

PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING RESOURCE

DEVELOPING YOUTH WORK AND SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

PURPOSE OF THIS RESOURCE

This professional learning resource aims to enhance the confidence and skills of youth work and school practitioners to develop and sustain effective partnership working. It has been developed through the [Youth Work and Schools Collaborative](#) as part of its work to build capacity for collaboration to meet the needs of children and young people affected by poverty.

We have utilised the experiences of practitioners and young people to develop this resource. It seeks to direct you to areas of importance which will enhance your practice and professional engagement with partners.



LEARNING OUTCOMES

By engaging with this resource, practitioners will:

- Develop knowledge and understanding of effective partnership working and how this can support improved outcomes for children and young people
- Build individual and collective capacity to develop or strengthen existing partnerships
- Learn from practical examples, practitioner experiences and resources

WHO IS IT FOR?

This resource will be relevant to practitioners and managers seeking to develop, or further strengthen school and youth work partnerships. In particular, it may be most useful for those who are seeking to work towards sustainable, effective partnerships to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

All those involved in partnership working have a role to play, across all levels and parts of the system. You may therefore wish to use this resource with existing partners – even if you've been working together for some time. Additionally, it may be a useful exercise when schools or Community Learning and Development (CLD) services are preparing for inspection.

HOW MIGHT YOU USE THIS RESOURCE?

Individual practitioners and teams can use the resource as a tool to support reflective practice and action-focused improvement. It is structured to provide opportunities for learning, alongside suggested activities to aid reflection and action. These activities can be undertaken individually, or within a group discussion. A separate [workbook](#) is available to record your reflections and consolidate learning.

ACTIVITY 1

STARTING POINT

Answer these questions so you can reflect on them later.

Q1. What are you hoping to learn from the contents of this resource?

Q2. What is your current practice/role in partnership working with schools/youth work?

Q3. What do you think the impact from the learning in this resource will be on your practice?

Note down your thoughts and you can return to these at the end of this resource to see if they are still relevant, or if you need to make any changes.



DEFINING TERMS

There are several terms that are often used interchangeably to refer to the practice of working together across teams, agencies or professions. These include partnership, collaboration, multi or inter-agency working and joint working. Percy-Smith¹ (2005) offer some definitions of the different terminology.

These definitions can help to reflect on your experience of working with others. Sometimes, how we define 'working together' can influence what we expect from it. Your experiences might also vary between partnerships that have a formal agreement, or an informal working arrangement, between delivering a one-off project together, or those sustained over a period of time. Working with one other individual can also feel very different to something involving several practitioners, across multiple agencies, or teams.

A team is not a group of people who work together. A team is a group of people who trust each other.

Simon Sinek

This is partly because collaboration is shaped by the individuals involved.

At the core of any effective partnership is working relationships and practices that help the individuals involved function as a successful team. Trust is a key characteristic of an effective team.

As we will come onto later, there are several key characteristics that we can seek to develop in any partnership, which can help them to be more effective.

This resource will focus primarily on approaches to nurturing trusting relationships. None of these are a 'quick fix' – trust takes time and effort to develop. It will also offer some practical steps that can support the effective operation and management of a partnership.

¹Percy-Smith, J. (2005) What works in strategic partnerships for children? Pg 24-25 Essex: Barnardos


ACTIVITY 2
YOUR EXPERIENCE TO DATE

Think of a time you were working in partnership with an organisation/s or team and answer the questions below.

Q1. How did you define this partnership?

Q2. How did this influence your expectations?

Q3. How did you find the experience of working together?

Q4. How did each individual support, or hinder, the development of the partnership and how you worked as a team?

Note down your thoughts.

WHY SHOULD YOUTH WORK AND SCHOOLS COLLABORATE?

