What is youth work?

Youth work is:

- One strand of Community Learning and Development
- Part of the learning community, contributing to delivery of Curriculum for Excellence
- A recognised education practice that facilitates the personal, social and educational development of young people – promoting inclusion, equity and young people’s interests and wellbeing

Youth work in Scotland is underpinned by three key principles, as set out in the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work:

- Young people choose to participate
- The work builds from where young people are
- The young person and youth worker are partners in the learning process

Some of the features which distinguish youth work from other professions that work with young people:

- Having a dedicated focus on young people
- Specialising in personal, social and educational development
- Being inclusive without being based on a singular interest, skill or capacity

What does it do?

The key purpose of youth work is to ‘enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential’.

Youth work delivers person-centred informal learning and development, working with the young person as a whole, within their family and community. As a rights-based practice, youth work offers opportunities for all young people, whilst making a unique contribution to those who are vulnerable.

Youth workers engage with children and young people through age and stage appropriate learning and activity. They use a diverse range of engagement tools and vehicles for learning to respond to the needs and priorities of children, young people, families and communities. This includes both universal youth work and targeted interventions.

Youth work’s position within the wider school community puts youth workers in a unique place to build relationships with young people across school, home and community settings. This allows youth work to create links between school and community, to engage families and deliver family learning. Parental engagement and family learning are important aspects of youth work, particularly around transition points and when supporting young people through targeted interventions.

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1. The key purpose of community learning and development is empowering people, individually and collectively, to make positive changes in their lives and in their communities, through learning.
What does youth work offer schools?

Youth work is valuable for all children and young people, helping them to develop a broad range of skills, capacities and achievements to allow them to succeed. It complements and enhances delivery of the formal curriculum and should be an integral part of the learning experience for all pupils; raising attainment for all.

Scottish Attainment Challenge

As part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, youth work focuses on improving outcomes for children and young people who need it most. This includes addressing barriers to learning and offering flexible and tailored options and pathways for young people to develop and recognise skills and achievements. These improve attendance, engagement, attainment, health and wellbeing and school leaver destinations. Additionally, they support schools to focus on key approaches identified within the Interventions for Equity framework, in particular:

- Promoting a high quality learning experience
- Differentiated support
- Partnership
- Employability and skills development
- Targeted approaches to literacy and numeracy
- Social and emotional wellbeing
- Promoting healthy lifestyles
- Engaging beyond school

5 reasons to collaborate with youth work

Youth workers complement and enhance the formal curriculum and support for pupils, working collaboratively with teachers:

1. Providing a range of learning options for your pupils, including youth work awards to recognise wider achievement
2. Supporting your school improvement priorities through delivering tailored interventions for equity
3. Providing capacity to respond to areas of need within your school
4. Contributing to school improvement planning and self-evaluation, including evidencing progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap; and
5. Supporting you with parental engagement, connecting families and communities in school education and delivering family learning.

Support and further information

In many schools across Scotland, teachers and youth workers are collaborating to close the attainment gap. These partnerships bring complementing professional skills, knowledge and approaches together to enable schools to target and focus effort on those who need it most. Practice examples can be found at www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes/closing-the-attainment-gap/

YouthLink Scotland is working in partnership with The Scottish Government Scottish Attainment Challenge Policy Unit and Education Scotland to further support collaboration between schools and youth work. The Youth Work & Schools Partnership Programme is helping schools to develop partnership with youth work and increase evidence of what works.
5 ways youth work is closing the gap

1. Overcoming barriers to learning
   The National Improvement Framework (NIF) acknowledges that supporting children and young people with their broader needs is an essential element to raise attainment and close the poverty-related attainment gap.

Social and emotional wellbeing
   Youth workers are particularly skilled in engaging and supporting the hardest to reach. They use a trauma informed approach and range of engagement and learning tools through which young people increase their social and emotional wellbeing. This includes those that focus on early intervention and prevention, promoting healthy lifestyles, building resilience and tackling health inequalities.

2. Parental engagement and family learning
   Parental engagement is an important element of closing the attainment gap. Family learning, as distinct from parental engagement, is an important aspect of youth work, particularly around periods of transition and in delivering targeted interventions.

3. Youth participation and pupil voice
   Youth work supports the National Improvement Framework focus on empowerment, supporting children and young people to participate in their own learning and in the life and work of their school and wider community.

Learning loss and holiday hunger
   Youth work also addresses barriers to learning through breakfast clubs, after school provision and school holiday programmes. School holiday programmes counter disproportionate learning loss in literacy and numeracy, and help address the broader needs of families impacted by ‘holiday hunger’.

Learning in health and wellbeing
   Youth work also offers a range of activities and learning options to complement formal learning in health and wellbeing; ensuring children and young people develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. This may include providing support and information services in a confidential space within the school, co-delivering PSE lessons, outdoor learning, group work, pupil support and youth work awards.

4. Wider learning and achievement
   Youth work plays a central role in ensuring all young people have opportunity to undertake wider learning and achievement, both within school and in the wider community.

   Wider achievement plays an important role in a young person’s learner journey and in closing the attainment gap. Youth work awards provide opportunities to recognise young people’s achievements, complementing formal learning and increasing attainment. Recognising wider achievement is important for all young people, but can be particularly crucial to closing the attainment gap for young people who are less likely to achieve through formal routes. Working towards a youth work award can increase attendance, engagement and attainment.

5. Employability and skills development
   Youth work contributes to Developing the Young Workforce, helping young people develop employability skills and progress to positive and sustained post-school destinations. This can include specific employability programmes, volunteering, peer mentoring and enterprise projects. In addition, employers are increasingly recognising the value of youth work and youth work awards in developing and demonstrating young people’s skills and achievements.

For advice or support regarding the role of youth work within your school community please contact Marielle Bruce, Youth Work & Schools Partnerships Manager on mbruce@youthlinkscotland.org | tel: 0131 313 2488
Who are youth workers?

There are 80,000 youth work practitioners across Scotland, supporting and engaging nearly 400,000 children and young people every week. The practitioner role is underpinned by the national occupational standards, values, ethics, and competences of the CLD Standards Council.

Youth work is a relationship-based practice. This has been identified by young people as a key element of the sector’s success in engaging and delivering outcomes with them.

The role of the youth worker as a trusted adult for vulnerable children and young people was highlighted by NHS Health Scotland, as important in preventing and responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences; playing a significant role in re-engaging children and young people in learning.

Youth Work Outcomes

Youth work helps young people to develop across each of the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. These capacities are embedded within the National Youth Work Outcomes.

The outcomes and indicators help young people to recognise and articulate their skills and capacities. This includes those that can be more difficult to teach in the classroom – including confidence, resilience, and life skills.

The National Youth Work Outcomes are also used to evidence impact and self-evaluate for continued improvement. This can be particularly valuable to help schools measure the impact of interventions on health and wellbeing, attainment, attendance, engagement and participation, and to understand what works.

Youth Work Outcomes

1. Young people are confident, resilient and optimistic for the future
2. Young people manage personal, social and formal relationships
3. Young people create, describe and apply their learning and skills
4. Young people participate safely and effectively in groups
5. Young people consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control
6. Young people express their voice and demonstrate social commitment
7. Young people broaden their perspectives through new experiences and thinking