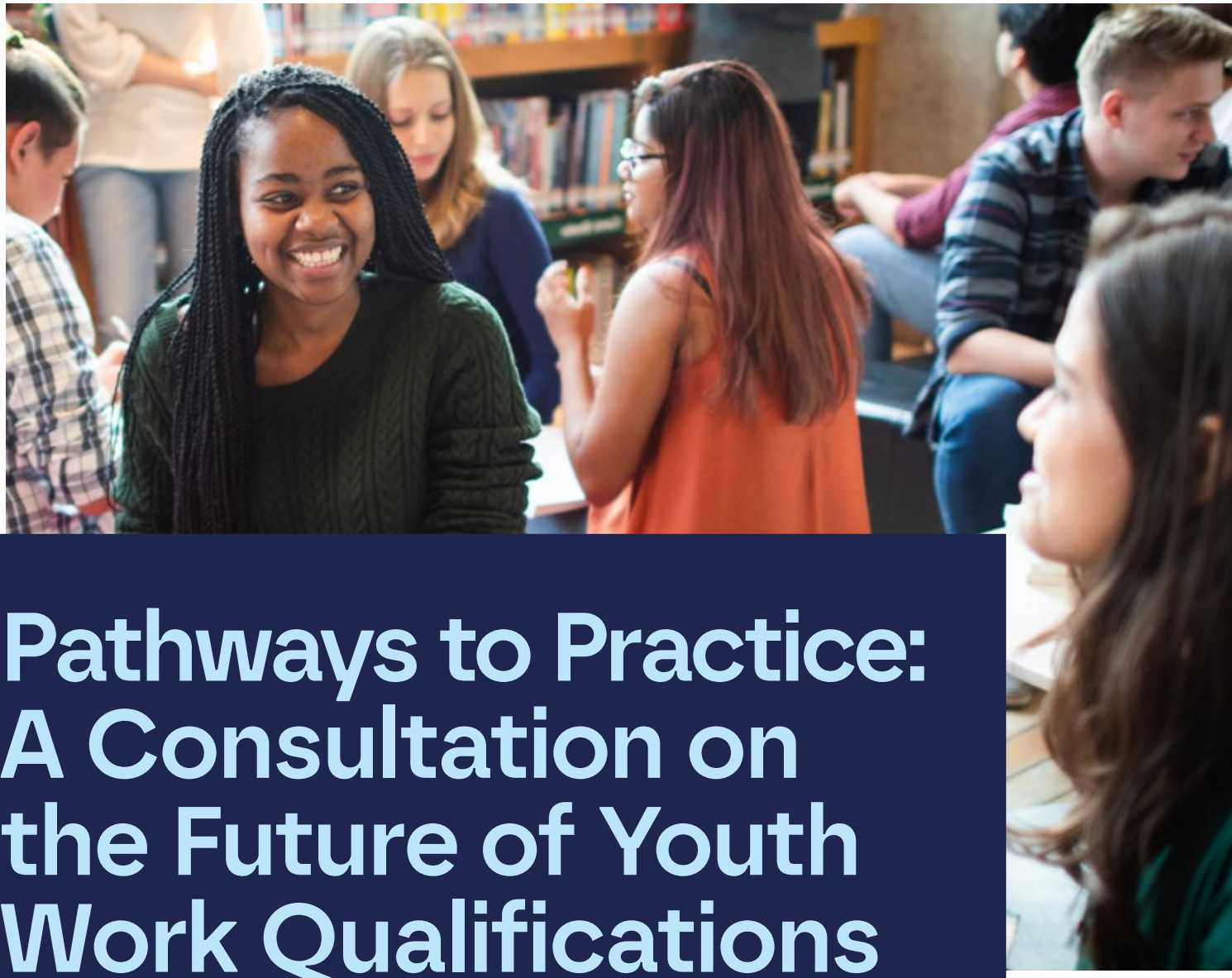
National Youth Agency



Pathways to Practice: A Consultation on the Future of Youth Work Qualifications

Outcomes Report

nya.org.uk

Foreword

Now more than ever, young people need the support of trained youth workers who can provide them with the safe spaces – not just physically, but digitally and metaphorically – to explore their values, gain essential life skills and help them make informed choices which can impact the rest of their lives.

Youth work is an educational process underpinned by professional values and ethics and informed by the National Occupational Standards. Good youth workers are committed to lifelong learning and recognise the value of gaining qualifications which enhance the practical skills and experience they gain along their youth work journey.

Through this reformed qualification framework, we aim to celebrate and build a diverse workforce that includes qualified professionals and sessional staff, as well as build the skills of our community of committed volunteers.

This new qualification pathway acknowledges that many youth workers encounter barriers to formal training, particularly those whose knowledge comes from lived experience or community-based practice rather than traditional academic routes. The sector is currently losing qualified professionals, and employees are facing unstable employment conditions. The need for a more flexible, inclusive and sustainable qualification framework has become urgent if we are to meet growing demand and rise to the opportunities being availed by the National Youth Strategy.

Through Pathways to Practice, we have addressed the insights and concerns raised by key stakeholders who participated in the consultation process and set out how the changes will help drive quality of youth work practice across the board – not just those qualified at Level 6 and above.

The reformed qualification framework seeks to modernise youth work training, widen access and better reflect the sector's needs, ensuring that all young people can benefit from high-quality, relationship-based youth work practice wherever they may be.

While no single initiative can solve all the challenges facing youth workers, our collaboration with sector colleagues strengthens our ability to engage with policy makers and funders, helping us to push for better conditions, greater investment and, above all, the recognition of the vital contribution that skilled youth work practitioners make to young people and their communities.

This report is a step towards that goal, offering a shared starting point for continued collaboration, investment and progress. Together, we can rebuild a stronger, more inclusive youth sector.

Abbee McLatchie,
Deputy CEO,
National Youth Agency

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Executive summary

The National Youth Agency's (NYA) mission is to enable more people to deliver great youth work. Through the data available from its research, including a review of job vacancies, we know that the youth work sector does not have enough trained and qualified people to meet young people's needs in England.

In response to this, the NYA is proposing a revised qualification framework that encourages and supports career-long development. This framework will upskill those already working in the sector and help attract a pipeline of new entrants. The revised framework responds to a clear and collective call from across the youth sector for a more coherent, inclusive and progressive qualifications system – one that recognises the diversity of the workforce, supports inclusive professional development and secures the future of youth work in all its forms.

The new framework will aim to:

- Secure the future of youth work as a profession.
- Address critical workforce shortages by growing the pool of trained practitioners and professionals.
- Increase accessibility and diversity of entry routes.
- Support infrastructure and delivery quality.
- Reinforce the strategic value of youth work in policy, places and the ecosystem around young people.

The NYA has developed four key proposals to update the youth work qualification framework:

1 Proposal One: Strengthen essential skills for youth workers by developing modular units, including the completion of individual units to gain training and qualifications.

2 Proposal Two: A more diversified offer that allows qualifications and training to be delivered in the community.

3 Proposal Three: Greater recognition of learning and experience via a recognition of prior learning (RAPL) system and increased modular learning.

4 Proposal Four: The introduction of a Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) in Youth Work (Level 4/5).

To ensure that any revisions to the framework are informed by the knowledge and experience of those working the sector, the NYA ran a consultation process on the proposals between November 2024 and May 2025. As part of this process, we undertook the following:

— A consultation questionnaire to gather feedback.

— Two webinars to provide an opportunity to find out more about the consultation:

  — for all those working with and in the youth work sector

  — for universities and wider training providers

— Focus groups for detailed analysis and exploration.

— Workshops and interviews to explore the details and implications of any proposed changes with key stakeholders.

— Desk and field research to ensure real-time data and evidence.

Several key messages from the consultation emerged:

— **There is strong sector support for the reform principles outlined in the consultation**, with over 70% of respondents in favour overall.

