

## **Subject benchmark statement**

### **Youth and community work**

2009

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## Preface

Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject or subject area. They also represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level in terms of the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should have demonstrated.

This subject benchmark statement, together with others published concurrently, refers to the **bachelor's degree with honours**<sup>1</sup>. In addition, some subject benchmark statements provide guidance on integrated master's awards.

Subject benchmark statements are used for a variety of purposes. Primarily, they are an important external source of reference for higher education institutions (HEIs) when new programmes are being designed and developed in a subject area. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme but are not a specification of a detailed curriculum in the subject.

Subject benchmark statements also provide support to HEIs in pursuit of internal quality assurance. They enable the learning outcomes specified for a particular programme to be reviewed and evaluated against agreed general expectations about standards. Subject benchmark statements allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design and can stimulate academic discussion and debate upon the content of new and existing programmes within an agreed overall framework. Their use in supporting programme design, delivery and review within HEIs is supportive of moves towards an emphasis on institutional responsibility for standards and quality.

Subject benchmark statements may also be of interest to prospective students and employers seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a given subject or subject area.

The relationship between the standards set out in this document and those produced by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies for individual disciplines will be a matter for individual HEIs to consider in detail.

This subject benchmark statement was produced by a group of subject specialists drawn from, and acting on behalf of, the subject community. The final draft subject benchmark statement went through a full consultation with the wider academic community and stakeholder groups. The process was overseen by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This subject benchmark statement will be revised no later than five years from its publication date, to reflect developments in the subject area and the experiences of HEIs and others who have been working with it. The review process will be overseen by QAA in collaboration with the subject community.

QAA publishes and distributes this subject benchmark statement and other subject benchmark statements developed by similar subject-specific groups.

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<sup>1</sup> This is equivalent to the honours degree in the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (level 10) and in the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* (level 6).

The Disability Equality Duty (DED) came into force on 4 December 2006<sup>2</sup>. The DED requires public authorities, including HEIs, to act proactively on disability equality issues. The Duty complements the individual rights focus of the Disability Discrimination Act and is aimed at improving public services and outcomes for disabled people as a whole. Responsibility for making sure that such duty is met lies with HEIs.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission<sup>3</sup> has published guidance<sup>4</sup> to help HEIs prepare for the implementation of the Duty and provided illustrative examples on how to take the Duty forward. HEIs are encouraged to read this guidance when considering their approach to engaging with components of the Academic Infrastructure<sup>5</sup>, of which subject benchmark statements are a part.

Additional information that may assist HEIs when engaging with subject benchmark statements can be found in the *Code of Practice (revised) for providers of post-16 education and related services*<sup>6</sup>, and also through the Equality Challenge Unit<sup>7</sup> which is established to promote equality and diversity in higher education.

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<sup>2</sup> In England, Scotland and Wales.

<sup>3</sup> On 1 October 2007, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Disability Rights Commission merged into the new Equality and Human Rights Commission.

<sup>4</sup> Copies of the guidance *Further and higher education institutions and the Disability Equality Duty, Guidance for Principals, Vice-Chancellors, governing boards and senior managers working in further and higher education institutions in England, Scotland and Wales* may be obtained from [www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/forbusinessesandorganisation/publicauthorities/disabilityequalityd/pages/disability.aspx](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/forbusinessesandorganisation/publicauthorities/disabilityequalityd/pages/disability.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> An explanation of the Academic Infrastructure, and the roles of subject benchmark statements within it, is available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure)

<sup>6</sup> Copies of the *Code of Practice (revised) for providers of post-16 education and related services*, published by the Disability Rights Commission, may be obtained from [www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/pages/publications.aspx](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/pages/publications.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> Equality Challenge Unit: [www.ecu.ac.uk](http://www.ecu.ac.uk)

# 1 Introduction

1.1 Youth and community work as an applied academic subject area is rooted in a range of overlapping traditions of practice which have developed in the different contexts of local, regional and devolved national governments in the United Kingdom. Higher education awards that are professionally validated and recognised by the Joint Education and Training Standards Committee (Joint ETS) are currently offered by around 40 HEIs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, seven HEIs offer equivalent awards, with the programme for one community-based training agency being validated through these. In Scotland, it is likely that the three-year Ordinary degree will continue to form the basis of professional qualification, although two universities have moved to four-year programmes. In other nations, the three-year honours degree is expected to be the standard qualification. Honours degree programmes 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. The term 'youth and community work' encompasses the different traditions in the four countries of the United Kingdom. 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.

