



# Digital Youth Work Standards

[nya.org.uk](http://nya.org.uk)

# Foreword

Digital technology is transforming every industry – improving manufacturing processes, helping people manage their health and remain independent for longer, as well as transforming the way we learn, shop, experience the arts and heritage, and socialise.

The opportunities for the youth work sector are boundless – with artificial intelligence (AI), the online gaming industry and the ‘internet of things’<sup>1</sup> opening mind-boggling opportunities to transform the youth work experience and ways youth workers can engage and support young people to help them flourish.

Adoption of digital technology within the youth sector relies upon digital-savvy leadership, a recognition of the value of digital skills and empowering people to work in new ways.

We hope these standards will inspire those who haven’t yet explored how digital technology can enrich their youth work offer, to consider where it could add value, help widen their reach or meet particular needs.

Youth work should always start from the point where young people are and be led by their needs and interests. The reality is that the majority of young people are already firmly living in a digital world, with the Ofcom Children’s Media Literacy Report 2024<sup>2</sup> stating that once young people reach the 12-15 age group, more than 99% are online. Additionally, a disproportionate number of young people are encountering barriers to face-to-face youth work – for example, those who are socially excluded, persistently absent from school, experiencing mental health challenges or neuro-disability.

We applaud all those pioneering digital youth work and demonstrating the impact this is making on young people’s life outcomes. We look forward to working with you to share your learning and shine a light on how the adoption of digital can enable more young people to benefit from the life-changing impact of youth work.



Leigh Middleton, CEO  
National Youth Agency

# Introduction

The National Youth Agency (NYA) has created these Digital Youth Work Standards to provide a clear framework for youth work organisations to navigate the exciting and evolving world of digital youth work, enabling safer and more effective digital practice.

The standards are based on contemporary research findings such as Onside's Generation Isolation report.<sup>3</sup> It revealed that 76% of young people spend most of their free time on screens and nearly half (44%) experience loneliness. The changing connections and digital worlds that young people find themselves in require youth workers to learn, adapt and change to embrace the impact and potential of new technologies.

Sectors such as healthcare and supported living have embraced the use of digital technologies to enhance their services, for example, the use of virtual reality (VR) in mental health services.<sup>4</sup> The use of this for youth work is a new and emerging practice. For many youth workers and young people, there is a whole world of digital technology to learn about and embrace that will support and enhance the work that we are already achieving with young people.

As youth workers, we need to deepen our understanding of technology's role in young people's lives and its integration within youth work practice – evolving with it to keep pace with digital advancements. This is to ensure we can provide safer, balanced digital opportunities for young people and keep pace with the changing digital world.

By establishing these standards, we aim to equip youth workers with the tools and confidence to integrate digital practices effectively, while ensuring young people's needs and expectations are met in an increasingly digital society.

We recognise that individuals and organisations may be at different stages of their learning journeys around digital youth work and hope these standards provide a helpful starting point and signpost to support your journey.

This document outlines the expectations set by the NYA as the national standards and regulatory body for youth work in England. It 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, great and advanced practice; everything you need to know to deliver a digital youth work project – legally, safely and effectively.

If you have any questions about digital youth work, suggestions to develop these standards for the future or further examples of impactful digital youth work, we would love to hear from you.

Please contact: Bex Pink,  
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For updates and newly developed digital youth work resources please visit: [NYA, Digital youth work.](#)





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# What is digital youth work?

Digital youth work is described by the European Commission as the use and focus on digital media and technology in youth work practice.<sup>5</sup>

Digital youth work involves the use of digital technologies and spaces to connect with, engage, and support young people. It is the process of actively incorporating digital activities, tools and topics into youth work services.

- Digital youth work is not limited to online interactions and may mean incorporating the use of digital tools in face-to-face environments such as a centre-based gaming club or developing a VR project through detached youth work.
- Digital youth work is informed by the lived digital experiences of young people,

responding to the digital technology and spaces they use. Young people should lead it and have access to support and resources in digital wellbeing, online safety and digital literacy.

- Digital youth work is not about replacing face-to-face youth work but instead offers opportunities for young people to engage with youth workers and youth work services using digital platforms and spaces to increase the accessibility of youth work support.
- Digital youth work widens reach, creating pathways to youth work for more young people, considering their individual needs and digital lives.



Digital Spaces

Digital Activities

Digital Tools

Digital Topics

# What does digital youth work look like?

- delivery of a young carers group through the online game Roblox
- using VR technology during detached youth work to discuss healthy relationships
- discussing online safety during a centre-based sports activity
- hosting an LGBTQ+ youth group through the chat server Discord

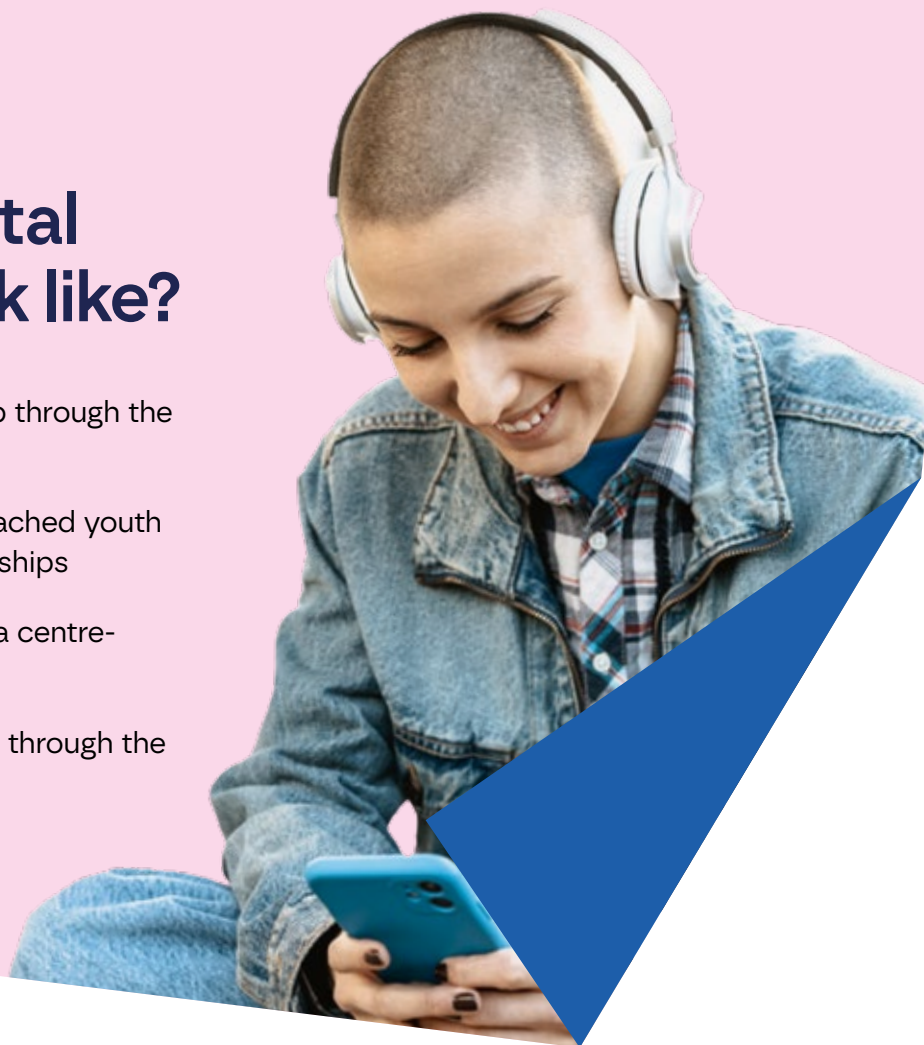
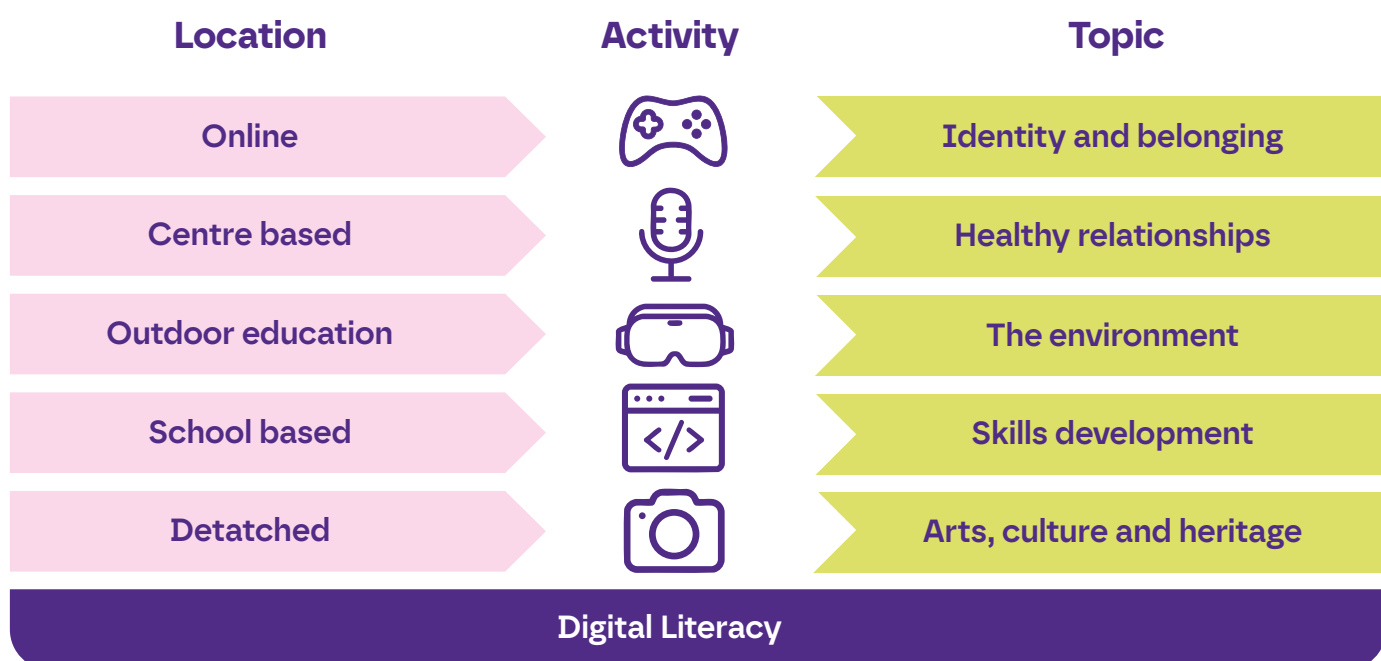