— **There is a desire for a comprehensive and progressive qualifications suite** from Levels 1 to 6/7 that supports access and aspiration and provides well-supported and modular progression into and through the youth work career pathway.

— **There is a clear mandate to retain and promote Level 6+ professional qualifications** while strengthening vocational and community-based routes to promote accessibility and inclusion.

— **There is a recognition of the need to value and support volunteers and unqualified workers** and to create pathways into youth work that recognise lived experience and non-traditional learning through strengthening vocational and community-based routes.

— **Reformation of the qualification framework should be transparent and connected to the national workforce strategy and sector investment.**



Throughout the consultation process, we have listened carefully and made significant changes to the original proposals in direct response to what the sector told us it needs. This includes addressing concerns raised about the devaluing the professional status of the Level 6 qualification, which we have addressed through maintaining Level 6 as the highest level of professional recognition in youth work, while establishing a complete and supported progression pathway from Level 1 to Level 5, including the new HNC and HND options. As such, Level 4 and 5 qualifications are not alternatives to professional youth work status but have been designed to widen access, support career changers and volunteers, and bridge the steep progression gap from Level 3 to Level 6.

While there is consensus around the need for change, the feedback we have received has ensured that we have fully reflected on the insight and expertise of youth workers, educators, employers, unions, policy makers, young people and many others. The final iteration of the framework presents a balanced and ambitious way forward. It also acknowledges the richness of youth work practice and the sector's deep debt to the voluntary workforce, including the thousands of committed volunteers whose contributions are too often overlooked.

The NYA will continue to work in partnership with education providers, training standards bodies, employers and youth workers from across local authorities and the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector to co-create a qualification framework that is inclusive, flexible and future-proofed. One that reflects the full diversity of the youth work workforce, from professionally qualified staff to community-rooted practitioners, and that supports clear progression for all. This includes maintaining alignment with the National Occupational Standards, strengthening professional pathways, and enabling high-quality, blended and community-based learning that meets young people where they are.

Change is urgent. To address workforce shortages, widen participation and secure youth work's place as a viable and valued career opportunity, we must act decisively. This reformed framework will build bridges and remove barriers to formal training for many, ensuring that all those with the passion, skill and potential to deliver effective youth work can access a qualification pathway that works for them. It will meet the needs of young people, fulfil statutory duty requirements[1] and contribute meaningfully to national ambitions for young people's wellbeing, inclusion and stronger communities. The framework should raise the profile of youth work as a skilled, relationship-driven profession that is embedded in community and will be integral to wider youth strategy, policy and funding.

This change model echoes long-standing ambitions first articulated in the Albemarle Report[2], which is to establish youth work as a structured, credible profession with progression, parity and purpose.

1 http://nya.org.uk/support-for-local-authorities/statutory-duty/
2 http://infed.org/mobi/the-albemarle-report-and-the-development-of-youth-work-in-england-and-wales/

Introduction

England's youth work sector is facing long-standing, systemic challenges that affect qualification access, workforce retention and training consistency. Although this consultation focused on qualifications transformation, the driving force behind this change is to improve the quality, consistency and reach of youth work across England – because young people deserve better access to trusted and skilled support in their communities.

Background to the consultation

Youth work in England is delivered by a **broad and diverse workforce** that includes **degree-qualified professionals**, many of whom are employed by local authorities or the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector; **practitioners and sessional staff** (qualified and unqualified) working in local authorities and VCFSE organisations; and a significant body of **volunteers**, often the lifeblood of local delivery, who bring lived experience, credibility and community connection. Each part of this workforce plays a vital role in supporting young people's personal, social and emotional development. However, the current qualification framework is unevenly accessible and insufficiently responsive to the range of pathways, roles and needs across the sector. In particular, formal qualifications remain difficult to access for many due to financial, geographical and structural barriers.



There are several key workforce and qualification gaps within the youth work sector:

— Research suggests around 60% of the current workforce hold no recognised youth work qualification, particularly within the VCFSE sector.

— Current entry routes into training are predominantly academic (requiring A-Level equivalent level qualifications), which may exclude individuals with lived experience or community leadership backgrounds.

— The number of degree-level youth work programmes are declining, with closures occurring at an average of 3.6 per year. As of May 2025, only seven BA courses remain actively in recruitment, threatening the long-term viability of these programmes.

— Qualification delivery has become fragmented and inconsistent across regions as training courses have been closed, leading to unequal access to training and variation in quality.

These gaps are compounded by structural barriers:

— University routes into youth work are often limited by financial, geographical or academic constraints for potential students.

— Many in the current workforce are in part-time or short-term roles, making traditional training models difficult to access.

— The youth work profession has seen a loss of over 4,500 qualified workers over the past decade.

— Of those in paid work, less than a quarter are employed under Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) terms and conditions, with significant variations in salaries and contracts for the majority.

Proposals to update the youth work qualification framework

Current workforce shortages, barriers to training and declining professional routes are already having an impact on young people, particularly those in marginalised or underserved areas. With fewer trained practitioners available, youth services are stretched thin, and many young people cannot rely on safe, consistent relationships with trained youth workers when they need them most.

By opening up more accessible routes into the workforce, recognising lived experience and creating a system that values and develops all levels of practice, the new framework aims to ensure that more young people can benefit from quality youth work, not just in cities but also in rural areas, and not just in formal settings but also in communities, online and on the streets. Youth work should be available in all the places that young people choose to be or find themselves.

A stronger, more diverse and better trained youth work workforce means:

— More inclusive services that reflect young people's lived realities and identities.

— Earlier, more meaningful intervention to support mental health, wellbeing and belonging.

— Trusted relationships with adults who are trained to listen, challenge, support and advocate.

— Opportunities for youth participation and leadership through more embedded youth-led practice.



This is not just a technical reform of qualifications; it is a strategic move to amplify the life-changing potential of youth work. It is about enabling the workforce to better meet the evolving needs of young people in a changing world.

The NYA has developed four key proposals to update the youth work qualification framework:

1. **Proposal One:** Strengthen essential skills for youth workers by developing modular units, including the completion of individual units to gain training and qualifications.
2. **Proposal Two:** A more diversified offer that allows qualifications and training to be delivered in the community.
3. **Proposal Three:** Greater recognition of learning and experience via a recognition of prior learning (RAPL) system and increased modular learning.
4. **Proposal Four:** The introduction of a Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma in Youth Work (Level 4/5).

The findings regarding these proposals are presented in the Consultation findings section.

Consultation and engagement methodology and strategy

In developing the proposals for change to the youth work qualification framework, the NYA referred to a range of key data sources[3] :

- The Annual Youth Sector Workforce Survey – the only dedicated survey of the youth workforce in England.
- The National Youth Sector Census – which maps youth work provision and informs policy making.
- The Higher Education Annual Monitoring Survey – the yearly survey of higher education youth work training.
- A review of job vacancies in the youth sector across England at three points between 2024 and 2025.
- The online open-data source Office for Students on current student programmes.
- Written submissions from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), trade unions, VCSE organisations and professional bodies.

These sources highlight both qualification gaps and the growing challenges in recruitment, retention and professional development.

The NYA consultation on changes to the youth work qualification framework sought to explore sector appetite for a more flexible, accessible qualification framework that supports both progression and professionalisation, while protecting the integrity of validated routes recognised or endorsed by Education and Training Standards (ETS), the Joint Education

3 The Annual Youth Sector Workforce Survey, The National Youth Sector Census, The Higher Education Annual Monitoring Survey, Office for Students

and Training Standards Committee (JETs) and the JNC Committee. It ran from December 2024 to May 2025, with early pre-engagement with key stakeholders from unions, ETS, JETS and HEIs in November 2024. It was designed to be transparent, wide-reaching and inclusive, engaging with over 500 people. Key activities included:

- **Online Survey:** 264 individual responses (62% professionally qualified,[4] 17% unqualified, 21% L2/3 qualified) – also shared through HEI course leads to send on to students.
- **Focus Groups:** Two with employers of youth workers, one with young people, one with youth workers, one with educators/training providers, two with Professional Association of Lecturers in Youth and Community Work (PALYCW) members. The selection of participants was randomised and through self-identification.
- **Stakeholder Workshops:** Dedicated sessions with PALYCW, Unite regional representatives, JNC X 2, ETS X 3, JET X 3, North Yorkshire Safeguarding Adults Boards x 2.
- **Written Submissions:** Letters and responses from the JNC Committee (part of staff side only), PALYCW and two youth workers.[5]
- **Sector Events and Forums:** Participation in Westminster Youth Strategy Forum and other invited opportunities at local and regional level.

