



The National Youth Sector Advisory Board's
Roadmap to a National Youth Strategy
October 2023



Our vision for young people

All young people should be happy, safe from harm, involved in the decisions that affect them, empowered to raise their voice, supported with their mental health and wellbeing, have access to support at every transition point and have opportunities to develop the skills they need to succeed in life and work.

Roadmap to a National Youth Strategy



Youth workers enable this by:

Building voluntary trusted relationships with young people, working with young people to provide fun and engaging activities, giving young people a voice, and providing safe spaces through high quality holistic personal support.

Achieving our vision for young people will mean:



- Access to quality and consistent youth work and enrichment opportunities throughout adolescence
- Long-term and increased financial investment in youth services
- Youth work recognised as a distinct form of education
- Reduced crime, with young people safe from harm
- Increased, professionalised and diverse youth workforce, with clear career pathways
- Facilitating, developing and empowering young people's voice and influence



Youth work definition

Youth work is a distinct form of education, in which young people voluntarily engage with trained professionals and volunteers, adapted across a variety of settings – including youth clubs, sports/arts clubs, faith or uniformed groups, statutory services and many more – to support a young person's personal, social, emotional and educational development and political awareness.

It is underpinned by the National Youth Work Curriculum¹, the National Occupational Standards and social pedagogy that support the principles of empowerment, participation, education and equality – starting with the development of trusted relationships – exploring young people's values, beliefs, ideas and issues. It enables young people to develop their voice, influence and place in society and facilitates the learning of practical and life skills that will help young people to realise their full potential.

It's time to act



Over the last decade, youth organisations and local authorities have fought to keep delivering great youth work amidst a £1 billion real terms cut in spending by local authorities on youth services since 2010.² We have seen fragmentation in delivery, recruitment and retention crises, and youth work as a profession being overlooked and misunderstood.

It is young people who have missed out, unable to benefit from the life-changing impact of extraordinary youth workers and trained volunteers. These dedicated people are the flag-bearers of the profession, building trusted relationships with young people who face challenges and barriers that might otherwise derail their lives.

Youth work is focused on improving wellbeing, not just through the consideration of an individual's physical, mental or emotional health, but also the surrounding contextual influences that affect a young person's ability to achieve their goals. Young people have never needed the support of skilled youth workers and enrichment opportunities more than they do today.

Young people are experiencing a mental health emergency with 18% of children aged seven to 16, and 22% of young people aged 17 to 24, having a probable mental health disorder in 2022.³ This has been compounded by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and a cost-of-living crisis, as well as contending with a myriad of challenges including the risk of online harm, exploitation and climate anxiety. Already existing barriers have only become that much harder to overcome.

If we're to achieve our vision, and level the playing field for all young people, we need an ambitious new approach. We must not compromise on young people's futures – the time to act is now!

The National Youth Sector Advisory Board (NYSAB) has developed the Roadmap to a National Youth Strategy which identifies seven priority areas for action. This builds on the NYSAB's Ten-Year Strategy (2020)⁴ and has been created through consultations with the National Youth Sector Advisory Board and young people. This aligns with the "Back Youth Agenda", a vision and agenda for action for young people from the Back Youth Alliance (BYA), a strategic alliance of 12 national youth sector organisations.⁵

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My youth worker made me feel confident in who I am and helped me to join in on projects that interested me, allowing me to meet lots of new people and gain work experience. Youth workers always make sure you know there is a safe space to enjoy and develop your skills in. Without my youth workers, I wouldn't be the person I am today. I will always be grateful for the opportunities and kindness they have provided to me and my friends.”

Stephen, 18, a young participant in the National Youth Strategy consultation

Priority 1:

Building and developing a diverse professional and voluntary youth workforce. Great youth work cannot happen without youth workers.

Issue 1

Youth work suffers a lack of parity of esteem with other essential professions, such as teaching and social work. Joint Negotiating Committee-qualified (JNC)⁶ youth workers and the voluntary youth workforce are undervalued and too often go unrecognised for the high impact support they deliver for young people.

Why is this important?

