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YouthLink
Scotland
The national agency for youth work

COVID-19: Guiding Framework to support the delivery of youth work services

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COVID-19: Guiding Framework to support the delivery of youth work services

Introduction

Youth work: Supporting young people through and out of the pandemic outlines how the Scottish youth work sector¹ will continue to strive to provide support and opportunities for children and young people as the Scottish Government moves the country through and out of the pandemic.

On 23 February 2021 Scottish Government published its updated Strategic Framework. This sets out the strategic approach to reopening society and the economy and a return to normality.

This guiding framework is intended to support youth work leaders² to make informed decisions regarding a risk-led approach to youth work delivery in 2021, in line with Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland advice; and to plan for the longer-term recommencement of full youth work services. It has been reviewed and updated regularly, in response to latest Scottish Government advice and restrictions. This version is dated 12 March and has been reduced in length to provide a clearer focus on guiding the youth work sector out of the national lockdown restrictions which came into effect on 4 January 2021.

Given the uncertain nature of the current situation, this framework will be continue to be subject to regular review. Organisations should ensure they are referring to the latest version, and always consider the content alongside Scottish Government and Public Health advice and guidance.

This version is dated 12 March 2021.

¹The youth work sector is diverse and includes statutory and third sector voluntary services (including national third sector organisations, uniformed local groups, community organisations), professionally qualified and volunteer youth workers/leaders and a wide range of approaches to the provision of 'youth work'. This includes universal and targeted interventions, outdoor learning, equalities, arts-based and youth voice. It is not possible for this guide to capture all nuanced types of practice, therefore, this document should be used as a guide to inform local decision making.

²A youth work leader is defined, for the purposes of this framework, as employers, youth work managers, supervisors, volunteer leaders and trustees - the lead person responsible for authorising delivery

What defines a youth work group/activity?

Youth work takes many forms and operates in a wide variety of learning environments.

The **Statement on the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work** defines youth work as “an educational practice contributing to young people’s learning and development.”

Youth work engages young people within their communities: it acknowledges the wider networks of peers, community and culture, it supports the young person to realise their potential and to address life’s challenges critically and creatively, and it takes account of all strands of diversity.

Youth Work has three essential and definitive features:

1. Young people choose to participate
2. The work must build from where young people are
3. Youth Work recognises the young person and the youth worker as partners in a learning process

Youth work’s focus is on the 11-25 year age group with particular emphasis on 11-18 year olds. Youth work acknowledges that some provision focuses on children under 11 years e.g. in uniformed groups.

Because Youth work is considered to be an educational activity it is therefore subject to specific guidance to support safe delivery within schools, community centres, buildings and facilities, in line with the permitted purposes allowed in the Scottish Government Route Map.

How to use this framework

This guiding framework has been developed with Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland and is informed by Scottish Government guidance, including sector specific guidance for the wider **Community Learning and Development (CLD) sector**. The framework is intended as guidance only and does not constitute legal advice.

At all times, the priority must be to safeguard the health and wellbeing of our children, young people, practitioners, their families and the wider community, and to minimise the spread of COVID-19. As such, you should use this framework in conjunction with:

- The latest **Health Protection Scotland guidance** and
- **Scotland’s Strategic Framework**

Each youth work leader is responsible for translating this guidance and applying the specific actions required in order to reduce transmission of COVID-19.

This framework is structured into two parts and is based on the Scottish Government guidance for Community Learning and Development as a practical support for the youth work sector.

1. Permitted approaches to delivery:

This outlines the youth work activities and approaches that are permitted. The **expectations before delivery** should continue to be in place when delivering through any permitted approach, including ongoing review of risk assessment and COVID-19 safeguarding measures that you have in place, in conjunction with the latest Scottish Government and other guidance and advice. These should be used to inform decisions regarding what is safe to deliver in an individual setting or local context at any one time, and any decision regarding the protection of young people, staff and volunteers during the delivery of youth work.

2. Expectations before delivery:

This outlines the measures that you should be able to demonstrate are in place, before you implement any change to current approaches to work or delivery. **If you cannot meet these requirements, you should not progress.**

Permitted approaches to delivery

The following section outlines approaches to delivery that will be permitted from 12 March.

