



National Youth Agency Vision for Youth Work in England to 2020

“In 2020 every young person will have access to high quality youth work in their community.”

August 2014



This paper sets out the National Youth Agency's vision for youth work in England. The National Youth Agency, as the national body for youth work, has drawn on its own knowledge and understanding of the sector and engaged with its trustees, staff and close associates to create this vision – now it is down to us and others to make it a reality.

Our definition of youth work

Youth work is an educational process that engages with young people in a curriculum built from their lived experience and their personal beliefs and aspirations. This process extends and deepens a young person's understanding of themselves, their community and the world in which they live and supports them to proactively bring about positive changes. The youth worker builds positive relationships with young people based on mutual respect.

"When is a game of football youth work?"

If the person running the football match is doing it because they have a passion for football and wants to improve the football skills of the young players, creating a winning team and climbing the local league then they are a football coach.

If football is the means rather than the end and the primary focus is the social and emotional development of the young person then it is much more likely to be youth work.

The skilled youth worker derives learning for the young people from all aspects of their engagement – from learning how to book a pitch, fundraising for a kit, finding a team to play against to the game itself. They encourage young people to reflect on their individual and collective learning at each stage and to think about the application of that learning in the future.

Working as part of a team, taking on leadership roles, taking personal responsibility for their actions, understanding consequences, even thinking about gender roles and equality/diversity issues will all be elements the youth worker can explore with the young people through the medium of football. However if the young people were interested in dance, cookery or environmental issues the worker could equally well use these as the hook.

What age is "youth"?

We do not see youth as a particular age but rather the developmental phase between childhood and adulthood. Typically this starts around the beginning of puberty and finishes in late teens but for many young people, dependent on personal, social and economic factors, it can start and or finish much later. We believe not only should youth work support positive transitions, it should work with young people to ensure young people's well-being throughout this phase.

Our vision for 2020

The local youth work offer

In 2020 every young person will have access to high quality youth work in their community. This includes open access provision as well as targeted opportunities that engage groups and individuals with specific needs.

The youth work offer will be clearly educational and provide young people with opportunities to engage locally, nationally and internationally with others face to face and/or through social media.

Young people will have ownership of the local offer and will be involved at every level. They will have the opportunity to influence the decision making processes in the organisations that deliver services to them and in local democratic structures. They will be encouraged and supported to be co-producers of services and play major roles in commissioning, scrutiny and audit and have direct control of budgets.



Every opportunity will be taken to support young people to become directly involved in service delivery either as staff, volunteers or through establishment of their own social enterprises. Particular emphasis will be given by youth workers to engaging under-represented groups in decision making processes.

Engagement of young people at a local level will be the platform for their engagement in decision making regionally and nationally.

National government will play a critical role in facilitating business/corporate engagement in supporting youth work and in establishing mechanisms for social investment.

Providers of youth work

In order to provide a comprehensive offer to young people there will need to be a range of providers in every community. The offer will be multi-dimensional and include the work of uniformed organisations, educational establishments, voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises and the private sector. Some services will be directly commissioned or provided by local authorities although typically these will be preventative/targeted.

It will be local stakeholders, led by young people, who decide on the mix of provision linked to robust needs assessment and local capacity. Where provision is weak or insufficient the council will proactively seek to develop new service providers.

Qualified youth workers will be employed by a number of these providers with explicit remits to engage with the most challenging young people, build community capacity and provide development opportunities.

Funding of youth work

Local partners will be, by necessity, creative, innovative and entrepreneurial in their approaches to funding the local offer. Undoubtedly the local youth work offer will be funded by monies from a number of sources: public; corporates; trusts and donors to voluntary organisations. It will be supported by people in the community giving their time and other assets. New funding methodologies like crowd sourcing will be part of the mix and young people's own enterprising spirit will be a critical part of the provision.

There will be a nationally recognised and supported framework for social investment whereby social investors front load investment in services which will then be repaid when agreed outcomes, that deliver long term cost savings to the state, are achieved. In some cases local authorities or other statutory partners will be the social investors, whilst in others these funds come from more

traditional investors. A robust outcomes framework and measurement tool will support the use of social impact bonds.

