



# **Subject Benchmark Statement**

## **Youth and Community Work**

November 2019

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## How can I use this document?

This is the Subject Benchmark Statement for Youth and Community Work. It defines the academic standards that can be expected of a graduate, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies, and describes the nature of the subject.

The [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (Quality Code) sets out the Expectations and Core Practices that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet. Providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland must also meet the Common Practices in the Quality Code.

The Quality Assurance Agency for UK Higher Education (QAA) has also published a set of [Advice and Guidance](#), divided into 12 themes, and a number of other resources that support the mandatory part of the Quality Code. Subject Benchmark Statements sit alongside these resources to help providers develop courses and refine curricula but are not part of the regulated requirements for higher education providers in the UK.

This statement is intended to support you if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses of study in youth and community work or related subjects
- a prospective student thinking about studying this subject, or a current student of the subject, to find out what may be involved
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of a graduate in this subject.

Subject Benchmark Statements provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the course but are not intended to represent a national curriculum in a subject or to prescribe set approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Instead, they allow for flexibility and innovation in course design within a framework agreed by the subject community.

It may be helpful to refer to relevant Advice and Guidance when using this Statement.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in QAA's [Glossary](#).

## About the Statement

This Subject Benchmark Statement refers to bachelor's degrees with honours in youth and community work.<sup>1</sup>

It has been produced by a group of subject specialists drawn from, and acting on behalf of, the subject community. The process is facilitated by QAA, as is the full consultation with the wider academic community and stakeholder groups each Statement goes through.

In order to ensure the continuing currency of Subject Benchmark Statements, QAA initiates regular reviews of their content, five years after first publication, and every seven years subsequently, or in response to significant changes in the discipline.

## Relationship to legislation

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

Higher education providers may need to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and industry or employer expectations.

Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Subject Benchmark Statement where appropriate. Individual higher education providers are responsible for how they use these resources.

## Summary of changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement (2017)

This version of the Statement forms its third edition, following initial publication of the Subject Benchmark Statement in 2009 and subsequent review and revision in 2017.

This latest version of the Statement is the consequence of the revision to the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) which was published in 2018. It has been revised to update references to the Quality Code and other minor changes within the sector. Changes have been made by QAA and confirmed by a member of the most recent review group.

There have been no revisions to the subject-specific content of the Statement.

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<sup>1</sup> Bachelor's degrees are at level 6 in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and level 10 in *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland*, as published in [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#)

# 1 Introduction

1.1 Youth and community work is a practice of informal and community education that involves the development of democratic and associational approaches which promote learning and development in the communities or individuals who choose to take part in the courses that youth and community workers facilitate and support. It is focused on work with adolescents and adults, with groups as well as individuals, and with personal development in the context of the development of wider social networks and collective engagement with issues of social justice.

1.2 Youth and community work as an academic subject area applied through professional practice is rooted in a range of overlapping traditions which have developed in the different contexts of local, regional and devolved national governments in the UK. The term 'youth and community work' encompasses the different traditions in the four UK nations. These traditions have not developed in isolation from one another and are not homogeneous in themselves. There is a history and current practice of mutual engagement, influence and contestation within and between the countries.

1.3 This Statement is intended to support the academic community that designs and delivers courses of study leading to bachelor's degrees in youth and community work. It is deliberately broad in design in order to provide a framework able to reflect the diversity and changing nature of practice and policy contexts within which this academic community operates. Relevant associated and emerging policy contexts and course areas include: youth work (in Northern Ireland); community education and community learning and development (in Scotland); children and young people's services (in England); youth work strategy and youth support services (in Wales); and voluntary and community services, community development, community engagement and community cohesion across the UK. The direction of policy in these areas may change as a result of political imperatives, and other areas of policy may also indirectly influence youth and community work.

1.4 This Statement describes the nature of degree courses in youth and community work and the standards expected of graduates. Higher education qualifications may be professionally validated or endorsed by the relevant body depending on jurisdiction and subject area. In Scotland, the three-year Ordinary degree forms the basis of professional qualification, although four-year courses are also offered. In the other nations, the three-year honours degree is the professional qualification. Some courses may offer awards through routes which do not offer professional recognition, and courses may have alternative awards for students who do not meet professional requirements but have otherwise achieved the standard required for the academic award. Degree-awarding bodies indicate clearly on their award certificates the difference between qualifications awarded with or without professional recognition; in Northern Ireland and Wales, students also receive a separate certificate conferring professional endorsement. Degree courses in working with young people, youth studies 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.

1.5 In Scotland, the term community learning and development (CLD) is used to encompass community-based adult learning, youth work and community capacity building, recognising the close links between them and the strengths that each brings to the others. The Standards Council for Community Learning and Development for Scotland approves professional courses of training in community learning and development.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [www.cldstandardscouncil.org.uk](http://www.cldstandardscouncil.org.uk)

1.6 In Wales, youth work courses are professionally endorsed by Education and Training Standards (ETS) Wales, an organisation part-funded by the Welsh Government.<sup>3</sup> Wider policy in Wales emphasises cooperation between public sector bodies and the importance of person-centred services.<sup>4</sup>

1.7 In Northern Ireland, qualifications are professionally endorsed by the North South Education and Training Standards Committee.<sup>5</sup> There is a strong commitment to youth work, rather than a broader, more generic definition of professional practice, and also to community development, degrees in which are additionally endorsed by the All Ireland Endorsement Board for Community Development Work.<sup>6</sup>