Respondents represented a balanced cross-section of the sector: 41% worked in VCFSE organisations, 27% in local authority youth services and 17% worked as education/training providers. Other organisations represented included infrastructure bodies (3%), other statutory bodies, e.g. health (2%), VCSE funding body (2%), private sector organisations (2%) and government departments (1%). The focus group and wider discussion and feedback forums enabled further diversity of views. This rich engagement ensured that the findings reflect both strategic and frontline perspectives, as well as policy influencers and young people themselves.

Although concerns were raised about the speed and inclusivity of the process by some JNC staff side and PALYCW, these were mitigated by the facilitation of additional focus groups with 20 HEI programme staff and the offer of further focus group sessions with union members, as well as the extension of the consultation period to increase engagement opportunities. The union sessions were not able to be actioned by union staff, which meant that an additional feedback session was delivered with eight Unite regional representatives in April.

The following sections outline what we heard through the consultation, the next steps we plan to take and a set of recommendations to guide future action. Together, these elements are intended to support the development of a qualification framework that is inclusive, sustainable and truly reflective of the breadth and depth of youth work practice.

4 For qualified, we mean in youth work or youth work practice. Professionally qualified means level 6 /7 or equivalent, as specified on NYA website

5 There was also an article published in Youth and Policy from four youth work lecturers that named an open call for engagement, but this article was not submitted to the consultation directly.



Consultation findings

This section presents the findings from the various consultation activities. The key themes that emerged are presented first, followed by a breakdown of the findings by proposal and by audience.

Key themes identified from the consultation

There was strong support for a reformed, inclusive qualification structure. Critically, even highly qualified professionals indicated support for new pathways, as long as academic and professional standards were not diluted. Six key themes regarding the future of the youth work qualification framework emerged from the consultation:

1 **There is an urgent need for accessible qualifications and for training gaps to be addressed.** Most of the youth work workforce is unqualified, particularly in the VCFSE sector. The absence of formal training is seen as a barrier to confidence, quality and retention. There is overwhelming support for developing routes that don't require full-time university access and that are routed in widening participation and access.

2 **A clear progression route from entry level to degree level is essential.** Levels 1–5 should focus on developing competence, confidence and practical experience, serving as a ladder to higher-level qualifications.

3 **There is commitment from many stakeholders to Levels 6+, including some unions from JNC Committee staff side.** Qualifications that align with the JNC Committee pay, terms and conditions remain important and valued. Level 6+ should be promoted as aspirational and aligning with professional standards. While these roles are often linked to leadership, policy and strategic development, as seen in the workforce survey, they should also be understood as the gold standard for professional practice. Qualification reforms must not devalue or duplicate these levels.

4 **Accessibility, inclusion and equity are essential.** Calls were made for qualifications that reflect real-world experience, cultural competence and lived expertise. There was strong support for parity of esteem between vocational and academic pathways recognising the diversity of the sector as it is now.

5 **There is a need for infrastructure development.** There are legitimate concerns about the practical application of these changes, with the need for increased trainers and assessors to ensure appropriate scope and clearer oversight to ensure quality standards are maintained.

6 **There needs to be a focus on funding and advocacy for the youth sector workforce.** Even with proposed changes, this may not 'solve' wider workforce challenges. We need to continue to make the case for support and investment in youth work training, recognition, and better pay, terms and conditions. This is a collective responsibility.



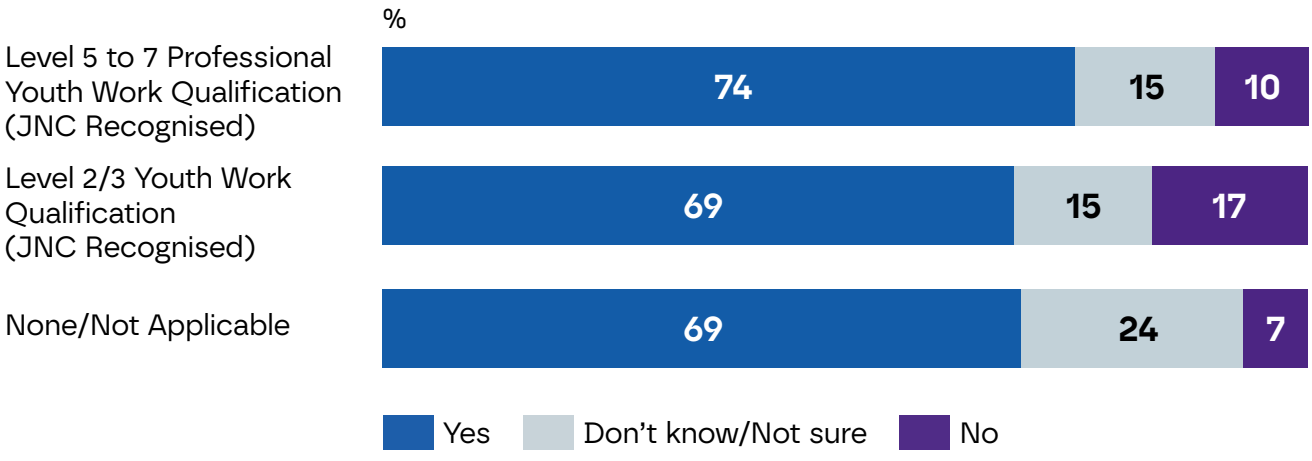


Findings regarding the key proposals

Through the consultation, we asked a series of questions to understand the current level of support for each proposal. Each question gave closed-ended options (to ensure clarity of response), although there was also space for free text responses.

Overall, there was strong support for changes to the qualification framework, with 72% of respondents feeling the qualification framework needs to change, increasing to 74% for survey respondents with a Level 6 (or equivalent) qualification recognised by the JNC Committee.

Figure 1: Do you believe in principle that the youth work qualification framework needs to change?



Reasons given for supporting changes to the youth work qualification framework can be broadly categorised under three themes:

1 The youth sector is exploring more creative and diverse means to train and develop their staff, which may sit outside of formal qualifications and training – for example, by drawing upon experiential and peer-led learning as well as lived experience. This particular model of building workforce capacity needs to be better recognised in formal accreditation.

2 It will expand the market of potential youth workers as it will encourage those with alternative relevant qualifications (i.e. degree) to pursue a career in youth work if they have a viable pathway to qualification.

3 It will encourage those with the necessary practical skills to enter (or stay in) youth work if they can see there is a viable qualification pathway they could take. Effective practice is defined by the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviours, National Occupational Standards and practice standards that can be broader than qualification attainment.

> "The current set up prevented me being able to achieve a higher youth work qualification to the point I could not progress further in my role. I had to leave and retrain. I achieved a Level 3 and being on the south coast there was no training nearby. I was accepted into a Level 6 part-time course in the midlands but had to decline due to home/work commitments."

26% of survey respondents felt that there should be no changes. Their concerns included:

— The potential that it will 'water-down' the current qualification framework without the primary place being given to push for professional youth work status or recognition.

— Pushing for professional parity should be the key focus for the sector, with a firm professional basis for the work.

— With a youth strategy on the horizon, priority should be given to pushing for investment into the sector and youth work roles.

— Worries around losing JNC Committee support for sufficient pay, terms and conditions.

— Concerns over whether this will increase uptake without investment in funding for qualifications.