1.2 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. In particular, work on literacy in a community context is a clear element of practice in Scotland. The Standards Council for Community Learning and Development<sup>8</sup> approves professional programmes of training in CLD.

1.3 In Wales, youth work, community development and play are all professionally endorsed by the Education and Training Standards Advisory Group (Wales) at the Welsh Assembly Government, which has developed the National Youth Service Strategy for Wales, Extending Entitlement<sup>9</sup>. The four pillars of the *Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales*<sup>10</sup> state that youth work, through its voluntary relationship with young people, offers inclusive opportunities for learning that are educative, expressive, participative and empowering.

1.4 In Northern Ireland, qualifications are professionally endorsed by the North/South Education and Training Standards Committee, and there is a strong commitment to youth work, rather than a broader, more generic definition of professional practice. The North/South Education and Training Standards Committee has endorsed the jointly agreed definition of youth work (see paragraph 1.6).

1.5 In England, the Education and Training Standards Committee of the National Youth Agency (NYA)<sup>11</sup> professionally validates honours degree programmes in youth work and youth and community work. Community development programmes are

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<sup>8</sup> [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Life-Long-Learning/LearningConnections/StandardsCouncil/Q/editmode/on/forceupdate/on](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Life-Long-Learning/LearningConnections/StandardsCouncil/Q/editmode/on/forceupdate/on)

<sup>9</sup> [www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy\\_strategy\\_and\\_planning/extendingentitlement/](http://www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/extendingentitlement/)

<sup>10</sup> Available from the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services [www.cwvys.org.uk](http://www.cwvys.org.uk)

<sup>11</sup> [www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk)

endorsed by the England Standards Board for Community Development Work Training and Qualifications.

1.6 There have been a number of bridging initiatives prior to the development of this subject benchmark statement. Of particular importance is the formation of the Joint meeting of the education and training standards committees for England, Ireland and Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales (Joint ETS), which has enabled mutual recognition of professional qualifications across the jurisdictions. For **youth work**, the following values were jointly agreed in the National Occupational Standards (2008)<sup>12</sup>.

- Young people choose to be involved, not least because they want to relax, meet friends, make new relationships, to have fun and to find support.
- The work starts from where young people are, in relation to their own values, views and principles as well as their own personal and social space.
- It seeks to go beyond where young people start, to widen their horizons, promote participation and invite social commitment, in particular by encouraging them to be critical and creative in responding to their experience and the world around them.
- It treats young people with respect, valuing each individual and their differences, and promoting the acceptance and understanding of others, while challenging oppressive behaviour and ideas.
- It respects and values individual differences by supporting and strengthening young people's belief in themselves and their capacity to grow and change through a supportive group environment.
- It is underpinned by the principles of equity, diversity and interdependence.
- It recognises, respects and is actively responsive to the wider network of peers, communities, families and cultures, which are important to young people, and through these networks seeks to help young people achieve stronger relationships and collective identities, through the promotion of inclusivity.
- It works in partnership with young people and other agencies which contribute to young people's social, educational and personal development.
- It is concerned with how young people feel and not just with what they know or can do.
- It is concerned with facilitating and empowering the voice of young people, encouraging and enabling them to influence the environment in which they live.
- It recognises the young person as a partner in the learning process, complementing formal education, promoting their access to learning opportunities which enable them to fulfil their potential.
- It safeguards the welfare of young people and provides them with a safe environment in which to explore their values, beliefs, ideas and issues.

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<sup>12</sup> National Occupational Standards for Youth Work: [www.lluk.org/national-occupational-standards.htm](http://www.lluk.org/national-occupational-standards.htm)

1.7 Also of significance are the definitions of **community learning and development**, which have been set out by the Scottish Government.