Figure 1: Youth Work Approaches and Digital Activities

Digital Youth Work can be a standalone piece of work or digital activities can be incorporated into other youth work environments.



There is often discussion and challenge around concerns of digital youth work impacting youth workers in face-to-face settings, with the assumption that the more we go online, the less we can protect face-to-face services. Digital and non-digital youth work approaches are not counteractive, but should be recognised as integral to contemporary youth work practice – there is a relationship between centre-based and online youth work that cannot be ignored.

A photograph of a person's legs in blue denim jeans and colorful sneakers, sitting on a wooden floor. They are holding a smartphone in front of them. The phone screen is black with white text. A purple triangle is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**“Digital youth work is not a separate discipline or method within youth work, but rather something intertwined with all areas of youth work.”<sup>6</sup>**

[Verke.org](http://Verke.org), Digital Youth Work

To better understand digital youth work we need to define the methods used in digital youth work practice:

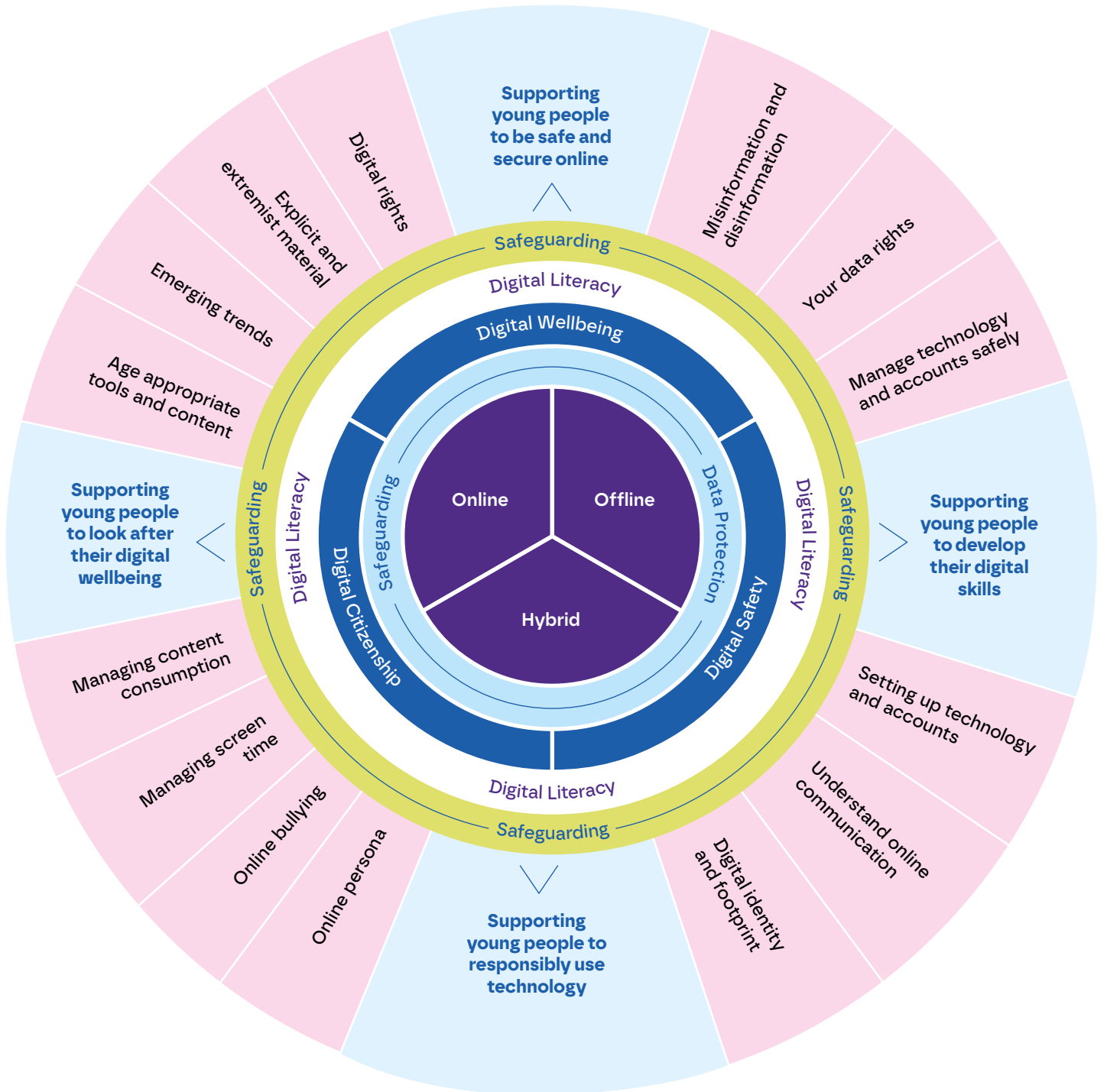
- **Online** – the use of the internet in practice and delivery of programmes online. This may include online gaming groups, chat server youth clubs, social media activity or online group work through meeting platforms such as Zoom.
- **Offline** – makerspaces, such as videography or podcasting, face-to-face gaming groups, VR experiential learning programmes or coding clubs.
- **Topic** – the exploration of digital topics and issues in youth work practice such as online safety, online harms, digital wellbeing and digital literacy.

## What is a makerspace?

A makerspace is a physical location where people gather to co-create, share resources and knowledge, work on projects, network, and build. They help intermediate and advanced users develop their skills and creativity, particularly inspiring younger generations to engage with the STEM agenda – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (or STEAM as it is now sometimes referred to, by also including the Arts).<sup>7</sup>



Figure 2: Topics in Digital Youth Work



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Youth work must always remain a dynamic and evolving field of practice, which seeks to engage with young people in a meaningful way and support their growth and development as they transition to adulthood.<sup>8</sup>

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Digital youth work has the same primary outcomes for young people as any other form of youth work, but can increase inclusion and accessibility. Online digital youth work, for example, can reach communities of young people who may face barriers to face-to-face provision, for several reasons including:

- availability of local provision
- emotional wellbeing
- social anxiety
- physical disability
- caring responsibilities
- neurodiversity

The benefits of this include:

- young people can access services in a way that works for them
- creating the opportunity for young people to build relationships with youth workers and peers
- building community without being in a physical space
- opening pathways for young people to transition to face-to-face services if it's appropriate for their needs

# Why is digital youth work important?

In a world where digital technology is becoming ever more integrated into our daily lives, binary online and offline distinctions are becoming less and less relevant for young people who have grown up with the internet intrinsically part of their lives.<sup>9</sup>

Technology and the online world are not new. With 9 in 10 young people spending time online every day in England, the internet and digital opportunities that this area of work presents are essential for youth work to remain relevant, engaging and resourced for current and future generations to come.<sup>10</sup>

Youth work can take place in any environment, and much like with detached or street-based, work in the secure estate or centre based, youth work should be in a place that meets the diverse needs of young people, including digitally and online.



