



Subject Benchmark Statement

Youth and Community Work

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Contents

About this Statement.....	1
How can I use this document?	1
Relationship to legislation	2
Additional sector reference points	2
1. Context and purposes of Youth and Community Work Qualifications	3
Purposes and characteristics of Youth and Community Work Degrees.....	4
Equity, diversity and inclusion	4
Accessibility and the needs of students	5
Education for sustainable development (ESD)	5
Employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education.....	6
Generative artificial intelligence.....	6
2. Distinctive features of Youth and Community Work Degrees	8
Design	8
Progression	8
Flexibility	9
Partnerships.....	9
Monitoring and review.....	10
3. Content Structure and Delivery.....	11
Content.....	11
Teaching and Learning	13
Assessment.....	14
4. Benchmark Standards	16
Introduction	16
Threshold standards (FHEQ Level 6/SCQF Level 10).....	18
Typical standards (FHEQ Level 6/SCQF Level 10)	19
Excellent standards (FHEQ Level 6/SCQF Level 10).....	20
Postgraduate standards (FHEQ Level 7/SCQF Level 11).....	21
5. List of references and further resources.....	23

About this Statement

This QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Youth and Community Work defines what can be expected of a graduate in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies.

Subject Benchmark Statements are an established part of the quality assurance arrangements in UK higher education. They are sector-owned reference points, developed and written by academics. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular discipline or subject area. Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as an expert quality body on behalf of the higher education sector. A summary of the Statement is also available on the QAA website.

Key changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement include:

- a revised structure for the Statement, which includes the introduction of cross-cutting themes of:
 - equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)
 - accessibility and the needs of disabled students
 - education for sustainable development (ESD)
 - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education (EEE)
 - generative artificial intelligence (GenAI).
- a comprehensive review updating the context and purposes, including course design and content in order to inform and underpin the revised benchmark standards.

How can I use this document?

Subject Benchmark Statements are not intended to prescribe any particular approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Rather, they provide a framework, agreed by the subject community, that forms the basis on which those responsible for curriculum design, approval and update can reflect upon a course, and its component modules. This allows for flexibility and innovation in course design while providing a broadly accepted external reference point for that discipline.

They may also be used as a reference point by external examiners when considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with those of other higher education providers. Furthermore, Statements can support professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with their definitions and interpretations of academic standards.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of programmes in youth and community work at undergraduate and master's level
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a programme in youth and community work
- an employer, seeking to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of youth and community work graduates.

Relationship to legislation

The responsibility for academic standards lies with the higher education provider which awards the degree. Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them by their relevant funding and regulatory bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements.

The status of the Statement will differ depending on the educational jurisdictions of the UK. In England, Subject Benchmark Statements are not [sector-recognised standards](#) as set out under the Office for Students' [regulatory framework](#). However, Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Because the Statement describes outcomes and attributes expected at the threshold standard of achievement in a UK-wide context, many higher education providers will use them as a tool for course design and approval, and for subsequent monitoring and review, in addition to helping demonstrate the security of academic standards.

Additional sector reference points

Higher education providers are likely to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement when designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. In 2024 QAA published an update to the [Quality Code](#), which will be helpful when using this Statement.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in [QAA's Glossary](#). Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Statement where appropriate.

1. Context and purposes of Youth and Community Work Qualifications

1.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement embraces the subject areas of Youth Work, Community Work, Community Development, and Community Learning and Development in a shared academic area, where, in most cases, knowledge is applied through professional practice.

1.2 Throughout this document the terms Youth Work, Community Work, Community Development, Community Learning and Development and Adult Learning are used to describe a unique set of professional practices, acknowledging the core values that underpin these practices (see section 4.4) whilst recognising the nuanced differences which exist across the four nations of the UK (see section 1.8). As such the listed subject areas can be studied as single or joint academic disciplines and through a range of theoretical lenses that may include education, sociology, psychology, theology, anthropology and philosophy.

1.3 This Statement provides a frame of reference for both non-professional awards and awards leading to professional recognition, including higher-level awards including master's degrees, and sets out expectations concerning:

- i) subject knowledge, understanding and skills of graduates
- ii) teaching, learning and assessment methods employed in their education
- iii) the essential nature of the subject area in bringing together theory and practice.

1.4 This Benchmark Statement supports both the practical application of subject knowledge through validated Youth Work, Community Work, Community Development and adult learning qualifications, and courses which align to this without professional recognition or assessed placement expectations.

1.5 Degree courses in Working with Young People, Youth Studies, Adult Education, Community Development or Working with Communities which are not combined with a route to professional qualification may also draw on this Subject Benchmark Statement as a reference point. The Statement reflects the complexity and rapidly changing nature of these contexts by including specific reference to the legislative, professional and institutional arrangements in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It also describes the nature of undergraduate degrees and post-graduate qualifying courses and the standards expected of students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

1.6 In each country of the UK, there are different professional accrediting bodies which set professional requirements in that nation. However, professional accreditation cannot be conferred separately from the degree qualification, and institutions must comply with professional requirements for students to be professionally endorsed.

1.7 Degree-awarding bodies can indicate clearly on their award certificates the difference between qualifications awarded with or without professional recognition or issue a separate certificate conferring professional endorsement.

1.8 Across the UK and Ireland, professional recognition of Youth Work, Community Development and related disciplines is organised differently. The bodies listed below collaborate through the Joint Education and Training Standards Forum (Joint ETS), which supports mutual recognition of qualifications across jurisdictions and contributes to the development of National Occupational Standards for Youth Work.

- In Scotland, Community Learning and Development encompasses adult learning, youth work and community capacity building, with professional approval overseen by

the [CLD Standards Council for Scotland](#).

