

Raising the bar

Youth Work
Practice Standards

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Introduction

Youth services come in all shapes and sizes, from parents using a village hall to offer positive activities for young people (such as a Girlguiding group), to highly complex professional interventions in secure settings (such as a Young Offenders Institutes).

Different forms of youth work need suitable levels of governance, planning and evaluation and this document aims to be your guide. This document includes the minimum requirements, in a way which is easy to grasp and implement. But if the needs of young people are more complex, then this document outlines the extra measures you may need to take. Knowing what to do and who to ask for help is essential. The National Youth Agency (NYA) is here to support projects and organisations like yours.

There are significant pressures on the budgets of local councils. Charities are relentlessly squeezed, yet the need for highly skilled youth work provision is paramount. There is a rise in mental health problems amongst children and young people, exacerbated by the aftermath of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

The NYA has produced a practical how-to guide for setting up and delivering effective youth work for young people within your community.

Running safe and professional youth provision is straightforward, but it can be challenging in certain environments, and we all know it can take a lot of hard work and bags of enthusiasm. We aim to support you to create impactful opportunities for young people while ensuring you set up correctly and follow the right legislation.

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All youth projects in England need to implement the basic measures in this document as a minimum.

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This document outlines the expectations set by the NYA as the national standards and regulatory body for youth work in England. This document is informed by national youth sector organisations and other frontline practitioners. We highlight all the requirements that are in place which will directly affect you, your provision, and young people. In addition, we provide examples of good and great practice; everything that you need to know to deliver a youth work project – legally, safely and effectively.

Accompanying these Youth Work Practice Standards is the toolkit resource ‘Youth Club in a Box’. Within this document and the toolkit you will see many references to processes, resources, frameworks and other legal requirements.

If you have any additional questions that you cannot find the answers to, please contact us at info@nya.org.uk.

Register for a free account on youthworkone.org.uk too, where you can access free advice, support, information, training, resources and guidance. You will also find here the Youth Worker Register and National Youth Work Census.¹



What is youth work?

Youth work primarily supports young people between the ages of 11 to 19 years (though this can be as young as 8 or up to 25 years). It is a **distinct educational process** adapted across a variety of settings to support a young person’s personal, social, emotional and educational development. It aims to:

- explore their values, beliefs, ideas, and issues
- enable them to develop their voice, influence, and place in society
- acquire a set of practical or technical skills and competencies, to realise their full potential.

Youth work is built on a foundation of anti-oppressive, anti-discriminatory practice. This means it should be inclusive, accessible and engaging for all young people – everyone has a place and a home within youth work. Youth workers should always advocate for young people, and challenge where they see things that are unequal or inequitable. Great youth work supports and empowers young people to challenge these things for themselves and others, and works to make society a fairer and better place for everyone.

All local authorities with an education department have a responsibility to ensure there is sufficient youth work to support young people in the local area. We call this the Statutory Duty and this falls under 507B of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.²

Local authorities must ensure that there is a **minimum sufficiency** of offer for all young people, and provide support and infrastructure for those delivering youth work in a local area. Youth work can be delivered through statutory services (such as council-run local youth services or early intervention services) and the voluntary, community and faith sector.

Councils need to ensure there is enough support for young people during their leisure time. This should meet their needs and take account of cost, location, types of support and access challenges.

While these are funded differently, the structures that should be in place to support quality, equitable and safe practice are the same.

The process of how a young person is encouraged to develop and grow is what sets youth work apart from other professional practitioners who work with young people. Uniquely, youth work is the only service where the young people themselves get to choose whether they engage with it. This is unlike in schools, or with the police or social care, where young people are compelled to engage. Youth work supports young people individually and collectively to achieve goals and outcomes that are self-determined. It provides safe relationships, spaces and opportunities to have fun, try new things and learn about themselves and the world. Youth work should be accessible and include all young people in the way that best meets their needs.

Youth work can be labelled as universal (open access, where it's easy for everyone to take part) or targeted (provided for a specific group).



Councils need to ensure there is enough support for young people during their leisure time. This should meet their needs and take account of cost, location, types of support and access challenges.



Universal youth work is open to all young people whatever their background, culture or beliefs. It focuses on providing young people with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive and to make positive contributions to their communities.

This can include work that specifically accommodates or engages with young people on the basis of their identity, issues or experiences to create more equitable access to provision.

Example 1: a youth group for young women from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller nomadic communities.³ This is because young women from this community may not be allowed to attend a mixed cultural or mixed gender open access session.

Example 2: a youth group for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This is because those with specific physical or learning disabilities may require entirely different provision to enable them to freely participate in activities.

Targeted youth work is tailored to meet the specific needs of a group of young people. It provides the support and resources they need to overcome any challenges they may face. It is likely to have a predetermined outcome (such as addressing antisocial behaviour in a community) but utilises youth work to engage and build relationships with young people to address these outcomes.

Example: an organisation which provides youth work in a secure children's home is classed as 'targeted'. The young people are incarcerated so are not able to choose to 'go' to the sessions. However, they can choose to engage with the team delivering the youth work, which is underpinned by the young people determining their own goals through the youth work curriculum, and using relational approaches to achieve this.

A young person engaging with a youth offending officer (YOS) is not youth work, because the outcomes are entirely predetermined. The YOS worker has different responsibilities (primarily to the law rather than the young person) and requirements (to meet sentencing outcomes).

Youth work can happen in a range of environments. Traditionally, the places that were designed for this purpose (youth clubs and youth centres) and other places where young people can be found (schools, parks, other community or statutory settings).

Youth work can be delivered by qualified youth workers, youth support workers and trained volunteers. Often, older young people may go on to become trained peer leaders and volunteers with the groups they may have attended.

Youth work programmes may have a pre-identified outcome or goal (determined by the need and the young people's choices). Examples of this include supporting young people to lead and deliver a community volunteering project; providing a safe space for young parents to come together for support; facilitating young people to campaign on an issue of importance to them (such as the Fridays For Future climate movement).⁴

Youth work often provides experiences for young people to try new things and have adventures away from home. All of these opportunities are underpinned by the Youth Work Curriculum (for informal education), similar to the government's National Curriculum (for formal education).

Why youth work? (its purpose and the legislation)

Local authorities have a duty to ensure that all young people have access to a sufficient local offer of educational leisure time activities (youth work) under the Education Act 1996 updated 2002.⁵

This is to ensure that young people have somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to. This is vital for all our young people, but particularly critical for those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged in some way.

Variety in youth work is important. The best youth work provides a broad range of opportunities and activities in a community in a way that is inclusive.

We are all totally unique, and young people have different needs and interests.

Some young people will enjoy going to a uniformed youth group. Some will enjoy outdoor learning and activities (like taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Awards). Some may want to get involved in volunteering and social action (like the National Citizen Service). Whatever type of youth work you deliver, it is important to make sure that what you are doing provides a good standard of equitable and safe experience for the young people you work with – and more importantly it's what they have asked for.

We hope this document helps you achieve this.

