



# National Youth Work Awards

Celebrating Excellence

Categories and  
Guidance  
Notes for  
Nominators





# National Youth Work Awards 2026



## National Youth Work Awards

The National Youth Work Awards celebrates youth work and the youth workers who make a difference every year in the lives of young people.

The last year has continued to be exceptionally challenging for the sector as youth workers support young people post-pandemic and deal with increasing poverty barriers. The Awards will highlight the life-changing role youth workers play in the lives of young people across the country.

## The Audience

The National Youth Works Awards is now in its 19th year. The audience includes more than 300 practitioners, managers, volunteers and supporters of youth work from many different sectors as well as Scottish Government Ministers, MSPs, civil servants, other figures from public and civic life in Scotland.

## Nomination Forms

Nominations should be made online via our online form:

<https://www.youthlink.scot/awards/#nomination-form>

For any further information or queries you may have about the nomination process, including offline forms, please contact:

[awards@youthlink.scot](mailto:awards@youthlink.scot)

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We represent a sector that includes a workforce of over 55,000 working with 380,000 young people in every part of Scotland. The vast majority of this workforce is volunteers.

Our vision is of a nation which values its young people and their contribution to society, where young people are supported to achieve their potential.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026



## Award Categories

The National Youth Work Awards are aimed at individual youth workers, managers, projects or groups for work that is delivered in youth work settings or in other settings, using a youth work approach. The awards are a mixture of universal, targeted and specialist youth work provision.

Award categories are listed below in alphabetical order:

- Arts & Creativity
- Community-Based Youth Work
- Digital & STEM
- Equality & Diversity
- Health & Wellbeing
- Inclusion and Prevention
- Inspirational Leader
- Outdoor Learning & Environment
- Participation & Youth Voice
- Recognising Skills & Achievement
- Team of the Year
- Volunteer Youth Worker
- Youth Worker of the Year
- Lifetime Achievement Award (Fellowship of YouthLink Scotland)



# National Youth Work Awards 2026



## Guidance Notes

- Read the criteria and eligibility for each category carefully and ensure the information is clear, concise and demonstrates why your nominee should be a finalist.
- Nominations are limited to no more than one nomination per organisation, per category. We would also ask that you limit nominations to no more than two nominations across all categories.
- Information on the nominee must be accurate – please ensure contact details (especially email addresses) are correct.
- Entries MUST adhere to the word limit in each section of the nomination form.
- Please attach any supporting materials (clearly marked with the nominee's name and category).
- The supporting statement (from either a young person or youth worker) is really important in all the categories, but is not required for Inspirational Leadership or Lifetime Achievement nominations.
- If a nominee submitted by a young person is shortlisted, we will contact the supporting person to assist with additional information and consent forms and getting to and from the awards venue depending on the young person's age.
- It is preferred that nominations and any attachments are submitted using our online form or sent by email to [awards@youthlink.scot](mailto:awards@youthlink.scot) but hard copies are also accepted.
- Please make sure you attach a high resolution (at least 3MB) head and shoulders image of your nominee which can be used for the dinner programme, presentation and media purposes.



## Timeline

- **Monday 15th December 2025:** Nominations open
- **Friday 30th January 2026:** Deadline for nominations
- **February 2026:** Shortlisting
- **March 2026:** Judging panels
- **April 2026:** Finalists announced
- **3rd June 2026:** Awards Dinner

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Arts & Creativity

The Arts & Creativity award recognises individuals or groups who have been highly successful in encouraging young people's participation in the arts.