Older children and teens (aged 11 to 18 years) feel more confident communicating online than in person (71% versus 53%). They benefit from the online world in diverse ways, including help with schoolwork (81%), building and maintaining friendships (68%), supporting their creativity (81%), and helping them get better at things they like doing (86%).<sup>11</sup>



Incorporating digital delivery into all youth work services helps youth workers and organisations engage young people in new ways, offering more flexible opportunities and increasing accessibility by:

- meeting young people where they are at: offering a range of opportunities that are accessible and tailored to their needs
- developing digitally connected practice and knowledge that is inclusive, accessible, equitable and evolves with the needs and interests of young people
- enabling practice to remain up-to-date and responsive to emerging technologies and trends
- supporting the digital wellbeing and literacy of young people
- providing opportunities for organisations to operate efficiently, increasing service reach and engagement through affordable means

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Youth work aims to provide young people with opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence, and to help them navigate the significant and ever-evolving challenges of growing up – especially in light of our digitised age and by providing youth work services that incorporate digital methods.<sup>12</sup>

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# Rethinking 'traditional' youth work

Some youth practitioners say that digital youth work stands apart from traditional youth work. But we need to shift our perspective to better understand what youth work fundamentally entails and the role of digital within this.

**The truth is quite simple: youth work is youth work. Digital youth work is just another method, space, tool or resource that supports and engages young people.** Whether using VR during a detached session, discussing online safety during a football activity or using a games console to facilitate conversations about healthy relationships, digital practices should be seamlessly integrated into all forms of youth work – not treated as a separate or 'other' approach.

It's also essential to consider what we mean by 'traditional' and to challenge the notion that youth work can be split into traditional face-to-face and digital contemporary forms.

At its core, youth work is about building relationships, and it must adapt to the spaces and places that resonate with young people today. It cannot be confined to fixed methods or locations but should be dynamic and able to happen anywhere.

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**A reflection: during the Covid-19 pandemic, did youth work cease to exist or did it evolve to meet young people's needs in the spaces available?**

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It is therefore no longer appropriate to distinguish digital youth work from face-to-face activities or treat it as a separate method or branch in youth work. In fact, digital youth work should not be defined solely as youth work done online, but should cover all forms and methods of youth work.<sup>13</sup>

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# Digital safety and wellbeing

The digital landscape that young people are navigating has transformed dramatically over the past decade. The increase in smartphone technology and rapid growth of social media have led to a substantial increase in young people's digital engagement. In 2014, children reported spending an average of 12.5 hours a week online, but by 2024, many are spending 6 to 8 hours or more on social media daily.<sup>14</sup>

This surge in digital use has brought opportunities and great challenges. It has coincided with a rise in online harms, synthetic media and the spread of information disorder – a term encompassing false information such as misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, rumours, and manipulated media. These developments are contributing to increasing mental health challenges among young people and leading to discussions around the future of social media for young people in the UK following Australia's recent announcement that they are to be introducing legislation banning social media for under 16's.<sup>15</sup>

Young people, while experiencing a sense of community and connection online are also reporting that they are struggling to determine what is fact and fiction. Ofcom's report in 2024 found older teens find it harder to distinguish real from fake news online, with young people aged 16 to 17 years less confident in their ability than they were the previous year (75% versus 82%).<sup>16</sup>

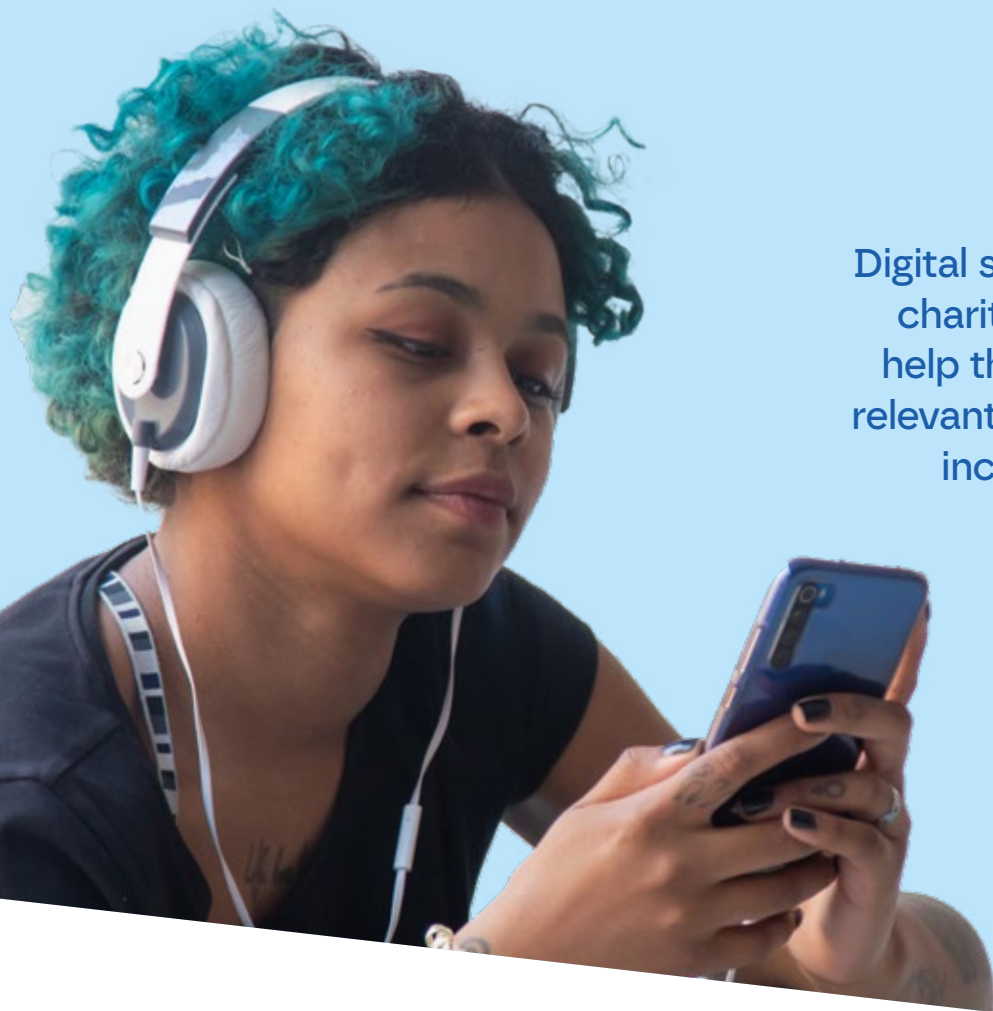
As youth workers, it is essential to stay in tune with and connected to young people's digital lives and experiences. Youth workers play a pivotal role in addressing challenges and supporting their digital wellbeing.

By understanding how technology and the internet shape health, behaviour and perceptions, we can effectively support young people through the complexities of the digital world. Our role involves equipping them with the tools to navigate emerging digital trends and challenges responsibly, boosting their resilience and supporting them to become healthy and happy young digital citizens.

## What is synthetic media?

Synthetic media refers to content created or manipulated using AI, such as deepfakes, AI-generated images, videos and audio – often designed to mimic or alter reality.

Source: Nominet,  
[digitalyouthindex.uk](https://digitalyouthindex.uk)



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Digital should be part of every charity leader’s skillset to help their organisation stay relevant, achieve its vision and increase its impact.<sup>17</sup>

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# The who?

## Embracing a digital positive culture

The success of youth work services relies on their culture and the ability to adapt to the needs of young people. This is particularly important in the rapidly evolving digital age. Youth work services need to have and maintain a clear understanding of the role that technology plays in the lives of young people and be responsive to their needs in a way that works best for them. Services should be led by the voices of young people and be prepared to engage in a range of offline and online digital environments to provide young people access to much-needed youth work services.

## Governance and leadership

To ensure effective governance and leadership in digital youth work, it is essential to have clear policy documentation.

As technology evolves, it is important to continuously involve young people in policy development, leading discussions and expressing their digital needs and expectations. This approach helps ensure that the unique role youth workers play in young people’s lives remains central to the governance and leadership of youth work.