This resource is set out into chapters that cover the different things that you should consider when planning your work:

- **The where**
- **The who**
- **The how**
- **Further reading and support**

Each section will include what you need to know if you're starting from scratch, what you need to do if you need a refresher or you've never done this before, and a table that sets out the standards that must be in place for youth work to happen.

Good practice	Great practice
Anything in this column is what you must have in place before delivering any youth work.	Anything in this column is what you should be working towards to improve outcomes for young people. This demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement and quality.

The good practice column is the **minimum basic requirements** that should be achieved. Within this document and the supporting guidance, in particular Youth Club in a Box, you will find links to resources to use to make sure these things are in place. This is designed to help you do safe, good and equitable work with young people.

If you are struggling to put any of the minimum standards in place, then there are lots of places you can go to for support. We are here precisely for the youth work sector and all those who are volunteering their time to help our nation's young people prosper. Don't hesitate to get in touch with us at nya@nya.org.uk.

Please see the following checklist of the key things to consider.



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Checklist



All youth work providers must ensure that they deliver safe, equitable, well-planned and educational opportunities. These should be delivered by people that are skilled and trained, and meet the standards that are set out throughout this document.



Before planning a project or programme, ensure that you can positively respond to the following questions:

Question	Tick
Have I made sure that I have the right governance arrangements in place to protect the organisation, the staff and volunteers, and young people?	
Have I ensured that the environment that will be used is safe through conducting a risk assessment?	
Have I ensured that this opportunity is inclusive and accessible?	
Have I ensured that the people providing the activity are safe?	
Have I made sure that there are enough safe adults to provide this opportunity?	
Have I made sure that the adults providing this opportunity have got the skills to deliver it appropriately?	
Have I planned out the activity and opportunity to ensure it meets its objectives and outcomes?	
Have I got the right permissions and consent in place from young people/ guardians for their participation?	
Have I ensured that I have got the right systems in place to record what is needed and store all information securely and in accordance with GDPR?	
Have I made sure that there are mechanisms in place to reflect on and learn from all sessions, interactions and situations?	

The where

The locations youth work takes place

Youth work can take place in any environment. This can be indoors, outdoors or online. It could be in places where young people choose to be (such as parks or community centres) or where young people find themselves (hospitals, the secure estate, schools).⁶ The venue for youth work should be a place that meets the diverse needs of young people, including physical accessibility.

Examples of locations may include:

- **Youth clubs or a dedicated youth space** – this may be a building with sole purpose to deliver youth services or within a shared community space (like a community centre or school). Young people should feel ownership of the environment or space that they occupy. It should be a suitable environment for a variety of physical and cultural needs.
- **Detached or street-based** – this takes place in non-institutional settings, and has no specific building base. This can be on the street, in parks, cafés, skate parks, shopping centres, and other spaces young people have chosen to be. This makes it accessible to young people who may be unlikely to attend building-based provision. (See the Federation for Detached Youth Work for examples and guidance).⁷
- **Outdoor education** – outward bound and adventure spaces, such as with water-based activity providers or in purpose-built environments.
- **Outreach** – outreach work can be understood as reaching out to young people to bring back to a service or provision, or take it out to them. Outreach work happens when workers go out of their own space to speak with young people and provide their service in a new location (such as a park).
- **Residential venues** – opportunities away from home can be provided in residential locations where young people sleep, engage in youth work and receive positive opportunities for fun, learning and development. Examples may include outward bound or activity centres.

- **Non-traditional settings** – for example, within youth justice, healthcare, social care, schools. Youth workers can deliver opportunities and experiences in any environment.
- **Digital or online provision** – young people increasingly spend time online. Youth work can be delivered in the digital space using platforms like Zoom or Discord. The development of the Metaverse is also creating youth work opportunities, with young people creating avatar versions of themselves to access a virtual reality youth club.⁸

Before undertaking youth work in any physical location, you must ensure that you have completed a thorough risk assessment of the space. You can find a template for this in the Youth Club in a Box⁹ resource.

This should explore:

- whether the space is large enough to accommodate the people that will attend and the activities that will be undertaken
- whether it is safe and free from hazards (or ensure there are mitigations in place to reduce the risks)
- whether you know how to exit safely should an emergency arise
- whether the space is being used solely by the youth group. If not, is there anything extra you need to know to keep the staff, volunteers and young people safe?
- who you should report any risks, hazards or incidents to (including in an emergency).

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Practice Standard 1 – the where

Good practice	Great practice
Ensure that the venue has adequate insurance (where appropriate). This includes vehicles that may be used to transport young people to and from locations.	Request a copy of and safely store all insurance policies.
Ensure that there is a risk assessment completed for the location where the work takes place.	Regularly review and quality assure all risk assessments to ensure they are compliant. Ensure all staff are trained to complete risk assessments including dynamic risk assessments.
Ensure that there is clear information available about how to exit the location in an emergency.	Regularly demonstrate emergency procedures with staff and young people.
Ensure the location is safe and free from obvious hazards.	Record and report all emerging hazards and mitigations.
Ensure the location is accessible for all young people who will be attending.	With the input of young people themselves, complete a needs assessment for projects and programmes.
Ensure all staff are familiar with the risk assessment and location information.	Brief all staff prior to every session on risk assessment.
Ensure all participants and staff show respect for the location and other people using it.	Work with young people to feel ownership of the location, and to challenge each other where it is required.
Ensure your space is welcoming, accessible and inclusive for all young people, whatever their identity, community, culture or needs.	Work with young people to design the space so that they feel a sense of ownership and belonging.

For additional information and support about your responsibilities and accountabilities for health and safety and risk management, please see the NYA Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub and the Health and Safety Executive.^{10, 11}

The who

Staff and volunteers

High-quality youth work is reliant on trained and skilled youth workers, youth support workers and volunteers to deliver it.

Youth work training in England is endorsed and validated by the Education Training Standards Committee on behalf of the NYA. This includes qualifications that are recognised by the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC).¹²