1.8 In England, the Education and Training Standards Committee of the National Youth Agency (NYA) professionally validates degree courses in youth work and youth and community work.<sup>7</sup> Community development courses are endorsed by the Endorsement and Quality Standards Board for Community Development Learning (ESB).<sup>8</sup>

1.9 The Joint Education and Training Standards Forum (Joint ETS) brings together a number of these endorsement bodies to share information, discuss issues relating to professional endorsement and to agree protocols for working practices. Joint ETS members are ETS England (NYA), North South ETS (all Ireland), ETS Wales, and the Standards Council for Community Learning and Development for Scotland. The Joint ETS Mutual Recognition Protocol enables mutual recognition of professional qualifications across the jurisdictions. As the sector specialist body for youth and community work, the Joint ETS is responsible for the two sets of National Occupational Standards, for youth work and for community development, which are shared across the UK.

1.10 For youth work, the National Occupational Standards (2012) define the purpose of youth work as:<sup>9</sup>

Enabl[ing] 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.

The National Occupational Standards set out values under the following headings:

- participation and active involvement
- equity, diversity and inclusion
- partnership with young people and others
- personal, social and political development.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.etswales.org.uk](http://www.etswales.org.uk)

<sup>4</sup> Further information available at The Listening Organisation: Ensuring care is person-centred in NHS Wales <http://www.1000livesplus.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/1011/1000%20Lives%20Plus%20-%20%27The%20Listening%20Organisation%27%20white%20paper%20WEB.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [www.ycni.org/NSETS/NSETS.html](http://www.ycni.org/NSETS/NSETS.html)

<sup>6</sup> [www.communityworkendorsement.com](http://www.communityworkendorsement.com)

<sup>7</sup> <https://nya.org.uk>

<sup>8</sup> [www.esbendorsement.org.uk](http://www.esbendorsement.org.uk)

<sup>9</sup> National Occupational Standards for Youth Work, available at:

[www.nya.org.uk/resource/national-occupational-standards](http://www.nya.org.uk/resource/national-occupational-standards)

The National Occupational Standards may also be found on the website of the other UK endorsement bodies.

1.11 In relation to community development work, the National Occupational Standards (2015) use the following definition:<sup>10</sup>

Community development enables people to work collectively to bring about positive social change. This long-term process starts from people's own experience and enables communities to work together to:

- identify their own needs and actions
- take collective action using their strengths and resources
- develop their confidence, skills and knowledge
- challenge unequal power relationships
- promote social justice, equality and inclusion

in order to improve the quality of their own lives, the communities in which they live and societies of which they are a part.

1.12 The values that underpin the community development work standards are:

- social justice and equality
- anti-discrimination
- community empowerment
- collective action
- working and learning together.

1.13 Although youth and community work is a diverse field with a range of definitions, participation, inclusion, empowerment, partnership and learning are shared values and fundamental principles of practice. UK degree courses in this area also relate to European qualifications in non-formal education, social pedagogy and animation which further strengthens the perspective taken in this Statement that the practices supported by degree-level study in this subject are fundamentally practices of learning and education.

1.14 Youth and community work is a distinctive body of professional practice that historically overlaps with the fields of social work and education, and cross-professional and crossdisciplinary working remains an important feature. Different degree titles reflect different emphases within the subject. Commonly found titles include: youth and community work; community and youth work; community education; community and youth studies; community learning and development; informal education; community youth work and community development; and youth work and youth studies. Joint awards are also possible: examples include youth work and sports science; youth work and applied theology; and childhood and youth studies. Further examples of degree titles are given in Appendix 1.

1.15 Graduates progress to a range of careers in areas of work with young people; community development and education; capacity building; community and youth engagement and inclusion; community cohesion; health and housing; or to postgraduate study. In whatever career they engage, they bring a professional practice grounded in the theory and practice of community-based informal education.

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<sup>10</sup> National Occupational Standards for Community Development, available at: [www.fcdl.org.uk/learning-qualifications/community-development-national-occupational-standards](http://www.fcdl.org.uk/learning-qualifications/community-development-national-occupational-standards)

## 2 Defining principles

2.1 As an academic subject applied through professional practice, youth and community work is distinguished by its focus on practice based on the identification of, and response to, needs and aspirations through dialogue and mutual aid. It is a subject whose development occurs in a dialogue between higher education providers, practitioners of informal education and professional bodies. Subject development also occurs in direct dialogue with young people and community members who have engaged with this learning process. Work-based learning is a central element of learning in this subject. Course development characteristically occurs as a result of dialogue with a range of stakeholders working in partnership with academic staff. Stakeholders may include practitioners, policy makers and other professionals working with young people and communities. The subject area draws on a range of academic literatures, including youth work, adult education, informal education, popular education, informal support, community development and community capacity building.