Specialist centres for young people such as those under the MyPlace scheme, as well as other high quality local provision appropriate to the needs of young people, will be funded creatively and include a mixture of community transfer of assets, private finance initiatives and mixed investment.

Specific funding will be identified to support young people's engagement, as will be funding to build capacity in communities.

The role of local government

The role of local government will be to secure the youth work offer working with young people as partners in this process. Most local councils will embed this within their broader approaches to securing services for children and young people and joint planning and commissioning arrangements. However, specifically within these arrangements the authority will take responsibility for a local needs/asset assessment process and produce a local youth work strategy in conjunction with all key stakeholders. This strategy will bind local and national programmes and funding into a coherent single offer which will be accessible, meeting the needs of local young people. Established joint commissioning processes with other funders will be linked to agreed outcomes and mechanisms will be in place to ensure the quality of the local offer.

Where councils play a proactive part in building capacity in communities to support young people, community development approaches will sit alongside some levels of support for infrastructure organisations and in some cases small grant funds.

Local government will secure additional investment in the local offer through business engagement and social investment vehicles and will build capacity in communities to support young people.



The workforce

The workforce will be made up of a number of elements:

- Skilled and professionally qualified service leads and managers.
- Professionally qualified youth workers.
- Qualified youth support staff with nationally recognised qualifications relevant to their roles.
- Volunteers (whether as community volunteers or contributing as part of an employer engagement programme) will have specific contributions to make and good levels of support.

The views and interests of all those in the youth work workforce will be represented by a strong professional body.

Everyone involved in youth work will have access to high quality accredited continuing professional development opportunities and there will be clear progression pathways for those who seek qualifications and employment within the youth work sector, particularly young people and non-traditional entrants. To support training pathways every local youth work offer will clearly articulate arrangements for youth work apprenticeships, qualifications and student placements.

The role of business

The engagement of business with youth work will be a given. Businesses – whether larger corporate organisations or small and medium sized business will understand the need to invest in young people as customers, potential workforce and members of communities.

There will be widespread recognition that youth work plays a central role in building the key skills and resilience in young people that support their entry into the world of work. Government employability programmes will recognise and fund this.

Many corporate bodies will develop youth facing shared value propositions which benefit their business, young people and the youth work sector and contribute to the local offer. Programmes will typically focus on social action, enterprise, employability, health and well-being, economic exclusion, financial capability and digital competence.

It will be recognised that the value of business engagement goes beyond the financial and many businesses will have employee volunteering schemes that support the local offer. Conversely in the construction of the local offer providers will consider how they can create high quality employee volunteering opportunities.

What needs to happen to make our vision a reality:

Government must publicly recognise the value of high quality youth work in the ensuring all young people achieve their full potential.

Government must identify a budget equivalent to 10% of the cost of youth unemployment as the payment mechanism against social investment and impact bonds specifically for youth work. In 2012 the cost to the economy and direct costs of youth unemployment was some £15 billion. The cost of other negative outcomes for our young people would add many billions more.

Government should introduce an appropriate framework to inspect the scope, quality and impact of the local youth work offer.

Local government must recognise its position at the heart of the formulation of local statutory, voluntary sector and business partnerships to deliver youth work. Locally councils must take responsibility for place shaping for young people ensuring independent needs assessments are linked to effective co commissioning of an accessible and comprehensive local offer. At a national level the Local Government Association should reinvigorate its partnership with the National Youth Agency to support development and sharing of best practice, drive innovation and audit quality.

Twenty of the Ftse 100 must invest in high profile youth work programmes and bodies such as the CBI, BItC and Chambers of Commerce should promote the value for business of such investment.

Employers must require all youth workers to undertake JNC approved qualifications relevant to their roles and responsibilities. A register of youth workers should be introduced to provide public with assurance around the quality of youth work practice in the sector.



The National Youth Agency believes that now more than ever young people need youth workers. Youth workers dedicate their time and expertise to helping young people in their personal and social development, equipping them with the practical skills they need to be resilient in challenging times, and positive contributors to future economic growth.

The National Youth Agency works to support youth workers to do that more effectively, and for more young people.

We do this by:

- Championing the work of youth workers
- Enabling youth workers to do what they do
- Supporting the recognition of youth work as a profession

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