Leaders must understand digital youth work and be driving the evolution of services to meet the needs of young people in spaces and places that best suit them, meeting them where they are and enabling a digitally agile workforce.

## Strategy and culture

Youth work strategy and culture should take a strengths-based approach, framed in the knowledge of how the digital landscape and young people's lives intersect. A commitment is required across the youth work workforce, including leadership, to continuous digital development, respecting and learning from the voices of young people and responding to their digital lived experiences.

## Workforce

Youth workers need to be digitally brave in character, trained and enabled to explore new and developing technologies and digital practices. Recognising digital tools they are already using such as game consoles in youth centres or engaging young people on social media, youth workers should be empowered to adapt to emerging and changing trends, platforms and technologies. Youth workers should be well-resourced to trial and test tools and platforms, looking forward to future digital trends to evolve their digital youth work practice.

You can find a tool to help assess your digital youth work skills and competencies here:

European community of youth work practitioners, Erasmus and European Solidarity Corps, [Assessment tool for digital competencies in youth work](#).

Figure 3: AI generated images of digitally brave Youth Workers

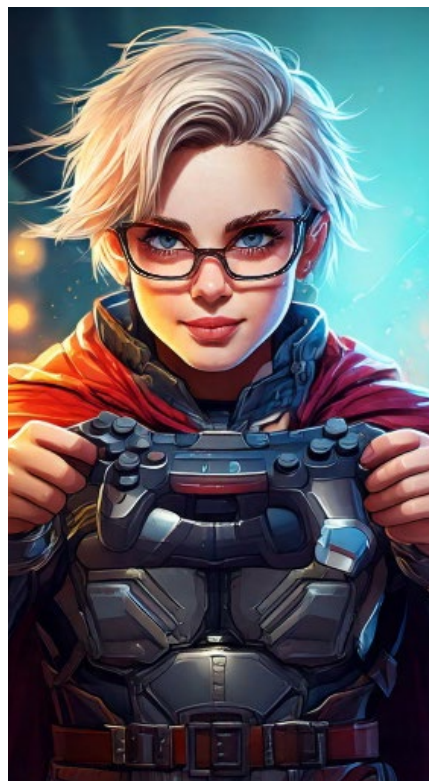
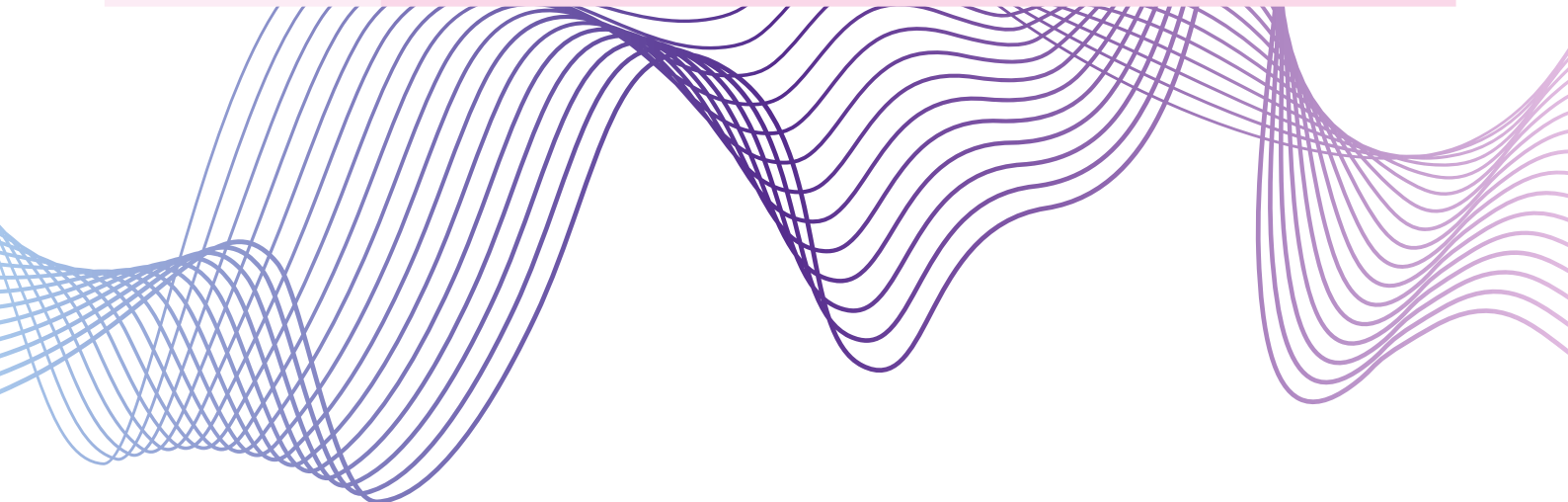


Figure 4: Table displaying the digital youth work standards: The who

| Standard                         | Good practice  | Great practice   | Advanced practice   |
|----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <b>Governance and leadership</b> | <p><b>Digital youth work policies</b><br/>Establish clear, documented digital youth work policies and procedures ensuring digital safety and ethics.</p>                                       | <p><b>Governance and policy commitment to continuous digital development</b><br/>Clear, demonstrable understanding and commitment from all leadership and staff.</p>   | <p><b>Youth-led policy development</b><br/>Undertaking annual reviews, ensuring the voices of young people, technologies, tools and spaces in which they are interacting are considered and integrated into services.</p> |
| <b>Strategy and culture</b>      | <p><b>Defined digital youth work strategy</b><br/>Develop a digital youth work strategy that aligns with the needs of young people and defines organisational commitment to digital goals.</p> | <p><b>Digital positive culture</b><br/>Leaders drive a positive digital youth work culture which is integrated at every level of practice from strategy and policy to resourcing, training and programme design.</p> | <p><b>Strategic digital influence</b><br/>Leaders networking and demonstrating good practice, influencing digital youth work on a local, regional and national level.</p>   |
| <b>Workforce</b>                 | <p><b>Digital competence</b><br/>Ensure all staff has digital awareness, skills and access to explore and use digital tools and resources.</p>   | <p><b>Digitally active workforce</b><br/>A trained, competent and confident workforce actively using digital tools and technologies to complement and support practice.</p>  | <p><b>Culture of innovation</b><br/>Encouraged and empowered workforce undertaking digital exploration, connecting with emerging technology trends to anticipate and adapt to future needs.</p>                           |



# The what?

## Safer and effective digital practice

At the forefront of all youth work planning and delivery should be the safeguarding and wellbeing of young people. Identifying and mitigating risks are an integral part of youth work practice, whether face-to-face, outdoor education or an online activity. The fundamentals of safeguarding apply across all approaches and methods of youth work delivery.

Digital youth work requires the application of existing knowledge and skills, and training in safeguarding and risk management. The core principles of safeguarding remain unchanged, and practice expertise in youth work naturally carries over into digital spaces.

Organisations must have robust safeguarding and data protection systems for face-to-face and digital youth work. They must read and apply the National Safeguarding Standards for Youth Work which provide the minimum standards for safeguarding compliance in the youth work sector.



These can be found here: National Youth Agency, [Safeguarding standards for the youth sector](#).

## Safeguarding and risk management

The online world can present many risks, as the offline world does, but at a much faster and evolving pace. Youth workers should take a proactive and contextualised safeguarding approach to working in digital spaces and understand where risk is present.

Youth workers need to engage with the digital context of young people's lives, the technology used and the online spaces where young people are, to understand these risks. We do this to offer alternative, safer and accessible online opportunities for young people and support them to safely navigate the complex online world.

Youth workers and organisations must also consider laws and regulations such as the Online Safety Act 2023, have a good understanding of online harms, and understand the role technology plays in facilitating abuse.<sup>18</sup>

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**Safeguarding risks change as society does and young people's knowledge and experience is essential to understanding the shifting landscape and devising appropriate measures in response.<sup>19</sup>**

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Safeguarding in the digital space should be informed by emerging trends, taking into account young people's digital lived experiences to best define risk and safeguarding issues. Collaborating with allied sectors and digital experts, organisations should work collectively to understand risks in the digital space and how to mitigate them. The NYA promotes sharing learning and expertise to ensure that risk assessments and approaches to working in digital spaces follow best practice.

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## Data protection and privacy

In line with existing organisational policies and processes, privacy and data protection will be built into digital youth work delivery as default.

Youth workers and organisations will be committed to understanding how to effectively manage data in digital spaces and have the appropriate support in place to offer digital opportunities to young people working with data protection officers and relevant teams where necessary. Please see the Digital Youth Work Guide for more information on data protection in digital youth work and Data Protection Impact Assessments. You can access these resources here:



[Digital Youth Work Guide](#)

Youth workers should support young people to understand how personal data is managed, along with the importance of data protection and privacy in line with the GDPR Act.<sup>20</sup> This will enable young people to engage with and advocate for their concerns and expectations relating to data protection in the context of digital youth work. There is also the expectation that youth workers understand and follow data protection procedures.