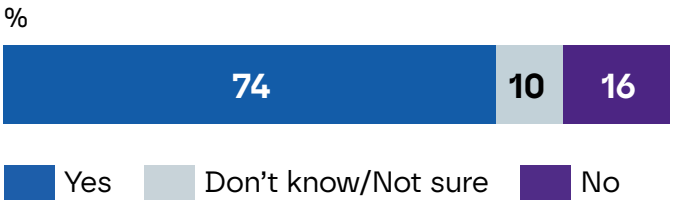
It is worth noting that the highest agreement rate and support for most proposals came from those holding a Level 6 or equivalent qualification.

As part of the consultation process, the NYA developed a set of key proposals for reforming the youth work qualification framework. The findings are presented below, offering insights into the views, priorities and concerns shared by a wide range of stakeholders.

Proposal One: Strengthen essential skills for youth workers by developing modular units, including the completion of individual units to gain training and qualifications

Among respondents, 74% agreed to this proposal,[6] with 16% not agreeing and 10% indicating they were 'not sure'.

Figure 2: Do you agree with this proposal?



The primary reasons people agreed with this proposal were:

— It will provide more opportunities to upskill existing staff and build a pool of newly trained entrants.

— A modular approach will make learning more accessible to youth workers.

— It will help to ensure that individuals are provided with the skills to carry out their roles more effectively and safely.

The primary reasons for disagreement were:

— It may lead to the de-professionalisation of youth work qualifications, status, and terms and conditions.

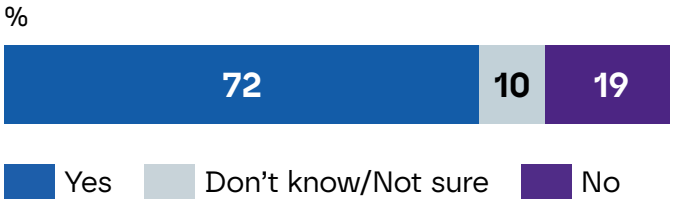
— It may discourage youth workers from seeking further qualifications.

— There are insufficient current employment opportunities to justify changes to professional qualifications.

Proposal Two: A more diversified offer that allows qualifications and training to be delivered in the community

Surveys responses to the proposal showed 72% in agreement with this proposal, with 19% in disagreement and 9% not sure.

Figure 3: Do you agree with this proposal?



The primary reasons for agreement were:

— It may offer opportunities to engage in learning that would not otherwise be a practical option.

— Community-based learning may be more affordable to learners and/or employers.

— It may provide better work/life balance for learners.

For respondents that disagreed, their reasons included:

— Having to access online training and learning may be a barrier for some learners.

— It may reduce access to degree-level professionals to develop higher learning.

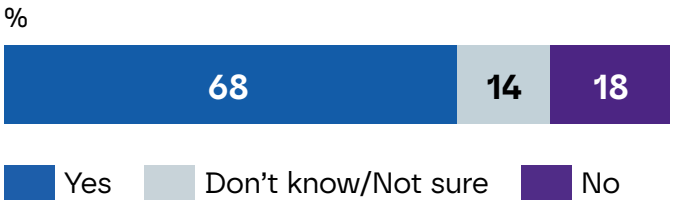
— Current quality-assurance processes are inadequate to ensure additional training provision would be of sufficient quality.

6 Essential skills meaning those required to work with young people, including understanding theory of youth work, safeguarding etc

Proposal Three: Greater recognition of learning and experience via a RAPL system and increased modular learning

68% of respondents agreed with this proposal, with 18% disagreeing and 14% indicating they were not sure.

Figure 4: Do you agree with this proposal?



For those who agreed with this proposal, primary reasons given included:

— It may widen access to training and learning for those from non-academic backgrounds, increasing diversity of access.

— Learners may be better equipped to deliver their role, rather than a focus on unnecessary learning.

— It may reduce time to complete the process to gain an accredited qualification.

— It may support youth workers in shorter term roles to be able to gain an accredited qualification.

For those that disagreed with this proposal, the primary reasons given included:

— There is a danger that it may dilute the principles and standards of youth work practice.

— It is unfair to existing youth workers who have already qualified.

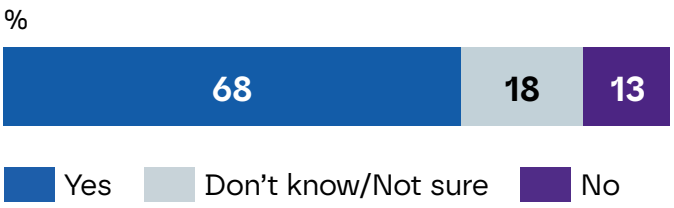
— There is a lack of local infrastructure (such as supervisors and assessors to support this approach).

> "I really wish there was more consideration for those part-time workers to access entry level qualifications to encourage them into progression routes. Not everyone wants higher levels, but we need volunteers and part-time staff to operate under professional status."

Proposal Four: The introduction of a Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma in Youth Work (Level 4/5)

Among respondents, 68% were in favour of this proposal, 13% disagreed and 19% indicated they were not sure. Interestingly, this was an area that had almost the same level of support from both those with Level 6 (70%) and Level 2/3 qualifications (68%).

Figure 5: Do you agree with this proposal?



The primary reasons provided for agreeing with this proposal included:

— It may help youth workers grow their skills and knowledge base without longer commitments.

— It may be more financially viable for current youth workers.

— It may encourage youth workers to make the next step to obtain a Level 6 or higher qualification.

The primary reasons for disagreeing with this proposal included:

— There is a danger that it may lead to de-professionalisation of youth work qualifications, status, and terms and conditions.

— It may potentially further reduce the number of Level 6 youth workers.

— There is a danger that it may dilute the principles and standards of youth work practice.

> "I have been working as a Youth Worker and Senior Youth Worker for 14 years and just last year accessed the Level 2 Principles in Youth Work. I would love to study up to a Level 4/5 to support my work and receive the recognition for my on-the-job skills and learning to date. If these courses were more readily available and affordable for small charities and individuals this would make an impact on the number of qualified Youth Workers, I believe."

Findings from focus groups

In focus groups, we heard several consistent messages:

— **Essential skills training is central** to the qualification framework. This training needs to ensure that people understand the theoretical basis for youth work, be underpinned by equity, equality, diversity and inclusion, and be accessible for non-youth workers (for example, teachers and social workers). Essential skills for youth work was described as understanding core principles and values, safeguarding, working with groups, and other knowledge closely aligned with the baseline recommendations as set out in the practice standards guidance.

— There needs to be clear and visible **alignment with National Occupational Standards through all qualification development.**

— The use of the term 'specialism' within youth work (HNC Level 4) was not well received, and highlighted as a risk in terms of quality and competency within a professional framework. This should be removed.

— There needs to be a **focus on securing funding and investment for training** the workforce, such as bursaries, inclusion in funding models, and investment in trainers, assessors and supervisors.

— A more flexible framework is welcomed but needs to be underpinned by a **pipeline of new youth workers,** with more active engagement with and targeting of younger people.



Differentiation of findings by audience

Responding to concerns from some stakeholders in PALYCW and some Staff Side Unions about the transparency of presentation of consultation findings, we have disaggregated findings by stakeholder group to provide the nuance of responses from different audiences.

Youth workers

The consultation drew thoughtful responses from current qualified youth workers, reflecting deep commitment to the future of the profession. Many viewed the proposed reform programme as essential and overdue, particularly in addressing gaps in the training and qualification framework.

A consistent theme was the perceived steep and inaccessible leap between Level 3 and Level 6 qualifications. Youth workers strongly supported the introduction of Level 4 and 5 qualifications as a way to improve progression, particularly in specialist roles, such as within justice environments, where there are opportunities to link training to progression. However, they also stressed the need for these to be robust, well-delivered and clearly aligned with the broader framework.