Organisations should not automatically seek to deliver activities face-to-face. **The safest approach for your organisation or group may be to continue to deliver remotely or digitally.** In addition, some children and young people may feel anxious or not ready to engage in face-to-face youth work and their views should be respected when considering how you will deliver and the right time and pace for any re-introduction of face-to-face youth work.

Organisations may also wish to consider how their plans will enable them to continue to support the most vulnerable families and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on all children and young people's mental health, learning and development.

From 12 March, the following approaches could be considered:

Digital youth work delivery

Youth work at home is likely to continue to be an important route for children and young people to engage with youth work. Resources, tips and ideas for digital youth work, shared by youth workers across Scotland, can be found [here](#). See [further support available from YouthLink Scotland](#).

Many youth workers use Youth Awards within their programmes. The [Awards Network](#) providers have developed a range of resources to support wider learning and achievement at home, including working towards accreditation/award.

Providing one-to-one support to vulnerable young people (outdoors and indoors)

The provision of one-to-one support to vulnerable young people is permitted to continue. This may include continuing to provide essential items and support to families, children or young people in crisis, including

measures to address food insecurity. Youth work leaders should continue to ensure the **expectations before delivery** are in place, including comprehensive ongoing risk assessment, hygiene measures and physical distancing.

Youth work in schools

As part of education recovery, including learning in the outdoors, youth work may be delivered as part of the school day/curriculum with school aged children and young people. Youth work taking place in partnership with schools is permitted to take place and should be delivered in line with [Scottish Government Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on schools reopening](#) and in agreement with schools and local authorities.

Youth work outdoors

Outdoor youth work activities, with a maximum of 15 individuals (inclusive of young people and youth workers/leaders) in any one interaction. The general approach should be to minimise the size of groups where possible. The expectations before delivery should be in place including physical distancing for young people 12 and over (and between adults and adults and all children/young people). Organisations may also wish to consider working with bubble groups based on age bands to manage the different physical distancing requirements for each age group. Organised outdoor youth work activities may include games and non-contact physical activity. Delivery of outdoor youth work should be restricted to your locality. Travel to/from a youth work activity is permitted within a local authority for staff, volunteers and young people. Travel as part of the activity e.g. outings and trips, is currently not permitted.

Outdoor sports

Youth work leaders considering delivery of organised outdoor contact sports should consult Scottish Government guidelines and Sports Scotland advice. Non-contact outdoor group sports for 12-17 year olds is permitted subject to sport-specific guidance.

Before delivering youth work outdoors, organisations should consider:

- How will staff, volunteers and young people travel to the site or settings for outdoor youth work work?
- What measures are needed to support cleaning of any equipment or materials to be used and to facilitate personal hygiene?
- How will you manage the number of young people engaging at any one time, particularly when your setting may be a public space?
- How will you manage physical distancing and other safeguarding arrangements?
- How will you communicate to young people your safeguarding measures and the requirement to maintain physical distancing?

Detached youth work

Detached youth work is permitted. It should be delivered in response to local need. This may include continuing to support young people to make informed choices regarding transmission of the virus. Youth work organisations may wish to consider the role of detached youth work, particularly as an approach to re-engaging, or providing essential face-to-face support for at-risk young people.

Detached youth work is a specific youth work approach and youth work leaders should ensure their practitioners are confident and competent to deliver in this way. This may include how youth workers take responsibility for their own safety, including the ability to maintain physical distancing, when making decisions about whether to engage with groups. As with all approaches to delivery, the **expectations before delivery** should be met, including a specific risk assessment for detached work, and consideration given to the skills and experience of those delivering. Information and guidance, developed by YouthLink Scotland and Youth Scotland can be found [here](#).

Organisations should consider:

- How will young people, staff and volunteers travel to the site or settings for detached work?
- Has travel been minimised as much as possible?
- What measures are needed to support cleaning of any equipment or materials to be used and to facilitate personal hygiene?
- How will you manage the number of young people engaging at any one time?
- How will you manage physical distancing and other safeguarding arrangements?
- How will you communicate to young people your safeguarding measures and the requirement to maintain physical distancing?