- In Wales, Youth Work qualifications are endorsed by Education Training Standards Cymru/Wales, and qualified practitioners must register with the Education Workforce Council - see [JNC Professional Youth Worker - ETS Cymru](#).
- In Northern Ireland, Youth Work qualifications are endorsed through the National Youth Council of Ireland [North/South Education and Training Standards \(NSETS\)](#), reflecting a distinct professional youth work tradition. Across the island of Ireland, community work education and training programmes are endorsed by the [All-Ireland Endorsement Body](#).
- In England, the [National Youth Agency](#) validates Youth and Community Work qualifications, while the [Endorsement and Quality Standards Board for Community Development Learning](#) endorses Community Development programmes.

Purposes and characteristics of Youth and Community Work Degrees

1.9 Youth and Community Work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline underpinned by values, ethics, competencies and standards. Youth and Community Work uses democratic and relational approaches within informal and community-based practice. Programmes seek to equip students with specialised knowledge and practical skills to work with young people and communities.

1.10 Qualifying programmes in Youth and Community Work may be studied full- or part-time, be delivered via open and distance-learning, be work-based, and at undergraduate or postgraduate levels, and as Apprenticeships. Irrespective of learning mode or delivery location, professional qualifying courses must include structured opportunities for supervised practice in relevant and appropriate practice-learning settings, as required by the relevant PSRB.

Equity, diversity and inclusion

Vision

1.11 Youth and Community Work is a subject discipline with equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at its core. Accessibility and EDI are integral to the development of courses, with students encouraged to engage with EDI in their everyday scholarship, practice and decision-making.

Defining principles

1.12 Youth and Community Work programmes enable students to co-construct inclusive and accessible curricula, valuing diverse scholarship and drawing on the range of academic disciplines that inform youth and community work. They recognise learning as a lifelong process that takes place across formal, informal and community-based settings, while developing students' capacity for meaningful participation and engagement.

1.13 By recognising the influence and impact of dominant systems within formal, informal and hidden curricula (see QAA's [Unpacking your Hidden Curriculum: Guide for educators](#)) programmes foster critical engagement with knowledge, language and power.

1.14 Programmes critically engage with EDI, exploring how ideologies, power structures and lived experiences intersect to shape individual and collective realities. In doing so, they promote understanding of fairness, justice, rights, responsibilities and diverse perspectives.

1.15 Programmes critically examine the impact of digital technologies, including AI, in relation to digital literacy, access, inclusion and the influence of social, cultural and economic inequalities.

Accessibility and the needs of students

1.16 The [Equality Act 2010](#) in England, Scotland and Wales, is a legal duty on education providers to adopt a proactive rather than reactive approach, where issues of accessibility in teaching, learning and assessment are anticipated. This was reinforced following the landmark legal case *University of Bristol v Dr Robert Abrahart* (see the Equality and Human Rights Commission's [Advice note](#)). In Northern Ireland there is a distinct [body of equality legislation](#).

Vision

1.17 Youth and Community Work programmes attract students from diverse social, economic and educational backgrounds, including disabled and neurodivergent students and those with a range of access requirements. The experiences of students and the communities served by the profession are diverse and intersectional. Accessibility and inclusion are therefore core disciplinary values that extend beyond legal compliance and should underpin all aspects of programme design and the wider student experience.

Defining principles

1.18 Youth and Community Work programmes, regardless of mode of delivery, are designed around the profession's core values of accessibility, inclusion and participation, ensuring that all students can engage fully with the curriculum and wider learning experience.

1.19 Programmes recognise and value the diverse experiences students bring, using these to enrich critical dialogue and challenge discrimination.

1.20 Curriculum design, assessment and placement opportunities, where appropriate, can be co-constructed with students and informed by professional bodies, employers, practitioners and communities.

1.21 Youth and Community Work programmes anticipate and address barriers to participation through inclusive curriculum design, accessible assessment, appropriate support and equitable placement opportunities. Any adjustments maintain professional, regulatory and practice standards while promoting student wellbeing and success.

1.22 Any adjustment to placement expectations, may include changes to the published assessment format but not the removal of PSRB requirements (see paragraph 1.8), or a reduction in the total number hours of assessed practice.

Education for sustainable development (ESD)

Vision

1.23 Youth and community work enable individuals and communities to take action that addresses current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to address their own.

Defining principles

1.24 Youth and Community Work programmes engage critically with sustainability and the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), recognising the profession's contribution to sustainable development through education, participation, community action and social justice. Programme teams may consider drawing on the QAA and Advance HE guidance [Education for Sustainable Development Guidance](#).

1.25 Programmes draw on interdisciplinary perspectives to explore the social, cultural, economic, political, historical and environmental dimensions of sustainability, enabling students to analyse issues from local and global perspectives and to develop sustainable approaches to practice.

1.26 Programmes in Youth and Community Work support students to develop the knowledge, skills, values and reflective capabilities needed to promote sustainability throughout their personal and professional lives, recognising the importance of lifelong learning, wellbeing and responsible use of resources and community assets.

Employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education

Vision

1.27 Youth and Community Work programmes foster [employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship education](#) and capabilities, equipping students with the leadership, communication, collaboration and project management skills required for professional practice. They encourage critically reflective, innovative and adaptive approaches to problem-solving, promoting an innovative and adaptive mindset, integrity and responsibility in responding to complex social challenges.

Defining principles

1.28 Youth and Community Work programmes place education, participation and social action at their core, recognising learning as a negotiated, lifelong and transformative process.

1.29 Programmes prepare students for diverse career pathways within and beyond youth and community work by embedding employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship throughout the curriculum.