Respondents also made it clear that the reform of training frameworks may not succeed without broader structural change. Many described long-standing frustration at the lack of recognition and status youth work holds compared to other professions. Calls for a national register providing parity with social workers, better pay and stable full-time roles were common.

While there was hope and optimism about the proposals, youth workers cautioned that successful implementation would require not only good training design, but also investment,



clear communication and a sustained campaign to attract and retain a high-quality workforce.

Key messages from this group:

1 Strong support for change from youth workers

— Youth workers widely welcomed changes to qualifications and training, viewing reform as essential to sustaining the profession.

— Many described the proposals as timely and much needed.

2 Clear demand for better progression pathways

— Youth workers repeatedly noted that the jump from Level 3 to Level 6 is too steep, and there was strong support for introducing Level 4 and 5 qualifications to support more accessible, incremental progression.

3 Frustration over status and recognition

— Many called for youth work to be recognised as a formal profession through a national compulsory register, similar to teaching or social work.

— Concerns were raised that without this recognition, reforms may not shift perceptions or conditions meaningfully.

4 Pay, hours and job security remain major barriers

— Youth workers cited part-time contracts, low pay and insecure roles as key reasons people leave the field or never enter.

— A widely shared view was that reform must be tied to investment in sustainable, full-time jobs.

5 Quality, delivery and oversight of new qualifications

— While the proposed new qualifications were welcomed, there was concern about who would deliver them, particularly in areas requiring specialist knowledge and expertise.

— The need for experienced assessors and supervisors was raised, especially given the limited number of senior qualified practitioners already in the field. This is a live issue for the sector.

6 Concern over possible confusion or dilution

— Some felt that adding more levels might risk confusion without clear communication and consistent standards, with a need for clear descriptions of how the framework would work.

— A national awareness campaign was suggested to explain the new pathways to current and prospective youth workers.

7 Broader and more inclusive recruitment is needed

— Youth workers stressed that the profession cannot rely solely on young people entering from school or college (although this should also be a priority market).

— Suggested target groups included career changers, returning practitioners and volunteers with lived experience.

8 Training must uphold core values and theory

— There was a strong sense that youth work's theoretical and ethical foundations must be preserved in any new training model.

— Some workers feared that less academic routes might result in a less prepared or less respected workforce.

> "Robust training and supervision is essential, but a ladder style qualification system to progress towards professional status would be brilliant. We are well due change in youth work qualifications; we also need to be aware of how this will be delivered to keep standards high."

Volunteers

Volunteers who responded to the consultation brought a heartfelt perspective grounded in many years (sometimes decades) of youth work practice. Despite limited resources and, in some cases, no permanent premises, their passion for the work and commitment to young people remain steadfast.

However, there was concern that youth work is still not treated as a viable, full-time profession, with volunteers sharing that young people and the wider public often view it as part-time or temporary work, rather than a career path. This perception, they felt, is reinforced by their view that traditional qualifications may be inaccessible for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Volunteers argued that more progressive, step-by-step training, particularly delivered face-to-face and in communities, would not only help sustain the workforce but would also make the profession feel more achievable to the next generation. They also highlighted the importance of recognising prior experience and transferable skills, especially from education and social care, as critical to maintaining high-quality, community-led provision.

Key messages from this group:

1 Deep passion and long-term commitment

— Volunteers expressed a strong emotional and vocational connection to youth work, with some dedicating decades of their lives to it without a desire to become a 'professional'.

2 Youth work is undervalued as a career

— Volunteers noted that youth work is too often seen as a 'part-time' or temporary role rather than a legitimate career.

— This perception, they felt, affects both how the public sees the profession and how young people imagine their own career futures.

3 Current pathways feel inaccessible to young people

— Volunteers observed that many of the young people they support – often from more deprived backgrounds – do not see university or Level 6 qualifications as either realistic or achievable.

— A more progressive and inclusive training route could help bridge that gap and encourage more young people to consider youth work as a profession.

4 Practical, in-person training is preferred

— There was a strong preference for face-to-face community-based learning, especially for a profession as relational and hands-on as youth work.

5 Recognition of experience and transferable skills

— Volunteers called for greater recognition of professional experience and transferable skills from other sectors (e.g. education, social care).

— They felt that current frameworks often undervalue real-world expertise and good practice, despite its importance in sustaining local provision.

> "Maybe it's a case of working very closely with volunteer organisations for young people, Duke of Edinburgh, etc, giving young people the opportunity to volunteer and work in youth clubs/ settings. I didn't realise I could do it as a profession until I volunteered in a youth space."

Employers

Employers who contributed to the consultation offered a grounded, practical view shaped by the realities of running youth services in today's landscape. The vast majority agreed that the current qualification system does not meet the needs of the sector. It was described as too rigid, too academic and not reflective of the hands-on, relational nature of youth work.

They stated that the current system creates real barriers for talented staff without GCSEs or academic backgrounds. Employers called for entry routes that start where people are, recognising lived experience, prior learning and informal youth work.

Experience and aptitude are what most employers value the greatest in recruitment, particularly for frontline roles. Many said that Level 3 qualifications are more than sufficient in most cases, and that formal training often follows once someone is already in post. On-the-job learning, modular continued professional development (CPD) and apprenticeship-style routes were seen as more realistic and effective than traditional classroom-based learning.

> "Love the idea of collating learning and experience to acknowledge skills of unqualified youth workers."



There was strong support for more inclusive and accessible training routes, particularly for those who may not have GCSEs or who learn best in practical ways. Employers spoke about talented individuals being excluded by the current system, despite having the skills and commitment needed to thrive in the role.

At the same time, employers pointed to broader systemic challenges. The loss of local authority youth services has left a gap in infrastructure, workforce development and long-term planning. Many voluntary sector organisations now carry the weight of delivery, often without the resources or support to build and sustain a qualified workforce.

Key messages from this group:

1 **The current system isn't working for most employers**

— Most feel the current qualifications landscape doesn't meet their needs.

— The current system feels too rigid, too academic and out of touch with how youth work actually happens.

2 Experience is more important than qualifications

— Most employers prioritise personal qualities and lived experience when recruiting.

— Formal training comes when in post. Most see Level 3 as more than enough for most roles.

3 Learning on the job matters most

— Employers want training that reflects real life, i.e. that is hands-on, practical and embedded in the work.

— Apprenticeships and modular CPD are preferred over classroom-based qualifications.

4 Barriers need to be broken down

— Many potential youth workers are locked out by entry requirements such as GCSEs, A levels or academic-style courses.

— Employers want more inclusive routes that build on what people already know and do.

5 One size doesn't fit all

— There's broad support for separating qualifications for frontline vs. strategic roles.

— Level 6+ learning has its place, but it shouldn't be the default for everyone.

> "Apprenticeship all the way because it's hands-on experience, and that's more golden than sitting in a classroom.
>
> I haven't got the time to do today's qualifications. That's the biggest barrier.
>
> Love the idea of collating learning and experience to acknowledge skills of unqualified youth workers."

Educators, trainers and awarding organisations

Trainers and awarding organisations who responded to the consultation welcomed the direction of the proposed qualification reform, particularly the shift towards a more values-led, flexible and pedagogically aligned model. Many felt that the proposals reflected principles of youth work, including reflective practice and continuous learning, and that they could help widen participation.

Several people highlighted how part-time and volunteer youth workers are often eager to gain qualifications but are blocked by time constraints, inflexible delivery or competing work and life commitments. The new framework was seen as a welcome opportunity to remove some of those barriers and offer a more accessible, modular approach to training.

However, there were also concerns. Some felt that the model could unintentionally limit ambition, especially if new qualifications become seen as an endpoint rather than a step on a longer journey. There were also questions about how the proposals would align with existing JNC terms and conditions frameworks, and whether they might weaken clarity around professional progression. There would be a need to ensure clarity around what progression could look like.

Trainers also flagged structural challenges that could affect delivery, including a shortage of qualified assessors, particularly at Level 3, and the difficulty of ensuring professionally qualified supervision across all settings. While the proposed framework was broadly supported, trainers stressed the need for robust quality assurance and clearer guidance, particularly around RAPL.