2.2 Debates prevalent in this subject signal a coherent but contested field of teaching and learning in higher education. Some of these debates include:

- the extent to which community development provides a model for all practice, against the view that youth work requires a specific pedagogy and definition, which makes central the position and needs of young people
- whether the definition of youth work as informal, social and political education is sufficient, or neglects the close historical connection between youth work and practices of information, support and guidance
- whether ideological modifiers of the terms 'youth work' or 'informal education' (such as Catholic; socialist; Islamic; feminist; Quaker; Jewish) enhance or detract from the understanding of the core practices
- whether theorised practice and the academic subject is to be developed from theory or public policy (a top-down approach) or from practice or community-based initiatives (a bottom-up approach)
- the roles of the state, the market and the third sector in relation to the field of practice
- whether professionalism is an essential part of practice or whether it is most characteristically a form of activism or volunteering
- whether some (participative and inclusive) research methods are more congruent with this field of practice than others.

2.3 There is a substantial existing literature which supports the teaching of degree courses in this area, including theorisations and empirical studies of social education, political education, informal education, popular education, youth development, global youth work, conflict, culturally sensitive work, and faith-based youth work. In addition, broader literatures in education and the social sciences also engage with themes of development and communities.

2.4 Youth and community work as an academic subject area draws on a range of disciplines but with its key foundations as an applied subject in education and social science. Courses of study encourage students to engage with fundamental questions about the meanings of education, community and development. Students question their own experience and conduct reasoned argument in the context of wider debates and of social scientific research. Courses draw on a range of intellectual resources and disciplines to familiarise students with the characteristic debates and terms of engagement of the subject. Other subjects which may inform youth and community work include history; cultural studies; philosophy; theology; sociology; social policy; law; politics and economics; psychology;



health and social welfare; and conflict transformation.

2.5 The practice of community-based informal education, including youth work, community education and development, is a value-rich activity. The development of trusting interpersonal relationships, which is central to professional practice, requires a high degree of autonomy, responsibility and ethical conduct. The welfare of individuals and groups requires the understanding both of the intrapersonal/intra-group dynamics and the environmental conditions in which that individual/group is placed. Professional practice often seeks to mediate 'citizenship aspirations' within a context of unequal power, with its dangers of marginalisation, exclusion and oppression. Collaborative learning, democratic participation, and association are therefore central practices. Youth and community work as an applied academic subject is characterised by its attention to values, principles, purposes and processes.

2.6 Youth and community work is an ethical activity which requires practitioners to recognise the dignity of the individual and the capacity of individuals and groups to shape their own lives within often highly constrained circumstances. Degree courses in this subject are characterised by their engagement with debates about the ethical dilemmas raised in professional practice. In doing so, they seek to engage students with relevant professional codes of practice.

2.7 To enable them to become an ethical practitioner, students learn to recognise the links between the interpersonal, the intrapersonal and the cultural and structural aspects of the power relationships in which people's lives are embedded. They understand the impact of injustice and inequality and of oppressive or limiting social relationships, and offer constructive challenges to social injustice in its personal, cultural, institutional and structural dimensions. They learn to support people in creating open, critical and safe spaces for learning and in maintaining control of their own agendas for learning and development, limited only by concern for their own and others' safety, well-being and rights. Students are enabled to create respectful alliances across socially constructed differences, divisions and inequality, and to work in partnership with young people and adult community groups in order to effect change.

2.8 Courses of study encourage students to develop inclusive and anti-oppressive practice in their own settings as well as in the wider social context of education. They equip students with the ability to deal with complex ethical issues through sound moral reasoning, including an understanding of how values are explored and expressed in informal contexts. They aim to draw on and extend current thinking and practice in relation to the development of knowledge and understanding, skills and abilities, and personal values and commitment.

2.9 Students develop confidence in their ability to explore complex professional dilemmas from an ethical basis. They have a clear understanding of the relationship between their own inherited and developing value system and professional codes of ethics, based on statements of rights and responsibilities, and commitments to social justice and equality. They recognise the contested terrain in which such moral reasoning occurs.

2.10 The educational principles underpinning practice can be characterised as follows:

- appreciative enquiry: the educational process starts from recognition of the strengths and potential of participants rather than from an appraisal of deficits and pathologies
- holistic: educational practice aims to engage body, mind, heart and spirit
- democratic and participatory: the curriculum of education is drawn from the real world and context of the group of participants, and is developed in discussion with them. Learning is active and experiential

- associative: the educational process values the small group as a resource for development and learning. It also values small group learning as an aspect of citizenship with many potential (and potentially conflicting) contributions to political democracy
- critical collaborative enquiry: the educational process draws on the strength of group collaboration to enable new questions to be posed and new understandings developed. It is an open-ended process of questioning received ideas and settled social contexts and norms
- voluntary/free: people are engaged in this practice on the basis of informed choice and consent. They take part because they want to and can leave without penalty; this principle underpins the democratic nature of the curriculum
- reflective: professionals and those involved as 'learners' or 'activists' are engaged in systematic reflection on their learning
- emancipatory: the education process is committed to personal, social and political empowerment/change.

2.11 Courses in this subject are therefore characterised by their democratic ethos, with regard to attention to student voice and participation and to the encouragement of collaborative enquiry and critical engagement with the wider social context of their education. Students in youth and community work learn to develop an educational practice that is compatible with these principles.

