

# PROFESSIONAL LEARNING RESOURCE

## YOUTH WORK: A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS



## PURPOSE OF THIS RESOURCE

This guide sits alongside other resources intended to inform decision making on the use of Pupil Equity Funding and approaches within wider school improvement planning for excellence and equity in education.

It explains youth work's role within Scottish education, and where collaboration between schools and youth work can help achieve the Scottish Attainment Challenge mission to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty related attainment gap.





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### WHAT IS YOUTH WORK?

Youth work is a recognised education practice, contributing to young people's learning and development. It is one strand of the professional practice of Community Learning and Development (CLD)<sup>2</sup>. As such, youth work is planned, delivered and evaluated by professionally qualified youth work/CLD practitioners, and other experienced practitioners, including volunteers, who hold a range of competency-based qualifications and skills to practice youth work<sup>3</sup>.

There are 80,000 youth work practitioners across Scotland, supporting and engaging nearly 400,000 children and young people every week. Youth workers are based in the third sector and local authorities. They work with the young person within their family and community.

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"<sup>4</sup>.

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

*"Headteachers should endeavour to work in partnership with their local community partners, such as youth work, to develop approaches to utilising the funding to best effect."*

Youth workers plan and deliver person-centred non-formal learning and development. They engage with children and young people through age and stage appropriate learning and activity. A diverse range of engagement tools and vehicles for learning are used to respond to the needs and priorities of children, young people, families and communities. This includes universal youth work and targeted interventions. As a human rights-based practice, youth work offers opportunities for all young people, whilst making a unique contribution to vulnerable people and those with protected characteristics.

Fundamental to youth work is the relationship between the youth worker and the young person. This has been identified by young people as a key element of the sector's success in engaging and delivering outcomes alongside them.

There are seven [national youth work outcomes](#), which help young people understand their progress and development. The outcomes framework also illustrates the sector's commitment to evaluate and report on [quality and improvement](#) as part of Scottish education.

<sup>1</sup>SAC Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress

<sup>2</sup><https://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/about-cld/what-is-community-learning-and-development-cld/>

<sup>3</sup>The practitioner role is underpinned by the national occupational standards, values, ethics, and competences of the CLD Standards Council.

<sup>4</sup>[Youth Work National Occupational Standards](#)







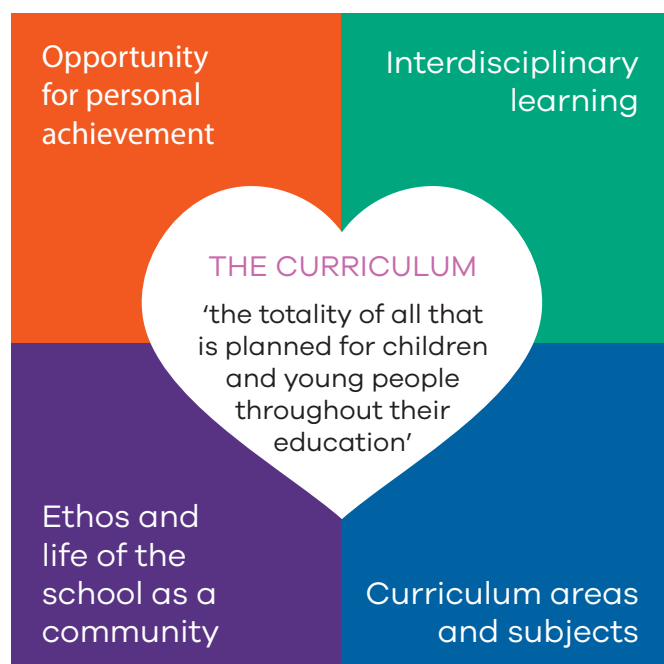
## YOUTH WORK AND SCOTTISH EDUCATION

Youth work is part of the Scottish education system<sup>6</sup>, with the shared purpose of ensuring that all children and young people develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to reach their potential in learning, life and work.

This purpose is encapsulated in the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence – to enable all children and young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. These capacities underpin the National Youth Work Outcomes<sup>7</sup>.

Youth workers design and deliver learning experiences for young people across communities, schools and colleges. This helps to maximise opportunities for learners to develop the four capacities and a broad range of skills that allow them to achieve and succeed.

Learners experience the curriculum through four contexts and in different educational settings. This includes non-formal, youth work settings. School and youth work collaboration is important to ensure a coherent curriculum offer, across contexts and settings.



*“Alongside schools, youth work improves the wellbeing, readiness to learn and educational outcomes of children and young people.”<sup>8</sup>*

*“The curriculum is more than curriculum areas and subjects. It is the totality of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education.”<sup>5</sup>*



SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS



CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS

To enable **ALL** young people to become



RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS



EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS

Youth work contributes to delivering the key priorities outlined in the National Improvement Framework<sup>9</sup>, helping to achieve excellence and equity through:

- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people
- Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people
- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Youth work has a strong focus on equity and inclusion, which underpins practice and the sector's contribution to the national improvement priorities. This includes working towards equity of experience and outcomes for young people with protected characteristics and in recognition of the concept of intersectionality.