For further guidance please seek advice and support from your organisation's data protection officer and the Information Commissioner's Office, which can be found here:

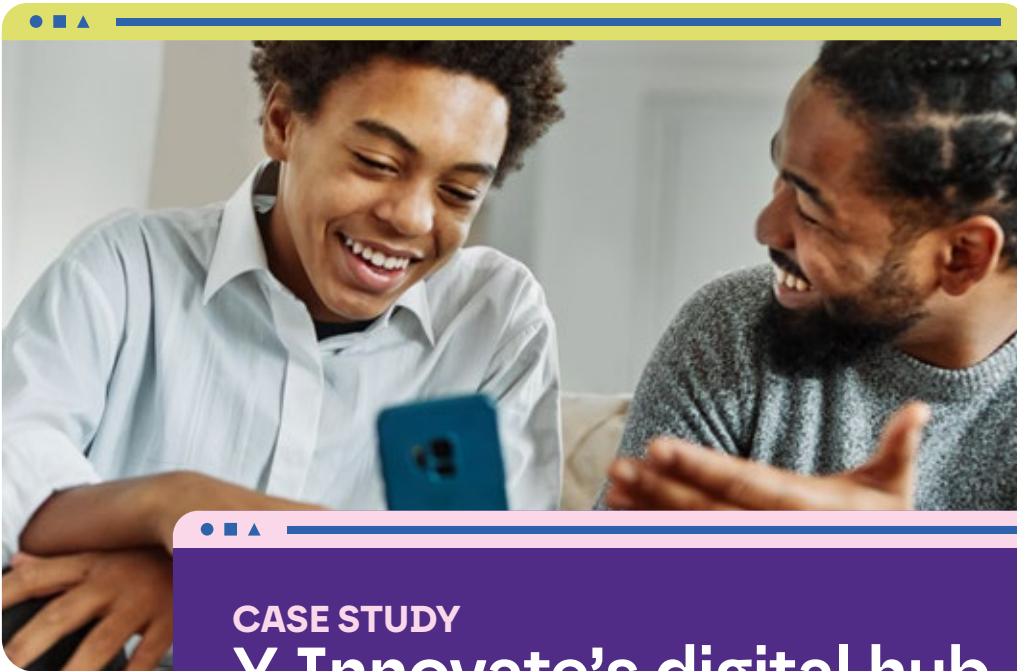
[Information Commissioner's Office](#)

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## Digital wellbeing and online safety

With nearly all (99%) of 16 to 24-year-olds using social networking sites in the last 12 months,<sup>21</sup> digital education should be a key aspect of youth work ensuring that youth workers remain connected to the digital lives of the young people they support. As technology and social media play an increasingly prominent role in the lives of young people, youth services must prioritise promoting digital safety and wellbeing across all places and spaces in which youth work takes place. This involves educating young people on topics such as online privacy, cyberbullying, online harms and the responsible use of technology.

Encouraging healthy digital behaviours, youth work practices should adapt to the evolving needs of young people and align with the National Youth Work Curriculum.<sup>22</sup> Digital safety and wellbeing should be woven into all aspects of youth work, for example, a centre-based sports project might include activities focused on tackling online bullying, while a street-based arts programme could facilitate discussions on misinformation and disinformation online if it was relevant to the activity and young people involved.



## CASE STUDY

# Y Innovate's digital hub

Using alternative education styles to re-engage young people in learning, Y-Innovate's digital hub demonstrates safeguarding and safety at the core of digital programme development.

YMCA Tayside is an organisation operating in Scotland. It has a digital hub called 'Y Innovate', which runs 6-week courses for 11 to 12-year-olds who find the school environment challenging or who face barriers to education, such as caring responsibilities or poverty.

These courses are effective for young people because of the following reasons:

- **accessibility** – the course gives young people access to technology they are unlikely to use, such as robotics and 3D printing
- **addressing need** – the course was designed to help young people re-engage with learning. YMCA has found sessions improve participants' school attendance and it has done this by encouraging creativity and sparking interest through novel technology and interventions
- **complementing face-to-face youth work** – the course is run alongside traditional youth work sessions and strengthens the YMCA's other work and that of the school's partner organisations
- **safeguarding and safety at the core** – youth workers' concerns around online safety prompted the creation of the course and, as sessions progressed, youth workers were able to uncover further needs and address them in future sessions

Find out more here: [YMCA Tayside](#).

Figure 5: Table displaying the digital youth work standards: The what

| Standard                                   | Good practice   | Great practice  | Advanced practice   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Safeguarding and risk management</b>    | <p><b>Digital safety and risk management</b><br/>Implement and demonstrate clear policies and best practices for digital safeguarding and risk management. Conducting regular risk assessments for digital activities and training.</p> | <p><b>Trial and test environments</b><br/>Create space and processes for youth workers to explore and test new digital technologies and environments, analysing and assessing risk when preparing for new and emerging tech trends.</p> | <p><b>Digital safeguarding networks</b><br/>To collaborate and lead innovative safeguarding approaches, responsive to the ever-changing digital landscape, issues and trends.</p>                         |
| <b>Data protection and privacy</b>         | <p><b>Data confident</b><br/>Ensure compliance with data protection regulations with clear policies for safer, responsible data handling and training for youth workers in data protection.</p>   | <p><b>Data-savvy young people</b><br/>Resources and awareness raising for young people around data protection, keeping their data safer and avenues to share concerns.</p>  | <p><b>Digital data ownership</b><br/>Create space to develop cross-sector best practices. Young people are empowered to inform and influence data protection systems and processes as a data subject.</p> |
| <b>Digital wellbeing and online safety</b> | <p><b>Informed spaces</b><br/>Youth workers ensure all digital work is undertaken with digital wellbeing at the forefront of practice, ensuring young people are knowledgeable and aware of how to keep themselves safer online.</p>    | <p><b>Digital wellbeing curriculum</b><br/>All youth work programmes embed digital wellbeing into curriculums. Young people have access to ongoing discussions and resources around online safety, harms and wellbeing.</p>             | <p><b>Youth-led wellbeing influence</b><br/>Pathways are available for young people to influence digital wellbeing services and define them through regular consultation.</p>                             |

# The where?

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## Digital spaces and places

Digital youth work enables young people who might not otherwise engage with youth work to access the life-changing support it provides. It can happen in many places and spaces, from utilising digital technologies during detached sessions to using chat servers to engage with neurodiverse young people.

The possibilities of digital youth work are endless and should flex and change to meet the needs of young people as they arise.

Youth work prides itself on not taking a one-size-fits-all approach. The reality is that centre-based or traditional face-to-face youth work does not work for every young person.

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## Online

Online digital youth work practice should be informed through continuous review and knowledge of trending technologies. It also needs to be flexible and responsive to new advancements in tech and to young people's preferences, which may shift over time. Digital youth work should create safer and inclusive programmes that can help support the developmental and aspirational needs of all young people, particularly for communities who otherwise could not or would not access in-person youth provision.

Online digital youth work should be delivered in well-managed and risk-assessed spaces following clear guidance, policies, processes and boundaries, offering safer alternatives. Youth workers should be trained to engage young people in online spaces through tried and tested platforms.

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## Offline

Offline digital youth work is the use of digital technologies in face-to-face settings and should respond to the evolving ways that young people communicate and interact, and how technology impacts their lives. Offline digital youth work should utilise relevant technologies, using hardware and software that young people are likely to use outside of the digital youth work setting or should provide access to technologies that young people may not otherwise be able to access, for example, VR headsets. Face-to-face provision should be well-resourced and staff should ensure the tech being used is maintained and safe.

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## Hybrid

Hybrid digital youth work uses blended approaches and multi-user programmes, with resources available for young people to join in with online or offline activities. Staff should be trained to deliver exciting and relevant programmes in a hybrid environment, and have a good grasp of technologies together with the youth work tools to raise the aspirations of young people. Equally, there should be opportunities for digital detached youth work to engage young people online to find ways to develop in-person engagement in physical youth workspaces and places.

## CASE STUDY

## Essex Youth Service's video gaming clubs

In March 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, Essex Youth Service created video gaming clubs. These were run weekly over Zoom and in the last 4 years have developed to become a Virtual Youth Centre, operating on the gaming platform Roblox.

