

National Youth Sector Advisory Board

Ten-Year Strategy

Our commitment with young people

As a nation we need a clear commitment for young people to be safe and secure, treated fairly, confident in and ambitious for their future.

It starts by putting young people at the heart of Covid-recovery and renewed support for a generation, and will uphold the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

This requires a commitment to quality youth provision and continuous improvement of youth services.

Collective action

There is a vibrant, diverse youth sector of multiple providers – statutory, voluntary and private – that provide a safe space, activities with young people to learn skills, socialise and forge relationships, and a trusted adult who knows what is needed with access to specialist or targeted youth provision. Critically, with young people involved in communities and decision-making, and their voices heard.

- There needs to be a clear understanding of what is needed for and wanted by young people, and from youth services and out of school activities.
- For that, it must be readily understood by young people and uphold the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, to account for young people's views and involved in decision-making at all levels.
- In which young people have the right to be involved in community development, co-design of services, policy making and funding decisions.
- Supported by multiple providers, a diverse youth workforce and leadership that are representative of the communities they serve.
- They will enable and empower young people including with protected characteristics for inclusion, equity and access to youth provision and the full range of talent and diversity of youth work.
- For all, it is the quality and consistency of the relationship between the young person and youth worker and skilled adult volunteer, that has greatest impact and helps transform lives.
- The ten-year strategy seeks to articulate, innovate, inform policy and demonstrate practice in youth work and services, for continuous and sustained improvement in outcomes with young people.

Youth provision

Most youth provision includes non-formal education - 'youth work' - where the learning opportunities are planned and intended. Some out of school activities are leisure-based, like sports and arts provision, but can include youth work practice. Youth work is supported by a curriculum for young people's personal and social development, in their skills for life and work, and mental and physical wellbeing.

Age-range

Youth services support young people through adolescence, ages 8 to 25, but are predominantly funded for youth provision from 11 or 13 to 18 years of age. Uniformed organisations typically include children from age 6, or younger. Youth work can provide learning at key transition stages, for ages 8-15 (early help; life chances) and ages 16-25 (young people's agency; healthy choices).

About National Youth Sector Advisory Board

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

Purpose and aims

A ten-year strategy is needed to secure youth sector services and activities in support of young people. It draws on shared insights from across the sector and young people. This helps make clear to Government what investment is needed and provides a focus for collective action that is sector-led, with young people.

This strategy does not seek to capture all that youth services deliver or to prescribe what youth organisations do. Rather the focus is on the capacity, quality and investment in youth sector activities, to ensure equity of access and a continuum of opportunities and experiences that make a demonstrable difference to young people's lives and life chances.

- The 10-year sector-led strategy will inform a 3–5-year plan and multi-year funding (lifetime of a parliament and spending review).
- To be effective, it will guide and support the collective action of providers, commissioners and funders with young people.
- It will be adopted or adapted by national and local government for democratic accountability of progress including an annual statement against objectives (laid before Parliament).

a) National Youth Sector Advisory Board

The advisory board will adopt the strategy to inform its work and provide a focus for sector-led change, to track progress and shared outcomes for and with young people. The strategy will form the basis of regular updates and collaboration.

It provides the basis for shared insights from constituent parts of the youth sector, increased understanding and partnership-working, and reporting on shared outcomes.

Output: policy influence and collective action, tracked through NYSAB on a quarterly and annual basis.

b) Youth services and organisations

The strategy identifies opportunities that can deliver real and lasting change with young people. It will inform sector-led work and practice, across sectors and related professions, national and local government. Youth sector organisations can adopt or adapt the strategy, fit for their organisational purpose and aims.

It provides a framework for sector-wide engagement and cross-sectors support, including longitudinal studies, on the quality and impact from youth work and out of school activities.

Output: a common language and shared findings that supports an evidence base and progress through collective action, from policy to practice, for a coherent national offer locally delivered with young people.

c) Government and agencies

National and local government and agencies, should adopt the commitment for young people to be safe and secure, treated fairly, confident in and ambitious for their future. Government is responsible also for the health and stability of the youth sector, and secure. That requires a long-term view informed by the 10 year strategy, matched to multi-year sustainable funding.