Community learning and development (CLD) is learning and social development work with individuals and groups in their communities using a range of formal and informal methods. A common defining feature is that programmes and activities are developed in dialogue with communities and participants...[CLD's] main aim is to help individuals and communities tackle real issues in their lives through community action and community-based learning.<sup>13</sup>

1.8 The practice of community learning and development involves:

- **empowerment:** encouraging people to have a say in decisions that affect them
- **participation:** giving people every opportunity to get involved in learning and acting with others
- **inclusion, equality of opportunity, anti-discrimination:** giving everyone a chance to be involved, whatever their background and abilities, and actively challenging discrimination
- **self-determination:** allowing people to make their own choices about what they do
- **partnership:** achieving more by encouraging everyone with an interest to work together.

Its outcomes are to be found in both personal development and in the building of community capacity, and these principles and outcomes are taken to apply equally to young people and to adults.

1.9 In relation to community development work, a commonly used definition is drawn from the National Occupational Standards<sup>14</sup>:

'The key purpose of **community development work** is to collectively bring about social change and justice, by working with communities to:

- identify their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities
- plan, organise and take action
- evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the action
- and to do all these in ways which challenge oppression and tackle inequalities.'

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<sup>13</sup> Scottish Government Guidance for Community Learning and Development  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/education/Life-long-learning/LearningConnections](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/education/Life-long-learning/LearningConnections)

<sup>14</sup> National Occupational Standards for Community Development Work (updated), 2003  
[www.lluk.org/national-occupational-standards.htm](http://www.lluk.org/national-occupational-standards.htm)



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

- **social justice:** working towards a fairer society which respects civil and human rights and challenges oppression
- **self-determination:** individuals and groups have the right to identify shared issues and concerns as the starting point for collective action
- **working and learning together:** valuing and using the skills, knowledge, experience and diversity within communities to collectively bring about change
- **sustainable communities:** empowering communities to develop their independence and autonomy while making and maintaining links to the wider society
- **participation:** everyone has the right to participate fully in the decision-making processes that affect their lives
- **reflective practice:** effective community development is informed and enhances through reflection on action.

1.11 It is evident that although there is a diverse field and range of contested definitions of practice to which this subject benchmark statement refers, there is sufficient common ground for the establishment of a shared benchmark statement for honours degrees in youth and community work. All the above definitions and values statements refer to participation, inclusion, empowerment, partnership and learning as fundamental principles of practice. It should also be acknowledged that the programmes referenced by this statement 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.

1.12 This statement describes the nature of honours degrees in youth and community work and the standards expected of graduates. Some programmes may offer awards through routes which do not offer professional recognition, and all programmes may have alternative awards for students who do not meet professional requirements but have otherwise achieved the standard required for the level of the award. Awarding institutions are required to indicate clearly on their award certificates the difference between qualifications awarded with or without professional recognition. This statement is intended to support the academic community that designs and delivers programmes of study leading to honours degrees. 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 programme areas include: youth work (in Northern Ireland); community education and community learning and development (in Scotland); integrated children and young people's services (in England); the Extending Entitlement policy in Wales; and community development, community engagement and community cohesion across the UK.

1.13 The education of the professional practitioner of youth and community work to honours degree level means that they will have achieved the same threshold level of education as teachers and social workers. Degrees in this field have a long history of connection with degrees in both social work and education. In making clear the nature and extent of youth and community work, the practice of cross-professional and

cross-disciplinary working should be strengthened. Different degree titles will 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: current examples include youth work and sports science; youth work and applied theology; and childhood and youth studies. Awards are offered as both BA (Hons) and BSc (Hons).

1.14 Graduates may 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; or to postgraduate study. In whatever career they engage, they will bring a professional practice grounded in the theory and practice of community-based informal education.

## **2 Defining principles**

2.1 Youth and community work is a practice of informal and community education that involves the development of democratic and associational practices, which promote learning and development in the communities or individuals who choose to take part in the programmes 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. Its pedagogic practice is based on the identification of and responses to needs and aspirations through dialogue and mutual aid. As an applied academic subject, youth and community work is distinguished by its focus on such practice. It is a subject whose development occurs in a dialogue between HEIs and practitioners of informal education. 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.

