

National Youth Work Curriculum: Social Care



The national youth work curriculum

The first of its kind for 30 years, the national youth work curriculum is a resource for senior leaders in councils and other organisations who want to maximise opportunities for looking after children and young people who are growing up in the care system, helping them to 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 or senior leader, the curriculum will be a crucial point of reference for you, allowing you to determine how youth work might help you meet your statutory responsibilities and your strategic and operational objectives.

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: Support in an uncertain world

Making the transition from childhood to adulthood is not always a smooth path. Tricky transitions to adulthood can contribute to poor mental health and poor emotional well-being, especially if you are one of the increasing numbers of young people who are growing up in care or being looked after following a period in care. For some of those individuals, the transition from childhood to adulthood may involve contact with the justice system, exposure to different forms of exploitation, and experiences that are harmful to their physical or mental health.

Whilst continuity of care from the state is vital and specialist forms of treatment and intervention may be necessary to address multiple and complex needs, what also matters to these young people is the opportunity to build strong, stable relationships with a trusted adult: the exact sort of relationship that forms the bedrock of youth work.

These relationships are always entirely voluntary. It is the young people who choose whether to become involved when to open up or to shut down and, whatever the legal or health implications of doing so when to walk away. Whilst those relationships cannot be fashioned or forced by adults, they can be developed and, in time, deepened by actively listening to what young people say, building on their aspirations and ideas, responding to their interests, needs and concerns, and dissipating cycles of boredom and frustration by devising interesting, thought-provoking activities for the young people to take part in.

The ultimate imperative 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, 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.

For looking after children and young people with adverse childhood experiences or complex needs who continue to face numerous levels of disadvantage, the long-term support of an experienced youth worker can provide significant long-term benefits in an otherwise scary and uncertain world.



The benefits of the youth work curriculum in social care settings

Youth Work works because at its very 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 in relation to children in care and looked after children.

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.

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 curriculum present a significant opportunity for senior leaders in councils and other organisations to further improve the ways in which they envision, plan, coordinate, commission and deliver services to young people in care and to care leavers, especially considering well-documented reports on the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on many young people's health and well-being.



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 settings, including those relating to:

- Young people's engagement in their own care planning
- Engagement in formal education activities leading to better educational attainment
- The prevention of attrition from community-based youth justice programmes and interventions
- Young people dealing with the consequences of adverse childhood experiences and/or recent traumatic events
- Self-harm, suicide, behaviour management and other risk-related issues
- Victims of violent, sexual, and other forms of exploitation
- The repetition of serious and violent offences including gang involvement
- Those who experience mental health and/or substance misuse issues
- Young people from the travelling community
- Youth to adult transitions within the justice system
- The resettlement of young people leaving custody

The curriculum allows young people in the justice system to be placed at the heart of delivery, and for needs to be identified and met in a more participatory way. It offers the opportunity for significant and lasting change through the delivery of more youth action projects that will enable young people to gain a sense of belonging, grow and flourish, understand the consequences of their behaviour and see beyond the confines of their immediate world.

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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