

# PROFESSIONAL LEARNING RESOURCE

## YOUTH WORK: A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS



## YOUTH WORK: A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

This guide is for Head Teachers. It sits alongside other resources to support decision making on the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) within school improvement planning.

The content may also be relevant to education leaders involved in local authority strategic planning and the use of Strategic Equity Funding (SEF).

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.

### WHAT IS YOUTH WORK?

Youth work is a powerful, dynamic and versatile education practice that equips children and young people with the tools and support they need to reach their potential. 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>.

Youth workers are based in the third sector and local authorities. The work is delivered across a variety of settings including youth centres, schools, colleges, outdoor education centres, or on the streets via outreach programmes and detached youth work.

Youth work promotes the values of inclusion, mutual respect, equality and youth voice. It's about building relationships based on trust and shared understanding, and using the strength of these relationships to develop a person-centred approach to the development of young people.

Youth work's focus is on the 11-25 year age group, but also includes early intervention programmes and provision which focuses on children under 11 years. This can include providing primary to secondary transition support, after-school clubs and uniformed groups.

*“Headteachers should endeavour to work in partnership with their local community partners, such as youth work and community learning and development, to develop approaches to utilising the funding to best effect ”<sup>1</sup>*

Youth workers plan and deliver opportunities for person-centred non-formal learning and development. 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.

[The National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework](#) helps young people understand their progress and development. The 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.



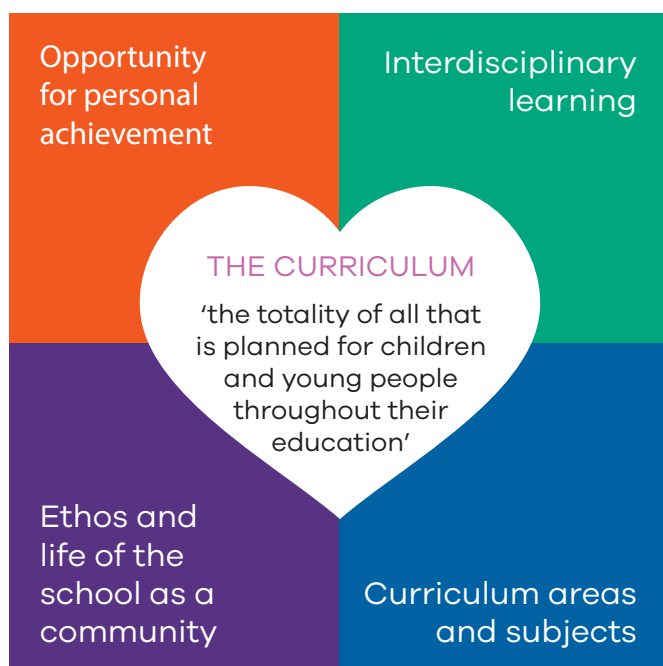
## YOUTH WORK AND SCOTTISH EDUCATION

Youth work is part of the Scottish education system<sup>4</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>5</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>6</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>7</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>8</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>4</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/learning-in-scotland/sector/>