Award nominees will be using a youth work approach to support young people's learning in the arts or building arts and creativity into a youth work setting.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Targeting inequality and removing barriers to access the arts.
- Demonstrating effective partnership working between the arts and youth work sector.
- Using innovative approaches to deliver creative opportunities for young people in one or more of the following art forms – drama, dance, film, visual arts, music, literature or digital arts.
- Engaging young people in the arts for the first time or supporting young people to nurture and grow existing talent.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Community-Based Youth Work

The Community-based Youth Work award recognises an individual or group with a strong focus on delivering universal youth work in their local community. Award nominees will be adopting an approach that is generic and open to all in the local area.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Building positive relationships with young people.
- Creating opportunities for informal learning for young people in their local community.
- Working with young people to shape opportunities for learning through active participation in activities that are of interest to young people.
- Delivering youth work in their local community and being open to all
- Promoting partnership working and empowering their communities.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Digital & STEM

The Digital & STEM award recognises an individual or group that has used digital technology, STEM approaches or social media in an innovative way within their youth work practice.

Award nominees will either be using digital or STEM technology within youth work or supporting young people to navigate the online aspects of their lives.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Making use of innovative approaches and offering new experiences to young people.
- Involving young people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of digital and STEM youth work.
- Using digital media and technology to achieve youth work outcomes.
- Addressing online and social media challenges and opportunities for young people e.g. sexting, cyber-bullying, online campaigning, digital rights.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Equality & Diversity

The Equality & Diversity award recognises individuals or groups who are making a significant difference to the lives of young people facing discrimination, using a youth work approach.

Award nominees will be promoting the Equality Act and be active in supporting young people facing additional barriers. For instance, protected characteristics, care experience, young carers and/or their experience of poverty. They will support young people to understand and challenge, prejudice and discrimination in all its forms.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Promoting an equalities and human rights best practice approach through their work with young people.
- Supporting young people to understand and challenge prejudice and discrimination in all its forms.
- Supporting young people to understand and overcome barriers caused by inequality.
- Supporting young people to participate in new experiences and thinking.
- Fostering young people's understanding of social justice issues and to consider social action.
- Demonstrating an understanding of intersectionality in their work and fostering partnership working.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Health & Wellbeing

The Health & Wellbeing award recognises individuals or groups that are positively transforming the health and wellbeing of young people.

This takes into account all aspects of health including: mental health, emotional & social, physical health & sports, sexual health & relationships, food & nutrition, substance misuse & addictions and poverty reduction.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Increasing mental health literacy.
- Helping young people build resilience.
- Creating places and spaces for young people that contribute to positive wellbeing and healthier, active lives.
- Demonstrating effective partnership working with the health sector.
- Using innovative practice locally or nationally to provide consistent skill, knowledge and dedication in delivering quality services to young people.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Inclusion & Prevention

The Inclusion and Prevention award recognises individuals or groups with a strong focus on rights-respecting work that supports young people to grow up safely in Scotland.

Award nominees will be using a youth work approach to work in partnership with young people to address the drivers of youth violence.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Building positive relationships with young people.
- Supporting young people to define their own solutions and lead community responses to safety.
- Upholding the rights of the most marginalised and excluded young people.
- Works across communities strengthening bonds and support networks.
- Understanding the unmet needs of young people.
- May use one or more of the following approaches: peer education, restorative approaches, trauma-informed approach.
- May focus on one or more of the following issues: positive masculinity, wellbeing, community building.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Inspirational Leader

The Inspirational Leader award recognises the value of quality leadership within a voluntary or local authority youth work setting. The award recognises that leadership within youth work happens at various levels.

Award nominees will be demonstrating their ability to lead and inspire their teams during periods of change or challenging circumstances.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Inspiring their team and building workforce capacity.
- Promoting a culture of improvement through reflective practice and self-evaluation.
- Providing innovative solutions to meet the challenge of change.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Outdoor Learning & Environment

The Outdoor Learning & Environment award recognises an individual, organisation or group that has successfully worked with young people to develop and deliver an outdoor learning and/or environmental project using a youth work approach.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or the more of the following:

- Providing progressive and creative outdoor learning and/or environmental youth work opportunities for young people.
- Facilitating enjoyable and challenging opportunities for young people to learn outdoors.
- Encouraging young people and their wider community to become interested in outdoor activities and/or environmental issues.
- Promoting a greater awareness and understanding of environmental and/or conservation issues.
- Connecting young people with the great outdoors and nature so that learning in the outdoor environment becomes a reality for all young people.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Participation & Youth Voice

The Participation & Youth Voice award recognises individuals or groups that are leading the way in supporting youth-led advocacy and decisionmaking.