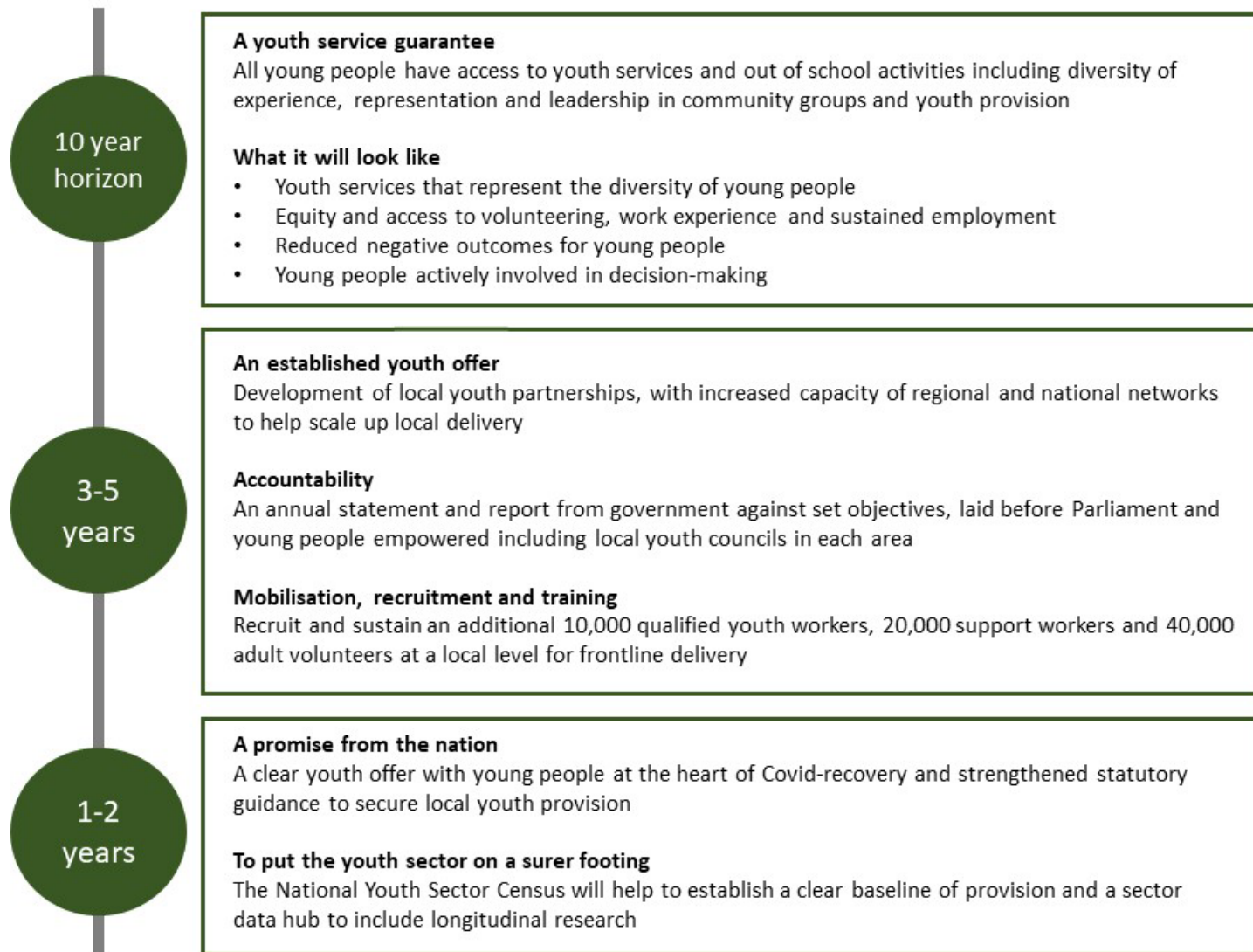
The strategy provides a mechanism for democratic accountability for investment, innovation and delivery of services with young people over a generation.

Output: a national youth offer, with equitable access for all young people to quality youth provision, on a regular basis locally delivered with young people now and for what is needed looking to the future.

Action plan

1. Youth sector bodies to sign up to the commitment with young people – ‘a promise from the nation’
2. Youth organisations and services to adopt or adapt the strategy to fit their own purpose and aims
3. Engage with young people in shaping the strategy, to bring it to life
4. Publish the strategy with links to resources and to keep track of progress
5. Connect with, inform and learn from grassroots, for collective action

The 10-Year strategy seeks to articulate and support collective action, not designed as a single voice or campaign. However, we recognise the immediacy of support needed by young people and the urgency to sustain key parts of the youth sector. The strategy provides a framework to address some immediate challenges and to mark progress as we seek to put in place strong and lasting foundations for youth work. This is not exhaustive, rather the sum of all parts of the youth sector, to lay those foundations on which we can build bold commitments and transformational outcomes with young people.



