

Youth Work Job Search Briefing

Introduction

The Job Search Briefing

This report presents the findings from the National Youth Agency's (NYA) comprehensive audit of current job opportunities for youth workers across England. The NYA conducted job searches for youth worker roles at three different points during 2024-2025 (April 2024, November 2024, and February 2025) in order to build an extensive picture of the current youth work job market. In total there were 501 youth worker jobs covered in this research. Full details of the methodology can be found in [Appendix A: Methodology](#).

Purpose of the exercise

The NYA undertook this exercise in response to significant changes in the delivery and provision of youth services over the past decade. A reduction of up to £1.1 billion in government funding to local authority youth services^[1], along with an increasing reliance on third sector organisations, has led to a more decentralised and diversified youth sector workforce. This workforce has now come to provide a range of open, universal and targeted youth services for young people^[2].

Given these changes, it has become increasingly important to monitor and assess the current job market for prospective youth workers. This assessment provides a clear understanding of the demand for youth workers, the qualifications required, and the remuneration offered to youth worker roles. This information is crucial for the NYA to ensure that training provision and standards meet the needs of youth workers and to advocate for appropriate and improved investment in the sector to meet young people's needs.

This briefing should be read in line with the NYA [Annual Youth Sector Workforce Survey](#) and [Annual Youth Sector Census](#) to build the most comprehensive and complete picture of the sector to date.

What is a Youth Worker?

To develop this research, the NYA has adopted a universal definition of a youth worker as described below.

“A youth worker is a professional who supports the personal, social, and educational development of young people, aged between 11 and 19 but also up to 25 depending on their needs. They build voluntary, trusted relationships with young people, away from many of the other pressures they may be facing in their lives. Youth workers engage with young people in various settings, including community centres, schools, and youth clubs, to help them explore and understand their ideas, values, and beliefs, building their confidence and life skills so that they can make a successful transition to adulthood” (adapted from NYA website [‘What is Youth Work?’](#))

It is understandable under this definition that youth work roles are likely to encompass a range of job descriptions and specifications that can be set in diverse settings away from ‘traditional’ youth centres. This means they can be challenging to identify, particularly if they are not advertised and described under the term ‘youth worker’.

At the same time, the term is also likely to be interpreted by different employers in multiple ways, depending upon the need for recruitment, the funding of the role and the setting within which the role will be performed. For example, a health provider may emphasise the need for a youth worker to provide health and social care support and specifically describe this in the job advertisement.

The NYA has been careful not to be overly restrictive with the parameters of the role to ensure that this diversity has been recognised (and to give a more accurate representation). At the same time, the team has also been careful not to sample just anything that is broadly being assigned under the term ‘youth worker’, if it did not meet this core description. We give further description of this in [Appendix A: Methodology](#).

Headlines

- 501 Youth Work jobs identified across 3 searches conducted in April 2024, November 2024 and February 2025.
- 30 per cent of roles see a qualification in youth work as 'essential' whilst 21 per cent see it as 'desirable' [3], meaning 51 per cent of advertised roles are seeking staff with a qualification in youth work [4].
- 42 per cent of jobs advertised are offered on a full-time and permanent basis. 70 per cent of jobs advertised are permanent roles, whilst 29 per cent are temporary (one per cent did not provide this status).
- 90 per cent of roles are at a 'Practitioner' [5] level whilst 10 per cent are at a more senior 'Manager/Team Leader' level.
- The average wage offered is £21,084 (actual salary, inclusive of part-time and sessional roles). Based on Full-Time Equivalent (FTE), the average salary is £28,356.
- For roles that are in Greater London, the average wage offered is £24,980 and the FTE equivalent average salary is £33,787. The average UK salary is currently £36,920 [6].
- Median salaries (based on actual salaries) are £22,291, whilst FTE median salaries are £26,596. This is considerably below the average annual median salary in the UK of £37,430 [7].
- 25 per cent of the jobs advertised are not at a living wage (per hour rate).
- Five per cent of jobs advertised specifically referenced JNC Terms and Conditions.

