



REQUIREMENTS FOR COMMISSIONING YOUTH WORK SERVICES: A SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL

The new arrangements for an Integrated Youth Support and Development Framework herald a number of changes to the ways in which youth work will be supported in the future and open up a range of opportunities, through a greater sharing of resources, experience and expertise between local authorities, voluntary organisations and other stakeholders, especially young people themselves, to improve the reach and quality of youth work. Changes will be required in the relationship between commissioners and providers of youth work, to establish more effective and invigorating partnerships in the interests of all young people. This paper seeks to identify what would need to be in place in a commissioned IYS Framework, to ensure that good quality youth work continues to be an important part of the local offer to young people.

The paper envisages the 'intelligent commissioning' of youth work as a sub-set of 'educational leisure time activity', and should be seen in the context of the Statutory Guidance on Positive Activities for Young People (DfES Jan 2007) and the Aiming High 10 Year strategy for Positive Activities (DCSF, HM Treasury, July 2007). It draws on the experience of Local Authority Youth Services and voluntary youth organisations in the South West region, brought together through networks facilitated by the Regional Youth Work Unit at Learning South West. **It is currently a 'work in progress' and feedback is welcome.**

We recognise that commissioners are likely to work with a number of different providers in achieving the youth work element of their overall 'youth offer', and that some providers will only be required to provide specific elements of the offer, while others will be expected to provide for a wide range of activities in a geographically defined area. We hope that these guidelines will make sense to all providers, whatever the scale of their engagement in youth work.

We have taken the National Youth Agency's 'Y-Mark', Quality Mark for Youth Work as our framework for identifying requirements. In general, minimum standards should be in line with the 'aspiring' category in YSQM. This version of the document can be used as a self assessment tool by both commissioners and providers, to establish whether commissioning specifications are sufficiently rigorous to ensure good quality youth work provision, and whether potential providers have the capacity to deliver good quality opportunities for young people.

Commissioners and providers can complete the grid below, awarding 'Green' for elements where criteria are fully met, 'Amber' for elements where progress towards achievement is identified, and 'Red' for aspects that have not been, or have yet to be addressed.