1. A national offer

Young people's needs are not the same. What they want, and their needs, vary at different ages, protected characteristics, stages or critical moments in their lives. However, we can identify a skills set and a continuum of opportunities and experiences that can improve **life chances** and help young people make **healthy choices**.

Young people want regular access to youth provision and outdoor learning; volunteering and social action opportunities; adventure and residential trips, and international exchanges. This requires **somewhere (safe) to go, something (fun) to do** with friends and to learn new skills, and **a (trusted) adult** who knows what is needed, able to access specialist or targeted services.

Outcomes

- a) Young people feel supported and confident in their future; and when they have a sense of belonging communities are stronger.
- b) Increased opportunities and/ensures enhanced social mobility for young people in disadvantaged areas and young people with protected characteristics.
- c) Young people are actively involved in decision-making and leadership across services and organisations, and report increased levels of political engagement in local and national democracy.

NYASB will – convene and connect local, regional and national bodies to shape a clear national youth offer with young people

2. Working across sectors

The youth sector cannot be seen in isolation. Youth services and out of school activities are interconnected with related services in education, health, justice, social care and employment. Bolder investment on youth services will have significant impact on improving outcomes and bring long term savings to other parts of the public sector.

- **Education recovery** for social and emotional skills and personal attainment, including alternative provision, outdoor learning and safeguarding.
- **A public health approach** to reduce negative outcomes, including youth violence and exploitation.
- **Social prescribing** of youth services and out of school activities, for improved physical and mental health, and reduced loneliness.
- **Leisure and recreational** activities, to up-skill and embed youth work for effective informal learning across including culture, arts, sport and digital.
- **Social care and safeguarding**, for early help and support with vulnerable young people and those at the edge of care.

Cross-sector outcomes

- a) Increased and equitable access to digitised services, volunteering, education, training and employment opportunities.
- b) A reduction in school exclusions, serious violence and exploitation.
- c) Reduced waiting lists for mental health services (CAMHS).

NYASB will – take a lead for cross-sector insights and experience of young people, to inform government policy and agency practice, and articulate the role of and evidence for youth work; as a driver for cross-government co-operation and investment.

3. Delivery

An overarching priority is the quality of offer and wider participation. The diverse range of needs requires the collective action of **multiple partners**, promoting equity as part of any youth offer and leadership.

Where **local authorities** undertake local needs assessments and subsequently develop plans to secure sufficient places for youth services and out of school activities, this should recognise their interdependency with other statutory, voluntary and community providers. Services should be locally determined with young people to meet needs, create opportunities and provide safe spaces in communities, **working with local youth partnerships**.

Where there are strong local identities or communities, **regional networks** emerge through local collaboration. Working with and through **national organisations**, for increased capacity to support local delivery or specialist needs, and international youth opportunities

Outcomes

- a) Collective action and co-ordination to learn from each other, not to work in silos, and to deliver locally with young people.
- b) Supported by a digital backbone to access services, work across boundaries, and enable young people and volunteers to change areas and keep involved.
- c) A global perspective and networks that connect to a young person's identity and communities, on issues that matter to them, from climate change to culture.

NYASB will – engage with grassroots organisations through extended networks to inform and learn from the development of local youth partnerships and equitable access with young people to youth provision

4. Investment

The Government has a primary role to ensure the health of the youth sector and a statutory duty to secure sufficient places and activities locally. **A fully funded statutory duty** will secure a baseline of open-access provision on which wider youth services and out of school activities can flourish. This must include **strengthened guidance** to secure provision matched to local needs, through local youth partnerships of statutory and voluntary services and community groups. A priority is for the **quality of offer** and **inclusive participation**.

There is a need to focus on investing in people, to secure jobs, training placement and volunteer opportunities in youth work, and safeguarding. This is supported by government investment in preventative and targeted services arising from poverty, violence, exploitation and poor mental health. It requires for greater stability to secure long term relationships with young people, collective action from partnerships and shared outcomes.

Outcomes

- a) Increased, sustained national and local revenue funding, ending a dependency on short term contracts and programme-led funding
- b) Capital funding that is locally determined in places young people want to be and flexible to include repair, repurpose, modular or mobile and digital spaces
- c) A youth premium for disadvantaged young people to access youth services and activities from which they are otherwise excluded

NYASB will – work through its constituent members and extended networks to inform and help establish strengthened statutory guidance, with sustainable funding of statutory and voluntary services

5. Evidence base

Research does not apply to all young people and youth projects all of the time; a diversity perspective is missing from much data gathering on young people. This requires use of robust data across population cohorts, vital to break down barriers and to create opportunities without discrimination or geographical inequalities.