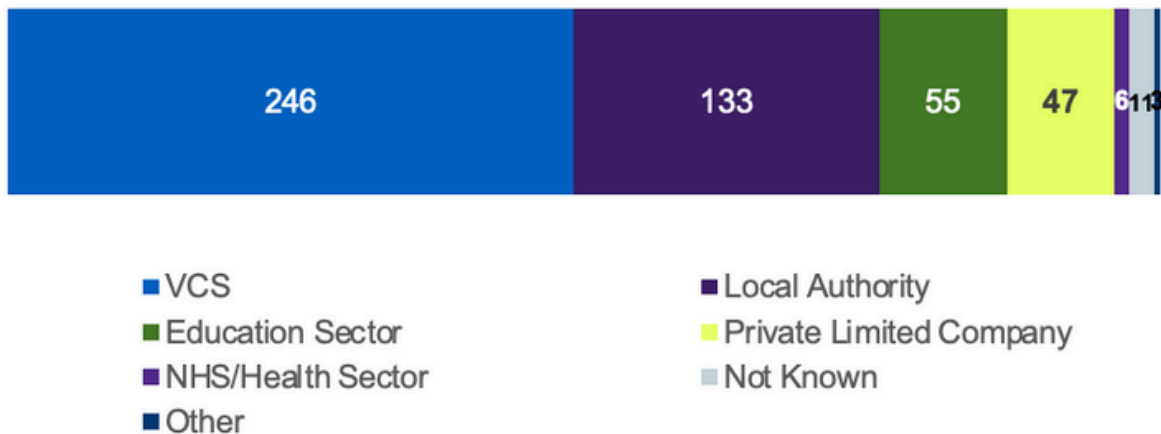
Key Findings

- There continues to be a 'mixed economy' of youth worker roles combining the VCSE, public, and private sector, with the majority of roles being in the VCSE sector (49 per cent of the jobs advertised) and 27 per cent in local authority.
- Around half of the jobs advertised (51 per cent) are looking for a specific qualification in youth work. However, previous experience of working with young people, combined with a set of values and principles, appear to be more valued by employers in the current climate.
- Increasingly youth work roles are being required for specialist or 'targeted' fields where they are being asked to work with specific groups (for example young people with SEND) or in specialist settings (such as a children's care home), instead of traditional youth work environments (such as a youth club).
- A number of roles are asking for alternative qualifications such as NVQs, instead of (or in addition to) specific qualifications in youth work. Increasingly it appears that having related qualifications may be a pathway into youth work for those starting a youth work career.
- 'Practitioner-level' positions are typically characterised by lower than national average salaries. 28 per cent of the 'practitioner-level' roles are also below living wage (per hour rate). They are also more likely to be temporary in nature (30 per cent of jobs advertised). Through analysis, we can see there are concerns about the long-term and sustainable nature of youth work roles, especially for new entrants to the sector

Employers

The majority of youth work roles are provided by the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) – 49 per cent in total. This was followed by youth work roles provided by local authority – 27 per cent, education sector – 11 per cent and private limited company (including recruitment companies) – 10 per cent. A visual breakdown is given here

Figure 1: Youth Work roles provided by sector



Overall, there have been 237 separate organisations recruiting for a youth worker role. Typically, recruitment is often driven by a particular organisation in a local area - for example, one organisation has been recruiting for up to 30 separate youth work roles during one of the search periods. This appears to relate to new funding investments in those areas driving the recruitment (or alternatively, an organisation putting investment into a particular area of their work).

Types of Youth Work role

50 per cent of the advertised jobs are for 'general' youth work roles (249 in all) incorporating essential youth work practice (for example, informal, relational approaches with young people). 48 per cent are for 'targeted' specialist roles (238 in all). Of these 238 targeted jobs, the majority are for SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) – 11 per cent of all jobs, followed by Social Care roles – nine per cent of all jobs.