Commissioners	Traffic Lights Assessment	Providers	Traffic Lights Assessment
<p>Performance Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioning Manager with sufficient understanding of organisations and youth work to make professional judgements about effective delivery • Established performance measures for the youth offer and youth work in place and agreed with key stakeholders • Targets for achievement of KPIs identified for each commissioned service • Commissioned contracts over realistic timeframes which recognise the developmental nature of the work, normally a minimum of 3 years 		<p>Performance Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear statement of organisational values/ purpose • Plan showing how priorities and targets will be achieved • Performance Management systems for individuals and teams in place • Monitoring & Review processes in place for projects/ programmes of work • Explanation of how planned work helps achieve key ECM outcomes and local/national performance measures 	
<p>Management Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear description of the information required from providers <i>This could include providing a universal system for all providers</i> • Capacity to chase information, analyse and feedback to providers and stakeholders • Reporting process in place to key stakeholders, including young people • Processes to ensure that information collected informs future developments and commissions 		<p>Management Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection systems in place which will meet the requirements of the commissioner • Staff who are competent in using the system • Processes to ensure that information collected informs future developments 	
<p>Quality Assurance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality standards drawn from recognised youth work sources (e.g. OFSTED framework, YSQM) 		<p>Quality Assurance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal QA process based on recognised youth work sources. • Staff understand and implement the QA process 	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient professional staff to undertake/ co-ordinate reviews and inspections of commissioned work: <i>there are models in other areas of Children's Services, such as Early Years, which could be drawn on</i> • Annual QA report highlighting required actions from providers disseminated to key stakeholders 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action taken to improve areas highlighted through QA process 	
<p>Equality & Diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs assessment takes into account young people from all relevant equality strands • Commissioned work includes projects catering for the diverse needs of different groups of young people, including LGBT groups, disabled young people and those from ethnic minorities • Barriers to access to positive activities, including transport and rural issues are addressed in commissioning services • Expectations of providers, in terms of countering prejudice, discrimination and bullying are clearly articulated and monitored • Young people from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds have a role in determining and reviewing the local offer 		<p>Equality & Diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and managers understand the barriers to young people's participation in their activities, and take active steps to resolve these • Projects are promoted to young people from all relevant equality strands • Staff are appropriately trained to work with young people with special and different needs • Appropriate records are kept on ethnicity, disability and gender of young people attending projects 	
<p>Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioners understand the importance of curriculum planning in youth work and include this in specifications for delivery 		<p>Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth work providers understand the importance of curriculum planning in youth work and include this in delivery 	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A curriculum framework for youth work, based on youth work values, is maintained and updated to incorporate new initiatives and changing needs and expectations from young people • Curriculum resources and materials are maintained and developed to ensure that providers can continue to produce good quality work with young people • Good practice and new ideas that grow out of the work of providers is promoted and disseminated to other providers in the area • Opportunities for providers to network and share good practice are promoted and facilitated • Opportunities for joint curriculum events are supported and facilitated, and information about proposed events is disseminated to providers and young people • Information about potential funding sources for new work with young people is disseminated to providers and young people 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff maintain their knowledge and ability to apply a youth work curriculum in their work with young people • The positive relationship between staff and young people is seen as paramount in developing new curriculum projects • The programmes and services offered will include specialist support services for young people not immediately attracted to the mainstream positive activities agenda • Providers make use of a range of curriculum materials and resources to enhance their work with young people • Provision is flexible and adaptable, using different methods, topics and settings, and engages young people as ‘co-producers’ • Providers engage in joint events with others to bring young people together for challenging and stimulating experiences, both within the Authority and in wider settings, including international work • Providers engage in networks and training events with others to share and develop good practice in aspects of the youth work curriculum • Providers commit to disseminating good practice generated in their projects 	
<p>Legal requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioners are aware of the legal requirements relating to Child protection, CRB checks, Data protection, Health & Safety, Off-site activities, sex and relationships education, work on drugs and alcohol etc, and incorporate these into commissioning specifications 		<p>Legal requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers are aware of the legal requirements relating to Child protection, Data protection, CRB checks, Health & Safety, Off-site activities, sex and relationships education, work on drugs and alcohol etc, and incorporate these into their policies and practice 	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of Off Site Activities Co-ordinator is maintained at Authority level, and providers are made aware of how to use this facility • Regular monitoring of providers' compliance with relevant legal requirements is carried out • Clear procedures are established for use of and access to shared data on young people 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers keep records of their working policies available for monitoring and inspection by commissioners and ensure their staff work within legal requirements 	
<p><i>Voice & Influence of Young People</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people are actively supported to play a role in determining, delivering and reviewing the local offer • Specifications for delivery require providers to engage young people in planning and reviewing their provision • Mechanisms for the involvement of young people in decision making about services that affect their lives are established at Local Authority and locality levels • Opportunities for local young people to participate in decision making at regional, national and international level are actively supported through both centrally delivered and commissioned services. • Young people are actively supported in gaining skills and qualifications to enable them to play an active role in delivering the youth offer and other elements of children & young people's services 		<p><i>Voice & Influence of Young People</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers actively engage young people in planning and reviewing their provision • Young people are supported and encouraged to take part in the delivery of provision to other young people as 'co-producers' • Providers support young people to express their views in a wide range of forums locally, nationally and internationally • Providers support young people to play an active role in their communities, and establish dialogue and joint working with adults and organisations in the locality 	

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<p>Personal & Social Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strategy to recognise and celebrate young people’s learning and development through involvement in the youth offer is developed and implemented • Providers are supported and enabled to use appropriate awards and recording processes to recognise young people’s achievements • The Authority ensures that young people’s achievements through youth work receive positive publicity through local media 		<p>Personal & Social Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers understand and utilise the opportunities and processes available to them to accredit and record young people’s achievements through their projects • Providers ensure that their programmes identify and prioritise disadvantaged young people’s personal and social development needs 	
<p>Workforce development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The commissioning strategy ensures that those delivering youth work are appropriately qualified to deliver by setting local standards in line with national guidance • A workforce development strategy is in place which will ensure that standards and levels of qualification and experience amongst delivery bodies are adequate and sustainable, and that access and progression routes into youth work and the wider C&YP workforce are developed and maintained • Appropriate professional and pre-professional qualification opportunities are made available, within reasonable travelling distance • A programme of CPD for practicing youth workers and managers is developed and maintained in line with local needs and national guidelines 		<p>Workforce development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers ensure that their staff are appropriately qualified and experienced, in line with national guidelines • Providers support staff to undertake training and qualifications to improve their capacity to deliver youth work • Young people are supported to undertake training to enable them to become involved in delivering youth work • Volunteers are supported to undertake training and qualifications appropriate to their role and aspirations 	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources for supporting training and CPD across all youth work providers are included in the commissioning strategy Uptake and impact of training and CPD is monitored and evaluated 			
<p>Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic lead for youth work engages with relevant partnerships dealing with work with young people (e.g. Teenage pregnancy, Crime Prevention) As a consequence of engagement, funding for youth work projects is released from these partnerships, and positive outcomes for young people are increased Strong communication links between local delivery projects and central strategic commissioners are developed and maintained, to ensure that the potential for youth work projects to positively engage with young people in difficult circumstances is maximised Commissioners encourage and support locally based partnership approaches that enable several agencies to work together to improve opportunities for young people Specifications for commissioned services are sufficiently flexible to enable projects to respond to changing needs in their communities without a complex retendering process 		<p>Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers in localities actively seek to build partnership approaches with other agencies in the neighbourhood, in order to maximise opportunities for young people Providers working with targeted groups of young people actively seek to build partnerships with those working in more generic open access settings, to enable young people to benefit from wider youth work opportunities Providers working in different localities with similar profiles and needs work collaboratively to share good practice and develop joint working for the benefit of young people 	