Expectations before delivery

Before implementing any planned face-to-face delivery, or re-opening of youth work spaces, youth work leaders⁵ should be able to demonstrate the following:

EXPECTATIONS BEFORE DELIVERY

CAN YOU DEMONSTRATE?

- **Scottish Government scientific and medical advice deems it safe to proceed.**
- **Ability to comply with Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland guidance**
- **Comprehensive risk assessment**
- **Measures for infection prevention and control:**
 - **Enhanced cleaning arrangements.**
 - **Adequate ventilation and facilities, equipment and procedures for personal hygiene including the wearing of face coverings indoors**
 - **Measures are in place to comply with physical distancing requirements**
 - **Ability to adhere to the Scottish Government Test and Protect COVID-19 guidance**
 - **Specific measures to protect those who are at higher risk from COVID-19**
 - **Clear communication processes** - to ensure staff, volunteers, service users and parents understand the measures you have put in place to manage risk
 - **Appropriate insurance cover**
 - **That these measures are monitored and reviewed regularly**

If you cannot demonstrate you have these expectations in place in a suitable and sufficient risk assessment, or feel your local situation cannot be managed in a safe way, **you should not progress.**

Further details on risk assessments can be found on page 9.

Youth work leaders may wish to undertake a readiness assessment or COVID-19 action plan, to help ensure you have considered all aspects in advance of any delivery³. This planned approach will also allow you to identify all the measures you need to put in place before delivery and ensure you have met the expectations required before delivery. Contingency planning should also be included within a readiness or action plan. This will ensure you are prepared to respond should Scottish Government advise that there is a change to the protection levels.

Examples of risk assessment and readiness checklist tools and templates can be found on [YouthLink Scotland's website](#). Organisations may also wish to seek support and advice from their national, regional or governing body/federation/association.

NB: Youth work leaders should consider this section in the context of current permitted approaches to delivery and planning for reopening of indoor spaces, when Scottish Government deems it safe to do so.

³ This includes any change to a staff member or volunteer's current place of work e.g. returning to the youth work setting to prepare for re-opening, to undertake administrative tasks or delivery digitally or remot

Compliance with Scottish Government and Public Health guidance and advice

Youth work leaders should work closely with their national, regional or governing body/federation/association to ensure compliance.

Activities that do not comply with Scottish Government and Public Health guidance put lives at risk, and may not be covered by insurance. Scottish Government Strategic Framework outlines current legal requirements regarding restrictions. Youth work leaders should work closely with their national, regional or governing body/federation/association to ensure compliance. They should also act in accordance with any local authority plans or guidance that are in place.

Those responsible for venues are those who own it and/or oversee its management. This may be a management body or committee such as a community group, third sector organisation or a local authority. Where premises are leased/rented from another organisation it is the organisation that owns the premises who will have overall responsibility for safe opening of the premises, including enforcing the mitigations. They have discretion over whether they have a need to open and, if so, will need to exercise judgements on when they consider it safe to do so. This could apply to a single location or more than one community centre if these are run by a single organisation.

Risk assessment

All decisions regarding delivery should be informed by comprehensive COVID-19 risk assessment. Risk assessment should identify the specific risks and subsequent measures that are required to protect the health and safety of everyone within each setting to be used for delivery (this includes all service users, staff, volunteers, and any external partners or visitors). A separate risk assessment may be required for different approaches or sites for delivery. Risk assessment will also outline how safeguarding measures are to be implemented, communicated and reviewed. This will include how to respond should anyone develop symptoms whilst on the site for delivery (including staff/volunteers within the working environment), and identifying areas of the site the individual may have accessed or equipment used while symptomatic. Risk assessment should be reviewed on an ongoing basis, including in response to changes in public health advice, and should be publicly available⁴.

Determining Capacity

In assessing and managing risk, youth work leaders should assess the number of individuals (staff, volunteers, children and young people) that can safely be accommodated in a setting at any one time. Capacity may differ across settings and approaches to delivery and may be lower than the current Scottish Government default position on the maximum number of individuals permitted to meet at one time.