Key messages from this group:

1 Proposals align well with youth work values

— Trainers welcomed the framework's grounding in reflective, continuous and relational learning.

— The approach was seen as a strong match for youth work practice.

2 Flexible, accessible routes are essential

— Many part-time or volunteer staff want qualifications but can't commit to traditional models.

— Trainers saw the proposed structure as a way to make learning more achievable for more people.

3 Risk of limiting progression

— There were concerns that new qualifications might become a perceived endpoint, discouraging youth workers from pursuing higher, degree-level learning.

4 RAPL needs strong quality assurance

— There needs to be clarity on how RAPL could be implemented.

— Respondents stressed the importance of maintaining standards while remaining inclusive.

5 Assessor and supervision shortages are a real challenge

— There are issues around a lack of qualified assessors and supervisors.

— Current regulations on assessor qualifications may also need to be reviewed (national assessment strategy for youth work).



Unite regional representatives and some JNC Committee members (staff side Unite, University and College Union [UCU], National Education Union [NEU])

Union responses to the NYA's qualifications proposals opposed the introduction of HNC/HND qualifications for youth workers, arguing that these qualifications could dilute the professional status of the field and undermine the degree-level qualifications currently recognised by the JNC. The Level 6 qualification is seen as essential for maintaining the credibility and professional standing of youth work, ensuring that youth workers have the necessary skills to safeguard and work within multi-agency settings.

While there is support for increased access to youth work training through modular and flexible qualifications, stakeholders are concerned that these should not replace or reduce the importance of degree-level education. Their responses underscored the importance of professional training and suggested greater efforts should be made to increase accessibility to the profession without the perceived lowering of standards.

This response also highlights the recruitment and retention challenges within the youth work sector and advocates for financial support and government investment, such as bursaries, to address these issues. Respondents stressed the need for continued advocacy to ensure that youth workers receive appropriate funding, training and recognition for their critical work in supporting young people.

The importance of maintaining high professional standards through retaining Level 6 qualifications as conferring professional status was heard universally from this group, highlighting that moving from a Level 6 qualification could dilute the credibility that youth work holds as a degree profession.

Concerns were also raised about whether all views were adequately captured during the consultation process. To respond to this (and as good practice requires) the methodology of the research is included in this report.

Key messages from this group:

1 Opposition to lower-level qualifications (HNC/HNDs)

— There were concerns that HNC/HND qualifications would dilute professional standards, create confusion and undermine the credibility of degree-level qualifications.

— Level 6 (degree-level qualifications) must remain the core professional standard to maintain the integrity of the profession.

2 Concerns about professional status and progression

— There were fears that introducing lower-level qualifications (Level 4/5) would reduce the professional standing of youth workers.

— Career mobility and status might be affected by the introduction of Level 4/5, potentially affecting long-term professional development and recognition.

3 Access to training and recruitment challenges

— Support for modular and flexible training pathways to make qualifications more accessible was welcomed, especially for part-time and volunteer workers.

— There were calls for financial support (e.g. bursaries) and government investment to tackle the recruitment and retention challenges in youth work.

Young people

Young people who participated included those early in their youth work career journeys. They shared insights into the current and proposed qualification structure, including the challenges they faced, and made suggestions for improvement. The discussion emphasised the need for greater accessibility, inclusivity, clearer career paths and more flexible training options. Participants also expressed the need for clearer career progression, recognition of prior experience and a stronger emphasis on practical training to support young people entering the field.

Participants felt that youth work should be recognised as a legitimate, impactful career. Some suggested that it should be marketed more effectively to young people considering other careers such as teaching or social work.

The pay for youth workers was also brought up as a concern, with some feeling that the sector's pay does not match the level of responsibility, which could turn people away.

Key messages from this group:

1 Awareness of youth work as a career path

— Several young people mentioned that they were not aware youth work could be pursued as a degree or professional career.

— This lack of awareness may be linked to the reduction of youth clubs and changes in how youth services are delivered.

2 Cost and accessibility of qualifications

— The high cost of current qualifications can be a major barrier for many, particularly when they need to self-fund their training. This needs to be addressed.

— There was strong support for modular qualifications that allow individuals to build their qualifications step by step, making it more manageable and accessible for those balancing work and study.

3 Value of prior experience

— Recognising lived experience in youth work was a common point, with participants noting that those with informal or volunteer experience should have that valued in the qualification process.

4 Career path and job security

— Some participants shared concerns about the lack of clear career progression in youth work. Without clear steps for career advancement, it can feel difficult to understand where youth work can take them long-term.

— The uncertainty around job security, particularly with funding cuts, was also mentioned as a barrier to choosing youth work as a career.

— Job security was a major concern, as many participants felt uncertain about the stability of roles in youth work, particularly with the potential for cuts to funding.

— The relatively low pay in the sector was also seen as a barrier, as it may discourage young people from pursuing youth work as a long-term career option.

5 Desire for practical, hands-on and relevant training

— Youth work qualifications should include more practical experience alongside theory, with some participants saying they would prefer to combine work and study rather than wait to gain experience after qualifying.

— The importance of incorporating trauma-informed practice into training was raised, particularly because youth workers often work with young people facing challenging circumstances.



— Diversity and inclusion training was seen as an essential part of youth work training. Participants noted that youth workers need to understand and support young people from different backgrounds.

6 Flexibility for career shifters

— Those with degrees in other fields expressed an interest in moving into youth work but felt there were not enough accessible routes for people to transition into the field without starting a new degree.

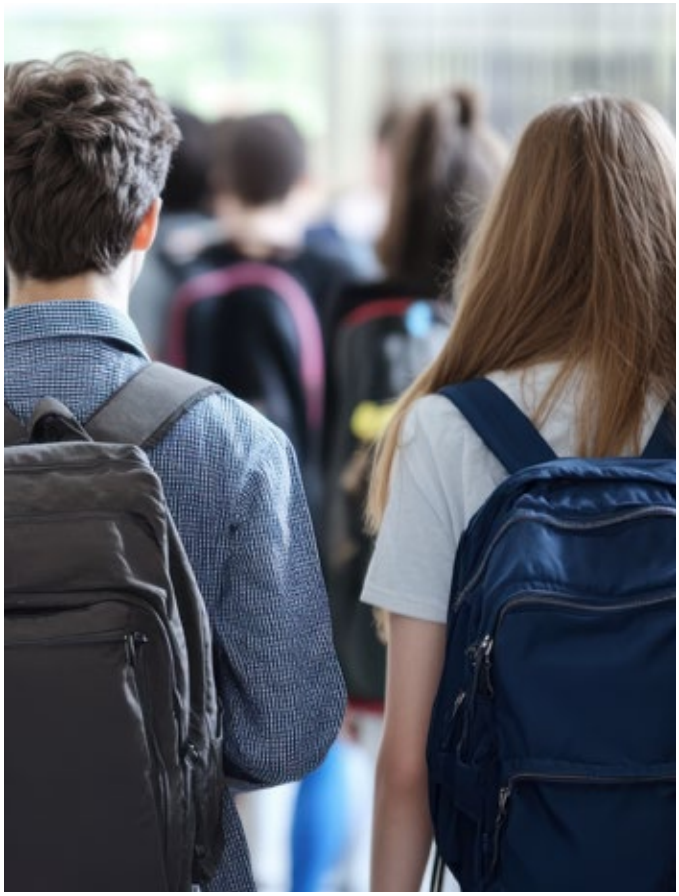
— Participants saw the potential in modular qualifications as a way to support career changers, allowing them to gain relevant skills without going through another full degree programme, which felt unachievable.

Professional Association Lecturers in Youth and Community Work (PALCYW)

The PALYCW group raised concerns about the proposed changes to the youth work qualifications, particularly regarding the introduction of Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications. While there was some support for offering alternative pathways into the profession – acknowledging the need for more accessible entry routes – the group stressed that these new qualifications should not dilute the professional status of youth work. Level 6 (degree-level qualifications) must remain the gold standard for youth workers to ensure the profession's credibility.