Informal education is just as important as formal education, supporting young people to develop trusted relationships and life skills. Youth work's distinct form of education needs to be formally recognised in order to make the profession more attractive, combat the recruitment and retention crisis and to address the fragmentation in youth provision.

Youth services sit within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), whilst the Department for Education (DfE) are responsible for formal education. This can create barriers to a joined-up approach to policy and service design for young people.



Issue 2

Since 2010, spending by local authorities on youth services has been slashed by 73%,⁷ with more than 4,500 youth work jobs lost⁸ and thousands of youth centres closed. Youth work faces historic national underinvestment at practitioner, training agency, university course and local authority level.

Why is this important?

Due to underinvestment, young people across the country are losing out on the proven transformative impacts of this vital support and are at increased risk of negative outcomes. Without professional youth workers and trained volunteers, great youth work cannot happen.

Youth work career pathways and opportunities for upskilling need to be clear and less confusing to navigate in order to incentivise new youth workers into the profession, retain existing youth workers looking for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and to support and train volunteers.

Building capacity among underrepresented groups in leadership positions within the youth sector must also be a key priority, to ensure that the youth work profession is truly representative of the communities it serves. Diverse role models within the workforce will also inspire young people from a range of backgrounds to pursue youth work as a career.

Due to lack of funding, insufficient action is being taken to address the recruitment and retention crisis and incentivise prospective employees into the youth work profession despite high demand for youth workers.

Recommendations for national government

- Nationally recognise youth work as a profession, with parity of esteem with teaching and social care and clear career and progression pathways.
- Support an entry level to graduate-entry accelerated training programme for new youth workers, building on learning from workforce initiatives in other sectors such as Teach First and Frontline.
- Drive national campaigns and local activities for:
 - * The recruitment and training of youth workers, setting measurable targets for the number of youth workers per area, including those on JNC pay scales;
 - * Increasing understanding of youth work, its value, qualifications, its delivery settings and more;
 - * Improving representation, equity and access for leadership positions within the youth sector, including Black and Global Majority groups, LGBTQ+ communities, people with additional needs or disabilities, those with care experience and more.

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Some young people can't access a group, club or organisation because of the postcode which is very frustrating and this needs to change.”

Jade, 20, a young participant in the National Youth Strategy consultation

Priority 2:

Create a clearly defined national offer and consistent local offers through holistic, joined-up community partnerships, with every local authority able to fulfil their Statutory Duty to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children and young people.

Issue 1

National and local youth offers are a postcode lottery, with provision and funding in a local area often difficult to navigate, fragmented or non-existent for young people.

Why is this important?

Despite youth services offering young people safe places to go in their area, many young people don't have access to the opportunity to work with trusted adults where they live.

It is vital that there is both universal and targeted provision in place in every area, so that all young people who need it have access to a youth worker and those who face specific barriers – including disability, ethnicity, care experience, sexuality and more – receive the bespoke support they need to overcome these.



Issue 2

There isn't a consistent national and local approach to youth work provision.

Why is this important?

More needs to be done to reinforce a complementary national and local approach – working closely with the voluntary, community and allied sectors of health, social care, justice and education – to stop young people from falling through cracks in provision.

The government has taken some welcome measures to support young people, including the National Youth Guarantee (which aims to ensure that by 2025 every young person in England has access to regular out of school activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer), the support of Local Youth Partnerships and updating the Statutory Duty guidance (which sets out local authorities' legislative responsibilities to provide sufficient youth provision in their area). Nevertheless, more needs to be done to assess the quality and quantity of youth provision.

Recommendations for national government

- Ensure there is a high quality local youth offer in every area of the country, with local authorities given the financial means and resource to fulfil their Statutory Duty.
- Introduce clear accountability frameworks for the National Youth Guarantee and for reviewing the quality of local youth offers through mechanisms such as peer review and evidence-informed continuous quality improvement frameworks.

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A lot of people are being let down, especially in secondary schools – there’s not enough mental health support.

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Dwayne, 19, a young participant in the National Youth Strategy consultation

Priority 3:

Maximising impact through partnerships - allied sectors and multi-agency working.