1.30 Drawing on interdisciplinary knowledge and adapting to changing social and technological contexts, programmes develop students' capacity to think ethically, sustainably and innovatively, and to work effectively across a range of professional settings.

Generative artificial intelligence

Vision

1.31 Youth and Community Work programmes recognise that artificial intelligence (AI), including large language models, chatbots and generative AI (GenAI), is increasingly shaping education, professional practice and society. Consistent with the values of critical reflection, participation and social justice that underpin Youth and Community Work programmes support students to engage with AI in informed, ethical and responsible ways.

1.32 Programmes critically explore both the opportunities and challenges presented by AI, including its potential to enhance learning, creativity, communication and access to

information, alongside issues of agency, privacy, bias, integrity, inclusion and human relationships. In doing so, programmes may draw on guidance such as the QAA's [Advice and Resources on Generative Artificial Intelligence](#).

1.33 Youth and Community Work programmes encourage students to develop the knowledge, skills and judgement required to use emerging technologies critically, ethically and sustainably in professional and community contexts.

Defining principles

1.34 Programmes in Youth and Community Work can support students to engage with AI critically, ethically and transparently, developing an understanding of its opportunities, limitations and impact on individuals, communities and society. This includes digital literacy, appropriate and responsible use of AI in learning and professional practice, consideration of safeguarding, surveillance, rights, inclusion, sustainability and bias, and recognition of the continued importance of human judgement, creativity and relationships.

1.35 Programme teams can embed critical engagement with AI across curriculum design, assessment, recruitment and research, recognising both its potential benefits and its challenges within youth and community work practice.

2. Distinctive features of Youth and Community Work Degrees

Design

- 2.1 Higher education qualifications at undergraduate or postgraduate level may be professionally validated or endorsed by the relevant body depending on jurisdiction and subject area (see paragraph 1.8).
- 2.2 Integrated work-based learning is central to Youth and Community Work programmes. Students undertake substantial supervised placement practice in appropriate community and youth settings, engaging in the critical theorisation of practice. For professionally endorsed routes, specific placement-hour requirements may apply.
- 2.3 Youth and Community Work programmes are typically co-designed with students, practitioners, employers, professional bodies and the communities they serve. This collaborative approach helps ensure curricula remain relevant, responsive to sector needs, and informed by the lived experiences of the people and communities with whom graduates may work with.
- 2.4 Programmes are underpinned by values of social justice, human rights, equality and anti-oppression. Drawing on the principles of informal education, they promote voluntary participation, empowerment and democratic engagement, encouraging students to take an active role in their learning while respecting the autonomy of individuals and communities.
- 2.5 Programmes in Youth and Community Work are interdisciplinary, drawing on fields such as sociology, social policy, psychology, philosophy, education and politics. This enables students to critically understand and respond to the complex social, economic, political and environmental factors shaping individual lives and communities.
- 2.6 A broadly defined commitment to EDI is embedded throughout the Youth and Community Work curriculum, challenging systemic inequalities and promoting diverse perspectives, critical reflection and anti-oppressive practice.
- 2.7 ESD is incorporated in Youth and Community Work programmes, enabling students to address social, environmental and economic challenges while supporting sustainable and equitable communities.
- 2.8 Programmes are pedagogically designed to develop critically reflective practitioners who evaluate their values, actions and impact on others. Through critically reflective practice, students learn to navigate ethical complexity, adapt to changing contexts and continually inform and improve their professional practice.

Progression

- 2.9 Youth and Community Work programmes support progression through undergraduate (FHEQ level 6; SCQF/FQHEIS level 10) and, where available, integrated master's study (FHEQ Level 7; SCQF/FQHEIS Level 11), enabling students to develop and demonstrate the subject-specific and transferable knowledge, skills and practice competencies outlined in this Statement. Graduates are typically well prepared for postgraduate study and a range of professional pathways.
- 2.10 Upon graduation from an undergraduate degree, it would be expected that a student who had achieved a second-class degree or higher would be capable of, and equipped for,

undertaking postgraduate study in a related discipline. Entry requirements to postgraduate courses are, however, determined by individual providers and may require specified levels of achievement at undergraduate level.

2.11 Undergraduates studying Youth and Community Work programmes as part of a combined or joint degree with other subjects (including programmes that specify major and minor options) will achieve core elements of the specific and generic skills outlined in this Statement and will add others according to the areas covered in the other subject(s) of their degree. Additionally, they may explore the overlap between different disciplines, creating further opportunities for interdisciplinary study.

2.12 Any student enrolled in a standard undergraduate honours degree programme in Youth and Community Work, may exit earlier and be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education (FHEQ level 4; SCQF/FQHEIS level 8), a Diploma of Higher Education (FHEQ level 5; SCQF/FQHEIS level 9), or other awards depending upon the levels of study completed to a satisfactory standard. Please refer to the [Characteristics Statement - Short Cycle Qualifications](#) for more detailed information on 'break points' in degree programmes.

Flexibility

2.13 At providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the duration of a full-time programme leading to a standard undergraduate degree is typically three years, or four years for a programme involving a year abroad (such as a programme involving languages) or a placement year, or for an integrated master's degree. In Scotland, a bachelor's/ordinary degree is set at three years at Level 9 on the SCQF/FQHEIS. A bachelor's degree with honours, which is the most typical route for students, is designed to include four years of study, and is set at Level 10 of the SCQF/FQHEIS. In addition, a number of Scottish universities have a long tradition of labelling certain undergraduate academic degrees as a Master of Arts (MA). This title reflects historic Scottish custom and practice with an MA/ordinary degree at Level 9 and MA with Honours at Level 10 on the SCQF/FQHEIS.