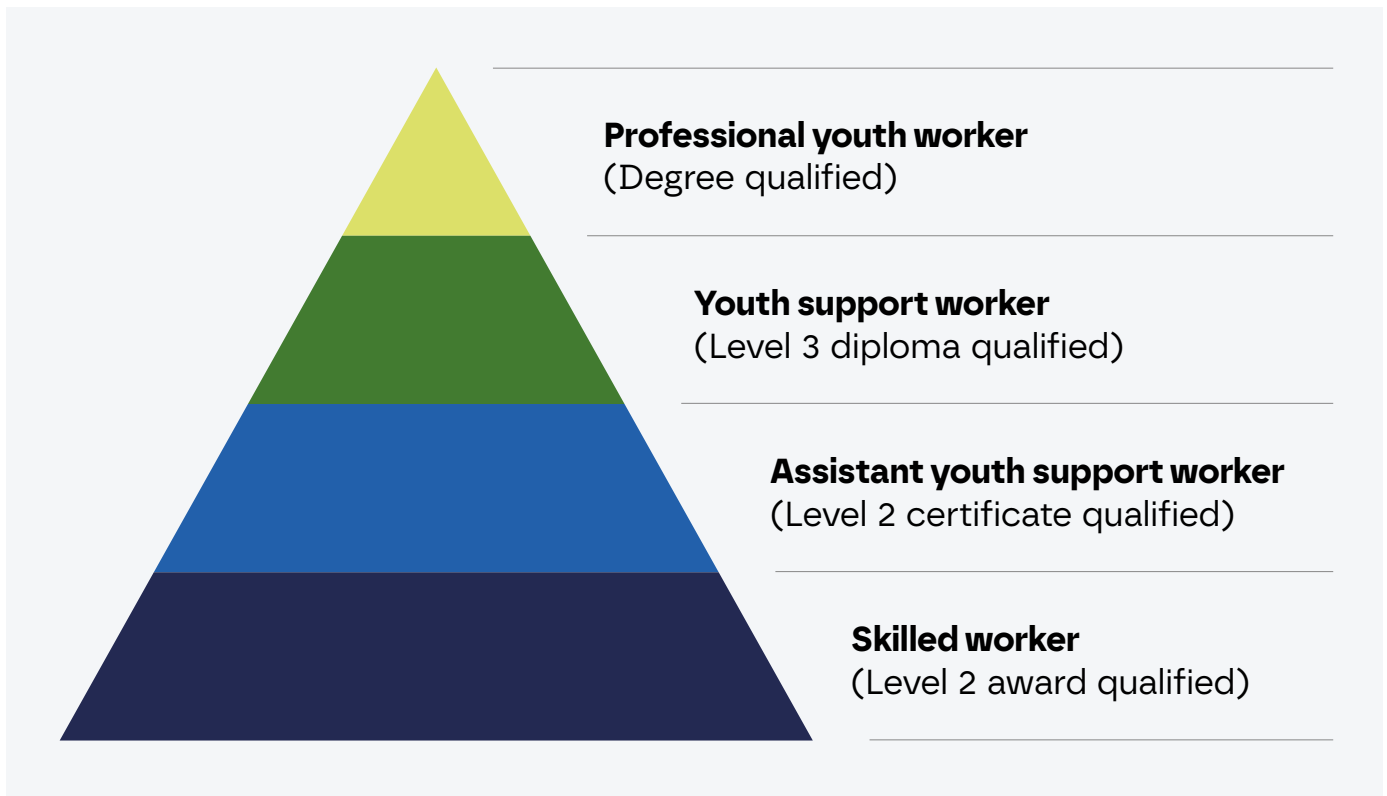
All practitioners working with young people should have achieved a minimum basic level of training that equips them to understand:

- the purpose and role of youth work (including the underpinning skills, knowledge, qualities and values required)
- how to safeguard young people and adults at risk within youth work
- adolescence and young people's development, and how youth work supports this
- how to plan and deliver activities for young people.

To find out more about youth worker qualifications see the Skills section on our website, [nya.org.uk/career-in-youth-work/getting-qualified](https://www.nya.org.uk/career-in-youth-work/getting-qualified).¹³

While it may not always be possible for all projects to employ professionally qualified youth workers (particularly in voluntary sector spaces such as uniformed youth groups like the Army Cadets), it is best practice to ensure that all volunteers and youth support workers are supported by a qualified, professional youth worker (that is on the Youth Work Register).¹⁴

One way of achieving this is through a Regional Youth Work Unit (or other community infrastructure bodies) that may be able to provide links and access to youth work networks.



The Department for Culture, Media and Sport provides bursaries for free training up to and including the Level 3 diploma.¹⁵

Funding is also available for youth support worker apprenticeships and integrated youth work degree apprenticeships to enable people to earn as they learn. Information on how to access this (and training providers) can be found on our website.¹⁶



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As a minimum, all staff (including volunteers) should have completed training in:

- safeguarding
- managing risk
- emergency first aid
- leading activities with young people
- building relationships with young people
- recording and storing information (including confidentiality)
- equity, equality, diversity and inclusion.

All staff and volunteers should have the opportunity to access and engage in training and development activities that support their own needs and those of young people. This can include accredited training, in-house or local training events, reflective practice with colleagues and supervisors, or qualifications.¹⁷

Recruitment

Recruiting an appropriate and safe workforce is part of ensuring quality youth work provision. All staff and volunteers who work at the project must have an appropriate level of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. A DBS check is a criminal record check that you can do for staff or volunteers who are working with children and young people or vulnerable adults. There are three levels – basic, standard and enhanced. Ideally all people working with children and young people should have enhanced checks.

To find out what level of check the role is eligible for please see the DBS guidance leaflets on the UK government’s website.¹⁸ This must be renewed at least every three years.

All project staff (paid and unpaid) should be interviewed during the application and selection process. Two references should be obtained to check suitability. Good practice often includes young people in the design and delivery of all recruitment processes.¹⁹

Where possible you should recruit staff and volunteers that have an understanding or relevant experience of the communities that you serve. One of the ways that you can tackle inequalities is to create opportunities for people that break down barriers to change.

An example of this might include supporting care experienced people into training and leadership, actively promoting the recruitment of those from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities, or making sure your staff team is racially diverse.

Pay and professional parity

The Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for Youth and Community Workers is the body that sets the national framework used to grade and pay youth work roles (professional youth worker and youth support worker).

Information about the pay, terms and conditions associated with roles utilising the JNC framework can be found on our website.²⁰

Supervision

Supervision is a process that involves creating space for volunteers and youth workers to meet with a line manager (or external supervisor where this works better) to receive management, development, reflection and support. Supervision should ideally be provided by a professionally qualified youth worker.

Supervision should happen in a place and time that is appropriate, uninterrupted and protected. This is because it should create the opportunity to explore challenging issues and may include the sharing of sensitive information that needs to be actioned.

Supervision should happen at least once every six weeks for full-time staff.

It should be recorded (by the supervisee or supervisor) and both parties should keep a copy of any notes and actions.

Wellbeing

The nature of the youth work relationship means that youth workers often hear about the difficult situations affecting young people at home, school or within the community. Youth workers may well be the first people that hear a young person's disclosure (of abuse), see signs of things that concern them about a young person's safety, or witness and experience traumatic events occurring in communities. Supporting volunteers and staff who experience first-hand or secondary trauma should be a key consideration for all youth work organisations.

It is critical to the long-term emotional and mental health of the youth team and any long-term volunteer support.²¹ This can be provided through debriefs, supervision, clinical supervision, access to talking therapies and employee or volunteer support, or signposting to appropriate services.



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Workforce ratios

There should always be at least two trained people present when working with young people. Ideally, one of these would be a professionally qualified youth worker or youth support worker.

If there are exceptions (for example, such as one-to-one mentoring or case-work for those working in justice or social care) then there should be appropriate and safe mitigations in place. These should include meeting where there are other people present, checking in and out of all sessions with a manager, and applying the principle of legitimate contact (see the Safeguarding and Risk Management section).