2.2 That youth and community work is a contested practice is clear from the range of names and titles which the practice bears, and from the connected, but different, histories of the practice across the four jurisdictions of the UK. The contestation occurs not only between nations, but also within and across them, and is evident in the academic literatures on which the subject draws, concerning youth work, adult education, informal education, popular education, informal support, community development, and community capacity building. Youth and community work as an applied subject is therefore also contested and it is sometimes claimed that its coherence resides in the recirculation of familiar terms of engagement.

2.3 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 youth
- 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.

2.4 There is a substantial existing literature which supports the teaching of degree programmes in this area, including theorisations and empirical studies of social education, political education, informal education, popular education, youth development, global youth work, 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.

2.5 While contemporary definitions of youth and community work as a degree subject draw on a range of academic disciplines, the key academic foundations for this applied subject are to be found in education and social science. Programmes of study should encourage students to engage with fundamental questions about the meanings of education, community and development. Students should be able to question their own experience and conduct reasoned argument in the context of wider debates and of social scientific research. However, the range of contexts within which learning and development in this discipline takes place is broad. All programmes should draw on a range of intellectual resources and academic disciplines to familiarise students with the characteristic debates and terms of engagement of the discipline. Other subjects which may inform youth and community work include history; cultural studies; philosophy; theology; sociology; social policy; the law; politics and economics; psychology; health and social welfare.

2.6 Youth and community work as an applied academic subject is also characterised by its attention to values, principles, purposes and processes. 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.

2.7 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. Honours degree

programmes in this subject should be characterised by their engagement with debates about the ethical dilemmas raised in professional practice. In doing so, they should seek to engage students with emerging professional codes of practice. For example, the NYA's statement of values and principles for *Ethical Conduct in Youth Work* (NYA 2004)<sup>15</sup> directs professionals to:

- engage with (young) people with respect and avoid negative discrimination
- respect and promote (young) people's rights to make their own decisions and choices (unless the rights of others are negatively threatened)
- promote the safety and well-being of young people without preventing them from learning through undertaking challenging activities
- contribute to the promotion of social justice among young people and in society generally, honouring diversity, yet identifying and challenging discrimination.

2.8 Such principles as these require that undergraduates 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 will 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 will 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. They will create respectful alliances across socially constructed differences, divisions and inequality, and work in partnership with young people and adult community groups in order to effect change.

2.9 Programmes of study should encourage students to develop inclusive and anti-oppressive practice in their own settings as well as in the wider social context of education. They should 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 should 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, both in graduate professionals and in other graduates who achieve non-professional awards.

2.10 Programme development should characteristically occur 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 children, young people and communities.

2.11 Students should have confidence in their ability to explore complex professional dilemmas from an ethical basis. They should 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 should recognise the contested terrain in which such moral reasoning occurs.

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<sup>15</sup> [www.nya.org.uk/information/100591/100592/108740/professionalqualifications](http://www.nya.org.uk/information/100591/100592/108740/professionalqualifications)

2.12 The educational principles underpinning practice can be characterised as follows (the definition of each term is open to contestation and debate):

- **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.

2.13 Programmes in this subject should therefore be 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. Undergraduates in youth and community work will learn to develop an educational practice that is compatible with these principles.

2.14 The purpose of youth and community work is to promote the education, development and flourishing of the young people and communities with whom they work, in the context of promoting social justice. However, this is not always the sole or main purpose of the providers of youth and community work, which also characteristically 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, it is important that programmes should 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, honours programmes in youth and community work should 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, in agencies where the principles and purposes of youth and community work are recognised and explored.

2.15 The process of honours level education in youth and community work should, as far as possible, be congruent with the educational processes that practitioners are being trained to use in community settings, while recognising the formal and assessed nature of an honours degree. In particular, the professional commitment to reflective practice, professional autonomy and responsibility means that programmes leading to professional qualifications should be 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<sup>16</sup>. The design of each programme leading to a professional qualification should offer 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 (see figure 1).