2.14 Students following part-time routes accumulate academic credit in proportion to the intensity of their study, and their total study time and credit value would be the equivalent to those achieved on full-time routes.

2.15 Higher education providers structure the programmes they offer to support students' learning and attainment. Depending on the educational mission of the provider, this may include opportunities to engage in learning on site, online, and/or through hybrid learning, arranged in terms, by semester, year-long, block, or other formats. These may be offered in full-and/or part-time modes of study and credit may be accumulated through the completion of micro-credentials, short-accredited learning, recognition of prior learning or accreditation of prior experiential learning.

Partnerships

2.16 Degree-awarding bodies may deliver programmes in partnership with other providers through validation and franchising arrangements, or through collaborative models in which partners contribute to defined elements of delivery, including placement learning and degree apprenticeships. In Youth and Community Work, such arrangements are a characteristic feature of programme delivery, requiring coordination across institutional and partner settings.

2.17 Youth and Community Work programmes are designed for delivery across multiple settings, combining institution-based learning with structured, credit-bearing work-based practice. Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that programme aims,

learning outcomes and assessment standards are consistently implemented across all partners, supported by coordinated approaches to curriculum design, teaching, assessment and feedback.

2.18 A characteristic feature of delivery in Youth and Community Work provision is the organisation and sequencing of different modes of learning within the programme structure. This includes the integration of placement or employment-based learning with academic study, supported by supervision, academic oversight, and student support. Degree-awarding bodies retain ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, ensuring alignment with institutional regulations and relevant external reference points.

2.19 Effective partnership delivery is supported by formal agreements that define roles and responsibilities, alongside clear arrangements for communication, monitoring, and enhancement. Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one, provide a reference point for degree-awarding bodies and their partners in designing and delivering provision that is coherent, comparable, and aligned with threshold academic standards.

Monitoring and review

2.20 Youth and Community Work programmes are subject to ongoing monitoring, evaluation and review in line with institutional quality assurance processes and, where applicable, the requirements of professional endorsement bodies. Degree-awarding bodies and their partners, including practitioners, young people and communities, draw on student feedback, evidence of student achievement and external reference points such as this Statement to support continuous enhancement and ensure programmes remain relevant to the evolving needs of the sector.

2.21 External scrutiny is a key element of quality assurance in UK higher education. Through the external examining system and periodic review processes, degree-awarding bodies receive independent evaluation of academic standards, curriculum relevance, assessment practices and student achievement, helping to ensure consistency across the sector. External Examiners are typically asked to comment on the design, principles and purposes of assessment, the appropriateness of assessment methods, and the range of modules offered to students. They also consider cohort outcomes and compare these with similar provision at other UK higher education providers, supporting both academic comparability and the maintenance of relevant professional and occupational standards. External Examiners produce annual reports that provide feedback and recommendations for enhancement, including changes to modules, assessments and programme delivery where appropriate. Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one, play an important role in supporting external scrutiny by providing a reference point against which External Examiners and review panels can evaluate whether threshold standards are being met within a specific subject area.

2.22 Programmes with professional and vocational outcomes may also require external evaluation and accreditation from professional and regulatory bodies. These are usually done through a combination of site visits and desk-based reviews.

3. Content Structure and Delivery

3.1 This section explains the features that characterise programmes in Youth and Community Work. It considers how curriculum content, teaching and learning approaches, and assessment practices support students' academic, professional and personal development within the values, traditions and practices of youth and community work.

Content

3.2 Youth and Community Work is an applied, values-led subject that combines practice, critical reflection, dialogue and academic rigour. Teaching and learning are informed by praxis, bringing theory, action and critical reflection together to support ethical, socially just and critically informed practice. Drawing on traditions of informal education, critical pedagogy and community development, alongside anti-oppressive, anti-racist, feminist and diversifying perspectives, programmes develop knowledge, critical understanding, professional practice and relational skills for working with young people, adults and communities in diverse contexts.

3.3 Programme content is shaped around informal and non-formal education; learning and development across the life course; community participation and empowerment; social justice, equality and inclusion; and the organisational, policy and professional contexts of practice. Students engage with ethical and contested dimensions of youth and community work, exploring the relationship between personal experience, professional identity and social change, while examining the historical, contemporary and emerging influences that shape policy and practice.

3.4 Subject knowledge and understanding in youth and community work draws on an established body of knowledge, theory and research concerning practice in community settings and informal educational contexts. As an applied subject, this knowledge is developed through the integration of theory, research, critical reflection and practice and continues to evolve in response to changing professional, social and policy contexts.

3.5 Subject knowledge and understanding are organised around six interconnected aspects:

- critically reflective, ethical and relational practice
- community, engagement and participation
- safety and wellbeing
- informal education and pedagogical practice
- evidence informed practice
- leadership, team building and organisational context.

Critically reflective, ethical and relational practice

3.6 Critically reflective practice underpins all aspects of youth and community work and is grounded in individual, collective and organisational learning. It involves reflexivity for, in and on practice.

3.7 Subject knowledge and understanding emphasise awareness of positionality and the conscious use of self. Students develop the ability to work ethically within diverse organisational, cultural and social contexts, drawing on theory and research to inform decision-making. Through supervision, dialogue and collaborative learning, they learn to navigate complexity, uncertainty and change while sustaining a commitment to lifelong learning, evidence-informed practice, practitioner self-care and wellbeing.

3.8 Students explore and critically reflect on the development of professional identity, including the relationship between personal and professional values, professional responsibilities, occupational standards and ethical practice.

3.9 Students investigate models of youth and community work in UK and international contexts, educational approaches across different life stages, and a variety of methods for working with young people, adults and communities.