2.12 The purpose of youth and community work is to promote the education, development and flourishing of the people and communities with whom they work. However, providers of youth and community work may also embrace concerns with crime and disorder, problems of democratic deficit, complex issues of health and welfare such as teenage pregnancy or drug abuse, or child and young person safeguarding. Therefore, courses aid students to develop a strong sense of their own professional identity, enabling them to engage critically with a variety of policy contexts and with complex fields of accountability. In particular, courses in youth and community work equip students to:

- recognise the boundaries between personal and professional life
- recognise the need to be accountable to young people, their parents and guardians, colleagues, funders and the wider society, and that these accountabilities may be in conflict
- develop and maintain the required level of skills and competence to do the job
- promote and develop recognition and understanding of the principles and purposes of youth and community work in the workplace.

2.13 The process and context of undergraduate education in youth and community work is, as far as possible, congruent with the educational processes and contexts that practitioners are being trained to use in community settings, while recognising the formal and assessed nature of a bachelor's degree. In particular, the professional commitment to reflective practice, professional autonomy and responsibility means that courses leading to professional qualifications are characterised by a rigorous attention to the development of reflexive practitioners, who are able to develop practice out of theorisation and to theorise their practice, in a reflective practice cycle. The design of each course leading to a professional qualification offers a distinctive and clear approach to the practitioner's balanced development in all three aspects of the triangle of knowledge and understanding, skills and abilities, and values and commitment, which may be used as a basis for the development of portfolios of reflective practice.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Available at: <http://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/cpd/cpd-strategy>

### **3 Nature and extent of youth and community work**

3.1 As an applied subject, youth and community work involves learning about practice through engaging in practice and also learning through reflection, theorisation and related study.

3.2 Courses in this field therefore involve both direct work with, and study of, young people and adults, and the study of the organisational and policy contexts in which they operate. They involve an investigation of values in practice and in the context of multi-professional teams. They are characteristically concerned with features that are distinctive to this subject, such as voluntary engagement and association; negotiated, collaborative courses of work or study which develop empowerment and participation; community-based enquiry, learning and development; and democratic engagement of both clients and professionals.

3.3 Courses in this subject area are distinct from those in formal education and social care and social work in their focus on informal and negotiated approaches and work environments. They are distinct from childhood studies and playwork in their emphasis on the education and development of those over 11 years old. Courses in youth and community work are also distinct from courses which offer education and training for specialist, targeted services such as guidance and counselling.

3.4 In some contexts, and particularly in Scotland, community-based adult education and adult literacy form a key component of courses in this subject area.

3.5 Partnership and multidisciplinary working is a very important contemporary aspect of this field of practice. Students need to understand the specific knowledge, skills, practices and responsibilities associated with their role, and to develop confidence in that role in the context of their contribution to partnerships and multi-professional practice.

## 4 Subject knowledge and understanding

4.1 Subject knowledge and understanding in youth and community work builds on a long and well-established body of knowledge, theory and research concerning the nature of practice in this subject and the role of the educator in community settings and informal contexts.

4.2 Subject knowledge and understanding is conceptualised here with four aspects, all of which contribute to the debate about the role and professional identity of the practitioner. It is by engagement in each of these areas that professional identities are formed and appropriate subject knowledge is gained:

- working in and with communities
- working with young people; working with adults
- approaches to learning and development
- developing community-based organisations.

4.3 The development of knowledge, skills and values are interconnected across these aspects by the attention which is paid throughout courses of study in this subject to the development of critical and reflective practitioners who are able to act as leaders in their professional environment, bringing about change for individuals and communities.

### Reflective practice

4.4 All subject knowledge and understanding is grounded in the application of, and reflection on, practice-based, individual, mutual and organisational learning processes. Youth and community work involves critically reflective and reflexive practice: reflecting for, in and on practice; investigating the meanings associated with being a critical and ethical practitioner; developing awareness of positionality and conscious use of self in relation to others; exploring (often multiple) accountabilities; becoming aware of the range of methods and approaches to work with young people and communities; and consideration of the legal and ethical frameworks shaping practice.

4.5 Subject knowledge in youth and community work develops and changes over time, partially in response to the changing professional context and partially as a result of the development of the theoretical frameworks which underpin practice. Different courses may focus on different parts of the curriculum, reflecting the particular interests or expertise of those responsible for its delivery. Courses drawing on this Subject Benchmark Statement as a key reference point include some coverage of each of the four aspects, though the following outline is indicative and, as such, offered as a guide to those engaged in the design of courses.

### Working in and with communities

4.6 Investigation of the meaning and practice of community:

- i the community-based context for practice
- ii the scope of professional practice which is community-based and is outside of formal learning and national courses of assessment in schools and colleges (though linked to them) and outside clinical or statutory practice in health and social care (though linked to them)
- iii studies of public services such as the youth services, adult and community education centres, support and guidance services, and third sector organisations' theorisations of local society, civil society and of social capital

- iv the relationship of young people to communities, and of people in different stages of their lives to one another in communities
- v the history of the development of community-based practice as distinct from state or market-based practice.

#### 4.7 Communities, networks and coalitions:

- i partnership, power, empowerment and democratic learning
- ii the analysis of practices which challenge existing power relations such as those rooted in age-based discrimination, sexism, racism, sectarianism, and/or practices rooted in class privilege, which may lead to marginalisation
- iii social, as distinct from medical, models of social issues such as disability discrimination or sexuality-based oppression
- iv networking as a significant aspect of practice
- v the study of coalitions and broad-based organising
- vi conflict and community-based practices and the role of alliances
- vii collective action and social change, including enterprise and self-help strategies for addressing shared needs and aspirations, campaigning and the links to social movements
- viii debates about citizenship, democracy, social justice and social value which may underpin practice
- ix analysis of the impact of social policy discourses on the development of professional practice in youth and community work, including youth policy and comparative international and European social policy.