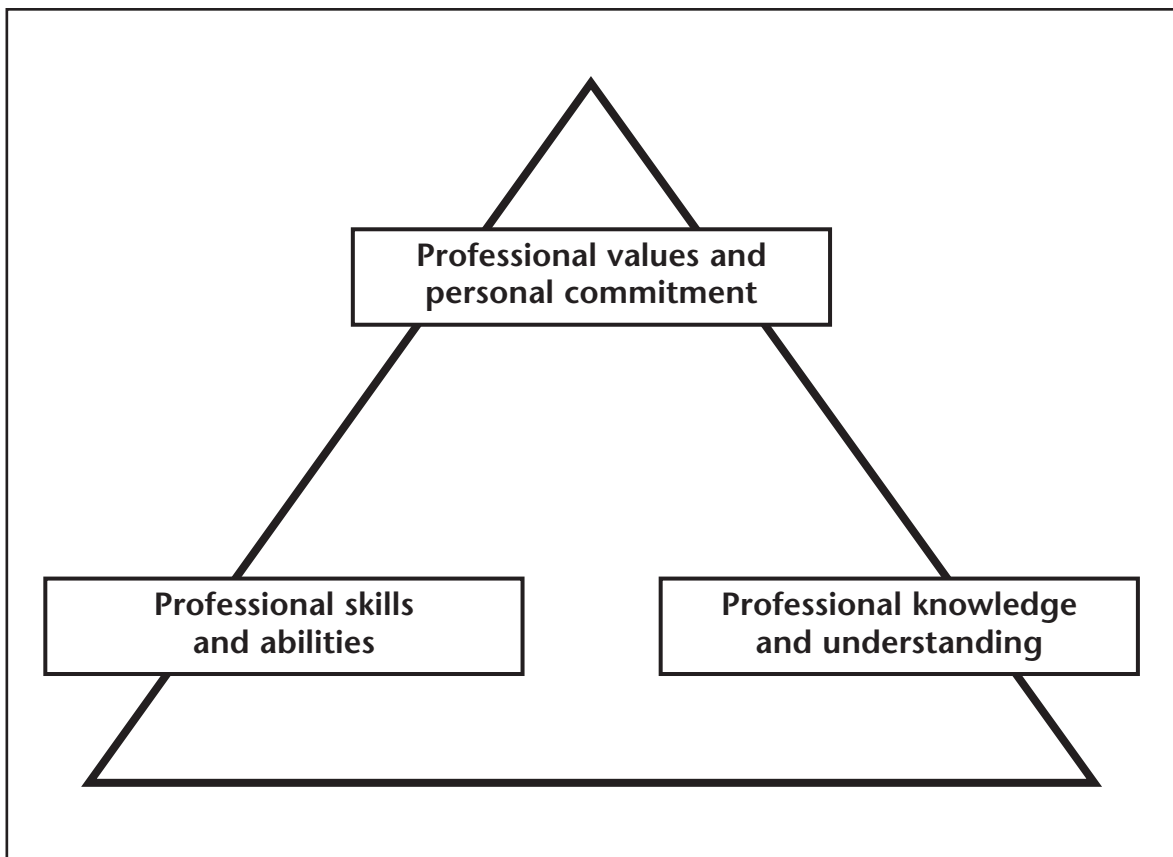


Figure 1: aspects of professional preparation and development (based on a model outlined in the framework for community education in Scotland<sup>17</sup>)

<sup>16</sup> National Youth Agency, Requirements for Professional Validation of HE programmes  
[www.nya.org.uk/information/100591/108741/professionalvalidation/](http://www.nya.org.uk/information/100591/108741/professionalvalidation/)

<sup>17</sup> [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/01/16202/17019](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/01/16202/17019)



### **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 Programmes 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 programmes 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 Programmes in this subject area are distinct from those in formal education and social care/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. Programmes in youth work are also distinct from programmes 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 programmes in this subject area.

3.5 Partnership and multi-disciplinary 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, integrated teams 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 concerning the nature of practice in this discipline 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.

The development of knowledge, skills and values are interconnected across these aspects by the attention which is paid throughout programmes of study in this subject to the development of critical and reflective practitioners.