The NYA endorses NSPCC guidance on staffing ratios for groups of young people, which can be found on its website.²² For groups of more than one young person there should always be two adults present. For every additional 8-10 young people you should have another adult present. You should always have at least two adults present.

When planning resourcing of staff and volunteers you should take into account the needs and abilities of the young people you are working with. For example, when working with young people with special educational needs or disabilities, you may require additional adults present to ensure equity of experience and to protect rights.

Lived experience, professional boundaries and conflicts of interest

Youth work provision may well happen in the communities where staff and volunteers live. Having local knowledge and personal connections to communities can be an asset (shared lived experiences). It can give broader insight into local issues, challenges faced by young people and communities and strengthen relationships. Sometimes, this can bring professional challenges. It can create a risk of blurring boundaries and expectations. Youth workers (and organisations) can be placed in difficult positions.

An example of this might be in small, rural or closed communities. Youth workers might be friends with parents and carers of their young people, or socialise in spaces where young people do too.

This can be even more challenging when young people become leaders and volunteers, transitioning from peer and group members to young professionals.

Providing good supervision and line management support, training and accountability alongside transparent and consistent guidance and governance can prevent some of these risks.



Practice Standard 2 – the who

Good practice	Great practice
<p>Follow safe recruitment principles.</p> <p>All staff and volunteers should have completed an up-to-date DBS check, provided two references and been interviewed.</p>	<p>Young people should be involved in the planning and delivery of all recruitment processes. Young people should have the opportunity to train and develop as peer leaders and then staff as they leave the provision (when they are older).</p> <p>Regularly observe youth work practice for quality assurance and to support staff development.</p>
<p>Actively try to recruit a diverse staff team with different experiences, views and representation (including age, sex, religion, gender, race and abilities).</p>	<p>Support young people to understand how and why to recruit diversely. Provide training for young people and staff on this topic.</p>
<p>All staff (including volunteers) should complete at least the minimum required training (see page 15) and work towards a Level 2 award in youth work principles.</p> <p>Everyone working with young people should have access to a professionally qualified (Level 6 or 7) youth worker for support and guidance.</p>	<p>Staff and the project should be managed and supervised by a degree-qualified youth worker (Level 6 or 7).</p> <p>All youth workers should have a minimum Level 3 diploma youth work qualification.</p> <p>All support workers should have a Level 2 certificate youth work qualification.</p> <p>All staff should have access to training and continuous professional development which supports the needs of the young people they work with.</p>
<p>All staff should have access to free training and that includes safeguarding updates.</p>	<p>Produce a workforce development plan that sets out the needs of the organisation, staff, and volunteers, and support the mechanisms for them.</p>

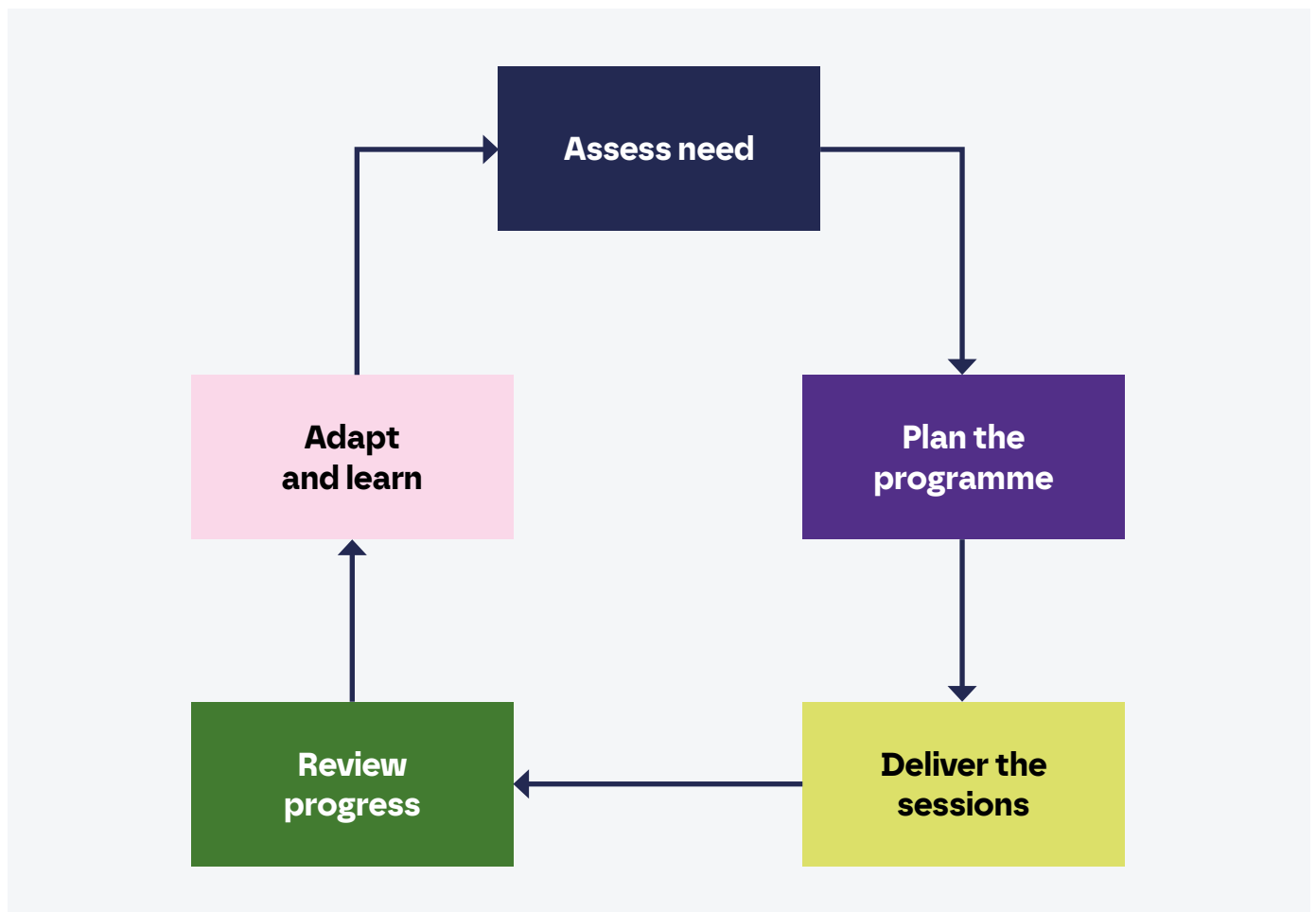
Good practice	Great practice
<p>Provide management and supervision sessions at least six weekly for full-time staff (and a pro-rata offer for part-time staff, including volunteers).</p> <p>Provide access to a suitably trained Designated Safeguarding Lead.</p>	<p>Secure access to professionally qualified youth workers to provide supervision.</p> <p>Offer training in supervision and reflective practice to staff and volunteers.</p> <p>Secure access to clinical supervision for frontline staff where appropriate.</p>
<p>Ensure staffing levels meet or exceed the NSPCC required minimum.</p>	<p>Ensure staffing levels meet or exceed the NSPCC required minimum.</p>
<p>All staff who are required to have joined the Youth Worker Register.²³</p>	<p>Provide and support access for staff for continuous professional development in line with the register requirements.</p> <p>Make updating the Youth Worker Register a requirement of employment (paid or unpaid).</p>
<p>Ensure there is access for all staff to safe spaces for their wellbeing (supervision). Provide access or signposting to support services.</p>	<p>Provide access to clinical therapeutic supervision for frontline delivery staff where appropriate.</p>
<p>Maintain a robust professional conduct of all staff and volunteers.</p> <p>Monitor this through good governance, management and the protection of professional boundaries.</p>	<p>Develop and deliver training and support for peer and local leaders.</p>

The how

Doing youth work

Within Youth Club in a Box you will find templates and all the planning tools you need to help you deliver great youth work or complement what you're already doing.