⁴ The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires employers to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessment for employees and where this involves more than 5 employees, produce a written record of the risk assessment

Under the current guidance, the general approach should be to minimise the size of groups where possible.

The following factors will be important to determine capacity:

- Scottish Government guidance on physical distancing
- Ability to maintain physical distancing for all users of the site/space
- Ability to manage enhanced cleaning and personal hygiene
- The specific setting for delivery
- Potential needs/behaviours of children/young people
- The age of children/young people
- The size and layout of space for staff and volunteers, including office space, kitchen and any corridors and entrances.
- Ventilation within buildings

Organisations should consider:

- What numbers will allow us to meet the physical distancing and public health requirements
- How can indoor and outdoor spaces be utilised and re-designed to minimise risks
- What staffing ratios will we need to supervise each space and building requirements
- What alternative settings/spaces could we use and manage safely
- What insurance or permissions need to be in place for alternative private spaces
- Where could you work with outdoor learning providers or other youth work colleagues
- Which cohorts of children/young people might benefit most from access to face-to-face youth work, in helping to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on health and wellbeing and to continue to close the poverty related attainment gap
- Gradual, phased re-introduction of a specific and managed number of children or young people safely in line with guidance
- What measures to manage numbers and movement around the workspaces will help ensure the health and safety of any staff and volunteers returning to the workplace.

Equality

When using this framework and planning delivery organisations should consider the particular needs of different groups of staff, volunteers and individuals. It is against the law to discriminate, directly or indirectly, against anyone because of a protected characteristic, such as age, sex, race or disability. Employers and organisations also have additional legal responsibilities towards disabled individuals and those who are new or expectant mothers.

Youth work is a rights respecting and rights promoting practice. Taking a rights based approach will be crucially important when addressing inequality in children's realisation of their rights, especially those

disproportionately affected during the crisis. Information and resources on protecting the human rights of children and young people are available from the [Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland](#). Where necessary, groups should also signpost to relevant specialist organisations.

Health and hygiene

This guiding framework is intended to support youth work leaders to follow and reinforce the FACTS protective measures within the context of youth work delivery and with young people.

The gradual and phased recommencement of face-to-face youth work activities⁵ will be dependent on procedures and measures being in place for infection prevention and control. This includes:

- Physical distancing
- Enhanced cleaning arrangements⁶ and building ventilation
- Guidance on, and provision of equipment, where appropriate, for respiratory hygiene, e.g. face coverings and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where required
- Guidance on and facilities to aid personal hygiene, including frequent handwashing, or sanitising with alcohol gel⁶
- Measures such as a contact/groupwork log to support contact tracing in line with the [Scottish Government Test and Protect COVID-19](#) guidance
- Clear signage and communication for staff, volunteers and young people
- Guidance for staff and volunteers about the procedure if someone becomes unwell on-site or one or more COVID-19 cases occur, including post activity/attendance within the facility

Before any delivery is undertaken, measures to ensure physical distancing should be in place. Physical distancing applies to all those in the setting (service users, staff, volunteers, external partners) and includes any public spaces to be used for delivery, such as parks. It applies across all internal and external areas within the setting, including toilets, offices, kitchen areas, storage rooms, spaces for face-to-face delivery, entrances and outdoor spaces such as car parks. Clear communication and signage should support implementation of physical distancing measures, emphasising the responsibility of both the organisation and all individuals to keep everyone safe.

Physical distancing should be maintained at all times between adults, between adults and children/young people and between young people aged 12 and over. This is currently 2m. Youth work leaders should consult the latest [Scottish Government guidance](#) for the current default position for physical distancing, including the rules for children aged 11 and under and those aged 12+.

Organisations should consider:

- How you will manage and control the number of individuals in spaces and settings, to maintain physical distancing e.g. one-way systems in buildings
- How to ensure physical distancing is maintained between all youth workers and young people
- Scrutiny of indoor and outdoor facilities, layout and equipment to ensure physical distancing

⁵and any work associated with preparing for recommencement, where staff or volunteers are returning to the workplace

⁶<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-re-opening-schools-guide/pages/hygiene-health-and-safety/> may be helpful

- Clear signage throughout the setting
- Structure and timing of youth work activities or sessions to decrease opportunity for interaction.