Community engagement and collective action

3.10 Programmes enable students to critically explore the meanings, contexts and practices of community and community-based work across the life course.

3.11 Students examine how identities, relationships and participation are shaped by social, cultural, political, economic, technological and environmental factors, and consider the contribution of community-based practice alongside formal education, statutory services and clinical provision. Students also explore the role of collaboration, advocacy and collective action in shaping practice responses.

3.12 Programmes foster critical perspectives on participation, empowerment, democratic engagement, social justice and inequality, encouraging students to examine how power, discrimination and marginalisation operate within communities and institutions, as well as examining the relationship between education, development and social change.

Safety and wellbeing

3.13 Students develop understanding of health, safety and safeguarding, legal responsibilities, interprofessional working, and approaches that support mental and emotional wellbeing, and critically examine the ethical and professional importance of maintaining appropriate boundaries when working with individuals, groups and communities.

Informal education and pedagogical practice

3.14 Students explore learning as a relational process across formal, non-formal and community contexts. Informal education is examined in relation to the ways practitioners locate their practice within relationships of power across different contexts.

3.15 Programmes explore the holistic nature of learning and development. They also debate the ethical use and impact of digital technologies within youth and community work.

3.16 Group work is a distinctive approach to personal, relational and social learning, using affirmative, asset-based approaches that recognise the different strengths, experiences and contexts of groups.

3.17 Students examine creative and participatory methodologies, including community-based forms of expression and evaluation.

Evidence informed practice

3.18 Programmes develop students' ability to critically engage with research, evaluation and evidence-informed practice, using inquiry to inform decision-making, improve practice and contribute to the development of youth and community work.

Leadership, team building and organisational context

3.19 Youth and Community Work programmes engage students with the organisational

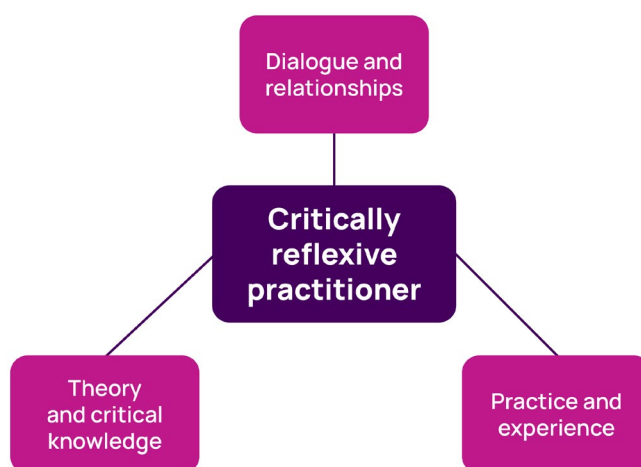
and professional contexts of youth and community work across the public, voluntary and third sectors.

3.20 Programmes explore leadership and management, examining interdisciplinary and collaborative practice, including different models of service delivery, the distinctive contribution of youth and community work and the knowledge, skills and professional judgement required for effective partnership working.

Teaching and Learning

3.21 Teaching and learning in Youth and Community Work programmes are grounded in informal and community-based education. They value the personal and professional experiences of students and draw on diverse and co-produced forms of theoretical, practice-based and lived knowledge. Teaching and learning are understood as an integrated process, illustrated in Figure 1, through which dialogue, critical reflection, practice and theory are brought into relationship in ways that embody the values of the subject and respond to changing social, digital, environmental and global contexts.

Figure 1: Teaching and learning in youth and community work



3.22 Teaching and learning approaches draw on formal, informal and non-formal education, creating opportunities for learning through critical reflection, dialogue, collaboration, enquiry and practice. Students engage critically with theory, policy, research and practice, exploring the contested nature of concepts, identities, relationships and interventions within youth and community work.

3.23 Reflecting the traditions of informal and community-based education, approaches to teaching and learning are typically participatory, collaborative and flexible. They recognise the emotional and relational dimensions of learning and draw on anti-oppressive, trauma-informed, culturally responsive and pluralising pedagogies, while engaging with developments such as digital participation, generative AI, sustainability, and wider social and environmental change.

3.24 Higher education providers work in partnership with community, voluntary and statutory organisations to offer diverse learning experiences. Through individual, group and practice-based learning, students engage with communities, practitioners and interdisciplinary professional contexts, developing digital literacy through critical, ethical and

reflective use of established and emerging technologies.

3.25 Practice learning is a central feature of Youth and Community Work courses, enabling students to integrate theory, critical reflection and professional practice in community settings. In professionally endorsed programmes, practice learning forms an assessed component.

3.26 Collectively, these teaching and learning approaches support the development of critically reflective practice, professional judgement, relational practice and ethical awareness, consistent with the values and traditions of youth and community work. Programmes may also engage with emerging perspectives, including new materialist and posthuman approaches, that attend to relationality, embodiment, affect, rhizomatic thinking, diffraction and the production of knowledge in practice.

Assessment

3.27 Assessment on Youth and Community Work programmes reflects the knowledge, practices, values and capabilities associated with the subject and supports both academic development and professional formation. Through formative and summative assessment, students can demonstrate achievement across academic and practice contexts, develop critically reflective practice and professional judgement, and, where relevant, meet the requirements of professional endorsement.

3.28 Assessment is varied, inclusive and aligned with the relational, critical and practice-based nature of the subject. Assessment is designed to promote accessibility, inclusion, academic integrity and authentic engagement with practice and community contexts, while recognising the potential, ethical implications and responsible use of digital technologies and generative artificial intelligence.