4.3 Critical and reflective practice involves engagement with the model of the professional as a reflective and reflexive practitioner; investigating the meanings associated with being a critical practitioner; exploring accountability in practice and developing methods of mutual support; locating professionalism in practice settings through practice learning; and developing understanding of practice and/or professionalism through a variety of placements of substantial duration, agency visits and presentations, attendance at and participation in conferences. It also involves learning through reflection on the variety of settings in which youth and community work occurs, including secular and faith-based settings; statutory and voluntary contexts; third sector and private sector agencies; and locating professionalism in practice interventions through becoming aware of the range and methods of professional interventions with young people and communities. It involves engagement with the legal and ethical frameworks shaping practice, with critical enquiry and social research. In youth ministry programmes, the ability to think and reflect theologically is needed and is reflected in these programmes of study. All subject knowledge and understanding is grounded in the application of, and reflection on, knowledge gained through work-based learning (in practice settings). It is underpinned by a range of theoretical debates and by statements of professional ethics agreed by the relevant validating/endorsing body, in the context of professional validation/endorsement.

4.4 Subject knowledge will develop and change 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 programmes may focus on different parts of the curriculum, reflecting the particular interests or expertise of those responsible for its delivery. All programmes drawing on this subject benchmark statement as a key reference point should seek to include some coverage of the four areas. The following account is indicative and as such offered as a guide to those engaged in the design of programmes.

### **Working in and with communities**

4.5 Studies of this aspect may include the following.

4.5.1 Investigation of the meaning and practice of community:

- the community-based context for practice
- the scope of professional practice which is community-based and is outside of formal learning and national programmes 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)
- 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
- the relationship of young people to communities, and of people in different stages of their lives to one another in communities
- the history of the development of community-based practice as distinct from state or market-based practice.



#### 4.5.2 Communities, networks and coalitions:

- power, empowerment and democratic learning
- the analysis of practices which challenge existing power relations such as those rooted in age-based discrimination, sexism, racism and/or practices rooted in class privilege
- social, as distinct from medical, models of social issues such as disability discrimination or sexuality-based oppression
- networking as a significant aspect of practice
- the study of coalitions and broad-based organising
- conflict and community-based practices and the role of alliances
- collective action and social change, including enterprise and self-help strategies for addressing shared needs/aspirations, campaigning and the links to social movements
- debates about citizenship and democracy which may underpin practice
- 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**

4.6 Studies of this aspect may include the following.

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

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

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

- investigations of models of work with young people and communities
- investigation of whether particular educational methods are more or less suitable for different stages or age groups
- models of practice including outreach work and detached work, project-based work, cultural work and sport, and participatory practice.

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

- professional practice in relation to legal obligations and duties of care in safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults
- promoting good mental and emotional health, and recognising and responding to breakdown
- informal education and support

- 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**

4.7 Studies in this aspect may include the following.

4.7.1 Informal education, conversation, critical dialogue and experiential learning:

- situated learning: local, global and metaphysical, including global learning, environmental learning and theological or faith-sensitive learning
- 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
- citizenship learning, collaborative and open enquiry, and political education
- exploration of culturally sensitive and culturally specific learning.

4.7.2 Developmental group work:

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

4.7.3 Creativity in learning:

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

## **Developing community-based organisations**

4.8 Studies in this aspect may include the following.

4.8.1 Understanding organisations:

- studies of the agencies and workplaces in which community and youth workers are employed
- the distinctive cultures of third sector organisations, including churches and faith communities
- the role of community organisations in contributing to cohesion and integration, contestation and change

- strategies for anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice at organisational level
- equality, diversity and interdependence in the workplace and beyond
- human rights-based equality duties and non-discrimination legislation.

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

- the study of inter-professional and interdisciplinary working, including the leadership and management of teams and individuals
- mentoring, supervision, staff development and training
- the role of part-time workers and volunteers
- safety and support for youth and community work practitioners.

#### 4.8.3 Multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working:

- exploration of the nature of inter-professional and interdisciplinary approaches, including the possibility of transprofessional approaches
- current professional context of integrated services and approaches
- youth services in the context of integrated working
- youth work in a variety of agency and multi-agency contexts
- universal provision and targeted provision
- dedicated and distinct service provision
- specific skills in working with other education professionals and with health and social care professionals in mixed teams
- exploration of the links with other children's workforce professions
- nature of accountability in multidisciplinary teams.