Youth work organisations working with children and young people with additional support needs may wish to refer to [Scottish Government guidance for physical distancing in education and childcare settings](#), regarding appropriate management of physical distancing and hygiene measures.

Youth work leaders considering outdoor contact sports should follow the latest Scottish Government guidance, including adhering to the maximum number of individuals who can meet together at any one time, and [Sports Scotland](#) guidance.

Face coverings

For the purposes of youth work activity, face coverings should be worn indoors by all participants - staff and volunteers aged 12 years and over (or young people who are in S1 and older). We also recommend that those under the age of 12 years should be encouraged to wear a face covering. Face coverings should not be used for the purpose of reducing physical distancing requirements. Face coverings should also be worn when people are not engaged in an indoor youth work activity. This is especially important where 2m distance cannot be guaranteed, where people are moving about in corridors, confined communal areas (including toilets), and other areas of buildings where physical distancing is particularly difficult to maintain. Some individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings. [See further information on exemptions from the Scottish Government.](#)

It is important to note the difference between face masks and face coverings. Face coverings are not intended to help the wearer, but to protect against inadvertent transmission of the disease to others if you have it asymptotically. Face coverings are not classed as PPE. On dedicated transport, all youth workers and all children/young people aged five and over are required to wear face coverings, in line with guidance for public transport unless they have a condition for which a face covering would be inappropriate.

A full list of mitigations can be found in the [Scottish Government guidance for the Community Learning and Development sector.](#)

COVID-19 symptoms, test and protect.

Youth work leaders, staff, volunteers and service users have a responsibility to ensure they adhere to the Scottish Government Test and Protect COVID-19 guidance which says people with symptoms should stay at home and self-isolate (including household members). Employees and volunteers should be supported to stay at home for the duration of the isolation period.

You should have clearly communicated guidance in place for your youth work site. Individual health factors should be considered when making decisions regarding a return to face-to-face delivery and/or return to the workplace. Scottish Government advice for employers can be found by following this [link](#).

Youth work leaders should ensure there is a clear procedure in place to deal with situations if a member of staff, volunteer or service user falls ill with symptoms of COVID-19 while in the site for delivery.

Organisations should have measures in places, such as a contact/groupwork log to support contact tracing in line with the [Scottish Government Test and Protect COVID-19 guidance](#). These should comply with GDPR requirements.

Special considerations for people who are clinically vulnerable or shielding

Shielding was paused on 1 August 2020. Since then, the Scottish Government has been advising those who are at highest risk should they contract coronavirus, including those who were formerly asked to shield, to follow the same guidance as the rest of the population stringently and with extra care.

The Strategic Framework introduces enhanced advice at each protection level to protect people with the highest clinical risk, setting out clearly how advice will change depending on the rates of infection in local areas. As the levels in a local area change, the protection advice for people on the shielding list in that area will change as well. People at highest risk should still follow the advice for the general public as a minimum, but these levels provide additional advice for areas like work, schools, shopping and contact with others.

Organisations should also consider measures to mitigate risk to those with protected characteristics, and to respond to concerns expressed by any staff or volunteer who considers themselves to be at higher risk.

Accidents, security and other incidents

The COVID-19 virus is expected to remain in the population even after lockdown restrictions are lifted. It is therefore essential that youth work leaders ensure that the COVID-19 safeguarding measures are reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis and remain in place until Scottish Government advises otherwise.

Using **public health advice**, organisations should develop a clear procedure for and guidance to support staff and volunteers, regarding what to do if there is an accident, incident or safety concern, for example if:

- An individual or individuals are not adhering to the safeguarding measures
- Someone becomes unwell on-site or one or more COVID-19 cases occur
- A staff member or volunteer would have to break physical distancing restrictions, for example to administer first aid or to de-escalate a potentially volatile situation.

Communications

It is important that your plans for a gradual phased recommencement of face-to-face youth work activities, and the policies, procedures and measures you have in place to protect individuals and manage risk are clearly communicated to all staff, volunteers and service users. You may wish to consult with young people to develop guidelines for attending, including safe and staggered arrival/leaving.