### **Working with young people: working with adults**

#### 4.8 Models and meanings of development through the life course:

- i the links between education and development
- ii holistic approaches: the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of resourcefulness and resilience
- iii critique of normative and deficit models of development.

#### 4.9 Engaging with young people and adults in communities in order to develop strategies for education and change:

- i investigations of models of work with young people and communities in the UK and globally, including those which may be controversial
- ii investigation of whether particular educational methods are more or less suitable for different stages or age groups
- iii models of practice, including outreach work and detached work, project-based work, cultural work and sport, and participatory practice
- iv evaluation of the impact of strategies and practices.

#### 4.10 Children's, young people's and adults' health, safety and well-being:

- i professional practice in relation to legal obligations and duties of care in safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, including the role of other professionals and agencies
- ii promoting good mental and emotional health, and recognising and responding to breakdown
- iii informal education and support
- iv the importance, and nature, of personal and professional boundaries, and the different boundary issues involved in work with young people and work with adults.

## **Approaches to learning and development and reflective practice**

### 4.11 Informal education, conversation, critical dialogue and experiential learning:

- i situated learning: local, global and metaphysical, formal and non-formal, including global learning, environmental learning and theological or faith-sensitive learning
- ii using characteristic methods of informal education, which require practitioners to locate their practice within a matrix of power dynamics across local, global, political and faith boundaries
- iii citizenship learning, collaborative and open enquiry, and political education
- iv exploration of culturally sensitive and culturally specific learning.

### 4.12 Developmental group work:

- i learning about personal development through group participation, social education and popular education
- ii debates about peer education
- iii volunteering and community activism as learning
- iv open groups and closed or targeted groups in practice
- v exploration of group work based on affirmative action, for example, women's groups and disabled young people's groups.

### 4.13 Creativity in learning:

- i the nature of creativity as a source of learning
- ii the links between informal education, adventure education, and play and arts-based education
- iii holistic approaches to learning, recognising the emotional and spiritual aspects of learning.

## **Developing community-based organisations**

### 4.14 Understanding organisations:

- i studies of the agencies and workplaces in which community and youth workers are employed
- ii the distinctive cultures of third sector organisations, including churches and faith communities, and cooperatives and social enterprises
- iii the role of community organisations in contributing to cohesion and integration, contestation and change
- iv strategies for anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice at organisational level
- v equality, diversity and interdependence in the workplace and beyond
- vi human rights-based equality duties and non-discrimination legislation.

### 4.15 Management and leadership in community-based projects:

- i the study of inter-professional and interdisciplinary working, including the leadership and management of teams and individuals
- ii financial planning, management and accountability, including models of social enterprise and social investment
- iii mentoring, supervision, staff development and training
- iv the role of part-time workers and volunteers
- v safety and support for youth and community work practitioners
- vi measuring and evaluating the impact of projects.

4.16 Interdisciplinary and collaborative working:

- i exploration of the nature of inter-professional and interdisciplinary approaches, including the possibility of trans-professional approaches
- ii current professional context of integrated and non-integrated services and approaches
- iii youth services in the context of integrated and non-integrated working
- iv youth work in a variety of agency and multiagency contexts
- v universal provision and targeted provision
- vi dedicated and distinct service provision
- vii specific skills in working with other professionals in multidisciplinary teams, for example from education, health and social care or housing organisations
- viii exploration of the links with other professions
- ix nature of accountability in multidisciplinary teams.

4.17 Youth and community work graduates have developed a sound understanding of the value-base of professional practice; are able to take professional responsibility and identify their own learning needs; display creativity; and work as critical, reflective and reflexive practitioners. They are equipped to read and critically evaluate research in the field of study; to undertake small-scale participatory research studies with young people and community groups; and to evaluate the impact of interventions on young people and communities.

4.18 Graduates who gain a professional qualification have their professionalism informed by their knowledge-base in the study of youth and community work; their practice-based knowledge of informal education and community-based learning, and their practice-based knowledge of community-based organisations and management.

## 5 Subject-specific and generic skills

5.1 Subject-specific and generic skills for youth and community work are constructed on a strong base of knowledge of theory and practice.

### Subject-specific skills

5.2 Graduates are able to demonstrate skills in the following areas.

5.3 Understanding, developing and managing their professional role:

- i an understanding of, and the capacity to apply and integrate, theoretical frameworks and key concepts relevant to practice in youth and community work
- ii an informed and critical understanding of their professional role as educators in relation to other professional interventions in the lives of young people and communities
- iii substantial autonomy in using both conventional and innovative, original and creative methods in the planning, delivery and evaluation of impact of educational courses across a range of practice settings
- iv systematic analysis of relevant concepts, theories and issues of policy, and their use in informing evidence-based practice
- v the ability to maintain professional boundaries in voluntary relationships and in informal contexts, including the appropriate use of information technology and social media
- vi the ability to make informed judgements on complex ethical and professional issues in a disputed field and to act appropriately in the light of relevant professional and ethical codes of practice
- vii the ability to operate as a reflective practitioner, demonstrating appropriate professional actions and behaviours
- viii critical reflection upon, and commitment to, their continuing personal and professional development and evolving their own practice.