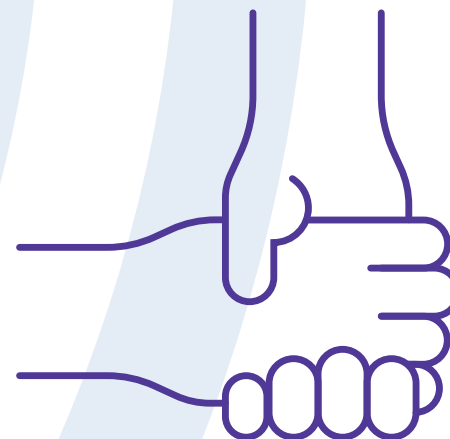
Issue 1

The distinct role youth workers play in supporting young people is often not understood outside of the youth sector, which can act as a barrier to the formation of multi-agency and allied sector partnerships.

Why is this important?

Youth work can take place in a variety of places and spaces and its impact can be maximised by working in partnership to build a support network tailored to a young person's circumstances, but only if partners recognise the value of ensuring youth workers are included.

Youth workers provide a vital connection to young people and their communities via the trusted relationships they build and through providing young people with a platform to voice their opinion on services and issues that matter to them. Innovative multi-agency partnerships can maximise the impact of the holistic and preventative offer youth workers build for young people.⁹



Issue 2

The number and quality of cross-sector partnerships vary across the country and depends on ambitious leadership and local services available.

Why is this important?

Whether it's working with schools, in alternative provision, with health teams, with social care or with youth offending teams – or signposting to other support for young people – youth work methodology and values have been proven to have a transformative impact and should always have a place in these partnerships.¹⁰

Multi-agency partnerships are vital to provide the complex layers of specialist support young people need through effective collaboration which draws upon the skills and knowledge of all of the professionals involved.

Recommendations for national government

- Include the youth work sector and statutory services in integrated commissioning pathways, recognising and working in partnership with the third sector and non-statutory services to support young people through multidisciplinary teams.
- Support cross-sector workforce development activities to increase mutual trust and understanding between professions and ensure that youth workers have access to the latest evidence-based practice.

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If we understand how the system works, we're going to change it.

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Charlie, 18, a young participant in the National Youth Strategy consultation

Priority 4:

Youth participation - Youth work facilitates, develops and empowers young people's voice.



Issue 1

Too often, decision-makers make decisions on behalf of young people rather than giving them a seat at the table.

Why is this important?

Young people are experts in their own lived experience and deserve to be meaningfully involved in all the decisions that affect them, including shaping policies and initiatives.

Young people, especially those facing barriers to engaging with formal spaces, need support to understand and meaningfully engage in shaping the policies that affect them.

Issue 2

Youth participation is often seen as a 'nice-to-have' rather than a 'must'.

Why is this important?

If policies, programmes and services are designed without young people, they may not sufficiently cater to those they wish to serve. Consequently, facilitating, developing and empowering youth voice and influence is beneficial for both young people and decisionmakers.

Recommendations for national government

- Pledge to meaningfully involve a wide cross-section of young people in shaping policies and co-designing initiatives and programmes that impact them, including children and young people who have complex needs and young people from diverse backgrounds.
- Ensure that youth participation in policy and government decision-making is funded, resourced and designed properly to remove barriers to participation, building on DCMS's Youth Voice Toolkits and the findings of the Youth Engagement Impact Study.

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There needs to be a commitment to long-term funding, no point just being a one-off opportunity. Consistency is key and not just giving it to the affluent areas.

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Chris, 21, a young participant in the National Youth Strategy consultation

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It's not about throwing money at problems - it's about investing in people which reduces cost elsewhere in policing and the NHS.

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Sophie, 18, a young participant in the National Youth Strategy consultation

Priority 5:

Long-term funding and commitment to the youth sector and youth work.

Issue 1

The youth sector and youth work has been underfunded, particularly over the last 15 years, with an almost annual billion-pound decline in spending on youth services by local authorities. The sector has seen a huge reduction in revenue funding, with funding streams tending to be smaller, short-term and targeted in nature.

Why is this important?

Amid stretched local authority budgets and competing priorities, youth services can get cut, leading to many youth organisations having to close or reduce their services without stable funding to sustain their programmes and activities.¹¹ Vital support for young people will continue to be lost without long-term funding and commitment to the youth sector and youth work from national government.