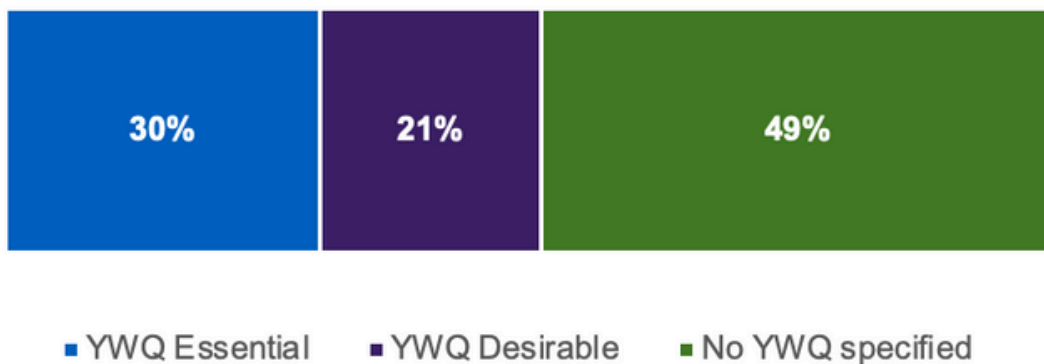
90 per cent of the job roles (450 in all) are at 'Practitioner' level i.e. do not have managerial responsibilities, with 10 per cent of the jobs (51 in all) at Manager/Supervisor level.

Of the Practitioner roles, 38 per cent are for permanent, full-time roles (170 in all). 30 per cent of the roles are temporary or 'zero hour' contracts (134 in all). Of all the practitioner roles, 46 per cent are part-time or sessional roles (209 in all).

Qualifications and Experience

30 per cent of the roles (148 in all) require a form of qualification in youth work to apply. 21 per cent of the roles see a qualification in youth work as 'desirable', whilst 49 per cent of roles do not require any specific qualification. Three per cent of roles were specifically requesting a Level 6 Youth Work degree.

Figure 2: Qualifications in youth work required for youth work roles



A number of roles specifically state a non-youth work educational qualification to apply (for example, an NVQ Level 3 in Health and Social Care), with 44 per cent requiring some form of formal educational qualification within the application [8]. 10 per cent of job roles require, or see desirable, a degree-level qualification to apply.

Interestingly, we see a broad range of qualifications often being asked for as part of the application, including NVQ Level 3 in Health and Social Care, Nursing, Psychology and Residential Childcare. It was 'typical' that if a qualification in youth work is being asked for then other forms of formal qualification are also considered, often being described as 'youth work or other relevant qualification'.

It is understandable that advertisements for Manager/Team Leader level roles are more likely to request a qualification in youth work than for Practitioner Level roles, with 61 per cent of Manager/Team Leader roles requesting this, compared to 49 per cent for Practitioner roles. 12 per cent of Manager/Team Leader roles requested a Level 6 Youth Work degree.

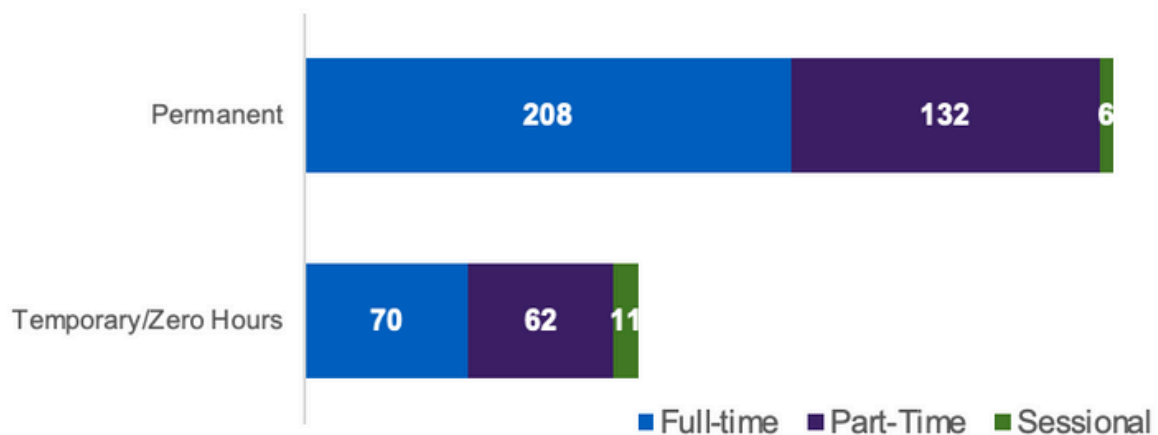
For the search conducted in both November and February we also measured how many roles specifically require previous experience of working with young people. From this search we can see that 77 per cent of roles see previous experience as essential, with 18 per cent as 'desirable', whilst five per cent do not state the need for any previous experience of working with young people.