<sup>6</sup><https://www.education.gov.scot/Documents/btc4.pdf>

<sup>7</sup><https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/scottish-education-system/>

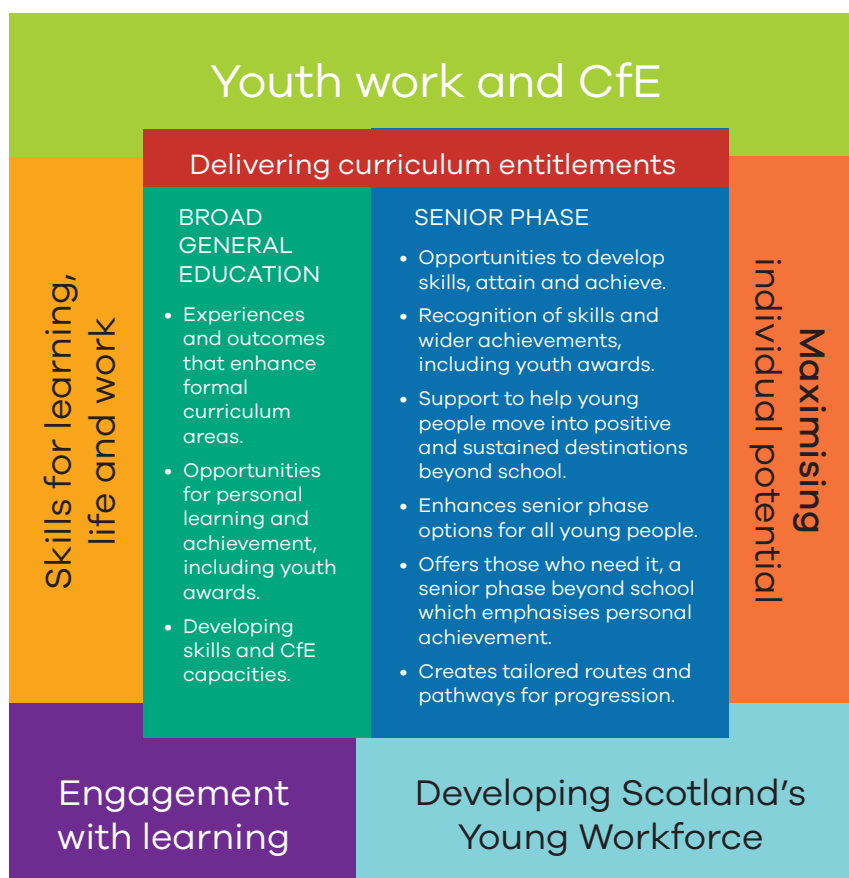
<sup>8</sup><https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/policy-research/outcomes-and-skills/youth-work-outcomes/>

<sup>9</sup>PEF Operational Guidance

<sup>10</sup><https://www.gov.scot/publications/achieving-excellence-equity-2022-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/documents/>



## THE FOLLOWING DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATES WHERE YOUTH WORK



What does collaboration with youth work offer?

Youth work is a valuable element of the learner journey 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 the provision of support for pupils, contributing to raising attainment and improving outcomes for young people impacted by poverty.

By working as a collaborative learning community, youth work and schools can together deliver a coherent curriculum experience for learners, across contexts and settings. Greater alignment between community and school planning and education service improvement plans, ensures that effective decision making takes place benefiting children and young people's outcomes.







### Improving equity

Alongside schools, youth work improves the wellbeing, readiness to learn and educational outcomes of children and young people. As part of the collective agency required to deliver the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) 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 effective plans and approaches to utilising Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) and to support and enhance their work to achieve the SAC mission. This includes approaches

within the school and across the learning community and working together to measure impact.

Scottish Government guidance<sup>11</sup> 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.”

*“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.”<sup>10</sup>*

<sup>10</sup>PEF Operational Guidance

<sup>11</sup>SAC Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress



## FIVE WAYS TO CLOSE THE GAP WITH YOUTH WORK

### 1. Readiness to learn

Supporting children and young people with their broader needs is an essential element to raise attainment and close the poverty-related attainment gap. Overcoming barriers to learning can include improving health and wellbeing, tackling food insecurity, or enabling young people to engage with learning in different settings, or through non-formal approaches.

#### 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.

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.

#### Learning out of school and addressing food insecurity

Breaks from school are known to result in a loss of engagement and progression in learning, particularly among young people in areas of multiple deprivation, who may have limited access to non-formal learning opportunities out of school. Food insecurity also hampers young people's ability to engage with education, which is more prevalent in these areas.

Youth work addresses barriers to learning through breakfast clubs, after school provision and school holiday programmes and through embedding dignified approaches to tackling food insecurity in youth work learning opportunities<sup>12</sup>.

#### 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, co-delivering PSE lessons, outdoor learning, group work, pupil support and youth awards.

### 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.

Youth work's position within the learning community puts youth workers in a unique place to build relationships with young people across school, home and community settings, to engage families and deliver family learning.