5.4 Fostering democratic and inclusive practice:

- i the ability to build trusting relationships as a foundation for learning
- ii the ability to foster participation and support for young people and adults in playing an active role in their communities, increasing their voice and influence in contexts and on issues that affect them
- iii the ability to create inclusive environments and to identify and counter oppressive attitudes, behaviours and situations, at both interpersonal and systemic levels
- iv the capacity to build practice on an understanding of issues of power, empowerment and the complexity of voluntary relationships
- v the capacity to promote, publicise and share good practice.

5.5 Maintaining and developing organisations which support practice:

- i the ability to lead and promote the development of productive and sustainable responses and structures, including the support and management of community-based and young people's organisations
- ii skill in safeguarding the health and welfare of individuals and communities through the understanding and implementation of legal and regulatory frameworks
- iii the capacity to lead and manage others in the workplace (volunteers, staff, accountability, equality and diversity in the workplace)
- iv the capacity to provide for support, safety and well-being of staff
- v context-appropriate leadership of individuals and groups



- vi financial and project management skills (planning, monitoring, evaluation, applications for funding, management of resources, policy development, understanding quality framework models).
- 5.6 Facilitating personal and collective learning development and capacity building:
- i the capacity to engage with young people and community groups, build relationships and facilitate young people and adults' individual and collective learning and development
  - ii the ability to analyse policies and practices in the light of a range of theoretical perspectives, from the standpoint of participants in courses, and to devise practice responses with them
  - iii the ability to support and develop a range of literacies, including emotional literacy
  - iv the ability to design and implement initiatives, projects and courses using appropriate professional frameworks and methods
  - v the ability to select, plan and evaluate appropriate approaches from a range of intervention methods and techniques
  - vi skill in evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of their work and the work of community-based projects
  - vii a commitment to the learning cycle, both as an individual and as part of an organisation.

5.7 Networking and multi-agency working:

- i Building relationships and leading strategic partnerships with other professionals, in particular in education and in health and social care
- ii building and leading partnerships across community groups and young people's projects
- iii including young people and community members in partnerships
- iv involving, consulting with, and acknowledging accountability to stakeholders
- v creating effective alliances with other organisations, respecting alternative professional approaches while maintaining the values of youth and community work
- vi creating networks and alliances among and across community groups and young people's projects
- vii developing inclusive networks which promote inclusion, celebrate diversity, recognise interdependence and do not intensify marginalisation of small projects or minority groups
- viii contributing to wider development of children and young people's services, including in a deregulated environment.

## Generic skills

5.8 Graduates are able to demonstrate:

- i understanding and critical evaluation of research in the field and the ability to undertake small-scale participatory research projects
- ii an ability to use information and communication technologies
- iii organisation and articulation of opinions and arguments in speech and writing, using relevant specialist vocabulary
- iv self-management, including the organisation of an efficient and effective work pattern, and working to deadlines
- v an ability to collect and apply numerical data, as appropriate
- vi an ability to collect, analyse and interpret qualitative and quantitative data
- vii an ability to present data in different formats, including graphical and tabular
- viii commitment to the improvement of their own learning and performance

- ix an understanding of their own approaches to learning
- x an ability to work on their own initiative and in cooperation with others
- xi an ability to use their knowledge and understanding critically to locate and justify a personal position in relation to the subject
- xii skill in reflection on their own and others' value systems and the ability to explore such values in informal contexts, including an ability to constructively challenge the views of others and resolve conflict
- xiii effective communication using written, visual, electronic and oral means with individuals and groups, including presentations
- xiv emotional literacy and personal resilience.

## 6 Teaching, learning and assessment

6.1 Teaching, learning and assessment enables students to be inducted into the traditions of youth and community work. In keeping with this, particular attention is given to the processes of teaching and learning in degree courses in the subject area. These processes value the personal and professional experiences of students; place value on a range of sources of theoretical and practical knowledge; and encourage the development of both theoretical ideas and practical endeavours. As such, they draw on the practices of all aspects of the formal/informal education continuum, providing opportunities for learning through reflection, dialogue, debate and peer learning. They recognise the ambiguity of, contradictions within, and the contested nature of, concepts and interventions.

6.2 The promotion of reflection and of reflexivity is central to all teaching, learning and assessment in this subject area, whether in the context of the higher education provider or in work-based learning. Courses facilitate critical thinking and reflection by questioning and critically discussing beliefs, discourses and attitudes. Teaching is flexible, adaptable, participative, interactive, intersubjective and collaborative in ways that are consistent with the subject area and congruent with informal and non-formal learning.

6.3 Higher education providers work in partnership with professional and community-based agencies to provide a variety of approaches to learning and teaching so that students have an opportunity to experience a wide range of strategies and approaches to learning. Courses include individualised study as well as active participation in group activities, working with other professionals in experiential learning environments and working as part of a team. Attention is given to the effective use of information and communications technology to facilitate learning and teaching and the development of students' digital literacies. Learning approaches that students may engage in include:

- lectures
- workshops
- tutorials
- seminars
- self-directed group work and projects
- visits and exchanges
- peer-to-peer learning and discussion
- online tools
- collective problem-solving and participative enquiry-action learning
- practice simulations
- practice learning opportunities.