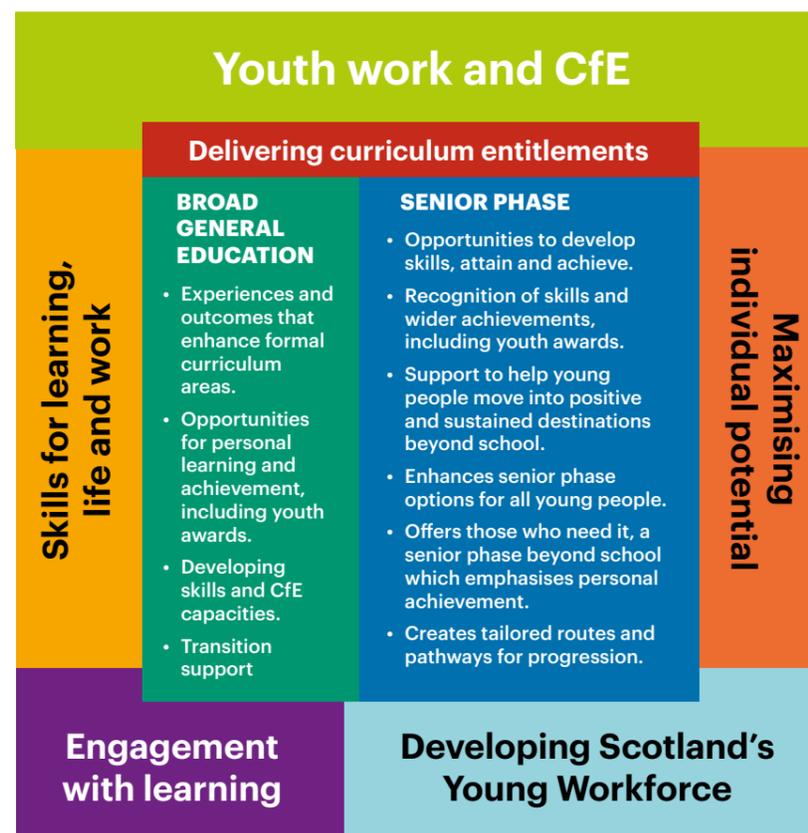
The National Improvement Framework² outlines the need for a collaborative system to achieve excellence and equity in Scottish education.

Youth work is part of the Scottish education system, delivering Curriculum for Excellence across communities and in schools. Youth workers, in the third sector and local authorities, plan, deliver and evaluate a significant variety of non-formal learning opportunities, which assist children and young people to develop the skills and attributes they need to thrive. This complements and enhances learning through the formal curriculum, maximising individual potential with appropriate support and challenge.

For some young people, youth work is the key to unlocking learning, overcoming barriers to engagement and providing a curriculum offer based on the needs of the learner.

A strengthened collaborative approach is also central to deliver the refreshed mission for the Scottish Attainment Challenge, “to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty related attainment gap”³. The refreshed Challenge places greater focus on the breadth of achievements and the importance of health and wellbeing to improving outcomes for children and young people. This requires effective partnership between schools and youth work.

Alongside schools, youth work improves the wellbeing, readiness to learn and educational



[Youth Work: A Guide for Schools](#)

outcomes of children and young people. As part of the collective agency required to deliver the Scottish Attainment Challenge mission, youth work focuses on improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty. 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.

Head teachers are encouraged to work in partnership with youth work partners to develop

²<https://www.gov.scot/publications/achieving-excellence-equity-2022-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/documents/>

³SAC Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress

effective plans and approaches to utilising Pupil Equity Funding and to support and enhance their work to achieve the Scottish Attainment Challenge mission. This includes approaches within the school and across the learning community. And working together to measure impact.

“Head teachers must develop a clear rationale for use of the funding, based on a robust contextual analysis of relevant data which identifies the poverty-related attainment gap in their schools and learning communities and plans must be grounded in evidence of what is known to be effective at raising attainment for children affected by poverty.”⁴

Scottish Government guidance⁵ also identifies the need for a collaborative approach with youth work, in the development and achievement of local authority stretch aims, “recognising the importance of readiness to learn and a broad and varied curriculum”.


SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE

St Francis' RC Primary and Jack Kane Centre, Edinburgh, talk about closing the attainment gap together.

Working in partnership is also a core feature of youth work in Scotland. Community Learning and Development Youth Work National Occupational Standards⁶ and How Good is our Community Learning and Development⁷ both identify engaging in partnerships as a key element of a youth worker's role. They are clear that youth workers engage in partnerships to improve outcomes for young people:

“It is about collaborative working with others in order to share resources to improve youth work provision and provide the best possible opportunities for young people in the community.” (NOS YW04).

The following diagram, developed by the Youth Work and Schools Collaborative, illustrates some of the ways the collective knowledge, skills and expertise of a partnership can improve outcomes. This is because an effective partnership should add value. It is important to identify what the ‘added value’ of working together looks like in your particular context – what is it you can achieve together that you couldn't otherwise. And how does this contribute to improving outcomes for young people.