Some children, young people, parents, staff and volunteers may understandably feel anxious or uncertain about face-to-face delivery and their views should be considered within the decision making process regarding a blended model of delivery. It is important to clearly communicate your plans and protection measures to your workforce, service users, parents and external partners, and where possible and appropriate work with them as part of the process.

Youth work organisations may wish to consider how they use social media. Social media communication can provide opportunity to promote positive messages to young people and communities. It can also be useful in supporting young people to make safe and informed decisions regarding their face-to-face interactions. Careful consideration should be given to potential unintended impacts of social media communication, for example reputational risks of images with young people who may be exempt from wearing a face covering, or who may appear not to be observing physical distancing.

Transport

Scottish Government guidelines continue to state that if individuals can work from home, they must do so, where possible. Where this is not possible, youth work leaders should consider how their staff and volunteers need to travel to any site for delivery (including those who may be undertaking administrative work, preparing for the re-opening of youth work buildings or spaces, or using youth work spaces to deliver digital or remote support and activities). Those using public transport should adhere to the latest Scottish Government legislation and/or guidelines around the wearing of face coverings and physical distancing. Organisations should also consider the appropriateness of travel for those with protected characteristics, and respond to concerns expressed by any staff or volunteers who consider themselves to be at higher risk. Staff and volunteers who are clinically vulnerable or shielding should not be asked to leave their home unless advised otherwise by Scottish Government or their healthcare professional.

In planning any return to face-to-face delivery, youth work leaders should consider how service users would travel to the setting for delivery and where possible deliver within their locality.

As an essential part of the education system in Scotland, travel to and from youth work activity is permitted to take place within a local authority. Organisations providing youth work activity are asked to limit travel between areas unless travel is for the purposes of providing essential services. Travel as part of a youth work activity, such as an outing or trip, is not currently permitted.

Workforce support and training

Youth work leaders should work closely with staff and volunteers in planning a gradual, phased recommencement of face-to-face youth work services. They should consider the support and training needs of staff and volunteers to deliver services safely through the blend of remote/digital and face-to-face youth work being planned.

This includes supporting staff and volunteers who may be anxious about a return to the workplace, providing effective training regarding the use different approaches (including digital platforms) and safe working practices.

Organisations should seek support and advice from their local authority, partners, or national, regional or governing body/federation/association. Links to some of the resources available to support youth work delivery can be found on [YouthLink Scotland's](#) website.

Working with external partners/agencies

Youth work leaders should ensure that any external partners or agencies, working within the site they are responsible for, are aware of and follow the policies and procedures you have put in place to keep everyone safe. Any of your staff or volunteers delivering within an external setting should follow the risk assessment and procedures of the lead provider.

Delivery in spaces managed by others

Where youth work is delivered in spaces managed by others, including community halls, church halls and private outdoor settings, the organisation responsible for the setting should ensure they have a [venue](#)

risk assessment, procedures and facilities for infection prevention and control, and measures to support physical distancing. A youth work group or organisation using these premises or settings should undertake a risk assessment for the activity they will be delivering and ensure the other expectations before delivery are in place. They should comply with the mitigations put in place by the person responsible for the premises.

Links to relevant guidance

Scottish Government <https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Scottish Government CLD Guidelines <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-community-learning-and-development-sector/>

Other Scottish Government relevant guidance [**Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): reopening schools guidance**](#)
[**Scottish Government guidance on support for continuity in learning**](#)

Scottish Government Postcode Checker <https://www.gov.scot/check-local-covid-level/>

Scottish Government guidance on face coverings <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-public-use-of-face-coverings/>

The latest [**Health Protection Scotland**](#) guidance

A range of guidance for different approaches to youth work can be found on YouthLink Scotland's dedicated COVID-19 site <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/covid-19-guidance/youth-work-recovery-resources/>

Youth Scotland COVID-19 website – contains information and the latest toolkit to support current youth work delivery <https://www.youthscotland.org.uk/covid-19/>

Health Protection (Coronavirus Additional Temporary Measures) Regulations 2020 (Scotland) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2020/318/contents>

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