Planning and delivery cycle



Assessing need

We all know that the best way to work out what young people want is by asking them. This will give you a baseline of information to start to build your project, programme or sessions.

After consulting, try to continue to include them in all of your planning, delivery and review cycles. Refer to Participation section (p33) for guidance on how to do this using best practice techniques. You should consider the different communication preferences and needs of all young people.

Often, there are groups of young people who do not have a voice or a say at home or at school. This can be for a variety of reasons; they might have had negative experiences with adults in positions of authority such as teachers. They may have communication needs or appear to be more tricky to engage with because of their lived experiences.

An example of this might be young Black people who may have experienced adultification prejudice in interactions with professionals (for example, being more likely to be stopped and searched by police). Good youth work will always find a way to make sure that all young people are included, if they wish to be.

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There might already be a community profile completed by another organisation (for example another youth work provider) or the local authority that sets out some of the challenges, wants and needs of young people in the community. There is guidance on how to complete a community profile or needs assessment in Youth Club in a Box.

There might be other sources of information that can help you shape and plan your youth work provision. Examples might include local surveys, Office for National Statistics data or the National Youth Sector Census map, or national information such as the UK Youth Parliament’s Make Your Mark initiative, which offers young people aged 11 to 18 years the opportunity to have their say on current issues affecting them.²⁴

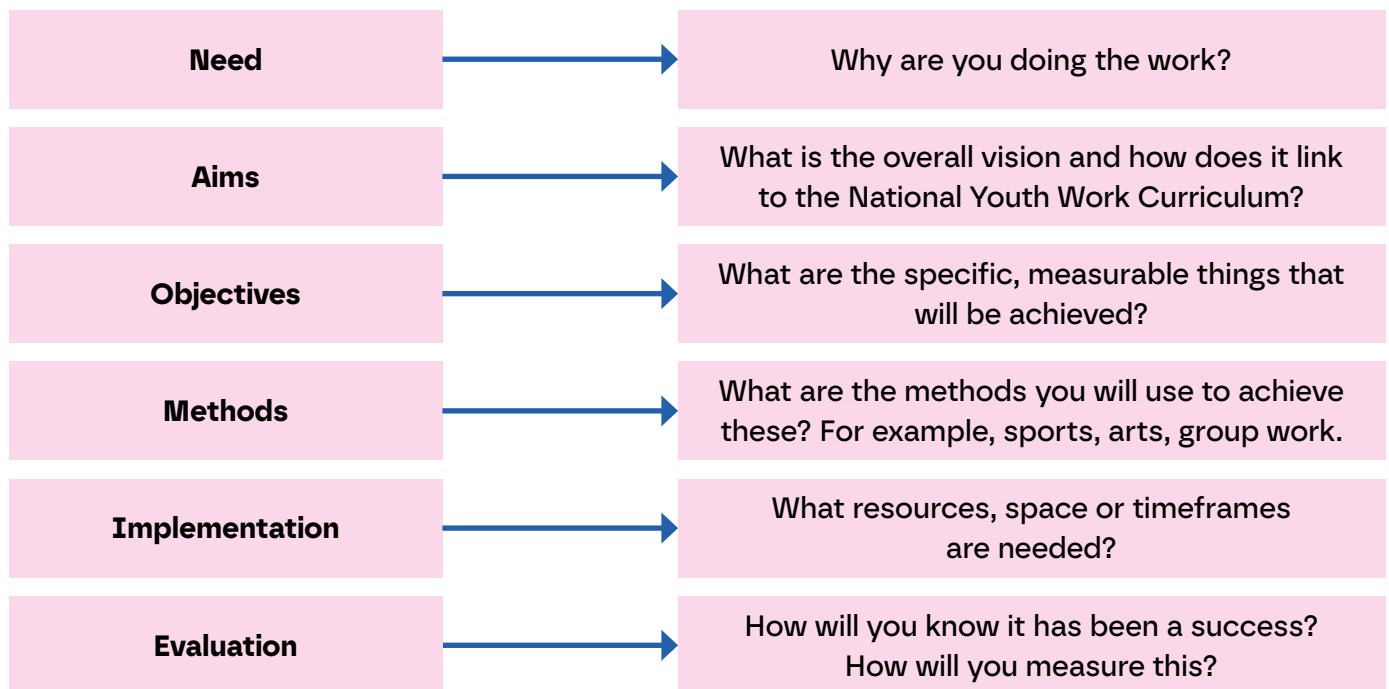
You can use these to demonstrate and evidence the need for your work. This gives a great starting point for conversations with funders, potential partners and collaborators.



Project, programme and session planning

All projects, programmes and sessions should follow the NAOMIE model (detailed in Youth Club in a Box) or something similar. This is a simple tool to ensure that you include all aspects of the planning cycle and fulfil your goals with young people.

It sets out:



For example:

N	A	O	M	I	E
Young people want to create a sense of ownership of the local park. There is an increase in antisocial behaviour in the area.	To foster a sense of belonging and ownership through the redesign of the park space. Identity and belonging; civic engagement.	To develop a fundraising plan. To raise X amount. To pay for a new shelter to be built. To design the new shelter's décor.	Social action. Group work. Research. Arts.	10 – week programme sets out individual session plans to contribute to outcomes. Include things like people and materials.	Individual evaluation forms each session. Group evaluation activities including Mentimeter ²⁵ . Reflective debriefs. Completion of park design.

Delivery

All sessions should follow the plans that you have set out and be informed by and responsive to the changing needs of young people. Youth work should be underpinned by the National Youth Work Curriculum²⁶, which sets out the opportunities for group and individual learning journeys that are determined by need.

National Youth Work Curriculum



You might have planned a session that is well structured, and links to a bigger piece of work you have been doing with young people. But, at any moment, young people could decide on a totally different issue and need that they want to work through with you in a session. This often happens. Youth work often needs to be flexible so that you're able to adapt and change the plans for a session to best meet the needs of the individual and collective young people in the here and now.

As long as you have the right resources, people and structures in place, and use the Curriculum, this is still part of the creative learning journey that young people are on when they engage in youth work.

For example:

You're in the middle of a session that is supporting a group of young people to build a fundraising plan for a shelter in their local park. (Curriculum: economic and financial wellbeing; leadership and civic engagement).