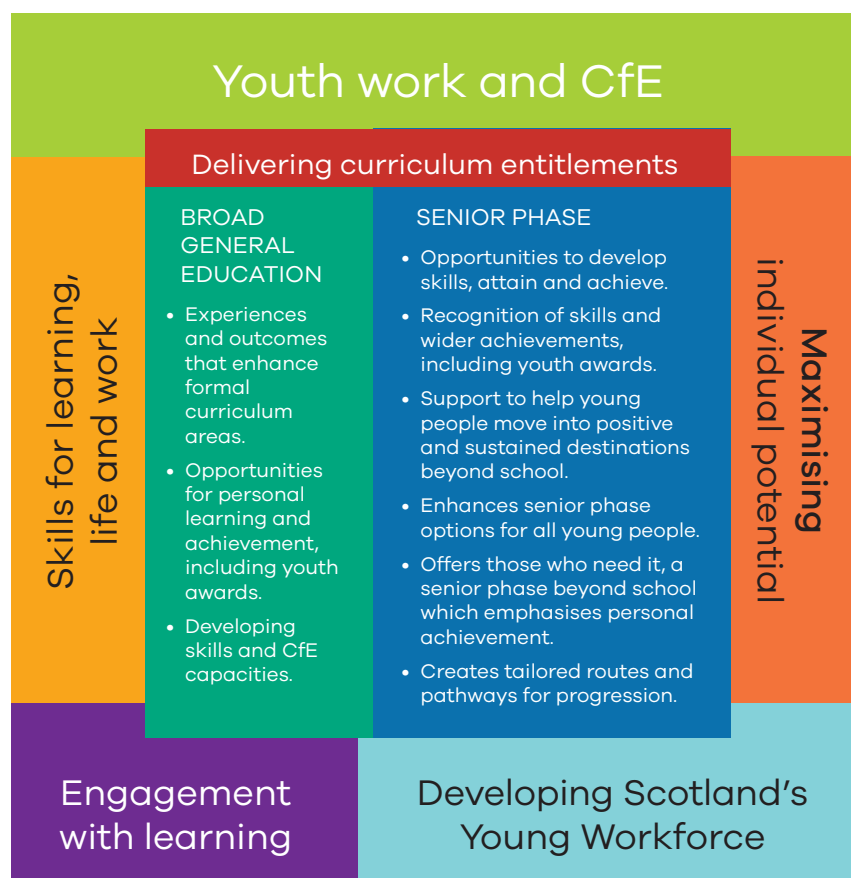
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youthlink.scot/education-skills/youthwork-outcomes-skills/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-equity-funding-national-operational-guidance-2023/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/media/7cnk33qn/btc4.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/2023-national-improvement-framework-nif-improvement-plan-summary-document/>

## THE FOLLOWING DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATES WHERE YOUTH WORK CONTRIBUTES ACROSS CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE.



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, school improvement and local authority strategic equity planning ensures that effective decision making takes place benefiting children and young people's outcomes. It will also be a vital approach to deliver a transformed education system being driven by the current education and skills reforms.





*“All 32 local authorities are in receipt of SEF. This funding is provided to support local authorities to develop and implement strategic approaches to achieving the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, working with schools, wider local authority services and national and community partners, such as youth work.”<sup>9</sup>*

### 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.

Investment of PEF in youth work can provide schools with opportunity to enhance, scale or introduce new approaches to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap within the school, and across the learning community.

Scottish Government guidance<sup>10</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>11</sup>*

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-attainment-challenge-framework-recovery-accelerating-progress-2/pages/8/>

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-equity-funding-national-operational-guidance-2023/>

## 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, supporting the wider impacts of poverty on families and providing holiday provision and transition support.

#### Social and emotional wellbeing

Youth workers are particularly skilled in engaging and supporting the hardest to reach. They use a trauma informed approach and a 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 vital role of youth workers in supporting health and wellbeing was highlighted in [All Learners in Scotland Matter](#).

#### 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>. Transition programmes can also be key to improving readiness to learn.

#### 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, skills and capabilities 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.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/Food-insecurity-report\\_proofed.pdf](https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/Food-insecurity-report_proofed.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> The Scottish Attainment Challenge Framework for Recovery and 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. Stronger partnerships with youth work, including

youth award providers, will be crucial to deliver the ambitions for a Scottish qualifications and assessment system that values the diverse achievements of every young person<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.

This has been reinforced throughout all aspects of the Scottish Government's programme of education and skills reform.

The refreshed SAC mission also 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 use the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework to support young people to recognise their skills and personal achievements and to understand the transferable nature of skills and how they relate to the world of work.

The framework supports meaningful learner conversations. It is mapped to the four Curriculum for Excellence capacities and My World of Work to support a holistic approach to tracking and profiling. Several schools have begun to use the Framework to support joint tracking with their youth work partners.

*“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://www.gov.scot/publications/future-report-independent-review-qualifications-assessment/>



*“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 poverty-related 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.youthlink.scot/education-skills/scottish-attainment-challenge/](http://www.youthlink.scot/education-skills/scottish-attainment-challenge/)

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

Marielle Bruce, Youth Work & Schools Manager on [mbruce@youthlink.scot](mailto:mbruce@youthlink.scot)



Achieved.  
Valid Until  
January 2024



YouthLink Scotland, Caledonian Exchange, 19A Canning St. Edinburgh, EH3 8EG  
T: 0131 202 8050 E: [info@youthlink.scot](mailto:info@youthlink.scot) W: [www.youthlink.scot](http://www.youthlink.scot)  
YouthLink Scotland is a Company Limited by Guarantee.  
Registered in Scotland No: 164547. Charity Ref: SC003923