

What is youth work?

At its core, the aim of youth work is to support the personal and social development of young people through informal education. Its distinctive characteristics include the voluntary engagement of young people, young people's active involvement in developing provision, the use of informal education as the primary method of youth engagement, and an approach to provision that is responsive to young people's preferences.

For many young people a positive youth work experience can set them on the path to success, representing real value for money by addressing the issues faced by young people early and head on. Ofsted inspections of children's and young people's services have shown that youth work has a distinctive and important role in contributing to successful outcomes for young people.

Youth work builds social capital. Social capital describes the pattern and intensity of networks among people and the shared values which arise from those networks. Higher levels of social capital are associated with better health, higher educational achievement, better employment outcomes and lower crime rates. This concept of social capital is fundamental to the Coalition Government's aspirations for a Big Society, to 'redistribute power from the state to society; from the centre to local communities, giving people the opportunity to take more control over their lives'.

Youth work has the potential to play a central role in achieving the Coalition Government's aspirations for young people's participation in education, employment and training. Youth workers play a key role in supporting young people who are outside of mainstream education to negotiate alternative routes of entry into learning and the labour market. Because youth workers' engagement is not bound by a timetable or a formal curriculum, they can support vulnerable young people through points of transition, at critical moments in their lives.

Source: "Valuing Youth Work" – a joint publication from the LGA and the National Youth Agency