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<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient resources are allocated to services to young people to ensure that the planned ambition for positive activities and other elements of the overall youth offer can be met • Full cost recovery guidance is agreed and adopted for all commissioned services • Resources to support access to young people's services, including transport and publicity are identified • Sufficient resources are maintained to support the continuous professional development of those who work with young people, and ensure that a suitably qualified and experienced youth work workforce is sustained • Resources for capacity building in the voluntary youth sector are made available, to assist them to participate effectively in the delivery of the Youth Offer • Resources are allocated to ensure that the curriculum offer to young people is rich and varied and based on youth work values • The costs of maintaining a range of accredited awards for young people are identified and retained 		<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers ensure that project budgets are sufficient to meet the needs of young people and deliver agreed outcomes • Providers ensure they have sufficient appropriately experienced and qualified frontline, back-up and management staff to deliver agreed outcomes • The costs to young people of participating in positive activities is kept to a minimum 	

Commissioners	Traffic Lights Assessment	Providers	Traffic Lights Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The commissioning team includes staff with substantial youth work experience and qualifications who can take responsibility for curriculum, workforce development, partnership building, specialised legal requirements, quality assurance and interpretation of MI data, and have an overview of developing commissioning needs A charging policy for young people participating in positive activities is agreed 			

As a minimum, commissioners are likely to require a small, professional youth work team to ensure that providers are supported in maintaining and developing quality work with young people. The team would need to have strong links to the provider organisations, and a sound knowledge of current issues and developments in youth work. The key tasks for the team would include:

- Establishing and monitoring performance measures and targets for the youth work elements of the overall youth offer
- Quality assurance management for youth work, including regular monitoring and inspection of providers
- Ongoing needs analysis to ensure that the youth work offer remains in line with the needs and aspirations of all sectors of the youth population, especially marginalised groups
- Ensuring that youth work providers have sufficient flexibility to respond to changing needs in the communities they serve
- Engagement of young people in needs assessment processes
- Maintaining and updating a relevant curriculum framework and resources and ensuring that providers engage in developmental curriculum activities with young people
- Ensuring that an effective policy framework for youth work is maintained and ensuring that providers comply with legal requirements and good practice guidance
- Ensuring that a strategy for young people’s involvement in decision making in localities and across the authority is in place and acted upon
- Developing and implementing a strategy to celebrate and accredit young people’s learning and achievement through youth work opportunities

- Establishing a workforce development framework for youth work and ensuring that sufficient opportunities for qualification in youth work and continuing professional development are made available to providers
- Engaging with strategic partnerships where the contribution of youth work could be valued, and resources could be allocated to youth work interventions
- Ensuring that local partnership arrangements involve providers in the most appropriate ways
- Reporting on the effectiveness of the use of resources allocated to youth work provision

There may be scope for sharing teams across authorities, especially where neighbouring Authorities have similar profiles and needs, and geographical distances are not too great. It may also be possible to commission some of these activities from other organisations, either Authority by Authority, or at regional or sub-regional level. No matter how they are provided, however, there is already evidence from other parts of the country that when these essential infrastructure support functions disappear, the quality of the offer to young people suffers dramatically (see OFSTED inspection of Cumbria Youth Service, 2004). Poor quality youth work has been shown to adversely affect young people's development (see Feinstein et al, 2006), while good quality work can be seen to be a major feature in enabling some young people to deal with difficult transitions (Aiming High, a 10 Year Strategy for Positive Activities, DCSF/ HM Treasury 2007). It is important that local authorities and Children's Trusts ensure that they make the best possible provision for their young people.

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June 2007