Concerns were also raised about the National Occupational Standards becoming obsolete or misaligned with the proposed qualifications. The group highlighted the risks of introducing specialised qualifications at Level 4. It was felt that youth workers at this stage should be learning foundational youth work skills, not focusing on specialised roles. There was a call for clarity on how prior learning would be recognised and incorporated into the new framework, especially given potential challenges with RAPL.

There was also strong emphasis on the need for professional formation, recognising that youth workers require a cohesive training path that includes both academic knowledge and practical experience. While there is support for broadening participation through flexible learning options, the group was adamant that the overall quality of youth work should not be compromised.



There were concerns from PALYCW that there was not enough representation in the consultation from those involved in higher education delivery, with only three members in the original focus groups. To respond to this, an additional two focus groups were held specifically for 20 people, and an additional question, answer and listening session was offered for all members.

Key messages from this group:

1 Opposition to lower-level qualifications (HNC/HNDs)

— Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications potentially undermine the professional status of youth work and should be seen as stepping stones, not replacements for degree-level qualifications.

2 Commitment to Level 6 qualifications (degree)

— Level 6 (degree-level) qualifications are essential for maintaining the credibility and professional standing of youth work.

— Degree qualifications should remain the primary route into the profession.

3 Concerns about National Occupational Standards

— There was confusion over how the new framework could align with National Occupational Standards, which requires clarification.

4 Clarification of essential skills and qualification content

— Concerns were raised over the lack of clarity around content for Levels 4–6.

— It would be essential to ensure alignment with youth work principles and practice, not just focusing on general employment-based skills.

5 Need for cohesive professional formation

— This group emphasised that youth work requires a cohesive professional formation that combines academic learning with practical experience.

6 Support for widening participation and flexible learning

— Although this group supported flexible learning pathways, it was stressed that these options must not compromise the quality of training.

7 Risk of creating an inconsistent youth work landscape

— Introducing Levels 4/5 could lead to confusion over qualified youth worker status.

— This group advocated for clearer distinctions, including Levels 4/5 to be labelled as youth support workers to avoid a two-tier system.

8 Concern about future professional recognition

— There was a collective desire to protect the title of 'youth worker' as a professional designation that is only attached to a degree-level qualification. This would prevent any devaluation of the profession and its role in supporting young people.



Implementation plan

Phase 1: Design and collaboration (June to December 2025)

June to December 2025

— Review and redesign of Levels 1–3 qualifications with the Awarding Bodies Network and youth work trainers.

— Redevelopment of the National Youth Work Training Assessment Strategy, ensuring alignment with the National Occupational Standards, Youth Work Practice Standards and safeguarding expectations.

— Development of basic training and CPD models.

Summer 2025

— Co-design of Level 4 and 5 (HNC/HND) qualifications with vocational experts and Pearson.

— Begin alignment discussions with HEIs and the JNC Committee to promote Level 4/5 as part of progression to Level 6 and as counting towards JNC-recognised professional formation.

Autumn 2025

— Stakeholder review sessions to test draft content for Levels 1–5 with youth workers, HEIs, unions, employers and volunteers.

Ongoing through 2025

— Strategic engagement with funders and policy makers to advocate for new bursary schemes and workforce development funding.

— Begin mapping assessor and educator capacity needs and recruitment strategies.

Phase 2: Piloting and implementation (January 2026 to December 2026)

Spring–Summer 2026

— Pilot test qualifications at Levels 1–5 across selected providers and geographies.

— Testing of RAPL models and assessor guidance in live environments.

Summer 2026

— Official launch of the new qualification framework (Levels 1–5).

— Disseminate tools, guidance and delivery support to education providers and employers.

— Begin rollout of new assessor/supervisor development strategy to scale infrastructure.

Summer–Autumn 2026

— National awareness campaign launch to communicate the new framework to the workforce, careers advisers, employers and sector bodies.

Phase 3: Evaluation, sustainability and growth (2027 onward)

— First impact review of new qualification uptake, accessibility and early outcomes across Levels 1–5.

— Review integration with HEI routes and JNC terms and conditions, updating where necessary.

— Continue to develop and expand the assessor and educator pipeline across regions.

Annually from 2027

— Publish an Annual Sector Qualifications Report (alongside HEI Annual Monitoring), tracking uptake, delivery capacity, RAPL case studies, and impact on workforce and outcomes.

— Maintain a feedback loop with stakeholders to adjust content, delivery and messaging as the sector evolves.

Ongoing throughout all phases

— Advocacy for increased public investment in youth work education and training.

— Continued partnership with unions, HEIs, awarding bodies and voluntary sector employers to protect professional integrity.

— Strong emphasis on diversity, inclusion and accessibility in both content and delivery of qualifications.

— Alignment with statutory responsibilities and national youth strategies.



Recommendations for the NYA:

Updating the youth work qualification framework and beyond

There is strong support for change that reflects the youth work sector today and strengthens it for tomorrow. Transforming the youth work qualification framework is not the only response required, but it is a vital part of the solution. We need to build a model that makes youth work training viable and accessible, while also recognising the pressures caused by funding and labour market instability.

Throughout this consultation, we heard clearly that while many of the proposed changes were welcomed, some were universally rejected.

We also heard a call to continue working with colleagues at local and national levels to advocate for greater support, sustainable funding and meaningful recognition of youth work as a profession, and for the essential role youth work plays in the lives of young people and communities.

As the national professional and statutory body for youth work training and education, the NYA will continue leading the charge to grow, skill and strengthen the youth workforce.

The recommendations that follow set out how we will take this work forward, building a qualification framework that is inclusive, sustainable and grounded in practice. While qualifications alone cannot address all the sector's challenges, they are a critical foundation, one that must reflect the diversity and realities of youth work today and support its future with integrity and ambition. These recommendations are also intended to inform the work of providers, funders, employers and policy makers who share responsibility for strengthening the sector.

1 **We will build a cohesive framework of training and qualifications that supports the whole sector.** We will enhance the existing suite of qualifications from basic essential skills at Level 1 up to professional degree level. We will co-design the qualifications at Levels 1–5 through working groups with clear standards and outcomes, ensuring alignment with the National Occupational Standards and professional standards. These will be underpinned by the feedback received on what is required knowledge for a youth worker supporting young people today.

2 **We will build opportunities for free or low cost essential skills development for volunteers not on a professional youth worker journey.** These will provide minimum standards (aligned with the Youth Work Practice Standards) to build a strong and safe foundation for practice.

3 **We will work to create more affordable and accessible routes to professional development.** We will work with sector colleagues, policy makers, funders and businesses to unlock funding opportunities for youth work training.

4 **We will work with training providers to build flexible, modular learning opportunities that value lived and professional experiences.** We will work to improve RAPL and experience to make gaining qualifications more inclusive and accessible.

5 **We will protect and promote Level 6+ as the goal for professional youth work training.** We remain committed to supporting universities and JNC endorsement of NYA ETS validated programmes. We will continue to advocate for and support institutions and courses, and promote these routes as essential to the future leadership of the sector. We need professional formation as a key part of the training ecosystem around workers at all levels.

6 **We will broaden stakeholder engagement to enhance transparency and co-production.** We will work with diverse stakeholders involved in youth work and training to ensure that the qualifications are fit for purpose, maintain the integrity of youth work principles and values, and reflect the diversity of thought, experiences and opportunities.

7 **We will work with partners to promote youth work as a profession.** We will promote the diversity of training opportunities and roles through campaigns and case studies and by influencing careers advice for young people and career switchers.

8 **We will respect the integrity of youth work practice.** We will do this by ensuring that the framework is underpinned by the National Occupations Standards, Youth Work Curriculum, Practice and Safeguarding Standards, and the values and principles that underpin youth work.