6.4 Students have significant involvement in community and youth projects as well as in other, more formal, settings. Learning through working with experienced practitioners of youth work, community education and/or community development, as well as other professional staff, is a central feature of courses in this subject area. Generally, each higher education provider has developed, and continues to develop, a scheme to facilitate partnership with local authorities, voluntary organisations, and private and third sector agencies.

6.5 Assessment is sustainable and aligned to practice. This recognises that students learn more deeply when the planned learning is constructively aligned with the assessment process. Sustainable assessment methods are fit for purpose in assessing knowledge and understanding of the subject area but also strengthen graduate attributes in their use of assessments or in their capacity to make professional judgements across a range of future practice contexts. Assessment is thus formative, summative and sustainable in its alignment

to professional practice and involves an appropriate range of methods of gathering evidence about student achievement and progress. It includes the use of data from both higher education providers and from practice agencies in which the student is undertaking her/his professional education. Assessment draws upon a diversity of methods which reflect the range of practical, academic and digital skills required by practitioners in the field. These may include:

- essays
- reports
- presentations
- posters
- work-based portfolios
- reflective logs and journals
- research projects
- simulations such as funding applications and needs assessments
- development of practice resources
- peer learning and assessment
- examinations/multiple-choice tests
- assessment of practice.

6.6 For practice-based learning the role of the practice-based supervisor is critical. Assessment of practice is rigorous and undertaken in partnership between the higher education provider and the practice area. Practice-based learning is based on clear contracts with employers. Supervisors and mentors are fully briefed by the higher education providers, and where they are involved in assessment there are clear systems for the moderation of their assessed practice. Practice supervisors for courses leading to professional qualifications are appropriately professionally qualified.

6.7 Practice-based assessment methods include criteria which build on practice requirements, as set out in the national occupational standards for youth work (2012) and community development (2015). Graduates are able to demonstrate their knowledge of the range of interventions that are used with young people and communities and their competence as newly qualified practitioners (where they have undertaken a degree leading to a professional qualification).

6.8 Specific assessment methods related to practice-based learning may include:

- reflective journals to reflect on performance and learning
- recording of critical incidents (capturing observations and insights)
- critical discussion of practice with other professionals
- problem-based assignments, which test integration and application of subject knowledge to real situations.

6.9 Systems to address issues of 'fitness to practise' (based on an assessment of the student's criminal record, attendance record, or being subject to disciplinary action on grounds which undermine students' professionalism) are required for courses leading to a professional qualification and are implemented in partnership between higher education providers and practice areas. Courses leading to a professional qualification are required by the professional endorsement body to appoint a practice-based external examiner and a professional reference group to facilitate such processes.

## 7 Benchmark standards

7.1 The standard expected of three types of graduate is addressed in this document: a threshold graduate, a typical graduate and an excellent graduate. The former describes the minimally acceptable standard achieved by a bachelor's degree with honours graduate. The typical level of achievement describes student performance around the median, which is where the performance of the majority of students currently lies. Student performance varies along a continuum from threshold to excellent.

7.2 Given the essentially applied nature of this subject, a graduate should be expected to show evidence of knowledge and understanding of professional values and ethics, the principles and approaches of youth and community work, of communities and organisations, and of learning and social theory which informs practice, as well as demonstrating an ability to reflect on and justify action within practice.

7.3 Youth and community work graduates achieving the threshold standard are able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course of study they have undertaken and the application of relevant subject skills. A threshold graduate is able to demonstrate an understanding of core youth and community approaches and offer some critical reflection on themselves as practitioners and core practice issues using relevant literature. A graduate achieving the threshold standard is able to:

- i describe the underlying professional value base and ethical principles of youth and community work and use these to conduct practice
- ii discuss and apply a personal and professional commitment to equality, diversity, human rights, autonomy, freedom, responsibility and justice
- iii construct youth and community practice interventions informed by theories of change, learning and human development
- iv formulate action in association with young people and communities that promotes participation, inclusion, learning and human flourishing
- v recognise social theory, social policy and media discourses and their impact on young people and communities
- vi inspect current youth and community work practice using basic research methods, and question professional understandings
- vii locate and distinguish youth and community work practice in the context of inter-professional and multidisciplinary practice
- viii identify contemporary debates, key concepts and contested issues within the discipline and comment on them
- ix seek out, use and evaluate literature, research and practice evidence
- x communicate effectively verbally and in writing using basic academic and professional standards.

7.4 A youth and community work graduate achieving the typical standard is able to (in addition to the threshold standard):

- i critically appraise dilemmas and complex ethics to devise responses informed by the professional value base and ethical principles of youth and community work
- ii analyse youth and community work practice within a comparative context using theory and evidence from a range of local, regional, national and international sources
- iii investigate their own youth and community work practice using reflective practice and research methods and propose alternative future action
- iv appraise social theory and social policy discourses and distinguish clearly between normative and empirical arguments and assess their impact on young people and communities

- v analyse and critically evaluate competing perspectives, recognise contested concepts and inspect their impact on youth and community work
- vi locate youth and community within dominant discourses and perspectives and justify arguments for change if required
- vii interpret and justify the practice of youth work, community education and community development within professions, society and social policy.