ADDED VALUE OF PARTNERSHIP


⁴PEF Operational Guidance

⁵SAC Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress

⁶<https://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/resources/standards-and-benchmarks/national-occupational-standards/youth-work-nos/>

⁷<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/quality-frameworks/how-good-is-our-cld/introduction/>



ACTIVITY 3

WHAT IS THE ADDED VALUE OF MY PARTNERSHIP WORKING?

Consider an example of where you have worked in partnership with a school/youth work provider.

Using the diagram above to help, answer the following questions:

Q1. What knowledge, skills and expertise did each partner bring to the work?

Q2. How did this add value – i.e. what did this enable you to do differently, or better together? How did this work benefit each partner?

Q3. What difference did this make to learners?

Q4. What didn't work well? What would you do differently? What did you learn from this experience?

Note down your thoughts.

PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVE

"I think it is extremely valuable to have youth workers within a school setting as they provide a vital link between school-home-community. They provide an insight into behaviours and relationships within the community which could impact on their ability to access education within the school setting. The professional dialogue also allows opportunities for the school to provide support and development of skills which they might otherwise be unaware was required."

DHT, St Francis Primary School, Edinburgh

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP?

The Youth Work and Schools Collaborative identified eight key characteristics of effective collaboration:

- Mutual trust and respect
- Clear, agreed purpose and aims
- Shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and approaches
- Common professional language
- Sharing of skills, knowledge and experience
- Joint planning and evaluation of progress (shared accountability)
- Open, regular communication and review
- Youth voice is representative, heard and valued

These characteristics are reflected in other sources of advice about successful partnership working⁸.

We will consider how to strengthen these characteristics later, but first, take a moment to complete the exercise below.

ACTIVITY 4

HOW EFFECTIVE IS MY PARTNERSHIP WORKING?

Take a few minutes to think about a partnership you've been part of with a school/youth work provider. Answer the following questions:

Q1. Which of the key characteristics were present? Which weren't? Which were most evident?

Q2. What impact did this have on your experience of the partnership and outcomes for children and young people?

Note down your thoughts.



STRONG FOUNDATIONS

At its core, partnership working is about relationships. Relationships underpin all the key characteristics. Trusting and respectful relationships between practitioners can create a strong

foundation – the right conditions and culture - for effective and sustainable collaboration. In reality, this can take time and effort to develop – and is a continuous process.

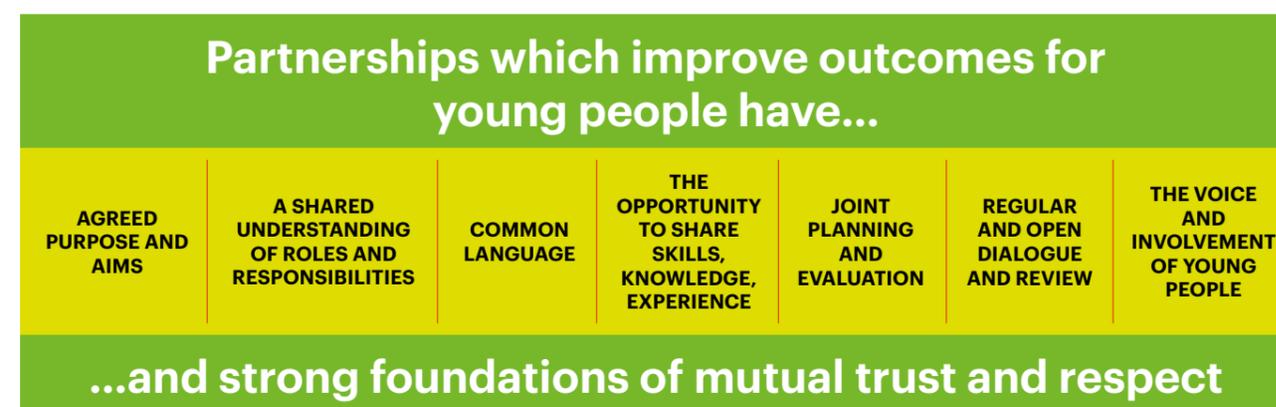
Relationships aren't built with organisations, they're built with people. Youth workers and teachers develop professional relationships, of mutual trust and respect, with young people. You can apply the same approach and skills to other professional relationships.

