

National Youth Work Curriculum: Education



The national youth work curriculum

The first of its kind for 30 years, the national youth work curriculum is a go-to resource for senior leaders in education, teachers and youth workers in education settings who want to help young people maximise their opportunities, 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, senior leader or hold a non-executive position in education, the curriculum will be an important point of reference for you. It will help you meet your statutory responsibilities and your strategic and operational objectives. It will also help you to plan, coordinate, oversee and support better outcomes for young people 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.

Youth work: Helping young people to thrive

Making the transition from childhood to adulthood is not always a smooth path. Difficult transitions to adulthood can contribute to poor mental health and poor emotional well-being, conditions which are affecting more and more individuals, including many of the thousands of young people who have fallen behind with schoolwork because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As many young people, parents and those who work in the world of education would attest, it is not simply a question of getting young people to re-engage with the school curriculum. It is also about developing constructive and inspiring relationships with young people – strong formative connections that sit at the bedrock of youth work within an educational process that is flexible to young people's needs, interests, and concerns.

Whether in school, after school, as part of school outreach or specialist support, youth work involves listening to what young people say, building on their aspirations and ideas, and dissipating cycles of boredom and frustration with interesting and thought-provoking activities that young people can take part in. The ultimate aim is to co-create a safe jumping-off point from which young people can start to see themselves and their future differently. Through youth work, young people 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.

Now more than ever, the participation and progression of many young people in formal learning settings such as schools and colleges depend on the extent of their involvement in non-formal practice-based learning. As such, youth work has the power to make a unique and invaluable contribution to young people's education, health, well-being, and personal development.

In the current climate, for many young people, youth work is the vital ingredient that makes a world of difference to them – that enables them to feel seen and heard and allows them to cope, learn and thrive against the backdrop of the pressures that Covid and successive lockdowns have brought into their lives.



The benefits of the youth work curriculum in education settings

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.

The skilled delivery of youth work and its ability to change the life chances of young people does not of course happen in a vacuum. It is supported by, and based on, a new national curriculum produced by the NYA.

The curriculum offers a flexible learning framework developed by youth workers for youth workers and other people and organisations who want to deliver effective youth work. For policymakers, service commissioners and senior leaders who wish to know more about what youth work is and how it can help, the curriculum is an invaluable resource that will provide them with the necessary tools and understanding to transform how youth work is perceived and rolled out within education settings.

Research consistently shows that adopting youth work principles and methodologies promotes good physical, mental and sexual health, and leads to better outcomes for young people. The curriculum offers an informal education process where learning grows through conversation, exploration and enhanced shared experience – the best learning methodology for unlocking young people's potential.

By adopting these methodologies in formal education environments, considerable headway could be made in the face of post-Covid challenges, leading to better education outcomes and helping young people to gain strength and hope during even the most challenging of times. The benefits of youth work extend beyond the young person too. The youth work curriculum also seeks to address other key issues such as racial disparity and health inequalities, as well as help to better meet the needs of neurodiverse and LGBTQIA+ populations. As the 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 constructive, strong, and diverse relationships that are the prerequisite for a fairer, more culturally sensitive education system.



The youth work curriculum: an exciting opportunity

The development and roll-out of the youth work curriculum presents a significant opportunity for senior leaders in education, teachers, and youth workers to further improve the ways in which they envision, plan, coordinate and deliver services and activities that effectively engage young people in formal education. There are numerous excellent practice examples of the synergies between youth work and formal education where teachers and youth workers are already working well together to improve young people's education and life chances. 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. 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 education environments and settings, including those relating to:

- Young people who are experiencing family breakdown
- Pastoral support and advice in personal development
- After-school and holiday provision
- Work with young people experiencing difficulties with learning and socialisation
- Alternative provision
- 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 at risk of becoming victims of violent, sexual, or other forms of exploitation

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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