

# Activity Agreements

Ensuring the Activity Agreement model strikes the right balance of initial soft engagement combined with a motivating, resilient, progressive approach

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**Y**oung people referred for an Activity Agreement are some of the most vulnerable and disengaged 16-19 year olds. The success of the Activity Agreement model lies in its individualised, needs-led approach to barrier removal and engagement activities. This enables young people to progress within the Activity Agreement environment to more challenging, development-focused learning and experiences that prepare them to participate in and sustain formal learning, training and employment.

## The Trusted Professional role

Young people referred for an Activity Agreement are those furthest from the labour market, often experiencing multiple barriers to participation. Supporting them to engage in and sustain further learning, training and ultimately secure employment will often require intensive advice and guidance, flexibility of delivery and tailored interventions.

A strong relationship with a Trusted Professional, acting in an advisory and guidance role, is a critical element of the Activity Agreement model. Evidence suggests that this advisory role is central to a young person's participation on an Activity Agreement and to ensuring the Activity Agreement strikes the right balance of initial soft engagement combined with a motivating, resilient, progressive approach.

The Trusted Professional provides consistent one-to-one support to each young person; offering advice, guidance and encouragement, reviewing progress, and supporting the development of their attitudes and aptitudes for employment. The partnerships they create with each young person are based on mutual trust and respect; allowing them to both support and challenge.

Trusted Professionals have a wide skillset and use a range of tools to appropriately support, challenge, motivate and develop young people. Their role in helping young people develop the personal/social skills, alongside employability skills is central to helping young people progress through and beyond their Activity Agreement. This includes challenging young people to reflect on their choices and build their capacity to consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control over their learning.

Trusted Professionals use assessment and evaluation tools to keep young people motivated and progression-focused. They ensure realistic goals are set and that young people have an accurate picture of the level of support they need. Regular reviews, including the use of measurement tools, allow young people to see their progress and achievements. In East Lothian, one young man with anxiety and low self-esteem reviewed his progress after attending a bushcraft and green woodworking skills course. This helped him to identify his strengths in leadership and practical skills, as well as his areas for development. This in turn built his confidence and motivation and informed the next stage of his Activity Agreement plan.

## Needs-led engagement activities

Young people being offered an Activity Agreement should be clear and in agreement that the intended outcome of their participation

is to move them on to employment or further learning. An assessment of suitability will have taken place, involving the young person, to determine whether this is the right intervention for them at this time.

Assessment identifies whether individual young people require an initial 'soft engagement' to encourage and support them to engage. This may involve support with travel, home visiting, participation on a one-to-one basis or within a small 'nurture' group, as part of barrier removal activity. One young person referred to Activity Agreements in East Lothian suffered from extreme anxiety and poor mental health. She was a selective mute and needed a high level of support to engage. Equine therapy was used as an engagement tool and she worked hard on communication to access this and was then able to challenge herself further to access other opportunities through the Activity Agreement. In Fife, volunteering opportunities have been particularly helpful for those young people who find it difficult to work in groups of their peers. The Trusted Professional ensures that such approaches are part of the young person's Activity Agreement plan; building the level of participation and challenge as the young person's skills and abilities grow.

## Individual Activity Agreement plan

A young person's Activity Agreement must form a clear pathway towards more formal engagement with learning, further training or employment. The creation of an individualised learning plan is a key resource for ensuring the Activity Agreement is a motivating, resilient and progressive intervention. Many Trusted Professionals use the plan during progress reviews, as an evolving document, allowing them to add new positive challenges as the young person progresses within the Activity Agreement environment; thereby keeping the young person moving forward and motivated.

## Partnership

Partnership is key to ensuring Activity Agreements offer young people a resilient, progressive approach. Many local authorities involve partners in Activity Agreement delivery and in meeting young people prior to them making the transition from the programme. This reinforces the progression-focused nature of Activity Agreements and helps young people build new support networks and skills, such as resilience, to sustain progression. In East Ayrshire, Activity Agreements deliver a programme targeting summer leavers, in partnership with Ayrshire College and other local providers. Young people take part in various activities and opportunities delivered by local provision. This helps young people overcome fears about moving on to college and training and helps build new support networks.

Throughout the Activity Agreement the Trusted Professional works in partnership with the young person, parents and other professionals; managing expectations and clarifying responsibilities. This can be particularly crucial within the overall responsibilities of the corporate parenting role or where the wider family is seeking support. Again this approach is important to ensure that young people receive the appropriate support, within a progression-focused employability intervention.

**YouthLink Scotland**

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