7.5 Youth and community work graduates achieving an excellent standard demonstrate to a higher level the knowledge and skills listed above and in addition show evidence of:

- i a systemic approach to learning and practice
- ii extensive independent reading
- iii originality of thought and expression
- iv critical insight, analytic rigour and systematic synthesis of theoretical and evidence-informed knowledge applied effectively in the work-based professional context
- v application of wide-ranging knowledge of the subject
- vi originality and innovation in the practice setting contribution to practice knowledge base and effective sharing of practice with colleagues.

7.6 Graduates who have received a professional qualification meet the standards defined by the relevant endorsement body. Graduates on a professionally endorsed qualification are typically able to:

- i create and apply theories about practice and demonstrate practice skills as outlined in this Statement
- ii design practice which integrates theory and is evidence informed
- iii practise ethically, recognising the complex, contested and essential nature of ethical practice in this discipline
- iv identify discrimination, oppression and/or exclusion and be strategic in developing interventions to address these and promote inclusion
- v manage complex accountabilities, including being able to compromise and negotiate without losing integrity and professional principles
- vi recognise and analyse powerful social policy and media discourses shaping practice, in order to work in the interests of young people and community group members
- vii facilitate informal and community learning and community development, using group work and a range of interpersonal skills; ability to operation in deregulated environment
- viii record, evaluate and report on the impact of interventions in the context of up-to-date knowledge
- ix operate as critical and reflective practitioners
- x promote experiential learning and reflection in self and others
- xi exhibit insight and confidence in managing themselves and draw on conscious use of self in working with others and in leading or participating in teams
- xii engage in continuous professional development.

## **Appendix 1: Example degree titles in youth and community work**

Applied Theology (Youth and Community Work)  
Child and Youth Studies  
Children and Youth Studies  
Childhood and Youth Professional Studies  
Childhood and Youth Studies  
Childhood and Youth: Theory and Practice  
Childhood Youth and Community Studies  
Children and Youth Work  
Church Community and Theology  
Community and Leadership  
Community and Neighbourhood Studies  
Community and Youth Work Studies  
Community Coaching and Sports Development  
Community Development  
Community Development and Leadership  
Community Development and Public Policy  
Community Development and Youth Work  
Community Education  
Community Learning and Development  
Community Studies (Development and Youth Work)  
Community Youth Work  
Family and Community Studies  
Managing Voluntary and Community Organisations  
Professional Development in Community Engagement  
Professional Studies in Youth, Community and Families  
Social and Community Development  
Working Together with Children and Young People  
Working with Children and Young People  
Working with Young People and Communities  
Young People, Communities and Society  
Youth and Community Development (NYA/JNC)  
Youth and Community Engagement  
Youth and Community Services  
Youth and Community Studies  
Youth and Community Work  
Youth and Community Work (Youth Justice)  
Youth and Community Work and Practical Theology  
Youth Community and Families  
Youth Practice  
Youth Studies  
Youth Work  
Youth Work and Community Development  
Youth Work and Community Learning and Development

Information on titles of degrees awarded by Christian faith-based colleges or offering a Christian faith-based pathway is available at: [www.cywt.org.uk](http://www.cywt.org.uk).

## **Appendix 2: Membership of the benchmarking and review groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Youth and Community Work**

### **Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Youth and Community Work (2019)**

The third edition, published in 2019, was revised by QAA to align the content with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published in 2018. Proposed revisions were checked and verified by a member of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Youth and Community Work from 2016.

Steph Green  
Simon Bullock

Ruskin College  
QAA

### **Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Youth and Community Work (2016)**

Marion Allison

Community Learning and Development  
Standards Council for Scotland

Janet Batsleer (Chair)

Manchester Metropolitan University

Annette Coburn

University of the West of Scotland

Steve Drowley

Cardiff Metropolitan University

Sue Gill

National Youth Agency (NYA) ETS

Steph Green

Ruskin College

Lorraine Grey

University of Northampton

David Howell

Christian Youth Work Training

Liz Rose

ETS Wales

Jim Robertson

Endorsement and Quality Standards Board  
for Community Development

Alistair Scott-McKinley

Ulster University

**Student reader**

Mishal Saeed

University of Oxford

**QAA officer**

Harriet Barnes

QAA

During the consultation, employers and employer organisations were invited to comment through the relevant Education and Training Standards Committees, which include representatives of local authority and voluntary sector youth services, regional youth work units and trade unions, as well as practitioners. The UK Christian Youth Work Consortium was also consulted.

### **Membership of the original benchmark statement group for youth and community work (2009)**

Details below are as published in the original Subject Benchmark Statement.

Dr John Bamber

University of Edinburgh

Ms Janet Batsleer (Chair)

Manchester Metropolitan University

Ms Marian Charlton

Leeds Metropolitan University

Mr Keith Cranwell

University of Greenwich

Ms Sheila Curran

The Open University

Dr Richard Davies

De Montfort University



Mr Steve Drowley

Dr Alison Gilchrist  
Dr Helen M F Jones  
Mr Sam McCready  
Ms Peggy McNab

Mr Geraint Owen  
Ms Paula Pope  
Dr Wayne Richards

National Youth Agency/  
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff  
Community Development Foundation  
University of Huddersfield  
University of Ulster  
Community Education Validation  
and Endorsement, Scotland  
Sheffield Hallam University  
Liverpool John Moores University  
University of Birmingham

Third edition - November 2019  
QAA2482

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2019  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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