Smaller grassroots youth organisations are most at risk as they do not have the capacity to navigate the complex funding landscape.

Due to the targeted nature of funding programmes, access to funding can be a postcode lottery, which also impacts provision.



Issue 2

Young people and youth work are not high enough on the policy agenda, since the profession's benefits are not being fully recognised.

Why is this important?

Investing in youth work makes sense economically, socially and morally.

For every £1 government invests in youth work, the benefit to the taxpayer is between £3.20 and £6.40.¹²

Youth work equips young people with the skills they need for the future, supporting their mental health and wellbeing, promoting resilience, and engaging and reengaging young people with employment. It supports young people to be active citizens in society and develops their political awareness.

It also has preventative impacts, reducing youth offending and reoffending, and anti-social behaviour. It supports engagement in education and reduces absenteeism, with youth work approaches increasingly being adopted in alternative provision settings due to its transformational impact on young people.

Recommendations for national government

- Create a cross-departmental (e.g. DCMS, DfE, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities [DLUHC], the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), Cabinet Office etc.) approach to funding, based on a cross-department National Youth Strategy. This should recognise the impact of youth work and the youth sector in a range of departmental outcomes, as well as the role of national government in supporting the wider youth work ecosystem.
- Fund the development of local youth partnerships to enable youth workers, providers and young people to design initiatives to support bespoke and tailored youth work provision where they live.
- Release funding from governmental and non-governmental long-term funding streams, such as Dormant Assets and The National Lottery Community Fund to create funding opportunities that support youth work services and the youth sector, as well as bring together the public, private, third sector and more to leverage funding.

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**Youth services and centres' funding has been cut
but we need access.**

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Emma, 19, a young participant in the National Youth Strategy consultation

Priority 6:

Equity and access to opportunity for young people.

Issue 1

Equity and access to opportunity for young people is a postcode lottery across England, with some young people having little or no access to youth provision depending on their geographic location.

Why is this important?

Investing in opportunities and support for young people through informal education is key to levelling the playing field and developing the skills that young people need to lead happy and successful lives.

Young people told us that accessibility of opportunities - including being able to travel to get to youth provision via public transport and for those with protected characteristics - is very important in enabling them to access and engage with the opportunities in their area.

Young participants in the NYSAB's consultation also told us that increasing the different places they get to experience and travel to - and the range of fun opportunities they have access to with friends and peers - would support their mental health and development through new experiences.



Issue 2

Young people from marginalised backgrounds need to be considered when designing local youth offers and inclusive provision.

Why is this important?

Ensuring that local provision is attractive and inclusive for young people from marginalised backgrounds - including Black and Global Majority groups, LGBTQ+ communities, people with additional needs or disabilities, those with care experience and more - is of key importance so that young people that face specific barriers don't lose out or aren't deterred from accessing youth work support.

Young people who face specific barriers need tailored support to overcome these.

Recommendations for national government

- Expand the National Youth Guarantee beyond out of school activities to include youth work and youth provision, with a clear accountability framework and delivery measures so that every young person can access youth provision they want to engage with where they live, with targeted provision for young people with specific and additional needs.

Priority 7:

Building an even stronger youth work evidence-base – showcasing and improving impact through evidence and collation of data.