One young person comes in and wants to talk about something that they've seen on the news that has upset them, for example, it may be about refugees and asylum seekers (Curriculum: global citizenship, identity and belonging). The other young people are distracted by this conversation and start to discuss, debate and explore this topic.

Youth workers need to facilitate a safe space to explore these issues, feelings and learnings. They connect these conversations for young people to wider local and national issues.

This hasn't derailed the overall project, but has enhanced it.

It has provided an additional development opportunity for young people with trusted adults to explore a difficult topic, at a time and place of their choosing. The Curriculum gives a framework for youth work that supports the individual and collective learning that is chosen by the young people you work with at that moment. The Curriculum has an online resource library to help you find examples of good practice and models for delivery to support your work with young people.²⁷

Sessions should be adequately staffed, have enough resources, be inclusive of all attending young people, be in safe and risk-assessed spaces, and be well planned.

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Monitoring, evaluation and learning (impact)

It is important to monitor, record and store key information about your youth work delivery.

This is to:

- Ensure you are legal, safe and compliant
- Evidence the progress that young people individually, or in groups, are making
- Have things to reflect on to make your youth work better
- Demonstrate to stakeholders (including funders) that you're making a difference
- Have records to protect staff, volunteers and young people.

This doesn't have to be a complicated or time-consuming task. Templates for record keeping can be found in Youth Club in a Box.

At the time of writing the NYA is working with other youth work organisations to develop a standardised framework for collecting data.

As a minimum, you should record the following information:

Membership data:

- Consent forms for all young people attending (see the NYA Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub for guidance on this)²⁸
- Emergency contact details for all young people and staff
- Health and extra needs.

Session data:

- How many young people attended and who (register)
- Which staff or volunteers were present
- What activities took place
- Where and when it happened.

Programme data:

- What is the overall plan or programme of activities?
- How will it be delivered?
- How will it be evaluated?

Governance data:

- Safeguarding concerns or reports
- Risk assessments
- Financial records
- Governance compliance (for example, health and safety reports, annual reporting information).

All documents that contain personal information should be stored safely and confidentially in line with GDPR²⁹.

You should make sure you have completed the National Youth Sector Census³⁰ so that you are included in the national data map of youth work provision.

Young people deserve access to youth work that is able to meet their needs and create the most positive impact in their lives, so measuring the impact of youth work is important. Being able to demonstrate the impact of your youth work and evaluate it is useful for funders and commissioners of your service too.

It allows you to show that you are delivering good work that benefits young people and is fulfilling its aims and objectives.

There are lots of ways to measure the impact of your work and evaluate its success. There are free tools available to help with this on the NYA website and from the Centre for Youth Impact.³¹

Working with young people to co-design evaluation and impact measurements is best practice. It makes impact and evaluation more accessible and inclusive – done with young people instead of to them. It also means that you are reviewing your work through the eyes of those accessing it, rather than just from an adult perspective.

Practice Standard 3 – the how

Good practice	Great practice
Ensure that a needs analysis has been completed so that you know you are delivering a project that has value to the young people and community.	Complete a community profile. Include your youth work provision in the Local Plan for youth work.
Complete the National Youth Sector Census (where appropriate).	Ensure your Census returns are completed monthly.
Collect consent forms for all young people and store these securely. Update these when required.	Co-design with young people consent forms and processes that are inclusive and accessible.
Ensure that you have completed plans for each session and programme that includes all minimum required information.	Create standardised tools and frameworks for programme planning systems that record all relevant information.
Link sessions to the National Youth Work Curriculum.	Use the Curriculum with young people to plan and inform sessions and programme development.
Build evaluation activities into each session and programme, and into supervision with staff including volunteers.	Offer regular training to all staff to develop their understanding of impact and evaluation. Co-design resources with young people, staff and volunteers.
Use feedback, impact and evaluation data to develop and evolve your youth work delivery.	Create a 'theory of change' and impact measurement framework for your work that is informed by a 'plan, do, review' cycle. Use this to inform and guide all delivery.

Safeguarding and risk management

No compromise

We have a legal and moral duty to safeguard the young people we work with. All work with young people and youth work must be free from harm and danger – there should be no compromise in standards.

Often, youth work is delivered in communities supported by volunteers. Whatever the size of the organisation, with paid staff or volunteers, we have the same responsibilities and accountability for safeguarding and child protection.

Work with young people that is not included in statutory settings guidance (such as that for schools) must refer to the guidance set out in the Out of School Settings Code of Practice from the Department for Education.³²

You must read and apply the [National Safeguarding Standards for Youth Work](#).³³

These provide the **minimum** standards for safeguarding compliance in the youth work sector.

- Ensure a clear safeguarding policy and interconnected organisational policies and procedures.
- Enable proactive safeguarding systems, governance and oversight.
- Embedding Working Together (inter- and intra-agency collaboration).
- Commitment to training and reflection.
- Empower young people's voices.

Advice on how to implement the standards can be found on [nya.org.uk/skills/safeguarding-and-risk-management-hub](https://www.nya.org.uk/skills/safeguarding-and-risk-management-hub).³⁴ This is a free online resource for organisations and individuals working with young people, which provides guidance, support, training, tools and resources to help with safeguarding and risk. It's a go-to place for help.

You should also check whether there is any additional guidance relevant to the work that you do. For example, for faith, sports or arts-based activities that may also be represented through professional bodies or councils.

Policies

You should ensure that you have appropriate and up-to-date policies and procedures to protect young people, adults at risk, and staff and volunteers from harm. Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 ([legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents)) places duties on a range of organisations, agencies and individuals to ensure their functions, and any services that they contract out to others, are built upon a foundation of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.³⁵

Policies and procedures you should have in place include:

- Safeguarding
- Child protection and reporting concerns
- Risk assessment and reporting

These should be simple and easy to follow for all staff and volunteers. They should include information and guidance on local reporting structures (such as details of the Local Safeguarding Partnerships and Emergency Duty Team). Examples of these can be found on the Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub.³⁶

Training

All staff, volunteers and peer leaders should have access to safeguarding training that is appropriate for their level of responsibility. You should ensure that your training is appropriate to the needs of the staff and volunteers (such as accessible by language). Safeguarding training is freely available through local authorities, the NSPCC and the Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub.³⁶

Designated Safeguarding Lead

All youth work organisations should have a trained and experienced Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) that is accessible during all face-to-face sessions with young people. This person does not need to be present during the sessions but must be available to the staff via the phone, and able to take responsibility and accountability for safeguarding the organisation. This includes ensuring that all safeguarding processes and policies are up-to-date and implemented appropriately and that all incidents and concerns are reported and recorded in the right way. The DSL should know and have access to all local safeguarding reporting practices and people, including the Local Authority Designated (Safeguarding) Officer.

Information and guidance on the role of a DSL is available on the Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub, along with training and support.³⁶

Charitable organisations should also have a person that is responsible for safeguarding at board level.