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

4.10 Graduates who gain a professional qualification should 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**

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**

5.1 Graduates should be able to demonstrate skills in the following areas.

#### **5.1.1 Understanding, developing and managing their professional role:**

- an understanding of, and the capacity to apply and integrate, theoretical frameworks and key concepts relevant to practice in youth and community work
- 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
- substantial autonomy in using both conventional and innovative, original and creative methods in the planning, delivery and evaluation of educational programmes across a range of practice settings
- systematic analysis of relevant concepts, theories and issues of policy, and their use in informing practice
- the ability to maintain professional boundaries in voluntary relationships and in informal contexts
- the ability to make informed judgments 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
- the ability to operate as a reflective practitioner, demonstrating appropriate professional actions and behaviours
- critical reflection upon, and commitment to, their continuing personal and professional development.

#### **5.1.2 Fostering democratic and inclusive practice:**

- the ability to build trusting relationships as a foundation for learning
- 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
- the ability to create inclusive environments and to identify and counter oppressive attitudes, behaviours and situations, at both interpersonal and systemic levels
- the capacity to build practice on an understanding of issues of power, empowerment and the complexity of voluntary relationships
- the capacity to promote, publicise and share good practice.

### **5.1.3 Maintaining and developing organisations which support practice:**

- the ability to support and promote the development of productive and sustainable responses and structures, including the support and management of community-based and young people's organisations
- skill in safeguarding the health and welfare of individuals and communities through the understanding and implementation of legal and regulatory frameworks
- the capacity to manage others in the workplace (volunteers, staff, accountability, equality and diversity in the workplace)
- the capacity to provide for support, safety and well-being of staff
- context-appropriate leadership of individuals and groups
- project management skills (monitoring, evaluation, financial management, management of resources, policy development, understanding quality framework models).

### **5.1.4 Facilitating personal and collective learning development and capacity building:**

- the capacity to engage with young people and community groups, build relationships and facilitate young people and adults' individual and collective learning and development
- the ability to analyse policies and practices in the light of a range of theoretical perspectives, from the standpoint of participants in programmes, and to devise practice responses with them
- the ability to support and develop a range of literacies, including emotional literacy
- the ability to design and implement initiatives, projects and programmes using appropriate professional frameworks and methods
- the ability to select, plan and evaluate appropriate approaches from a range of intervention methods and techniques
- skill in evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of their work and the work of community-based projects
- a commitment to the learning cycle, both as an individual and as part of an organisation.

### **5.1.5 Networking and multi-agency working:**

- skills in building partnerships with other professionals in education and in health and social care
- skills in building partnerships across community groups and young people's projects
- skills in including young people and community members in partnerships
- skills in involving, consulting with, and acknowledging, accountability to stakeholders

- skills in creating effective alliances with both education and health services
- skills in creating networks and alliances among and between community groups and young people's projects
- skills in developing inclusive networks which do not intensify marginalisation of small projects or minority groups
- skills in contributing to wider development of children and young people's services.

### **Generic skills**

5.2 Graduates should be able to demonstrate:

- understanding and critical evaluation of research in the field and the ability to undertake small-scale participatory research projects
- an ability to use information and communication technologies
- organisation and articulation of opinions and arguments in speech and writing, using relevant specialist vocabulary
- self management, including the organisation of an efficient and effective work pattern, and working to deadlines
- an ability to collect and apply numerical data, as appropriate
- an ability to collect, analyse and interpret qualitative and quantitative data
- an ability to present data in different formats, including graphical and tabular
- commitment to the improvement of their own learning and performance
- an understanding of their own approaches to learning
- an ability to work on their own initiative and in cooperation with others
- the ability to use their knowledge and understanding critically to locate and justify a personal position in relation to the subject
- skill in reflection on their own and others' value systems and the ability to explore such values in informal contexts
- effective communication using written, visual, electronic and oral means with individuals and groups
- emotional literacy.