Developing relationships based on mutual trust and respect is crucial to building a culture of collaboration which supports effective partnership working. Depending on the individuals involved, this may come naturally, or you may have to work at this. It can be influenced by:

- The work styles, personalities and skills of the individuals involved
- Their previous experience of youth work
- How much you are both willing and able to invest in building the relationship
- How you develop the other key characteristics

Fun activities such as The Psycho-Geometrics: The Shapes Quiz⁹ can help teams gain insight and understanding into the different skills, personalities and work styles that individuals bring to a team. This can help create open dialogue to build relationships, overcome or mitigate some blockages in a partnership.

In successful partnerships, individuals invest in the relationships. This helps create the culture and conditions – a strong foundation – on which to develop the other key characteristics. So, the key characteristics can be represented like:



PAUSE

Look back on your answers to Activity 4. What is the impact when the other features are working but there is no trust and respect between partners?

PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVE

"It is key that teachers have the opportunity for professional dialogue to ascertain that youth workers are not merely an additional body to work with 'troubled' children. Their role must be valued and respected and this really comes down to senior management's clear-cut expectations and working relationship with youth workers."

DHT, St Francis Primary School, Edinburgh

⁸E.g. <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/quality-frameworks/how-good-is-our-cld/introduction/> and *Empowering Schools*

⁹Psycho-Geometrics by Susan Dellinger, PhD Prentice Hall, 1989

The remainder of this resource will offer some practical suggestions to strengthen the key characteristics, identifying how these can also build the relationships which support the partnership.

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Know why you want to work together

Whether you are seeking to develop a new partnership, or strengthen an existing one, it is important to identify why you want to work in partnership, and why with this particular school or youth work provider. Being able to clearly articulate the added value can be an important first step in opening dialogue and building relationships.

Clear, agreed purpose and aims

It might be helpful for all those involved to develop jointly a clear understanding of why you are working together – how the joint work will add value and improve outcomes for children and young people. This can help develop a shared understanding of each other's priorities and where youth work and schools can complement each other. For example, reaching a shared understanding of the attainment gap within the school community can be informed by analysis of data from different sources e.g. youth work insight and data about the wider community and young people's broader needs.

Central to this dialogue is the voice of young people. The views and concerns of young people should be taken in to account when considering the need for any youth work and school partnership.

Once there is a shared understanding of why you are working together, creating a shared vision can help articulate the common purpose as a team. This could be a mission statement, or set of broad aims. Ideally all those involved in the partnership should co-design this. You may also want to consider when and how you will involve young people in the process.

Working together to create and agree a shared vision can help to build relationships and to reach an understanding of roles and common priorities. You might want to consider:

- What are the priorities, aims and vision of each partner – where do they already align?
- How will you share this vision more widely with colleagues and stakeholders?
- How will you ensure joint accountability?

Shared understanding of roles and responsibilities

Working in a school can be a very different experience to youth work in the community. It can also differ between schools. This reflects local need, the particular skills or expertise of youth work practitioners and organisation/school priorities. It isn't always easy remaining clear about your role and responsibilities when faced with the challenges of responding to need in a school environment. This is where things like joint working agreements can be useful. A [joint working, or service level agreement](#) can help to ensure the purpose, aims, roles and responsibilities are clear and agreed. You could also detail in the agreement how you will communicate, plan, review and measure progress together.

Including the youth work partnership within school improvement and/or Scottish Attainment Challenge planning can also help establish clear aims and responsibilities and how you will plan and evaluate together.

There are several ways you can build a mutual understanding between youth work and schools. Youth workers may want to help teachers understand what defines youth work, how it contributes to the shared priorities such as the National Improvement Framework, Scottish Attainment Challenge, Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). You can use the [youth work outcomes and youth work skills framework](#) to explore together how youth work develops the four capacities and skills for learning, life and work. Talk with confidence about youth work and the skills, knowledge and expertise you bring as a youth worker – and where this might complement school e.g. children's rights/UNCRC, personal learning and achievement.¹⁰

Consider the local context to priorities such as the Scottish Attainment Challenge. What are the particular challenges for this school e.g. attendance. Make use of national as well as your own data to demonstrate impact in relation to specific outcomes of relevance to the school.