- **Targeted and open-access to meet needs** – there are two different clubs on offer, one for those aged 13 to 19 years and one for 11 to 19-year-old young carers. This offers respite services for young carers, who may otherwise find it challenging to access activities due to their caregiving responsibilities.
- **Complementary online and offline models** – after the pandemic, the clubs began to meet in person. The online model engages young people where they are comfortable and spend much of their time and helps build healthy online habits. In-person groups help develop their social skills outside virtual environments, though digital technology is used at these sessions, such as VR headsets. In-person sessions also help Essex Youth Service to encourage participants to engage in other youth provision in the area.
- **A pathway of involvement** – young people are heavily involved in the planning and delivery of sessions, including co-design of the curriculum and risk assessments. This gives a sense of ownership and has led to participants becoming volunteers and leading sessions themselves.
- **Skills development** – in addition to developing young people's social and soft skills, some participating young people go on to pursue careers in the gaming industry. Their engagement with the club furthers their interest in gaming, but also gives valuable experience for their CV and puts them directly in touch with industry figures who have delivered sessions.

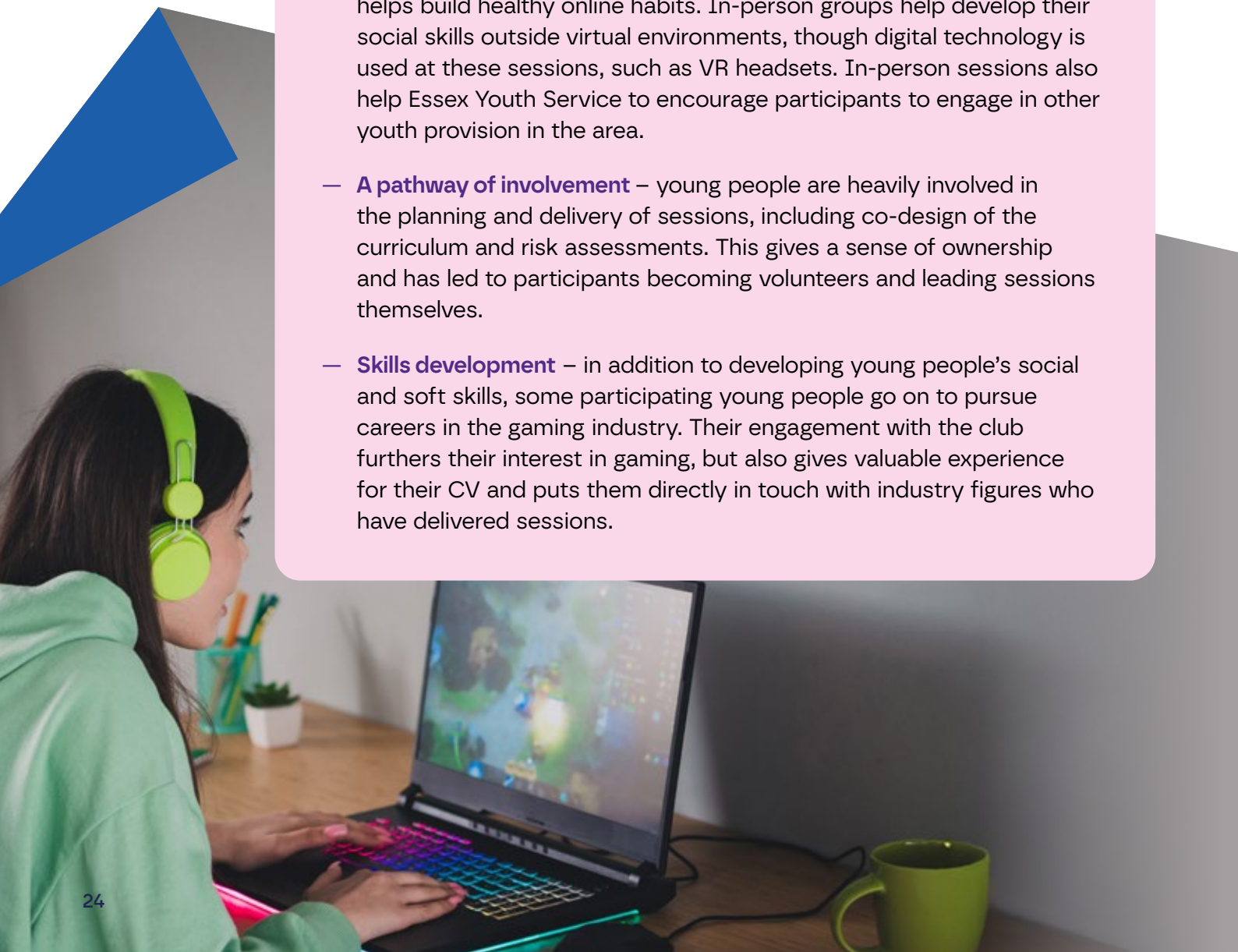


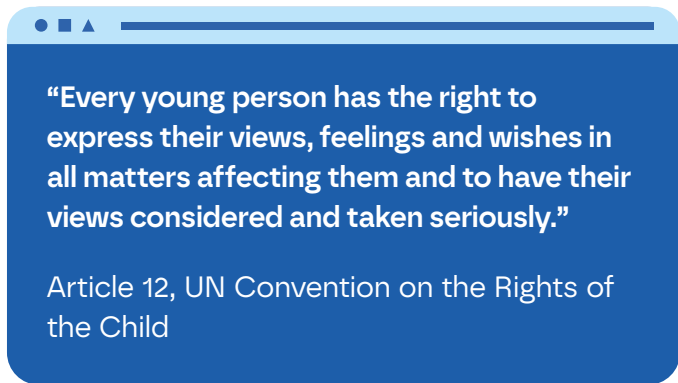
Figure 6: Table displaying the digital youth work standards: The where

| Standard       | Good practice  | Great practice  | Advanced practice   |
|----------------|--|---|---|
| <b>Online</b>  | <p><b>Safer digital platforms</b><br/>Use risk assessed, secure, tested and youth-friendly platforms for online engagement delivered by trained and competent staff.</p> | <p><b>Inclusive forward-thinking spaces</b><br/>Utilisation of technologies and the internet to reach communities of young people who may otherwise not be able to access face-to-face provision.</p> | <p><b>Digitally agile</b><br/>Set up co-owned testing spaces with young people exploring the latest platforms and tools for experimentation, learning and awareness of emerging technologies.</p>   |
| <b>Offline</b> | <p><b>Safer digital tools</b><br/>Use relevant, in date and maintained risk-assessed, secure, tested and youth-friendly digital tools.</p>                               | <p><b>Tech management processes</b><br/>Trained staff able to maintain tech and donate/recycle outdated tech for new.</p>   | <p><b>Commitment to communication</b><br/>A whole-organisation commitment to understanding how young people communicate is essential. Learning from and with young people to ensure service development that reflects young people's needs.</p> |
| <b>Hybrid</b>  | <p><b>Digital detached</b><br/>Offering online programmes to increase engagement opportunities for young people.</p>   | <p><b>Blended delivery models</b><br/>Combine online and offline activities to ensure accessibility and engagement.</p>   | <p><b>Digitally agile workforce</b><br/>Youth workers are confidently and competently able to work across online and offline settings, expanding the reach and accessibility of youth work.</p>   |

# The how?

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## Needs-led digital services



“Every young person has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously.”

Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Responding to the digital needs of young people is fundamental to providing relevant and engaging services. As the internet and technology are intrinsically part of life today, service leaders must listen and respond to needs, and make provision that evolves with young people’s interests.

Youth work should always be led by the needs and start from the places and spaces where young people are. This does not mean that youth work needs to be in every digital space and place, but how we work must be shaped by those experiencing it.

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## Accessibility

Whether face-to-face or digital, youth work provision should be accessible to all. Digital youth work offers the opportunity to work with young people across a wide geography and regional areas, as well as adapt services to meet specific needs. Digital youth work opens opportunities to offer services to young people who may not otherwise access the provision, whether because it does not exist

within their localities or due to a disability or caring responsibilities. Digital services should be developed with accessibility at the forefront of planning and consider digital poverty, exclusion and measures to bridge the digital divide.

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## Youth participation

Young people should be able to influence every level of a youth work organisation, from its facilities and provision to strategy and culture. Given the role that technology plays in the lives of young people, and that they are often at the forefront of using new technologies and embracing trends, it is important they are involved in decision-making and planning around the digital youth work on offer. This approach should be complemented by providing spaces for young people to be innovative, working with peers to design their services and work side by side with youth workers to explore new and emerging technologies in a safe and supported setting.