## **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 should be given to the processes of teaching and learning. These processes should 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 should 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. Programmes should facilitate critical thinking and reflection by questioning and critically discussing beliefs, discourses and attitudes. Teaching should be 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 HEIs should 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. Programmes should include individualised study as well as active participation in group activities, working with other professionals and working as part of a team. Attention should be given to the effective use of information and communication technology to facilitate learning and teaching. 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
- collective problem-solving and participative enquiry-action learning
- practice learning opportunities.

6.4 Students should 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 programmes in this subject area. Normally, each higher education provider should have developed, and continue to develop, a scheme to facilitate partnership with local authorities and third sector agencies.

6.5 Assessment of students should be undertaken using an appropriate range of methods of gathering evidence about their achievement and progress. It should include

the use of data from both HEIs and from practice agencies in which the student is undertaking her/his professional education. Schemes of assessment should be developed as part of the programme of study and should be informed by this benchmark statement. There should be an appropriate balance between formative and summative assessment. Assessment should draw upon a diversity of methods which reflect the range of practical and academic skills required by practitioners in the field. These might include:

- essays
- reports
- presentations
- work-based portfolios
- research projects
- development of practice resources
- peer learning tasks
- examinations/multiple-choice tests.

6.6 For practice-based learning the role of the practice-based supervisor is critical. Assessment of practice should be rigorous and undertaken in partnership between the higher education provider and the practice area. Practice-based learning should be based on clear contracts with employers. Supervisors and mentors who undertake roles in assessment should be fully briefed by the HEI, who should establish clear systems for the moderation of their assessed practice. Practice supervisors for programmes leading to professional qualifications should be appropriately professionally qualified. Opportunities for the training and development of practice-based supervisors should be provided by the HEI.

6.7 Practice-based assessment methods should include criteria which build on practice requirements, as set out in the national occupational standards for youth work and community development work. Graduates should be 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)
- problem-based assignments, which test integration and application of subject knowledge to real situations.

6.9 Systems to address issues of 'fitness to practice' (based on an assessment of the student's criminal record, attendance record, or being subject to disciplinary action on grounds which undermine students' professionalism) should be in place in all programmes leading to a professional qualification and should be implemented in partnership between HEIs and practice areas. All programmes leading to a professional qualification are required by the NYA to appoint a practice-based external examiner and a professional reference group to facilitate such processes. Similar procedures apply in other areas.



## 7 Benchmark standards

Given the essentially applied nature of this subject, a graduate should typically be expected to show evidence of knowledge and understanding, of personal values and commitment, and of subject-specific skills in the areas described in this benchmark statement.

7.1 A graduate of an honours degree programme covered by this benchmark statement should typically be able to:

- articulate theories of change and rationale for practice interventions
- show awareness of debates at the forefront of the discipline
- contextualise the practice of youth work, community education and community development in society and policy
- locate the inter-professional context and references for their professional practice
- question and be prepared to deconstruct taken-for-granted and common-sense professional understandings
- recognise and compare multiple, competing perspectives and challenge the status quo and dominant ideas
- be aware of current debates on key concepts and contested issues
- display critical engagement with primary sources and secondary materials.

7.2 Graduates who have received a professional qualification should, in addition, typically be able to:

- create and apply theories about practice and demonstrate practice skills as outlined in this statement
- practice ethically, recognising the complex, contested and essential nature of ethical practice in this discipline
- identify discrimination, oppression and/or exclusion and be strategic in developing interventions to tackle these in different situations
- manage complex accountabilities, including being able to compromise and negotiate without losing integrity and professional principles
- 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
- facilitate informal learning and community development, using group work and a range of interpersonal skills
- record and evaluate impact of interventions in the context of up-to-date knowledge
- operate as critical and reflective practitioners
- promote experiential learning and reflection in self and others
- 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
- engage in continuous professional development.

## **Appendix: Membership of the benchmarking group for youth and community work**

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	Open University
Dr Richard Davies	De Montfort University
Mr Steve Drowley	National Youth Agency/University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
Dr Alison Gilchrist	Community Development Foundation
Dr Helen M F Jones	University of Huddersfield
Mr Sam McCready	University of Ulster
Ms Peggy McNab	Community education validation and endorsement, Scotland
Mr Geraint Owen	Sheffield Hallam University
Ms Paula Pope	Liverpool John Moores University
Dr Wayne Richards	University of Birmingham

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