Job Security

29 per cent of the youth work jobs advertised (143 in all) are temporary roles or 'zero hours contracts'. The temporary roles typically ranged from 6 – 12 months in length. Of these temporary positions, 62 (12 per cent of all roles) are also part-time. As may be expected, the majority of temporary roles (94 per cent) are for Practitioner level positions. Temporary roles accounted for 30 per cent of all practitioner roles.

In all, 42 per cent of advertisements (208 in all) are for permanent, full-time positions.

Figure 3: Job Security of Youth Work Roles



Salaries

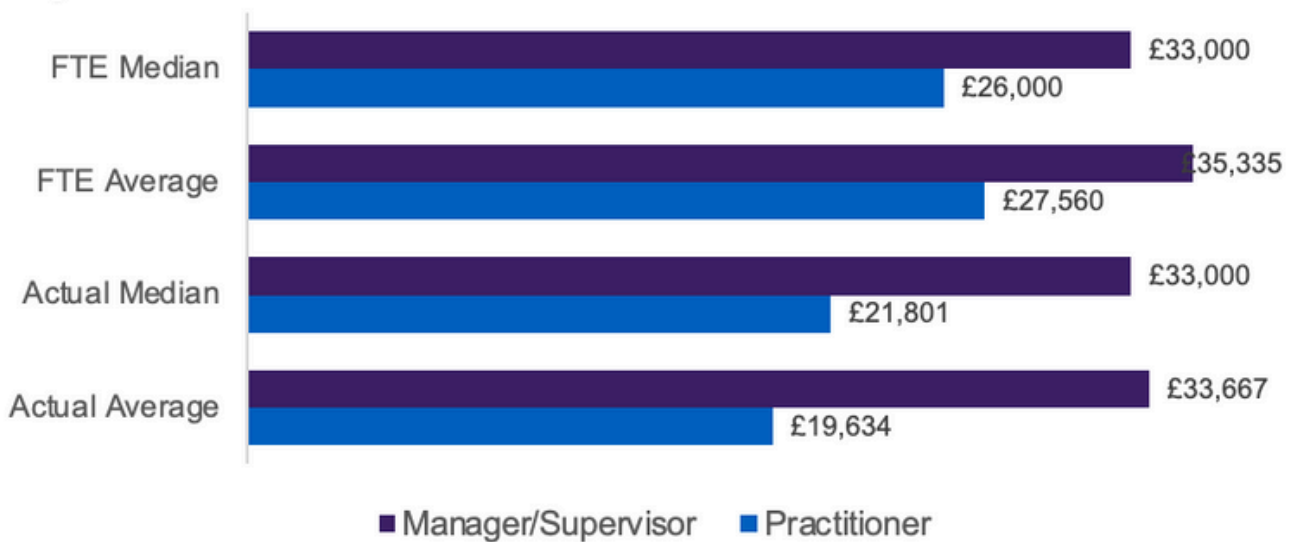
The average annual salary across all the roles (inclusive of full-time equivalent salaries) is £28,856 per annum, although this dropped to £21,084 for 'Actual' salaries (inclusive of part-time salaries).

The median wage for all roles is £26,596 (inclusive of FTE) with this again dropping to £22,291 when accounting for actual salaries.