Make use of your champions. Is there someone in the school (or from another school) who has experience of youth work and who would give you a testimonial about its value? This could include business managers, librarians, school nurses etc.

Explore ways of helping schools see the benefit. Speak about the benefits beyond the school gates and how learning can be maximised and complemented through the partnership. What other work could you tell them about, could you deliver something short-term to let them see the impact?

TOP TIPS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

- Make yourself, and most importantly, the amazing work you do known!

This can be done in many ways:

- Schools' weekly newsletters
- A weekly youth work update via email
- Use an in-service day to present who you are and the work you do
- Present at staff meetings to get your face and agenda known
- Deliver information sessions
- Support young people to share their learning experiences of youth work with school
- Value your work and report on it

Everyone loves to hear about someone's journey in life! This is a great way to show a young person's experience through youth work and the positive impact youth work can make on a young person's life

- Know that every school is different

All schools have their own agenda and their own outcomes for what they need from a youth work and education partnership. Get to know their vision and direction for the coming years and showcase how youth work can support these aims. This can be done with just looking at a school website which will depict their core values and vision. But be clear about your priorities, role and offer - and what you're willing to negotiate

- Share local intelligence/data/community planning with school – your insight around need and community priorities is invaluable
- Be transparent and honest with school – only offer what can be done

Explore a common professional language

Youth workers and school staff work with the same young people. They share responsibility for Curriculum for Excellence – providing learning opportunities and experiences that help young people develop the skills and capacities for learning, life and work. Although we share many aims, the language used across youth work and schools can often become a barrier to collaboration.

ACTIVITY 5

WHY SHOULD WE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP?

Answer the following questions:

- Q1. Why do you want to collaborate with the school/youth work partner – how will working with them add value to what you're doing on your own?
- Q2. Why would they want to work with you? - Think about what you bring as a practitioner as well as your service or organisation.
- Q3. What do you want from the partnership? (e.g. a sustainable partnership, or to deliver one intervention/project).
- Q4. How would it help meet local need? – What data/evidence do you have?
- Q5. How have young people been involved in identifying the need for this work/this partnership?
- Q6. How would you support the involvement of young people in decision making around this partnership?
- Q7. How would the partnership support your organisation's wider priorities/CLD or school plans?
- Q8. What are the potential partner's priorities? e.g. school improvement or CLD plan
- Q9. What capacity (skills, knowledge, experience, time, and resources) do you have to effectively deliver this work?
- Q10. How will you manage expectations from the partner and young people regarding your organisation's role?

¹⁰Resources to support this can be found at <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes/youth-work-and-the-attainment-challenge/building-capacity-for-collaboration/resources/>

Common language is when people develop a mutual understanding which helps them communicate more effectively. This might include explaining terminology and considering the language we use. Using a common language within collaboration is most effective when it's co-created. It can provide a focus, help to define clear goals and ensure a shared understanding.

Education Scotland and YouthLink Scotland have developed an online resource (['Lost in translation?'](#)) that can support the development of a common language to work with young people. You can use this locally to:

- Help reach a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities
- Understand terminology used in schools and youth work
- Explore a common language to work with young people and to support joint planning and tracking of progress/achievement.



SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE

Pauline Wilson, FARE Scotland

"We work with young people to share the impact of youth work with their teachers. At St Mungo's Academy young people have spoken at in-service days face-to-face and via teams to discuss their interactions with the youth work team, what they have been doing and just how much of a value it adds to their school day. We supported young people to develop and deliver training to teaching staff on what youth work was, what projects they were doing and how this impacted on them. In addition, we also gain feedback from young people on the group-work sessions and their impact. This information is then used for accountability but also to inform our practice.

We have also supported young people to develop mental health and wellbeing sessions to deliver to staff. These sessions were very specific to how young people wanted to be treated in the classroom when they are struggling with their mental health. It allowed for positive relationships to be built between young people and teachers and for the young people's agency to be shown in such a positive manner."

TOP TIPS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

1. Skills can be a useful common language to work with young people
<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes/youth-work-and-the-attainment-challenge/skills-framework/>
[Flyer for schools](#)
2. Read up
 - [Curriculum for Excellence](#)
 - [GIRFEC/SHANARRI](#)
 - [HGIOS 4 – How good is our school?](#)
 - School improvement/Scottish Attainment Challenge plans

These can support your learning of school outcomes and how you and your organisation fit into these.
3. Mind your language – consider the impact of using phrases such as 'extra-curricular' activities (if you want schools to understand youth work is part of the curriculum).

