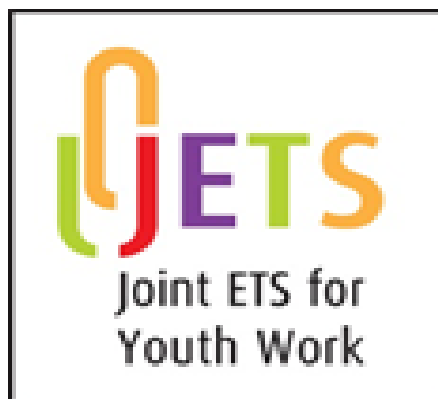
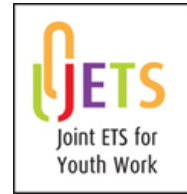




Digital Youth work – Promotion of Guidelines and Competencies for Workers and Organisations

Briefing paper - April 2020





1. Introduction

This paper has been produced by JETS, the organisation which brings together the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) for youth work in the four nations and Ireland. In Wales, professionally qualified status derives from the holding of an award that has been professionally endorsed by ETS Wales on behalf of the JNC. In England this function is carried out by ETS England on behalf of the National Youth Agency, Endorsement in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is carried out by the North South ETS and in Scotland by the Community Learning and Development Standards Council Scotland (CLDSC). In Scotland due to the CLDSC nature of focus, there is a standing partnership with YouthLink Scotland to provide Youth Work expertise.

This paper is intended to support training organisations, practitioners and funders in developing a unified understanding of, and approach to, digital youth work in response to the increased attention being paid to this area of work as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, and the possible impact this will have on the sector in the future.

It is largely based on extensive work undertaken by the European Union Work Plan for Youth 2016 – 2018 which consolidates good practice and expertise from across Europe.

2. Background

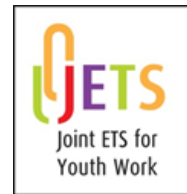
Use of digital space is a key part of everyday life for young people across the UK. Digital spaces are used by young people for private communications, socialising, education and entertainment, and consequently there is a need for agencies working with young people to engage with and make use of digital media in their work. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted this need and has seen many Youth Work organisations take their first steps into the digital world to continue engaging with and supporting young people. As we move through the Covid crisis, and thereafter, the need for those associated with the provision of youth work to engage with digital youth work will certainly increase.

This need has been recognised in some sections of the field, and a great deal of work has taken place to explore, define and refine good practice, policy and risk.

The report **‘Developing Digital Youth Work - Policy recommendations, training needs and good practice examples for youth workers and decision-makers’** <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fbc18822-07cb-11e8-b8f5-01aa75ed71a1> by the expert group on risks, opportunities and implications of digitalisation for youth, youth work and youth policy, set up by the European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2016-2018, has consolidated this thinking.

The report has informed the National Occupational Standards for youth work through the development of CLD YW08, “Engage with and empower young people to make use of digital media in their daily lives”. <http://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/resources/standards-and-benchmarks/national-occupational-standards/>

This paper suggests further endorsement of the report ‘Developing Digital Youth Work.....’ and its associated documents as a means to promote this work to the UK youth workforce, organisations and training providers to ensure that young people can benefit fully from the opportunities Digital Youth Work presents.



3. Definition

‘Developing Digital Youth Work.....’ offers the following definitions for Digital Youth Work;

- Digital youth work means proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work.
- Digital youth work is not only a youth work method – digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting (open youth work, youth information and counselling, youth clubs, detached youth work...).
- Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general, and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals.
- Digital youth work can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments – or in a mixture of these two. Digital media and technology can be used either as a tool, an activity or a content in youth work.
- Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work.
- Youth workers in this context refer to both paid and volunteer youth workers.

The UK was represented on this group by Liz Green, of YouthLink Scotland, and consequently has had input into its development and work leading from it.

This definition places digital youth work as a component of any youth work practice and as such implies the need for youth workers, youth work organisations and training providers to ensure that workers are appropriately skilled, knowledgeable and equipped to undertake this work.

4. Guidelines for Digital Youth Work

The report led to the development of guidelines for Digital Youth work, published in 2019;

<https://www.digitalyouthwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/09/european-guidelines-for-digital-youth-work-web.pdf>

These guidelines offer organisations, workers, funders and policy makers guidance on the development and embedding of Digital Youth Work. They are based on the work of the expert group, and are augmented by the information in the above report.



5. Competencies required for Digital Youth Work

The expert group identifies the following competencies needed for Youth Workers engaging in Digital Youth Work:

1. Digitalisation of society

- 1.1 To understand how digitalisation is shaping societies, including its impact on youth work and on young people;
- 1.2 To be able to take young people's digital cultures into account in youth work practices;
- 1.2 To be able to encourage young people to shape the process of digitalisation themselves.