Lone working

Ideally a youth worker should never work entirely alone with young people. There should usually always be at least two adults present. This is to keep both parties safe. But, there may be instances where one-to-one work is required. An example of this may be if you are offering mentoring, advice and guidance, or individual counselling.

When volunteers or paid employees are working alone, things can be put in place to make this work safer.

This includes: meeting and working in a public place, or where there are other adults or young people present; checking in and checking out of meetings and sessions with a DSL or colleague; safe words or phrases to alert others to danger; having two adults in all digital spaces and conversations; always sitting near a door and being aware of exits.

If your organisation has people involved in lone working, ensure that mitigations are in place to keep people safe and reduce risks. Further information can be found on the Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub³⁶ or the NSPCC website.

The not-for-profit organisation Positive Youth Foundation³⁷ in Coventry has a useful tool to help staff with decision-making. It's called the 'legitimate contact principle' and this is where the youth worker would always consider whether there is a genuine and legitimate reason to have lone contact with a young person.³⁸ And whether there are enough safety measures in place to warrant this (such as other staff knowing about the contact and it being recorded appropriately). Asking simple questions like this can help staff and volunteers with safe practices and decision-making.

Risk assessment and management

It is impossible to remove all risks from our work. Instead, we should ensure that we know, as far as possible, what the risks are and try to prevent them. This will make your organisation, staff and young people safer. It is an important part of governance to have clear procedures, processes and recording structures for risk assessment.

You can get advice, help and support from the Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub³⁶ and the Health and Safety Executive.³⁹

Before any youth work delivery, the session leader should:

- Identify the method of delivery and any risks associated (for example, football: slips trips and falls).
- Identify people in the session and any risks associated. (Are there enough staff? Are they trained? Do any young people have SEND?)
- Identify the delivery space and any risks identified. (Is the space appropriate? Will there be other people there?)
- Produce a risk assessment that shows how risk will be prevented or reduced.
- Ensure all supervisors, managers, staff and volunteers are fully aware of the risk assessment.

Activity: cooking chapatis

Risk	Mitigation
Burns from using the cooker.	All young people supervised when using cooker. Staff trained in first aid. Staff know how to use the equipment. Young people briefed on cooking safely. Additional staff present to supervise other young people.

All staff and young people involved in any session should be clear about risks and how to reduce them. The worker leading the session should be prepared to adapt and change the risk assessment in the moment to meet any changing needs and risks.

The leader should record the risk assessment and save it electronically. There are some activities that are carried out repetitively in youth work, including using the same spaces. Having a basic risk assessment ready, that we can easily amend with new or changed risks, makes this a simple procedure.



Practice Standard 4 – safeguarding and risk

Good practice	Great practice
<p>Ensure you have the right safeguarding, health and safety and child protection policies in place, and all staff understand and apply them in their work.</p>	<p>Co-design safeguarding policies and practices with staff and young people.</p> <p>Display these in the space in an accessible format.</p> <p>Review and amend regularly.</p>
<p>Ensure all staff and volunteers are trained in risk assessment, risk management and safeguarding, and this is updated regularly.</p>	<p>Provide access to training and continuous professional development for all staff including volunteers and peer leaders in a variety of safeguarding topics including cultural competency, (awareness of cultural norms, practices or sensitivities which might affect bias and young people's safety).</p>
<p>Ensure there is a trained and supported DSL for the organisation and they are clear on their duties.</p>	<p>Ensure your DSL is connected to local safeguarding forums, teams and best practice spaces. This includes receiving external supervision and support.</p>
<p>Ensure that all staff know who the DSL is and what their responsibilities are, and how to get in touch with them.</p>	<p>Make sure staff and your DLS knows who the Local Authority Designated Officer is and how to get in touch with them out of hours.</p>
<p>Create a lone working policy and ensure that all staff and young people understand this and how it can keep them safe.</p> <p>Ensure staff only work alone where absolutely necessary, and this is risk assessed and supported (for example with a buddy check-in system).</p>	<p>Co-design principles for lone working with staff and young people.</p> <p>Make sure everyone understands the principles and applies them across the board.</p>
<p>Check that all activities and programmes are risk assessed and risk mitigated.</p>	<p>Ensure all staff and young people are supported to develop risk assessments and risk management practices.</p>
<p>Record and review all risk assessments.</p>	<p>Senior leadership should review risk management processes to create a culture of learning and development.</p>
<p>Record and report all incidents appropriately and to the right person or organisation.</p>	<p>Develop or access a cross-organisation peer learning space where learning and development is shared with other similar or local organisations.</p>

Governance and leadership

Governance are the systems and structures that are used to manage an organisation. They provide a process for leadership, support and accountability in decision-making and youth work service delivery.

Depending on the type of organisation you run, you might have different types of governance structures in place.

Information and advice on voluntary sector governance can be found on the Charity Commission's website ([gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission))⁴⁰ and also the National Council for Voluntary Organisations ([ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/governance](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/governance)).⁴¹

Free training around aspects of governance in youth work is also provided by the NYA Academy ([nya.org.uk/skills/academy](https://www.nya.org.uk/skills/academy)).⁴²

Local authority youth work provision might have its own governance frameworks, guidance and training. Speak to your local Regional Youth Work Unit, council or Local Youth Partnership to get advice and support from a local context.⁴³

Organisations come in different contexts. For example, statutory providers, private and for-profit, community interest companies and charities. Therefore what constitutes good or great practice would be different depending on this.

If you are a voluntary sector provider there is a checklist that you can ensure you have in place before offering activities and programmes for young people:

- Do you have a constitution document that sets out what you intend to do, including where, why and how?
- Have you got a board or senior leadership team in place (for example, trustees, senior youth work manager) to ensure that you are compliant with all relevant laws, safeguarding procedures and good practice?
- Is your board diverse? Does it include people that reflect the community you work with and who contribute a range of views, experiences, abilities, faiths, races and cultures?
- Are you registered as a charity or with any other regulatory or supportive bodies, including the local authority?
- Have you got a system in place to keep good financial records that can be audited and checked when required?
- Have you made sure that you are familiar with GDPR legislation and have things in place to store and protect data confidentially and safely?
- Have you made sure that you understand and are familiar with the Equalities Act and your responsibilities?
- Have you ensured that all staff and volunteers are trained appropriately according to their duties and responsibilities?



Active participation and youth voice



Good – and great – youth work is always youth-led

Young people should be given the space and opportunity to lead, shape and own the youth work journey. Active participation in leadership development is an important part of this as it empowers young people to take ownership of their lives, experiences and communities.

It helps young people to grow and learn about themselves, and gives them skills to contribute to decision-making and power-sharing throughout their whole lives.

Building active participation into your youth work is of benefit to young people, youth workers and the wider community.

The legal framework for youth work for local authorities makes specific reference to young people's views being taken into account when planning services.⁴⁴ Young peoples' rights are protected through The United Nation Convention on Rights of the Child which makes provisions for young people to be included in decision-making and empowered in their own lives.⁴⁵ Whether you're a statutorily funded provider or not, it is still essential to understand how to include active participation and voice in the work that you do.

