funding streams being cut off. We are run by volunteers, and there is too great an expectation on volunteers to look for and access additional funding. Legislating this will support our volunteers to more easily access funding for our grassroots work.

### **2.3 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?**

Some reduction in costs.

Most girls aged 11-21 know someone who experiences a mental health condition or mental distress. There has been a particularly worrying increase of 11-16 year olds telling us this, from 77% in 2021 to 84% in 2024 (Girls' Attitude Survey 2024). We know that providing youth work improves people's physical and mental health well into adulthood. External research shows that 3 or more years in a uniformed organisation like Girlguiding

improves young people's life chances and can lead to better mental health. By supporting the mental health and resilience of young people, we reduce the costs associated with mental ill health later in life, creating a more well and resilient population.

**2.4 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 the next question.**

We know girls have missed out on opportunities because of the cost-of-living crisis. The 2024 Girls' Attitude Survey found that a fifth of 17–21-year-olds feel they've missed out on extra-curricular and after-school activities. Girls from marginalised groups are more likely to say they've missed out as a result of the cost-of-living crisis. 92% of girls from the most economically deprived areas say that Girlguiding is a place they can be themselves. Enshrining a right to youth work in law addresses these inequalities, by ensuring that disadvantaged and marginalised communities have access to youth work.

**2.5 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?**

We know that girls are increasingly anxious about global warming, the 2024 Girls' Attitude Survey found that 37% of girls are worried, anxious and overwhelmed about global warming (up from 32% in 2020). Youth work plays a key role in empowering young people to build a more sustainable future through outdoor learning, community action projects and sustainability focused programmes. We also know that youth work is vital for supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing, helping them to build resilience. Girlguiding girls are up to 23% more confident on

average than girls in the UK, according to the 2023 Girlguiding impact report. The UNCRC underlines the importance of listening to young people and acting on what they tell us, the mechanisms provided by this Bill will help more young people to develop the skills necessary for them to make their voices heard on issues that are important to them, like climate change.

## **2.6 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 recognise the value of targeted youth work provision, but as universal youth work providers, the Bill must ensure that there is greater recognition of universal youth work. Universal access to youth work is accessible, cheap and inclusive, and works alongside targeted youth work. As a Third Sector, voluntary, uniformed, organisation, we want this Bill to ensure that funding is distributed accessibly. The Bill sets out expectations for funding for Local Authorities and expected collaboration between Local Authorities and Third Sector organisations, but this collaboration must be robust to ensure that young people who access youth work outside of Local Authority provisions also benefit from the protections of this Bill.

Our delivery model is unusual as we rely on volunteers to deliver our youth work offer. Our volunteers are vetted and complete mandatory training in first aid and safeguarding. They are highly qualified, and many continue to upskill themselves through ongoing additional training in topics like inclusion, accessibility, and delivering a balanced and varied programme that is girl-led. We know that this brings benefits to local communities. Girlguiding volunteers are 5 times more likely to say they joined to learn new skills than other UK youth organisations. We know our volunteers value the skills they gain through volunteering with us, providing a skills boost for their CVs when entering or re-entering the workplace. They also report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction than the average UK adult.