3.29 Assessment supports students to integrate theory, research and practice; engage analytically with policy, evidence and lived experience; and develop critically reflective and ethically informed professional judgement

3.30 Assessment methods are varied and may include, but are not limited to, the following.

Essays, reports and research projects	Support critical engagement with theory, policy, research and practice
Reflective journals and portfolios	Encourage reflexivity, ethical awareness and the integration of theory and practice
Presentations, professional conversations and verbal and/or non-verbal assessments	Develop communication, dialogue and professional judgement
Practice-based assessment	Enables students to demonstrate learning through professional and community practice contexts
Simulations and project-based work	Support authentic engagement with practice situations, including community development, needs assessment and programme design
Group projects and peer learning	Reflect the collaborative, participatory and relational traditions of youth and community work
Digital and multi-media assessment	Support critical and ethical engagement with digital communication, participation and creative practice

3.31 Practice learning is a central feature of Youth and Community Work programmes, particularly those leading to professional endorsement. Practice supervisors and mentors support students' professional development and progression by fostering critically reflective practice and enabling students to theorise their practice.

3.32 Practice learning is supported through partnership between higher education providers, practice supervisors, employers and students. Clear agreements define responsibilities for learning, supervision, support and assessment. Where supervisors and mentors contribute to assessment, higher education providers maintain appropriate arrangements to ensure consistency across practice settings. Practice supervisors for professionally endorsed courses are appropriately qualified, experienced and supported.

3.33 Practice-based assessment is informed by relevant professional and occupational standards for youth work and community development. It supports the integration of theory, research, reflection and professional practice through authentic assessment that reflects the realities of youth and community work while maintaining academic standards. Students engage critically with professional relationships, community contexts, ethical dilemmas, organisational environments and research-informed practice

3.34 Practice-based assessment methods may include the following.

Reflective portfolios	Support the integration of practice evidence, critical reflection and professional development
Professional conversations	Facilitate critical dialogue, reflexivity and the exploration of professional judgement
Critical incident analysis	Encourage reflection on practice situations, ethical issues and decision-making
Problem based assignments	Enable the application of subject knowledge to complex practice contexts
Collaborative projects	Reflect inter-agency, partnership and community-based approaches to practice
Research led inquiry	Supports engagement with evaluation, community needs analysis and practice-based research

3.35 At higher levels of study, assessment may place greater emphasis on students' development as practitioner-researchers through independent research, evaluation and critical engagement with lived experience, policy, theory and practice.

3.36 Academic integrity is embedded within assessment design and aligned with the ethical and professional values of youth and community work. Assessment approaches may include authentic and scaffolded assessment, opportunities for critical reflection, professional dialogue, and approaches for students to engage ethically and responsibly with digital technologies and generative artificial intelligence.

3.37 Together, these areas of study support the development of the six graduate attributes described in Section 4: ethical and relational practice; community engagement and participation; pedagogical practice; safeguarding and wellbeing; organisational leadership and contribution; and evidence-informed professional practice.

4. Benchmark Standards

Introduction

4.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the minimum threshold (and, where appropriate, typical and excellent) standards for the award of an honours degree in Youth and Community Work. Achievement of these standards demonstrates the range of knowledge, understanding and skills expected of graduates in Youth and Community Work.

4.2 Most students will exceed the minimum threshold standards. Higher education providers determine the evidence required to demonstrate achievement and should refer to [Annex D in The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#). This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours - 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd. Minimum threshold standards do not define universal competence standards (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) for the discipline. Where providers develop competence standards as part of a programme specification, these may be informed by this Statement and relevant PSRB requirements, alongside the most recent guidance from [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#).

4.3 The benchmark standards set out in this section articulate the expected academic capabilities of Youth and Community Work students at the following levels of achievement.

- Threshold graduate (FHEQ Level 6/SCQF Level 10)
- Typical graduate (Level 6/SCQF Level 10)
- Excellent graduate (Level 6/SCQF Level 10)
- Postgraduate (Level 7/SCQF Level 11)

4.4 The benchmark standards described at paragraphs 4.16-4.36 recognise Youth and Community Work as a research-informed, values-led and critically reflexive field, grounded in relational, educational and community-based traditions, reflecting shared foundations across UK and Ireland. The benchmark standards are organised around a six-domain framework – ethical and relational practice; community engagement and participation; pedagogical practice; safeguarding and wellbeing; organisational leadership and contribution; and evidence-informed professional practice – set out below.

4.5 While professional standards vary in structure and terminology across nations, they share common values, practices and competencies. The six graduate attributes reflect these shared foundations and provide an integrated professional framework through which knowledge, understanding and skills are developed, demonstrated and assessed.

Critically reflective ethical and relational graduates

4.6 Graduates are ethically literate, values-driven practitioners who work with integrity, accountability and professional confidence. They practise youth and community work as a rights-based, anti-oppressive and socially just tradition, exercising ethical judgement in complex and changing contexts.

4.7 Graduates build purposeful and professional relationships with young people and communities, recognising and challenging the impact of power, inequality and intersectionality, actively challenging discrimination, exclusion and unethical practice. They remain responsive to social policy and technological change, drawing on professional guidance, emerging knowledge and ethical debates to inform inclusive and reflective practice.

Community engagement and collective action

4.8 Graduates demonstrate a critical understanding of the cultural, social, economic and political contexts shaping young people, adults and communities. They analyse structural inequalities, and community dynamics, situating individual and collective experiences within wider systems of power, policy and social change. Through participation, co-production and democratic engagement, graduates work collaboratively to strengthen the youth and community voice and collective agency. They respond critically to emerging challenges and opportunities, including the impact of inequality, digital participation and sustainability, supporting inclusive and innovative approaches to community development and social change.