### 3. Youth participation and pupil voice

*“School leaders are responsible for: ensuring that children and young people participate meaningfully in their own learning, in decision-making relating to the life and work of the school and in the wider community.”<sup>13</sup>*

Youth participation is central to delivering a rights-based approach to education, which is embedded within youth work in Scotland. Youth workers have particular skills and expertise in supporting children and young people to participate in their own learning and in the life and work of their school and wider community<sup>14</sup>.

Youth work supports engagement of young people in decision making and helping the wider system understand the needs and views of young people into the future. This includes engaging with seldom heard groups, where relationships and long-term support are key. Ensuring young people are genuinely involved in their learning, encouraging them to become critical thinkers must be further embedded as part of the curriculum experience for all learners. Youth work can lead in this area of work by sharing practice and encouraging improvement across the whole curriculum.

<sup>12</sup>[https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5659/food-insecurity-report\\_proofed.pdf](https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5659/food-insecurity-report_proofed.pdf)

<sup>13</sup><https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-attainment-challenge-framework-recovery-accelerating-progress/>

<sup>14</sup>They often work with youth awards such as the [Participative Democracy Certificate](#) to recognise achievement



## 4. Opportunities for personal learning and achievement

Youth work and youth awards play a key role in planning and delivering opportunities for personal learning and achievement, within school and in the wider community. Personal learning helps young people to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills for learning, life and work. This can be an important pathway to support engagement and raise attainment within the context of the SAC.

Youth awards are an important route through which young people have the opportunity to work towards recognition and accreditation that they can use to demonstrate their skills and achievements to employers and open up further options for their learning journey. Youth awards provide opportunities to recognise young people's achievements, complementing formal learning and increasing attainment. Recognising personal achievement is important for all young people. However, it 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 award can increase attendance, engagement and attainment and so should be supported.

### Youth awards:

- Help young people to develop a wide range of skills such as leadership and confidence
- Enable young people to talk about their skills with confidence and understand their value
- Support young people in their learning and to progress to further and higher education, training and employment on leaving school
- Are valued by employers as helping young people gain skills for work
- Can be life changing experiences for young people

Youth awards are widely used by the youth work sector to provide opportunity for and recognise personal achievement. Youth awards are achieved in a variety of settings. Many schools work in partnership with youth work and youth award providers to deliver recognition for non-formal learning that complements and supplements that from formal education. This is helping to raise attainment and achievement<sup>15</sup>. Several youth awards are on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), but all youth awards are increasingly recognised and valued alongside formal education qualifications<sup>16</sup>.

## 5. Skills development and Developing the Young Workforce

The development of skills is key to the purpose of Scottish education, supporting progress in attainment and school leaver destinations.

In 2021, the OECD<sup>17</sup> recommended that Scotland considers how the curriculum provides opportunities to develop a broader range of skills and capacities, alongside knowledge, across the four capacities.

The refreshed SAC mission recognises the need to reflect the breadth of achievements that contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people. This includes the development of skills.

Youth work helps young people to develop skills for learning, life and work across the learner journey. Youth workers support young people to recognise their skills and personal achievements (including using youth awards) and to understand the transferable nature of skills and how they relate to the world of work.

Skills form an essential part of the National Youth Work Outcomes. In many cases, the skills young people develop are building blocks on which the youth work outcomes are achieved. The key skills young people develop through youth work are described in the Youth Work Skills Framework. This Framework helps youth workers to support young people to recognise, articulate and demonstrate their skills development. To further support supporting meaningful learner conversations, tracking and profiling, the framework is mapped to the four Curriculum for Excellence capacities and My World of Work. This helps young people understand the transferable nature of skills.

*“The development of skills is essential to learning and education to help young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors...enabling them to reach their full potential.” (BtC4)*

<sup>15</sup><https://education.gov.scot/media/bzhdgub5/learning-resource-8.pdf>

<sup>16</sup><https://scqf.org.uk/media/ui2iqwnw/awards-network-blog-final-jan-2020.pdf>

<sup>17</sup><https://www.oecd.org/education/scotland-s-curriculum-for-excellence-bf624417-en.htm>





*“It is important that as part of their learning young people develop awareness and understanding of the skills that they are building, throughout their learning and across all stages and settings, in pre-school, schools and colleges and in the wider community.”  
(BtC4)*

Youth work and school collaboration helps ensure opportunities for skills development across all curriculum areas and in all the contexts and settings where young people learn. And that young people can recognise and articulate the totality of their skills.

#### Developing the Young Workforce

Youth work contributes to Developing the Young Workforce, helping achieve improvement in the skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people, and to accelerate progress for those most at risk of being furthest from the labour market.

Youth workers provide support and opportunities which help young people overcome barriers to learning, develop skills and progress into sustained employment pathways. This includes offering quality, meaningful volunteering and work experience opportunities that meet their goals and aspirations, and a commitment to preparing young people with future skills needs and economic priorities.







## 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/](http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes/closing-the-attainment-gap/)

YouthLink Scotland delivers one of the SAC national programmes. They can provide advice and support regarding developing partnership with youth work within your school community. Please contact

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