126 roles (25 per cent of all roles) are advertising a salary that came below the statutory national living wage (FTE) of £23,810 [9]. 448 roles (89 per cent) are advertising salaries that are below the national median salary (inclusive of all salaries) of £37,430 [10].

The average salary (actual) for Practitioner level roles are £19,634 and the median wage is £21,801, whilst for Managers/Supervisors it is £33,667 and £33,000 respectively.

Figure 4: Average and Median salaries youth worker roles



Regional Variations

As may be expected there are some regional variations in the availability of youth worker roles with the majority of youth work roles in Greater London (32 per cent) followed by the North-West (16 per cent) and the South-East (12 per cent). The region with the lowest level of available youth work roles is the North-East (3 per cent) and Yorkshire and the Humber (3 per cent) [11].

Region	Full-time	Part-time	Sessional	Not Known	Total
East Midlands	26	9	6	3	44
East of England	33	9	1	0	43
Greater London	77	75	8	0	160
North East	3	14	0	0	17
North West	55	21	4	1	81
South East	35	20	3	0	58
South West	19	26	1	0	46
West Midlands	21	14	0	0	35
Yorkshire and the Humber	10	7	0	0	17
Total	279	195	23	4	501

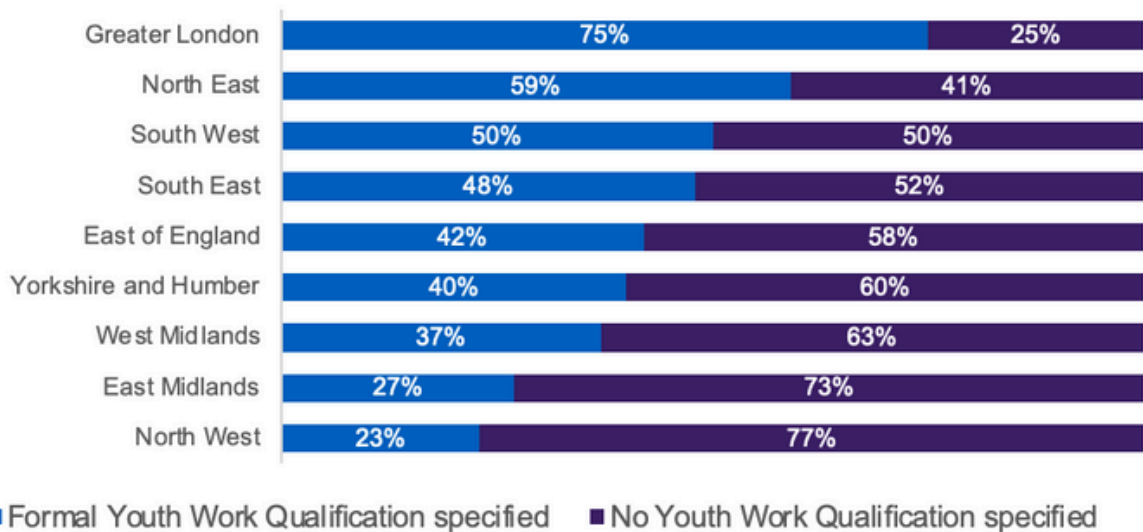
In terms of salaries, when looking at FTE salaries there is little variation across regions, with Greater London expectedly being the highest (£33,7837) followed by the South-East (£27,476). The lowest average FTE salary is the North-West (£24,708).

Figure 5: Average salaries across regions for Youth Worker roles



In terms of qualifications required there are some variations between regions, with Greater London (75 per cent) having the highest percentage of roles asking for a formal qualification in youth work followed by the North-East (59 per cent) and the South-West (50 per cent). The region with the lowest level is the North-West (23 per cent) followed by the East Midlands (27 per cent).

Figure 6: Formal Qualifications in Youth Work specified by Region



Conclusions

This job search analysis offers valuable insights into the current recruitment market for youth workers. Although the analysis covers only a sample of job roles, it provides a strong representation of the sector's current recruitment trends.