Skilled informal educators and pedagogical designers

4.9 Graduates are critically reflective youth and community work educators who design, facilitate and evaluate participatory learning in informal and community-based settings. Drawing on theories of human development, social pedagogy and critical education, alongside relational and more-than-human perspectives, they create learning environments that support personal growth, critical consciousness and collective action. Graduates demonstrate creativity and adaptability in their educational practice, responding to changing learner needs and social, digital and environmental contexts. Through reflective and evidence-informed practice, they continue to develop and adapt their approaches to learning and community engagement.

Safety and wellbeing focused practitioners

4.10 Graduates integrate safeguarding, risk management, digital literacy and wellbeing into ethical and responsive practice.

4.11 Graduates apply safeguarding principles confidently working across organisational and multi-agency contexts while balancing empowerment, care and risk. Graduates engage critically with digital and hybrid environments, promoting safe, inclusive and ethical participation. They draw on appropriate evidence-informed approaches to wellbeing, responding to changing needs, research and social conditions. They also maintain and navigate professional boundaries and prioritise their own physical, emotional and digital safety.

Critically reflective leaders and organisational contributors

4.12 Graduates contribute ethically, effectively and confidently to organisational life, demonstrating leadership, supervision and management capabilities within youth and community work settings. They work responsibly with teams, volunteers and partners, and engage constructively with governance, quality assurance, funding, outcomes and multi-agency practice. Graduates understand the organisational requirements for sustaining ethical and effective provision and contribute to organisational learning and development. They are adaptable and strategic leaders, responsive to changing professional, policy and funding contexts.

Evidence informed professionals with strong professional identity

4.13 Graduates are research literate, critically reflective and reflexive practitioners who use inquiry, evaluation and evidence to inform practice. They engage critically with research, policy professional debates, drawing on new knowledge and methods to support effective practice. Through critical awareness of self in relation to others and continuous professional development, graduates sustain an ethically grounded professional identity and demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning and the ongoing development of youth and community

work practice.

4.14 The benchmark standards articulated across paragraphs 4.16 to 4.36 describe the academic, ethical and professional expectations of Youth and Community Work graduates. They reflect contemporary understandings of youth and community work as an evidence-informed, values-led, critically reflexive and pedagogically grounded practice. The graduate attributes described above apply at differing levels of complexity and autonomy at Levels 6 and 7

4.15 In addition to demonstrating the academic standards at undergraduate or postgraduate level, professionally qualified students will demonstrate autonomous, accountable and research-informed professional practice, aligned with and validated against national professional endorsement standards.

Threshold standards (FHEQ Level 6/SCQF Level 10)

4.16 At threshold level, equivalent to a third-class honours degree, students demonstrate reliable and ethically grounded practice, an appropriate understanding of youth and community work, and awareness of the limits of their competence. They meet the minimum expectations of honours level study and are prepared for professional practice with supervision and further development.

Subject knowledge – threshold

4.17 Graduates demonstrate essential knowledge of:

- ethical, rights-based and anti-oppressive foundations of youth and community work, including professional values, boundaries and responsibilities
- social, cultural, technological and political contexts shaping young people's and community's lives, participatory involvement using informal and community-based education, human development and critical social pedagogy
- safeguarding, risk management, and wellbeing in youth and community work contexts
- organisational practice, partnership working, research, evaluation and professional development.

Subject understanding – threshold

4.18 Graduates demonstrate a core understanding of:

- how ethics, values, power and inequality shape relationships, decision making and professional responsibility
- the relational, educational and developmental practice of youth and community work within wider social, technological and organisational settings
- the interrelationship between learning, participation, wellbeing and safeguarding practice
- the importance of critical reflection, evidence and adaptability in responding to changing contexts.

Subject skills – threshold

4.19 Graduates demonstrate the fundamental skills to:

- apply ethical judgement, maintain professional boundaries and build inclusive relationships in familiar practice settings

- support participation, youth and community advocacy, voice and informal learning using structured and guided approaches
- identify safeguarding issues, manage risk appropriately and engage ethically including in digital contexts
- contribute to teams and organisations, using research and evaluation to inform practice
- critically reflect on practice and learning and take responsibility for ongoing professional development.

Generic skills – threshold

4.20 Graduates demonstrate the fundamental skills of:

- identifying practice-related issues, recognising gaps in knowledge, and locating and using relevant information
- analysing theory, policy and data, using digital tools, to support reasoned, evidence-based conclusions
- communicating effectively and collaborating constructively with teams and group activities
- reflecting critically on learning and feedback, recognising ethical and wellbeing considerations, and demonstrating emerging intellectual independence and professional responsibility.

Typical standards (FHEQ Level 6/SCQF Level 10)

4.21 In addition to meeting all threshold expectations, a graduate achieving typical standards, equivalent to a second-class honours degree, demonstrates confident, coherent and research-informed practice, applying knowledge and skills with increasing autonomy across academic and professional contexts.

Subject knowledge – typical

4.22 Graduates demonstrate greater breadth and accuracy of knowledge, covering:

- youth and community work ethics, pedagogy, safeguarding and community contexts
- relevant theory, policy and practice guidance, recognising the inter-relationships between them
- contemporary issues and debates affecting youth and community work.

Subject understanding – typical

4.23 Graduates demonstrate advanced understanding that:

- critically examines how theory informs practice
- explores the influences of power and inequality and their complexity in practice
- recognises the impact of organisational, policy and multi-agency environments on practice.

Subject skills – typical

4.24 Graduates demonstrate advanced skills to:

- apply ethical and professional judgement more consistently across a range of contexts
- facilitate participation and informal learning with confidence and responsiveness

- use critical reflection, feedback and evidence to evaluate, adapt and improve practice.