Effective data gathering needs clearer, simplified evaluation and feedback methodologies across activities and data-sets, and multiple providers. Also, young people's meaningful involvement in data and impact assessments; quantitative analysis alone can homogenise their experiences. Underpinned by greater use of digital provision as a way to enhance the core youth offer, and to develop a body of research that evidences its use, value and impact. The National Youth Sector Census will allow a data informed story to be told, and support longitudinal evidence.

Outcomes

- a) A common language and shared outcomes to read-across government, research, policy and practice
- b) The development of research and a data hub for the youth sector will capture best practice and impactful practice ('what works')
- c) Alignment to the Treasury Green Book will help to end the 'debate' about impact of youth work

NYASB will – share insights, data and reports to support continuous improvement of youth services and outcomes for young people; and to lead on an equalities review for equity and inclusivity of access to youth provision by young people, and diversity of the youth sector in its delivery

Conclusion

Youth work is a mosaic of local uniformed and faith organisations, youth clubs, out-reach work with young on the streets, youth councils, social action projects, youth services, and safe places to meet. It is a rich blend of statutory, voluntary and community provision, reflective of local need, community initiative and political commitment.

This strategy seeks to articulate and support the collective action, not designed act as a 'single voice but as a sum of all parts from across the youth sector. The strategy's foundations span a wide and varied range of services, from large national organisations to local community based voluntary youth activities. It responds to Government's priority to 'level up' opportunities and services, across England, and drives home the importance of young people being provided with high quality support and access to activities outside of formal education. In so doing, we identify significant inequalities faced by many young people, excluding them from activities and services.

The strategy highlights the positive impact that youth work can have on young people's lives, and their communities – supported in the present, ambitious for their future. This includes cross-sector and government cross-departmental collaboration working across all aspects of young people's lives, and provides a framework for the youth sector's contribution to sustained improvement in outcomes with young people.

The advisory board has facilitated strategic discussions across the sector, informed by young people and with government. We have framed key milestones to inform investment and evidence from youth work, which will make a demonstrable difference to young people's lives, through our collective effort that is rooted in our day to day contact with young people across the breadth of our provision.

Critically, youth work provides a credible means by which young people voice their concerns, and are active as part of the solution and not seen as a problem to fix. They wish to see action on diversity, inclusion and fairness relevant to their world and lived experience. The youth sector is well placed to advocate. This strategy is driven by those needs and opportunities.

Tony Gallagher, Chair
January 2022

Further reading

Young people have been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19. The attainment gap has widened for disadvantaged children (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021) and young people's mental and physical wellbeing and social isolation is significantly worse (The Lancet, 2021), and has raised awareness of the importance of safeguarding (Children's Commissioner for England).

Somewhere safe to go: with 85% of young people's waking hours spent outside of school or college (Education Select Committee, 2011). In deprived areas, there is a lack of places to meet (OCSI, 2019) and community spaces (APPG Left Behind Neighbourhoods, 2020), fewer charities (NPC, 2020) and volunteers to fill these gaps (NCVO, 2019) and digital poverty (Ofcom, 2018); with youth work capable of reaching individuals and communities who may otherwise remain inaccessible (APPG Youth Affairs, 2019).

Something to do and learn new skills: where the "transformational impact that youth services and trained youth workers can have, especially for young people facing multiple barriers or disadvantage" is recognised by government (Civil Society Strategy, 2018); there is a need to extend youth sector activities (Social Mobility Commission, 2019); and employers report better employability skills among young people who have participated in volunteering and social action activities (CIPD, 2015), prioritising character and attitude (CBI surveys) from positive youth activities.

A trusted adult, who knows what is needed: youth sector activities focus on personal and social development, and play an essential bridging role with young people to schools, social care and health services; including areas of greatest disadvantage and needs (Early Intervention Foundation, youth violence), as advocates trusted by young people (Jay Report, exploitation), and when half of all mental health conditions first occur by age 14 and three-quarters by age 24 (Health and Social Care Select Committee, 2018), with childhood obesity also associated with poor emotional health and low levels of physical activity (Public Health England).

Youth voice: providing opportunities for young people with the skills to learn about themselves, their strengths and assets, and their voice, influence and democratic engagement (Youth Work Curriculum, 2020); including the challenges of ethnic disparities and racism, and social networks to break down barriers and discrimination by identity and gender.

For further information

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