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## Curriculum

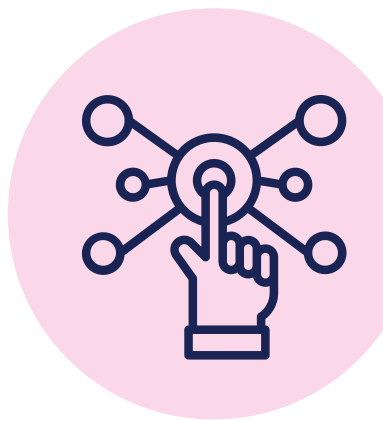
Having a youth work curriculum and resources developed with digital in mind will mean diverse needs can be addressed using a variety of tools and platforms. As the digital landscape evolves, the curriculum should develop to embrace new topics and technologies. Given the speed of technological advancements and the emergence of new guidance and legislation relating to online spaces, digital tools and resources must be regularly reviewed.



**The NYA's free youth participation framework, *Hear by Right*, sets out how young people can be engaged with decision-making and provided with a safe space to share their experiences to influence strategy, policies and operational delivery.**



Find out more here:  
[nya.org.uk/youth-participation-framework](https://nya.org.uk/youth-participation-framework).



## CASE STUDY

# Routes to Community Success – young digital directors leading opportunities and innovation in digital youth work

In April 2024, the NYA launched the digital strand of the Routes to Community Success programme to understand the digital needs of young people and the provision gap in England. It worked with 10 youth work organisations and services with an interest in developing their digital youth work provision, with a particular focus on online and virtual delivery.

- **Youth-led digital design** – the Routes to Community Success digital strand has been actively working with youth work organisations facilitating a youth-led approach to digital youth work design from April to October 2024.
- **Digital exploration** – the project puts young people’s voices at the centre of service development and design, through the involvement of 15 young digital directors who worked with young people across each partner organisation, undertaking in-depth needs analyses to understand their digital wants and interests.
- **Innovation** – beyond the needs analysis, the digital directors developed resources and training, undertook research and networked with digital youth work organisations to gather learning and share insights, with support and training from the NYA.
- **Recommendations and pathways** – as a result, the youth work services have a detailed plan to help effectively shape future digital provisions for young people.

Figure 7: Table displaying the digital youth work standards: The how

| Standard                   | Good practice  | Great practice   | Advanced practice  |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Accessibility</b>       | <p><b>Mapping and addressing the digital need</b></p> <p>Regularly review the digital needs of young people. Understanding their gaps in access to technology and digital skills.</p>      | <p><b>Inclusion and accessibility strategy</b></p> <p>Develop a strategy to ensure all young people can participate digitally, building partnerships to address resource gaps.</p>   | <p><b>A menu of youth-led digitally diverse services</b></p> <p>Providing considered, consulted, accessible and integrated digital opportunities for young people.</p>                                   |
| <b>Youth participation</b> | <p><b>Youth advisory groups</b></p> <p>Establish youth advisory groups to influence digital strategies and activities and showcase best practices.</p>                                     | <p><b>Digital youth leadership and innovation forums</b></p> <p>Young people steering digital innovation and decision-making.</p>  | <p><b>Multi-agency, co-owned exploration of digital platforms</b></p> <p>Young people and youth workers cross-working with organisations to explore digital mediums.</p>                                 |
| <b>Curriculum</b>          | <p><b>Digital-friendly curriculum</b></p> <p>Develop resources to operate in online and offline spaces. Integrating digital tools and platforms into curriculum planning and delivery.</p> | <p><b>Future-ready, co-designed curriculum</b></p> <p>Develop curriculum with young people that includes emerging topics and technologies such as AI and immersive technologies.</p> | <p><b>Resource sharing and adaption</b></p> <p>Cross-sector collaboration to develop materials and resources, adapting existing resources to become digital, and merge learning from allied sectors.</p> |



# Digital youth work checklist

These questions can help you achieve the standards for safe and high-quality digital youth work.

|           |   |  |
|-----------|---|--|
| <b>1</b>  | Have you created a digital positive culture?  |  |
| <b>2</b>  | Are young people engaged in the process of digital development?                               |  |
| <b>3</b>  | Have you established clear digital policies and procedures?                                   |  |
| <b>4</b>  | Are you taking a safeguarding and data-first approach to the development of digital services? |  |
| <b>5</b>  | Are you integrating digital wellbeing and online safety across all youth work programmes?     |  |
| <b>6</b>  | Are you providing accessible digital opportunities for all?                                   |  |
| <b>7</b>  | Are you providing ongoing training and support to staff?                                      |  |
| <b>8</b>  | Are you developing a diverse digital youth work offer?  |  |
| <b>9</b>  | Have you monitored, evaluated and evolved your programmes and services?                       |  |
| <b>10</b> | Do you have a future-ready approach?  |  |

**CASE STUDY**

# Discord online youth centre – Space Youth Services

Space Youth Services is a youth work charity which has eight youth centres across Devon. It offers a variety of activities for 11 to 19-year-olds, but recognises that not everyone can, or wants to, access in-person spaces – this is where its Online Youth Centre comes in. Young people can join Space’s Discord server to chat, play games and get to know new people who they often go on to meet in-person through the face-to-face delivery it also offers.

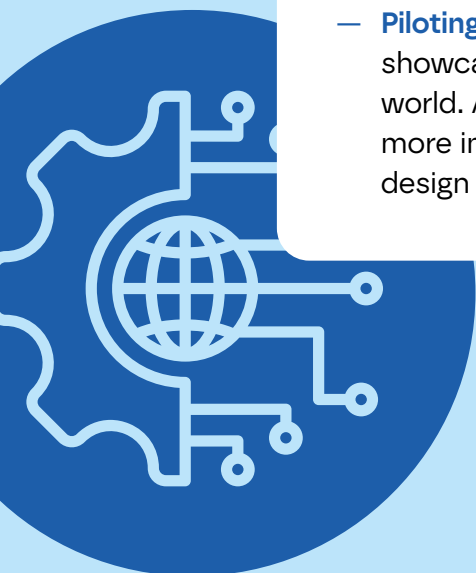
- **Accessibility at the core** – despite having eight centres in the county, Space’s Online Youth Centre makes sure no-one misses out with 3 Discord server sessions a week and access to its gaming server every weekday. There’s even a YouTube channel as a way to become familiar with Space.
- **Levels of engagement** – chatting online, especially through Discord, is a familiar environment for many young people. Some who have gone on to access more Space services have taken on volunteering roles, led sessions and even pursued youth work careers.
- **Individual support** – some young people come to Space through external social prescribing programmes which support them to use the service based on their needs. Space has an offer for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) too, online and in-person.
- **Spaces to learn about creativity and tech** – Space’s Creative Hub features Q&A sessions with directors, designers, YouTubers, and more. Participants have also joined Space’s *Flying Start* programme, which helps them develop their own business ideas.

## CASE STUDY

# Minecraft Urban Farm – Community Connections Plymouth

During 2024, the Community Connections Youth Team at Plymouth City Council has piloted using the game software Minecraft to support in-person sessions exploring their local environment. This was part of a special month-long project based on an urban farm – Poole Farm – which specialises in engaging young people in nature.

- **Complementary hybrid approach** – young people learnt about the farm environment outside before moving indoors to explore the space virtually through Minecraft.
- **Piquing young people's interest** – the youth team recognised that this group of young people – some being SEND and LGBTQ+ – were very familiar and comfortable with being online, and saw an opportunity to use this to help them engage with new, natural environments.
- **Developing skills and knowledge** – participants in the project learnt how digital spaces can help them visualise and build an understanding of the natural world. Young people also learnt about local environments and biodiversity they were previously unaware of.
- **Recognising achievement** – participation involved repairing enclosures and planting trees, just as a Ranger would do. As a reward for their hard work, young people collected 'Future Ranger' digital badges.
- **Piloting for further rollout** – this project formed part of a research project showcasing how digital methods can enhance connection with the natural world. As a result of positive feedback, the sessions will become a longer, more impactful programme and participants will be more involved in the design of the farm environment.



**CASE STUDY**

## Routes to Community Success programme – digital strand

The NYA received funding from the National Lottery Community Fund in 2023 to deliver the Routes to Community Success programme. This included working with young people to map the use and demand for digital youth work services.

Through focus groups and a survey of over 400 young people across England, the digital strand of the programme found that the vast majority of young people have never experienced digital youth work.