Generic skills – typical

4.25 Graduates demonstrate advanced skills to:

- undertake inquiry and research with increasing independence
- use evidence coherently to inform analysis and decision making
- communicate effectively with difference audiences
- demonstrate self-awareness through critical reflection on wellbeing, ethics and professional development.

Excellent standards (FHEQ Level 6/SCQF Level 10)

4.26 In addition to meeting threshold and typical graduate standards, a graduate achieving excellent standards, equivalent to a 1st class honours degree, demonstrates sustained critical engagement, originality and analytical independence, representing achievement at the upper range of honour level performance.

Subject knowledge – excellent

4.27 Graduates demonstrate integrated knowledge that:

- engages critically with complex and contested theory
- synthesises theory, policy, research and practice traditions in a critical and sustained way
- demonstrates awareness of emerging issues, innovations and future challenges in youth and community work.

Subject understanding – excellent

4.28 Graduates demonstrate excellent understanding that:

- critically synthesises diverse perspectives and recognises limitations of knowledge
- demonstrates nuanced understanding of intersectionality, power and social justice
- recognises practice as dynamic, shaped by changing social, technological and policy contexts.

Subject skills – excellent

4.29 Graduates demonstrate excellent skills which require:

- exercising sound professional judgement in unfamiliar or ambiguous situations
- designing, facilitating and evaluating learning and participation processes with creativity and purpose
- using research and evaluation to inform improvement and justify practice.

Generic skills – excellent

4.30 Graduates should be able to:

- demonstrate intellectual independence, through self-directed inquiry and original analysis
- construct persuasive, evidence-informed arguments and communicate them

- effectively
- work collaboratively and contribute positively to collective outcomes
- reflect critically on identity, values, well-being, and professional development.

Postgraduate standards (FHEQ Level 7/SCQF Level 11)

4.31 FHEQ Level 7/SCQF Level 11 graduates demonstrate advanced, critically informed and integrative knowledge, understanding and skills, enabling autonomous, ethically accountable and research-informed practice in complex and evolving contexts. They exercise critical inquiry, synthesis and reflective judgement, and develop leadership that supports innovation and influences practice, policy and knowledge development within youth and community work.

Subject knowledge – Level 7/11

4.32 Graduates demonstrate systematic and critical knowledge of:

- ethical, rights-based and anti-oppressive theories, including debates on power, intersectionality, professional identity and ethical decision-making
- community engagement, participation, co-production and democratic practice within complex social, political, economic, technological and environmental contexts
- informal, experiential and critical pedagogies in education, including curriculum design, facilitation and evaluation in diverse and changing learning environments
- safeguarding, risk and wellbeing, digital ethics and multi-agency practice
- organisational theory, leadership, governance, quality assurance, partnership working, and systems approaches
- research methodologies, evaluation and evidence-informed practice.

Subject understanding – Level 7/11

4.33 Graduates demonstrate critical understanding of:

- the interaction between values, ethics, power, policy and practice
- youth and community work as a complex, contested and emergent field of practice
- the interaction between learning, participation, wellbeing, safeguarding and digital practice
- the limits of existing knowledge and practice frameworks, and the need for critical engagement with emerging ideas, evidence and alternative perspectives
- their own positionality, power and responsibility as practitioners and leaders.

Subject skills – Level 7/11

4.34 Graduates demonstrate advanced professional and intellectual skills enabling them to:

- exercise professional autonomy and ethical judgement in complex and uncertain contexts
- design, lead, evaluate and adapt participatory and educational interventions that support critical consciousness, wellbeing and collective action
- engage critically and creatively with online, hybrid and emerging practice environments
- lead strategically within organisations, partnerships and multi-agency contexts
- design and conduct research, inquiry or evaluation projects, critically analysing data to generate new insights, improve practice and demonstrate impact

- communicate and justify evidence-informed decisions to diverse audiences
- demonstrate reflexive, future-focused practice and leadership.

Generic skills – Level 7/11

4.35 Graduates of Level 7/11 youth and community work programmes will be able to:

- critically identify and frame complex issues affecting young people, communities and professional practice
- analyse, synthesise and apply diverse forms of evidence to inform ethical judgement, programme design and decision-making in complex and changing practice contexts
- communicate with academic, professional and community audiences, and collaborate across disciplines and sectors
- engage in critical reflection and continuous professional development, demonstrating ethical awareness and responsibility for ongoing learning.

5. List of references and further resources

All-Ireland Endorsement Body (AIEB) - [Find out about AIEB Endorsement for programmes](#)

Community, Learning and Development Standards Council for Scotland - [Professional Approval – CLD Standards Council for Scotland](#)

Education Training Standards Cymru/Wales - [JNC Professional Youth Worker - ETS Cymru](#)
[Endorsement and Quality Standards Board for Community Development Learning \(ESB\)](#)
[Equality Act 2010](#)

Equality Commission Northern Ireland – [Equality laws in Northern Ireland](#)

National Youth Agency (NYA) - [For providers - National Youth Agency](#)

[North/South Education and Training Standards \(NSETS\) - National Youth Council of Ireland](#)

QAA [Advice and Resources on Generative Artificial Intelligence](#)

QAA and Advance HE - [Education for Sustainable Development Guidance](#)

QAA - [Employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship education](#)

QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies - [Annex D in The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#)

QAA [Unpacking your Hidden Curriculum: Guide for educators](#)

[United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs)

University of Bristol v Dr Robert Abrahart - [Advice note for the higher education sector from the legal case of University of Bristol vs Abrahart | EHRC](#)

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