

National Youth Work Curriculum: Commissioners' Briefing



The national youth work curriculum

The first of its kind for 30 years, the national youth work curriculum is a go-to resource for councils and other organisations looking to maximise opportunities for young people in their local places and neighbourhoods, helping them make the best possible transition to adulthood and reach their full potential.

The curriculum sets out what youth work is and what it does. If you are a policy maker, service commissioner or senior leader, the curriculum will be an important point of reference for you. It will help you to meet your statutory responsibilities and your strategic and operational objectives. It will also help you to plan, coordinate, commission, oversee and support youth work related outcomes and provision in your area.

As the diagram on the front cover shows, the curriculum provides a learning framework based on the practice and process of youth work. It also takes account of national occupational standards, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the youth work outcomes framework, and associated quality standards.

The benefits of the youth work curriculum in local authority commissioning settings

Youth work is the best learning methodology for unlocking young people's potential. Research consistently shows that adopting the right youth work principles and methodologies promotes good physical, mental and sexual health and leads to better outcomes for young people. By adopting the youth work principles that are at the core of the national youth work curriculum, commissioners and other leaders can ensure that young people are always at the centre of local decision-making, and that multiple, sustainable outcomes are identified, achieved and built on for the future.

Youth Work works because at its heart is the relationship between the young person and the youth worker. The relationship is voluntary and never begins from a deficit position. This means that the strengths of the young person are valued and developed from the outset no matter the situation or environment which has brought the youth worker and young person together.

Whether it's building better understanding of young people's diverse needs, breaking down the barriers that block access to the help they need, building workforce capability, increasing service standards, or attracting private or philanthropic investment so that best practice can be scaled and local provision sustained, the youth work curriculum offers an important framework that will help you achieve your goals. One of the curriculum's main aims is to provide leaders with the necessary tools and understanding to help transform the way in which youth work is perceived and rolled out within the systems, services and organisations that they lead.



At a time when resources are scarce and demand is soaring following the Covid-19 pandemic, the curriculum offers a flexible learning framework developed by youth workers for policy makers, service commissioners and senior leaders who want to plan, design, commission, deliver, or invest in effective youth work related services. With its unique ability to reach and engage young people so effectively, youth work has the power to shape the future of services and social systems that directly affect young people – systems that can be hard to navigate and that are not always able to meet complex or multiple needs.

The principles of youth work also have the power to address key issues in local areas, including racial disparity and health inequalities, as well as helping to better meet the needs of neurodiverse and LGBTQIA+ populations. As the youth work curriculum shows, it is the skills, knowledge and integrity of youth workers, together with the unique cultural understanding they bring from lived experience and far-reaching engagement with different communities, that enables them to build the strong, healthy, enduring relationships that form the bedrock of all youth work and that are the prerequisite for fairer, more culturally sensitive place-based systems. These relationships are always entirely voluntary, and they cannot be fashioned or forced by adults, however well intended. It is the young people who choose whether to become involved, when to open up or to shut down, and even when the health or legal risks may be serious, when to walk away.



Youth work's ingredients for success include actively listening to what young people say, building on their aspirations and ideas, responding to their interests, needs and concerns, and breaking cycles of anxiety and frustration by devising interesting and thought-provoking ways in which young people can feel part of something. By doing all these things and more, youth workers are able to co-create a safe jumping-off point from which young people can start to see themselves and their future differently. They learn new skills, develop confidence, discover how to make and act on decisions and, crucially, how to make their voices heard in relation to decisions made by others that affect their everyday lives.

The youth work curriculum: an exciting opportunity

The development and roll-out of the youth work curriculum presents a significant opportunity for councils and their partners to further improve the ways in which they envision, plan, coordinate and maintain oversight of local systems and services relevant to young people.

There is already an obvious synergy between the four pillars of youth work (empowerment, education, participation and equality) as outlined in the curriculum and the LGA's key principles for effective youth services¹. But more needs to be done, especially in light of well-documented reports on the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on many young people's health, well-being and future prospects.

¹ Local Government Association (2017) *Bright Futures: Our vision for youth services*

We believe that the youth work curriculum, which offers the framework within which relationships may be developed most effectively, could be applied in numerous different commissioning environments and settings, including those relating to:

- Young people who experience mental health and/or substance misuse issues and those dealing with the consequences of adverse childhood experience
- Young people who are experiencing family breakdown
- Young people who are not in education, employment or training
- Those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
- Looked after children
- Youth to adult transitions within health and other social systems
- Victims of violence and/or sexual exploitation
- Self-harm, suicide and other risk-related issues.

About the NYA

We are the national standards body and the professional statutory regulatory body for youth work in England. Our mission is to raise awareness of what youth work is, why it is important, the benefits it offers, and how to do youth work well and effectively. This includes offering strategic and practical support to youth work organisations, as well as to those that commission, fund and partner with them. We showcase great youth work practice, work on finding new ways of making youth work ever more effective through research and innovation, and set occupational standards for youth work. We also train and support youth workers, and give advice on youth work to organisations in higher education.



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