The findings indicate that specific qualifications in youth work are not uniquely requested for in recruitment, although the majority of identified roles do request a youth work qualification at some level. However, the value of a youth work qualification is harder to distinguish, with it likely to be placed within a wider set of key knowledge, skills and behaviours that are seen as equally valuable. It appears that possessing a youth work qualification may be advantageous to a prospective youth worker in the current market but the learning will have to be demonstrated within a practical setting to be successful.

The NYA acknowledges the importance of raising the value of qualifications in youth work among potential employers and will continue to advocate for this going forward as part of its work to raise awareness of the impact and value of youth work in supporting young people's wellbeing, health and social outcomes.

At the same time, ensuring that youth workers are appropriately paid whilst also seeing a sustained career for themselves in the sector remains critical. With up to 25 per cent of identified roles being below the living wage (FTE equivalent) and up to 29 per cent being temporary, there is a clear case to be made to attract and improve funding that raises the security of these roles.

The NYA is continuing to advocate for better investment in the sector through both the forthcoming National Youth Strategy and the developing Growth and Skills Levy. Given the relatively recent 'mixed economy' of youth work provision, the NYA will also persist in influencing funders to ensure decent standards and fair pay for youth workers

[1] YMCA (2025) [Beyond the Brink – The State of Funding for Youth Services](#)

[2] NYA (2025) [Youth Sector Census Snapshot](#)

[3] See Appendix A: Methodology for an explanation of 'desirable'

[4] Many job roles were also seeking other types of qualifications such as 'level 3 in health and social care' as an essential element of recruitment

[5] 'Practitioner' roles were considered to be roles where there were no staff management responsibilities

[6] Based on weekly average earning from [employment and labour market statistics](#) provided by the ONS

[7] This is based on current [employment and labour market statistics](#) provided by the ONS

[8] This could range from Level 2 up to Level 6 qualifications.

[9] The current national living wage, as defined by the government is £12.21 per hour or annual £23,810

[10] This is based on current [employment and labour market statistics](#) provided by the ONS

[11] As noted, this does not imply that there are limited youth worker roles available in these areas but instead is a representation of the available roles at the time of this search

Appendix A: Methodology

Job searches for youth worker roles were completed by the NYA Knowledge Team in April 2024, November 2024 and February 2025. This was to provide a 'sample' of youth work roles to extract findings from. In total there were 501 youth work jobs found through the search.

For the purposes of this exercise, the NYA Knowledge Team undertook searches using common online job search websites including:

- Charity Jobs
- Find a Job
- Total Jobs
- Google Jobs
- Indeed.com

The Team also used regional public sector job sites such as WM-Jobs.co.uk to help identify youth work jobs in the public sector. Regional Youth Work Units updates, which also provide details of local youth work jobs, were also used.

Search terms included 'Youth Work', 'Youth Worker' and 'Youth Support Worker' to identify Youth Work jobs. Some discretion needed to be used to understand whether a job role was actually 'youth work' with certain roles often seeing youth work as 'desirable' but not offering a specific youth work role (for example – residential workers in children's care homes).

In a number of cases certain deductions had to be made as to what types of qualification were being asked for. For example, some roles required a 'JNC Youth Work Qualification' but did not indicate at which level (so these were recorded as just 'essential') whilst in other roles 'suitable youth work qualification' was stated but without further specifics (and so these were recorded as 'youth work qualification desirable'). There were many occasions where it was stated 'a relevant qualification in the following....' and would state youth work as a specific option.

A number of roles were also advertised through a recruitment agency and so often had limited information and were coupled with general requirements. It was unclear in some cases whether a role may not have asked for a qualification at an early stage but may have asked for this at a later date.

About the National Youth Agency

As the national body for youth work in England, the National Youth Agency exists to champion youth work and grow provision in ways that keep it effective, relevant, safe and engaging, to help millions of young people reach their potential and thrive. We do this by providing guidance, support, advice, training and staff development opportunities for youth workers and youth work organisations.



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