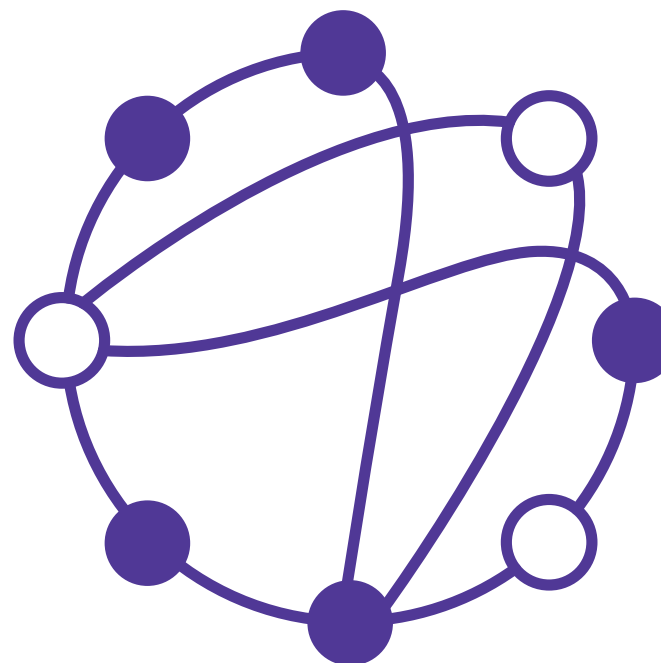
Issue 1

There is still much to do to build an even stronger youth work evidence base, through quantitative data and evaluations to demonstrate the link between high quality youth work and positive outcomes for young people.

Why is this important?

Whilst the value and transformative impact of youth work has been evidenced over the years, often through qualitative research, an even stronger evidence base will further support the case for investment in youth work to ensure positive life outcomes for all young people.

Showcasing and improving impact through evidence and collating the data can help national and local government – as well as youth services, allied sectors and multi-agency services – to work in partnership to spot gaps in provision. The evidence-base will also inform the design of interventions and help shape policy and practice. This will create a more effective and integrated youth sector which will improve the support available to all young people who need it.



Issue 2

Funding cuts to youth services has led to a reduction in data collection for more than a decade.

Why is this important?

We need to know where great youth work is happening – and where we need more – to build an even stronger case for investing in youth work and ensure that every young person who wants to can benefit from quality youth work.

Recommendations for national government

- Fund youth work research and evaluations, building on the shared impact measurement framework (in development).
- Prioritise and invest in better and more joined-up data collection at local level, including data sharing and using insights from the National Youth Sector Census, to stop young people from falling through the cracks of fragmented services.

Endorsement and support

The *Roadmap to a National Youth Strategy* was developed within a working group of the National Youth Sector Advisory Board and is endorsed by the following members and supporters of the Board:



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There are not enough places to actually go to – there needs to be more warm and safe spaces, more youth centres and shelters to tackle poverty.”

Jo, 22, a young participant in the National Youth Strategy consultation

About the National Youth Sector Advisory Board

The NYSAB is the sector forum for policy and practice with government and policymakers. It includes national organisations and agencies, regional networks, professional bodies, funders, local government and young representatives.

The National Youth Agency provides the secretariat and the Board is chaired by Tony Gallagher, a former Her Majesty's Inspector.

1. National Youth Agency (2020), National Youth Work Curriculum
2. YMCA (2023), Generation Cut: A research report into youth work funding disparities across England and Wales
3. Centre for Mental Health (2022) [online], <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/blogs/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-2022-what-does-data-tell-us>
4. National Youth Sector Advisory Board (2020), Ten-Year Strategy
5. The Back Youth Alliance is a collaboration of senior leaders and youth representatives from some of the UK's leading youth charities, working together to present a coherent voice to decision-makers with and for young people.
6. 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 jobs. The JNC also negotiates pay and agrees terms and conditions of service. There are two grades within the JNC framework 1) Youth Support Worker 2) Professional Youth Worker.
7. YMCA (2023), Generation Cut: A research report into youth work funding disparities across England and Wales
8. Local Government Association (2020) [online], <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/re-thinking-local/re-thinking-local-children-and-young-people/re-thinking-local>
9. National Youth Agency (2023), Better together: Youth work with schools – Complementing formal education to change young lives – New approaches to improving wellbeing and attendance
10. Ibid.
11. YMCA (2020), Out of Service: A report examining local authority expenditure on youth services in England & Wales
12. UK Youth and Frontier Economics (2022), The economic value of youth work

Within the report we have directly lifted quotes from young people who participated in the consultation exercise, however we have changed their names to protect their identity.

Our vision for young people

All young people should be happy, safe from harm, involved in the decisions that affect them, empowered to raise their voice, supported with their mental health and wellbeing, have access to support at every transition point and have opportunities to develop the skills they need to succeed in life and work.

Find out more about the National Youth Sector Advisory Board:

www.nya.org.uk/nysab



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