Award nominees will be effecting change that benefits young people and the wider community.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Enabling youth-led structures, such as youth forums, pupil councils, or youth parliaments.
- Supporting young people to play a representative and/or co-design role in charities, businesses, public sector bodies or community planning partnerships.
- Supporting young people in youth-led advocacy and decision making, through unstructured and/or nontraditional routes.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Recognising Skills & Achievement

This award recognises individuals or groups who demonstrate best practice in raising attainment or closing the poverty-related attainment gap, by supporting young people to both develop and recognise their skills and achievements. The work will use a youth work approach and should have been undertaken in collaboration with schools, youth awards, college or other partners.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Working in partnership with schools, youth awards or other partners.
- Providing tailored opportunities for young people to develop skills and achieve.
- Supporting young people to recognise and articulate their skills and achievements.
- Increasing volunteering, employment and enterprise opportunities for young people.
- Supporting young people to overcome barriers to learning.
- Encouraging young people towards positive pathways.
- Creating meaningful and good quality experiences of work that promote innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Tracking skills and achievements of young people.
- Helping to close the poverty-related attainment gap.
- Creating opportunities for young people to gain accreditation and qualifications.
- Delivering learning experiences and one-to-one support that help young people develop the skills and capacities essential for their learner and career journey.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Team of the Year

The Team of the Year award recognises effective and high performing team work, leading to positive youth work outcomes.

Award nominees will be evidencing sector-leading practice through collaboration and partnership with all stakeholders.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Supporting and empowering staff and volunteers to deliver high quality services.
- Demonstrating the impact of its work with young people through evaluation and evidence-based practice.
- Partnership working with young people, partners and stakeholders to design and deliver significant outcomes for the young people who have participated in youth work activities.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Volunteer Youth Worker

The Volunteer Youth Worker award will go to a volunteer youth worker who has consistently demonstrated their commitment to delivering quality youth work opportunities for young people.

Award nominees, will be involved in face-to-face work with young people in a youth work setting.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Supporting young people to achieve youth work outcomes.
- Creating opportunities for young people to realise their potential.
- Raising the profile of young people's achievements through youth work.

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Youth Worker of the Year

The Youth Worker of the Year award recognises a youth worker with a passion and dedication to improving the lives of young people through youth work.

Award nominees will be delivering quality services, which are having a positive impact on young people. Their contribution is recognised and respected by young people, youth workers and partners.

Award nominees are likely to be doing one or more of the following:

- Consistently demonstrating the skills, knowledge and value base of youth work
- Delivering youth work outcomes with young people
- Innovating and sustaining new models of practice
- Demonstrating an evidence-based approach to practice
- Working effectively in partnership with others

# National Youth Work Awards 2026 Categories



## Lifetime Achievement (Fellowship of YouthLink Scotland)

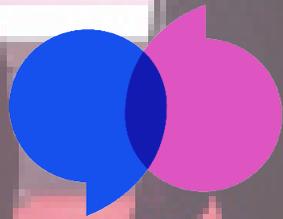
The Lifetime Achievement award recognises an individual who has made a consistent and outstanding contribution to youth work, impacting significantly on the lives of young people. The award nominee's contribution will be evident at a local and/or national level in a youth work setting. They will be held in high regard by young people, youth workers, managers and partner organisations.

Their contribution will have left a lasting legacy in the youth work sector.

Nominations may be submitted by organisations or individuals from the field of youth work and must be supported by a positive endorsement from a senior member of management.

Annual Youth Work Awards

# YouthLink Scotland



## YouthLink Scotland

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Registered in Scotland No: 164547. Charity Ref: SC003923