2. Planning, designing and evaluating digital youth work

- 2.1 To develop an agile mindset towards digital youth work;
- 2.2 To know how to support existing youth work goals with digital media and technology;
- 2.3 To be able to plan digital youth work according to the needs and hopes of young people: their interests, preferences, aspirations, hobbies, styles and online habits;
- 2.4 To know how to involve young people in all stages - design, development, implementation and evaluation - of digital youth work (for example peer activities, giving responsible roles to young people, volunteering), and to recognise the barriers to participation in these stages of digital youth work and how to overcome them;
- 2.5 To be able to develop, implement, reflect and redesign engaging activities supported by/with/about digital media and technology;
- 2.6 To be able to assess the risks involved in digital youth work activities and to mitigate them by applying appropriate measures;
- 2.7 To be able to design individual and collaborative activities using digital media and technology;
- 2.8 To be aware of digital devices and applications available and to be able to choose them for youth work;
- 2.9 To be able to use assistive technology to support young people with disabilities to access youth work; to recognise barriers to participation that may be presented in the use of digital technology;
- 2.10 To be able to use digital technologies to increase social inclusion and participation in society.



3. Information and data literacy

3.1 To be able to challenge young people to think critically about digital content and services;

3.2 To understand the digital literacy level of each young person (and to adjust digital youth work activities to it);

3.3 To know what information can be stored from a legal perspective (protection of young people's privacy, personal data, etc.)

4. Communication

4.1 To know how young people communicate in digital environments and to adjust digital youth work activities to that;

4.2 To be able to help young people to make informed choices about the appropriate digital tools with which to interact, collaborate and share with different target groups;

4.3 To be able to help young people be aware of cultural and generational diversity in digital environments;

4.4 To be able to support young people to become active citizens in digital society;

4.5 To know how to react to hate speech, cyber bullying and other unwanted behaviour online, and to encourage young people to do so;

4.6 To be able to reflect on the youth worker's own digital identity in a youth work setting.

5. Digital creativity

5.1 To be able to encourage young people to create and edit digital content and to express themselves through digital means;

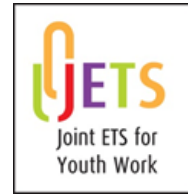
5.2 To be able to give young people opportunities to explore coding or get acquainted with maker culture;

5.3 To understand how copyright and licences apply to data, information and digital content;

5.4 To be aware of the available tools for digital creativity (including free and open source tools).

6. Safety

6.1 To be able to encourage young people to make informed decisions about how they want to portray themselves and engage online, who they want to share their content with and how to control this by using privacy settings;



6.2 To be able to help young people to understand terms and conditions of digital services and ownership of their data;

6.3 To be able to help young people deal with problems they have encountered in digital settings, for example cyber bullying, grooming, sexting and exposure to content they find upsetting or shocking. To be able to refer young people on to appropriate support services if necessary;

6.4 To be able to help young people minimise the environmental impact of digital technologies and their use;

6.5 To be able to establish appropriate professional boundaries in their online relationships with young people.

7. Reflection and evaluation

7.1 To understand where the youth worker's own digital competence needs to be improved or updated;

7.2 To be able to use evaluative techniques to reflect on the effectiveness of undertaking digital youth work and to improve practice;

7.3 To know how to share experience and learn from other youth workers.

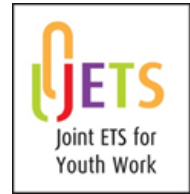
6. Safety

As with all other aspects of Youth Work, the safety of young people and workers is paramount in digital youth work. Digital youth work carries a range of risks, some of which will be peculiar to working in the digital environment. This requires that services ensure they have systems, policies, monitoring and training in place to mitigate these risks, and that workers, funders and policy makers are familiar with good practice in digital safeguarding.

In addition to safeguarding, the digital environment presents particular issues for data privacy, storage and access which organisations must consider. All digital work should be planned and executed in compliance with the relevant GDPR legislation.

The South West Grid for Learning Trust, www.swgfl.org.uk, provides excellent advice and resources for services working with young people relating to safety and safeguarding, and includes a helpline to support agencies in developing safe online work.

Online Compass www.onlinecompass.org.uk provides an online tool for reviewing and developing online safety policies and procedures for youth services and other organisations working with young people. It also contains templates for documentation which services may require.



7. Recommendation

The work by the European Commission is the most comprehensive piece of work on Digital Youth Work available to date, and it has already informed work across the UK including updating the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work.

The resources available through www.swgfl.org.uk and www.onlinecompass.org.uk support the report from the Commission with a thorough raft of resources and tools to ensure organisations are able to safely engage with digital youth work.

Given the renewed interest and need for engagement with digital youth work as a result of the Covid crisis, it is recommended that JETS endorses the report from the European Commission, the associated guidelines and competency framework, and seeks ways to promote these more widely with training providers, youth work organisations, workers and funders. It is also recommended that the www.swgfl.org.uk and www.onlinecompass.org.uk sites are promoted as useful resources for ensuring the safety of digital youth work.