There are some key definitions that might be of help when thinking about how you support young people to lead, shape and have influence within your organisation, and local and national communities.

- **Active participation** – an umbrella term to identify how young people choose to voluntarily participate and shape youth work, making decisions that influence and create change.
- **Youth voice and influence** – a process in which there is safe space for young people to amplify their voices, be heard and influence strategy, policies and operational delivery. Examples include youth forums and Cared for Children Councils.
- **Youth advocacy** – the process of identifying, understanding and addressing issues that are important to young people. By being an ally to young people it shows we recognise and support youth social action for social change. Examples of this include the British Youth Council's Make Your Mark campaign and charities like Kids of Colour.
- **Youth governance** – teaches the skills of active citizenship such as understanding how decisions are made and how to organise, plan, and communicate. Young people should be supported to take actions and make decisions about issues that affect them and their peers. Examples of this might be young trustees, Youth Parliament or young Co-CEOs as implemented by Young Manchester.

There are different models of active participation you can apply within your organisation. Which model you choose is usually informed by the experience and knowledge of the adults in power. Developing an understanding of what good participation looks like and can achieve can improve the experiences and outcomes of young people accessing your youth work.

There are several models that you can explore and embed. There are participation networks and free training available across the country to help you develop this. You can find out about local networks through speaking to your nearest Regional Youth Work Unit, by emailing participation@nya.org.uk or speaking to organisations like the I Will Movement, also known by its hashtag #iwill.

Created by child rights expert, Professor Laura Lundy, the Lundy model of participation (participationpeople.com/how-to-implement-the-lundy-model-of-participation-across-your-organisation-a-checklist) is an international recognised model that is based in four key concepts, and has been adopted by local, national and international organisations.⁴⁶

- **Space:** providing a safe and inclusive space for young people to express their views.
- **Voice:** providing information and supporting young people to express their views.
- **Audience:** making sure young people's views are communicated to the right people.
- **Influence:** ensuring children and young people's views are taken seriously and acted upon.



There are different models of active participation you can apply within your organisation. Which model you choose is usually informed by the experience and knowledge of the adults in power.



The 5C's of participation is another framework to help you think about ways to increase active participation and young voices in your work.

- **Consultation** – consult with young people to ensure their input influences outputs. Consultation approaches should be co-designed with young people to ensure they are fit for purpose.
- **Co-design** – co-design plans and services with young people to create a shared understanding and vision. Ensure this is using accessible language.

- **Communicate** – communicate with young people effectively by active listening and responding in a way that is meaningful to them.
- **Consistency** – embed consistent youth work values in all that you do.
- **Consider** – consider your position, power and influence.

Ensure there are spaces and opportunities for young people to own decision-making, share power and shape decisions in processes that affect them.

These should be accessible and inclusive for all young people, and in line with good practice guidance for equality, equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging.

Practice Standard 5 – active participation and youth voice

Good practice	Great practice
Support young people to understand their rights.	Support young people to actively challenge and advocate for their rights where appropriate, and through action.
Involve all young people in planning and decision-making for sessions, programmes and service development.	Co-design all aspects of youth work provision with young people (from delivery to governance).
Facilitate feedback opportunities in a way that meets young people's needs and so they can see where they have made a difference.	Support young people to learn through leadership roles and demonstrate their influence to others.
Support young people to engage in action and decision-making about issues that are important to them in their communities through the National Youth Work Curriculum.	Write a participation strategy for the organisation with young people and support them to share with the local authority, funders and broader decision-makers.
Provide training and development for staff and volunteers on active participation and youth voice.	Commit to continuous improvement of youth work practice through accessing local or national youth participation networks and training.

Resources and links

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas), [acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk)

Charity Commission, [gov.uk/government/publications/charity-commission-governance-framework](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charity-commission-governance-framework)

Child Outcomes Research Consortium, Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, corc.uk.net/resource-hub/useful-resource-for-working-with-children-and-young-people-with-learning-disabilities

Federation for Detached Youth Work, [fdyw.org.uk](https://www.fdyw.org.uk)

Gov.UK, [gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance)

Gov.UK, [gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-a-charity-model-governing-documents](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-a-charity-model-governing-documents)

Mind, [mind.org.uk/media-a/4662/resource3_howtopromotewellbeingfinal.pdf](https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4662/resource3_howtopromotewellbeingfinal.pdf)

NCVO, [ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance)

NYA, [nya.org.uk/resource/a-guide-to-commissioning-outcomes-for-youth-people](https://www.nya.org.uk/resource/a-guide-to-commissioning-outcomes-for-youth-people)

NYA, [nya.org.uk/quality/hear-by-right](https://www.nya.org.uk/quality/hear-by-right)

NYA, [nya.org.uk/skills/academy](https://www.nya.org.uk/skills/academy)

NYA, [nya.org.uk/quality/curriculum](https://www.nya.org.uk/quality/curriculum)

NYA, [nya.org.uk/national-occupational-standards-and-english-youth-work-policy-new-document-published](https://www.nya.org.uk/national-occupational-standards-and-english-youth-work-policy-new-document-published)

NYA, [nya.org.uk/quality/quality-mark](https://www.nya.org.uk/quality/quality-mark)

About I will, [iwill.org.uk](https://www.iwill.org.uk)

National Careers Service, nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/find-a-course/where-to-find-free-online-learning. National Improvement Hub, [education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/promoting-race-equality-and-anti-racist-education](https://www.education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/promoting-race-equality-and-anti-racist-education)

Network of Regional Youth Units, [regionalyouthunits.com](https://www.regionalyouthunits.com)

New Philanthropy Capital, [thinknpc.org/resource-hub/rights-of-passage](https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/rights-of-passage)

Race Equality Foundation, [raceequalityfoundation.org.uk](https://www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk)

Stonewall, [stonewall.org.uk/resources/introduction-supporting-lgbtq-children-and-young-people](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/introduction-supporting-lgbtq-children-and-young-people), 2022

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), [cipd.org/uk](https://www.cipd.org/uk)

The Proud Trust, [theproudtrust.org/young-people](https://www.theproudtrust.org/young-people)

The Open University, open.edu/openlearn/free-courses/full-catalogue

United Nations, [social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/disability-issues/youth-with-disabilities](https://www.social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/disability-issues/youth-with-disabilities)

Young Minds, [youngminds.org.uk](https://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Youth Work One, [youthworkone.org.uk](https://www.youthworkone.org.uk)

YMCA George Williams College, [youthimpact.uk/centre-for-youth-impact](https://www.youthimpact.uk/centre-for-youth-impact)

YMCA George Williams College, [youthimpact.uk/key-resources/outcomes-framework-21](https://www.youthimpact.uk/key-resources/outcomes-framework-21)

Design: [red-stone.com](https://www.red-stone.com)

Endnotes

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- 4 Fridays For Future is an international climate movement active in most countries and our website offers information on who we are and what you can do, fridaysforfuture.org
- 5 legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents
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- 25 mentimeter.com
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