9 **We will advocate for the value of youth work in policy and funding.** We will continue to advocate for better and fairer funding of youth work in national and local policy. We will continue to advocate for longer funding opportunities that allow employers to pay a fair wage for professional youth work that recognises and values the contribution it makes to the lives of young people. We will work with policy makers, funders and businesses to unlock funding opportunities for youth work training.

Conclusion

As the national body for youth work in England, the NYA exists to champion the transformative power of this sector. We believe that all young people should have the opportunity to benefit from the life-changing impact of extraordinary youth workers and trained volunteers, and this consultation represents a pivotal moment. There is consensus that this change is needed – but it must be inclusive, transparent and build on what works.

The way forward is clear:

— Build a robust and inclusive framework that includes all levels (1–6+).

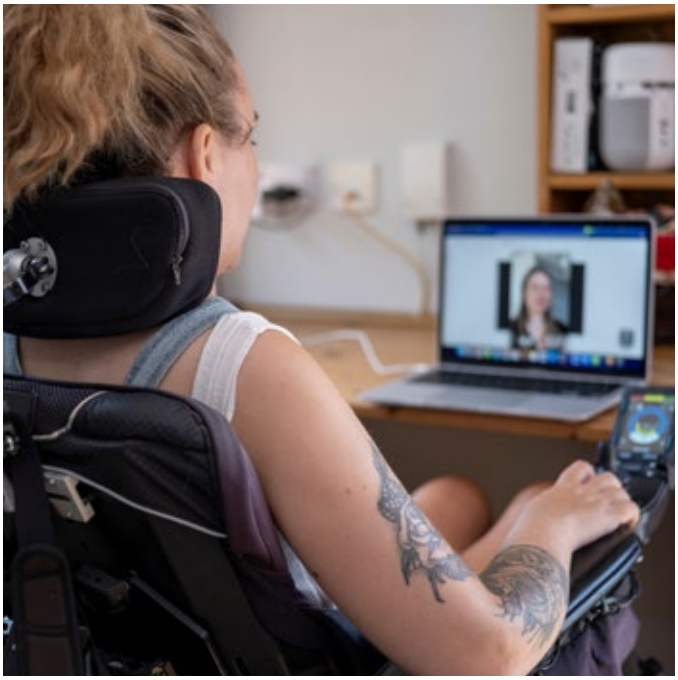
— Maintain degree-level training as the cornerstone of professional recognition.

— Provide clear and supported access routes for underrepresented, experienced but unqualified practitioners.

— Work with the sector, unions and academics to ensure quality and professionalism and strive for parity.

— Embed youth work in national and local strategies with appropriate funding and career pathways.

The NYA reaffirms its commitment to a future-ready, socially just and well-respected youth sector. Together, we have the opportunity – and the responsibility – to build a workforce that reflects the diversity, resilience and potential of the young people it serves.



Appendices

Appendix A.

List of acronyms

CPD	Continued professional development
ETS	Education and Training Standards Committee
HEI	Higher education institutions
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
JNC	Joint Negotiating Committee
JETs	Joint Education and Training Standards Committee
NEU	National Education Union
NYSAB	National Youth Sector Advisory Board
PALCYW	Professional Association Lecturers in Youth and Community Work
PSRB	Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body
RAPL	Recognition of prior learning
UCU	University and College Union
VCFSE	Voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise

Appendix B.

Supporting and Growing the Youth Work Workforce – The Critical Challenge

Appendix C.

Focus group guide

Appendix D.

Questions from survey

Appendix E. Concerns, risks and mitigations

There was a dynamic approach to concerns raised throughout the consultation process, creating opportunities for iterative mitigation. As feedback was gathered, risks were identified early and responded to through ongoing engagement with stakeholders. This allowed for real-time adjustments to proposals, ensuring that emerging issues were addressed collaboratively and transparently. The following section outlines the key risks identified during the consultation and the strategies developed to mitigate them, both during the process and as part of future implementation planning.

Concerns/risks related to the consultation

Concern/risk	Source	NYA mitigation/response
Timing of the consultation	JNC	Urgent need for action, opportunity with strategy and policy, Skills England funding, attrition rate, student numbers.
Speed and timescale of the consultation	PALYCW, JNC	The consultation period extended well beyond the twelve-week minimum, lasting approximately six months. This iterative approach allowed the NYA to respond to sector needs, incorporate emerging feedback, and ensure inclusive, representative input before finalising proposals
Uncertainty over who was consulted and how they were chosen	PALYCW, JNC Staff Side	Focus groups were categorised into young people, workers, employers and educators. Survey respondents were anonymised and randomly invited to groups based on these identifiers. Additional and bespoke opportunities were also added to the consultation.
Lack of meaningful consultation with key stakeholders (e.g. PALYCW, JNC, HEIs)	PALYCW, JNC Staff Side, others	We held additional consultation and feedback sessions with ETS, JETs, NYSAB, the Awarding Bodies Network, all Regional Youth Work Unit network group memberships and PALYCW members, and offered additional sessions to all unions and members.
Concern that reform is being driven by workforce policy, not professional need	General	The framework is aligned with youth work values, practice realities and sector growth needs, not just government strategy. However, alignment with workforce policy ensures resourcing and long-term visibility.

Concerns/risks related to the impact of a new qualification framework

Concern/risk	Source	Likelihood	Impact	NYA mitigation/response
Perceived threat to Level 6+ qualifications and the professional identity of youth work	PALYCW, JNC Staff Side (Unite, NEU, UCU only)	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	NYA confirms continued support for JNC endorsement and Level 6/7 HEI qualifications. These will be maintained and promoted as the gold standard and pinnacle of professional practice.
Concerns around the skills and competency of practitioners if not degree educated	PALYCW Unite reps	LOW	LOW	Current workforce predominantly not degree educated. This framework increases competency across all levels, including around safeguarding.
Concerns about 'dumbing down' professional youth work through vocational routes	PALYCW, JNC Staff Side	LOW	MEDIUM	The vocational routes (L1–5) are not replacements but pathways towards professional status. All qualifications will be rigorously quality-assured, with clear intended progression toward L6+ and JNC endorsement.
Lack of clarity on how L3–5 will be delivered, assessed and linked to practice	PALYCW	LOW	MEDIUM	NYA will co-develop delivery guidance, learning outcomes and assessment frameworks in collaboration with sector and education experts.
How will learners and current students be supported during transitions?	PALYCW	n/a	n/a	Not relevant to final framework as Level 6 still standard for professional youth workers.
Fear of replacing academic routes with apprenticeships or private provision	PALYCW, JNC Staff Side	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	The framework will support multiple delivery models including HEI-led, community-based, and apprenticeship routes. There is no intent to replace academic pathways.

Concern/risk	Source	Likelihood	Impact	NYA mitigation/response
Risk of undermining established HEI/NYA relationships **Reduced HEI course lead engagement or trust**	PALYCW	MEDIUM	MEDIUM-HIGH	NYA remains committed to partnerships with universities, including shared curriculum development, joint delivery and validation of programmes. NYA will host ongoing dialogue with PALYCW, JNC and HEIs, and integrate feedback.
Unclear impact on pay, conditions and recognition	JNC Staff Side, PALYCW, Youth workers	MEDIUM	LOW	NYA will continue to work with government and policy makers for improved pay, terms and recognition for youth workers, linked to qualification levels. The framework will underpin national workforce development conversations cross-departmentally.
Misunderstanding of L1–5 as replacement, not progression	Some youth workers, PALYCW	MEDIUM	HIGH	NYA will provide clear communications about L6–7 as end-goal, using visual progression maps
Fragmentation in qualification delivery	PALYCW	MEDIUM	HIGH	NYA will use heat spots maps to target areas with low/no delivery. This to be increased in line with need for assessors.
Lack of policy support		MEDIUM	MEDIUM	NYA will work with government and policymakers for youth work in cross-departmental strategies and budgets nationally and locally.



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