Establish a process for accountability and ongoing improvement

Effective partnerships learn and enhance practice through engaging in open, regular communication and review, agreeing joint accountability and by creating opportunities to share skills, knowledge and experience.

Creating opportunities for professional dialogue or joint professional learning can enhance practice and strengthen relationships between partners. As the relationship develops you may be able to suggest opportunities to share your skills, knowledge and approaches with teachers. It can also be useful to share and learn from [good practice and collaboration](#) elsewhere including engaging with your Regional Improvement Collaborative.

Joint accountability involves working together to identify, negotiate, plan, deliver and evaluate the work. This will help identify how the work is achieving school, community planning, strategic and national outcomes. Robust monitoring systems support tracking of progress and planning for improvement.

The resources [here](#) contain some suggested approaches to joint planning, evaluation and review. They also explain why capturing a holistic picture of progress is more effective.



SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE

CLD and Braes High School in Falkirk work jointly to plan and evaluate the Positive Transitions programme. Both partners support tracking of attendance, wellbeing, skills and achievements. CLD and school meet regularly to review individual pupil and cohort progress.

Embedding youth voice

Strong partnerships ensure that community and learner voice is representative, heard and valued. Youth work has a key role to play in engaging young people and supporting young people's voices. Partnership working can help implement the UNCRC and deliver our ambition for children's rights in Scotland.

Young people's voices should define the purpose of the partnership and the role youth work plays within the school. What do young people need from youth work in/around their school? What are their priorities that a youth work and school partnership should seek to address?

Be mindful of existing structures for pupil participation in school, the resources/time you have available (be realistic).



SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE

Youth workers in St Mungo's Academy in Glasgow supported young people to express their voice around how they wanted to experience learning in the classroom. They wanted:

- To create a group agreement with new classes
- Let us be involved in our own learning in the classroom
- Allow for flexibility in the learning
- Allow for a safe space to be created

TOP TIPS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

- A joint working agreement can help everyone commit to how and when you will review and share information
- Ask to see the school's CPD/in-service programme – negotiate where you could join/deliver
- Share your joint learning across schools, with YouthLink Scotland and with your Regional Improvement Collaborative
- Link into a schools professional learning calendar. This is a great way to get you, your work and how you work known. Creating sessions on youth work and your practice to show teachers and education staff is a great way to start a dialogue with teaching colleagues
- Work alongside teaching staff to deliver and support projects. This can improve working relationships and supports the sharing of best practice
- Remember school staff work on tight timetables – identify a direct contact person, save up questions, schedule regular meetings. Have current work accessible to share
- Be mindful of the school's planning cycle and slot your work into this



SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE

St Mungo's and FARE Scotland jointly plan and monitor progress. Youth work in the school is planned using the school planning format. Young people's progress and achievement is tracked using skills, supported by the [Youth Work Skills Framework](#).

ACTIVITY 6

SUSTAINING THE PARTNERSHIP

The future

- How will you and the partners future proof the work within schools and ensure the work is embedded in the educational experience for young people?



FINAL TIPS FROM PRACTITIONERS

- Change with the times - today's issues are not tomorrow's
- Embed qualifications such as [youth awards](#) in what you deliver
- Work towards embedding youth work into the curriculum
- Develop links with other local organisations - build the partnership
- Don't say yes to everything – keep to your own priorities
- Be clear on your boundaries. Naturally, youth workers will do as much as they can to support the young people they are working with however the volume of need can be overwhelming. Have frequent chats with colleagues and managers about time management and looking after yourself.
- Be prepared for resistance – partnership isn't always easy – but persist, believe in the process and have confidence in the way you work
- Know who to speak to when things go wrong

FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

[YouthLink Scotland's Scottish Attainment Challenge national programme](#)

[Youth Work: a Guide for Schools \(2022 update\)](#)

[Youth work and employability](#)

[Case studies of good practice](#)

Join the [Youth Work and Schools Collaborative](#)

[Collaborative approaches to education recovery](#)

[What Scotland Learned](#)

If you would like support to deliver this resource please contact Marielle Bruce, Youth Work and Schools Manager, YouthLink Scotland, mbruce@youthlinkscotland.org



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