- When presented with different types of digital youth work, the proportion of young people who never take part in specific activities ranges from 54% to 90%.
- Of all digital youth work types, young people are least likely (11%) to take part in one-to-one support online with youth workers.
- Social media group participation is the highest among digital youth work types at 46%.
- Lack of interest is the most common barrier to digital youth participation – however, this is linked to not having done activities.
- Around a third of young people said they want opportunities to use VR (35%), and take part in gaming or coding clubs (32%), ‘maker activities’ (34%), and social media groups in their area (36%).



Find out more here:

[nya.org.uk/routes-to-community-success-programme](https://nya.org.uk/routes-to-community-success-programme)



The following digital case studies were taken from MY NGO, a platform based in the European Union which offers training courses for youth workers, among many other services.

These examples show how digital youth work addresses unique problems in ways that traditional youth work may not. Of particular interest is how these examples often target specific demographics and use digital means to help them.

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## Online mentoring – Mentor Sweden

‘Mentor Sweden’ is a non-profit organisation which ran a mentor programme to engage young people entering Sweden as refugees and migrants. The online nature provided access to services which this young community would likely not have had access to. Mentors helped young people learn Swedish, integrate into the community and set goals for education and employment.

Find out more here: TEAMS, [Teaching that matters for migrant students](#)

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## Digital storytelling – Digital StoryLab

Copenhagen University’s Digital StoryLab offers workshops for young people to learn how to create narratives using digital tools. This helps young people develop different ways of expressing themselves and set goals for the future. While acting as a means of developing technical and digital skills, it also helps young people understand themselves and feel understood through participatory methods.

Find out more here: Digital StoryLab [English - Digital Storylab](#)

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## Skills for future employment – CoderDojo coding clubs

Originating in Ireland, CoderDojos have spread across 100 countries. They are a fun, free way for young people to learn how to code. Clubs are volunteer-led and develop skills in games, web development and more. They are typically in-person and run out of locally accessible public spaces, such as libraries and community centres. Dojos have spread widely because of their sustainable business model – being volunteer-led and using existing community assets – and the support provided by the CoderDojo for those wishing to set up their own club.

Find out more here: [Raspberry Pi Foundation, Coderdojo](#)

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## Resources

CAST, [Free digital resources](#)

Charity Digital Code, [Increase your charity's impact with digital](#)

Digital Youth Work EU, [European guidelines for digital youth work](#)

Minimum Digital Living, [The UK's digital needs for the 21st Century](#)

National Youth Agency, [Raising the bar: youth work practice standards](#)

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Screenagers Guidelines, [Screenagers - National Youth Council of Ireland](#)

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## Toolkits and frameworks

The following resources were used when writing this guide and are useful for youth workers seeking to develop their understanding of digital youth work practices.

Aye Mind is a website developed by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and other local Scottish partners. It collates online tools to support young people's wellbeing, and provides youth workers with guidance on delivering safe and effective youth work which can impact mental health. It has a comprehensive digital toolkit: Aye Mind Toolkit: [Your introductory guide to using digital technologies to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing](#).

Aye Mind and LGBT Scotland created a guide to using Discord in youth work settings. Short and practical, the guide is based on learning from LGBT Scotland's long-running 'Pride and Pixels' digital youth workspace on Discord. [Aye Mind, A youth work guide to Discord](#).

EU-based digital youth work platform 'MY NGO' has a free virtual training course for youth workers wanting to use digital activities in their practice. The examples are often from the EU, but are highly applicable to use in England. After the course, youth workers will understand the importance of digital and how best to use it. MY NGO: [Virtual training course for digital youth worker](#).

Unicef policy guide on children and digital connectivity: [Policy guide children and digital connectivity](#).

UK Council for Internet Safety: [Education for a connected world framework – 2020 edition](#).

Information Commissioner's Office, Children's Code: [Introduction to the Children's code](#).

LSE, Digital Futures for Children: [The best interests of the child in the digital environment](#).

Department for Education: [Using technology in education](#).

Education Endowment Foundation, using tech to improve learning: [Using digital technology to improve learning: evidence review](#).

## Glossary

### Chat server

A chat server is a tool that manages and facilitates real-time communication between users in a chat application or platform.

### Content

Any information or media such as text, images, audio or video, created and distributed digitally, especially through websites, social media and other online platforms.

### Curriculum

A structured plan that outlines the topics, subjects and learning activities to be taught as part of an educational programme. Used in education settings such as schools and colleges.

### Cyber

Cyber refers to anything related to computers, the internet, and digital technology, including online activities, systems, and security.

### Cyber resilience

The capacity of an organisation or individual to prepare for, respond to, and recover from cyber threats, minimising damage and ensuring continuity of operations even after an attack.

### Cyber trauma

Refers to psychological distress or harm caused by negative experiences online, such as cyberbullying, harassment, or exposure to harmful content.

### Data subject

An individual whose personal data is being collected, stored, and processed by an organisation, typically with specific rights regarding the control of their personal information under data protection laws.

### Detached youth work

Detached youth work is a form of youth work that takes place in the young person's environment, such as streets, parks, town centres and other public spaces.

### Digital

Refers to electronic technology that generates, stores, and processes data. It encompasses anything involving computers, networks, or online environments.

### Digital citizenship

The responsible and informed behaviour that people demonstrate when using digital technology, covering aspects like online etiquette, protecting personal information, and respecting others' rights.

### Digital ethics

The principles and guidelines governing the responsible use of digital technology, focusing on issues such as privacy, fairness, transparency, and accountability in the digital space.

### Digital inclusion

Efforts and initiatives aimed at ensuring everyone has access to digital technology, resources and skills, particularly those in underserved communities, so they can fully participate in the digital world.

### Digital literacy

The skills and knowledge needed to effectively and safely navigate, evaluate and create information in the digital world, including internet browsing, data management and the critical evaluation of online sources.

### Digital poverty

A lack of access to necessary digital tools, resources and connectivity, such as internet access, devices, or digital skills, which can limit an individual's or community's ability to participate in the digital world.

### Digital wellbeing

The state of maintaining a healthy and balanced relationship with technology, ensuring it enhances rather than detracts from mental, emotional and physical health.

### Discord

Discord is a digital communication platform designed for text, voice, and video chatting.

### Gaming

The practice of playing digital or video games, either online or offline, using various devices such as consoles, computers or mobile phones. Popular games include Fortnite, Minecraft and Roblox.

### Hardware

The physical components of computers and digital devices, such as monitors, keyboards, processors, hard drives and mobile devices necessary for running software and digital applications. In youth work settings this may also include game consoles, video cameras, music production equipment and any digital devices.

### Internet of things

The Internet of Things is when everyday devices, like fridges or lights, connect to the internet to share data and work automatically.

### Makerspaces

A makerspace is a shared creative workspace where people can use tools, equipment, and materials to design, build and invent projects.

### National Youth Work Curriculum

The National Youth Work Curriculum is a flexible framework which allows youth workers to identify how their interventions and activities can be used to support the personal, social and political development of young people.<sup>23</sup>

### Offline

The state of being disconnected from the internet or a network. In terms of youth work, this references the use of technology in physical settings.

### Online

The state of being connected to the internet or a network, enabling access to digital resources, websites, social media and other internet-based services in real-time. In terms of youth work practice, this references the use of the internet.

### Online harms

Online harms refer to harmful activities or content encountered on digital platforms, such as cyberbullying, misinformation, exploitation, or privacy breaches.

Online safety involves protecting individuals from risks and harms on digital platforms through secure practices, policies, and technologies.

### Roblox

Roblox is an online platform where users can play, create, and share games.

### Social media

Platforms and websites that enable users to create, share, and interact with content and connect with others, including sites like Instagram, TikTok and Twitter (now X).

### Software


The programs, applications, and operating systems that instruct computers and devices on how to perform specific tasks. Software can be system-based (like Windows or iOS) or application-based (like Word processors or video games).

### Synthetic media

Synthetic media refers to content created or manipulated using artificial intelligence, such as deepfakes, AI-generated images, videos, or audio, often designed to mimic or alter reality.

### Virtual reality (VR)

A computer-generated, immersive environment that users can interact with through specialised equipment, such as VR headsets, creating the sensation of being present in a digital space.



The Digital Youth Work Standards were developed with a team of sector experts with experience spanning digital youth work practice, safeguarding and risk management, technology, data protection and information security, workforce and quality.

With special thanks to:

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Amy Shocker, Aditi Chawla, Chris Frampton, Kiera Noonan, Eloise White and the team at Tata Consultancy Services.

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## Endnotes

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<https://charitydigitalcode.org/the-code/>
- 18 Online Safety Act 2023 (legislation.gov.uk):  
<http://legislation.gov.uk>
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