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The contribution of youth work to address  
the challenges young people are facing, in particular  
the transition from education to employment

*Results of the expert group set up under  
the European Union Work Plan for Youth  
for 2014-2015 – Executive summary*

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Education and Culture  
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Unit C1 – Youth policy

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## Executive summary

The findings of the expert group<sup>1</sup> detail the role of youth work and its specific contribution to addressing the challenges young people face, in particular the transition from education to employment. In this context, youth work is defined as 'actions directed towards young people regarding activities where they take part voluntarily, designed for supporting their personal and social development through non-formal and informal learning'.<sup>2</sup>

### Background

Youth is a period of many transitions such as moving from dependence on parents/family to independence and autonomy. One of the major transitions young people have to navigate is the journey from education and training to the labour market.

Youth work seeks to create a safe, supportive and flexible environment for personal development and offers non-formal and informal learning opportunities, personal advice, guidance and support. It is essential that young people are supported in developing their own identity, in creating a social network (including family and friends) and are included and respected by society. This also assumes on an individual level that they are healthy, confident, autonomous, motivated and have access to personal resources. Among the key elements of a flourishing society are respect, good relationships and mutual trust. On a societal level it is important that young people have access to quality education, training, guidance, jobs and social security. Likewise it is crucial that society enables young people to express their opinions and to participate fully in their community, social developments and in political life.

All of the above aspects and challenges faced by young people are intrinsically linked: to be part of a social network, to feel part of and included in society, to have a positive outlook for the future, are important preconditions for the successful transition from education to the securing employment.

In order to recognise the true value and contribution of youth work in addressing challenges young people are facing, it is required to adopt and embrace the holistic youth work approach to working with young people. Young people, particularly the most disadvantaged, not only need to be provided with skills for the labour market but more importantly with life skills and supports. These are essential to enable them to deal with the many challenges they will encounter and also the confidence to embrace the opportunities that will arise. The findings of the expert group detailed in this report clearly demonstrate how youth work is currently working on these issues. The report also provides evidence (examples and practices) and some key messages with regard to the role of youth work.

One of the main strengths of the youth work approach is the emphasis on partnership and its role as a link and broker between young people and different fields, sectors and services, such as the local community, school, social services, media and the police.

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<sup>1</sup> Expert group 'on defining the specific contribution of youth work and non-formal and informal learning to address the challenges young people are facing, in particular the transition from education to employment' set up under the European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2014-2015.

<sup>2</sup> Working definition from the expert group on Youth Work Quality Systems in the EU Member States, [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/reports/quality-youth-work\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/reports/quality-youth-work_en.pdf).

## Challenges young people are facing

### Individual

- Positive future outlook
- Using my resources
- Being initiative
- Being autonomous
- Being motivated
- Finding my identity (who can I be?)

### Relational

- Having people I can trust
- Having a good relationship with my friends, parents and family
- Creating a social network

### Societal

- Having access to quality education and training
- Finding a quality guidance
- Finding a quality offer
- Finding a quality job
- Finding a place in society
- Express my opinion in society

They are linked to each other.

## Specific contribution of youth work

**The power of youth work is its holistic approach** which can address many of these challenges at once through:

- Respect
- Dialogue approach
- Relation work (trust)
- Inclusive approach
- Positive approach
- Tailor-made approach
- Flexible approach
- Voluntary based approach
- Non-formal and informal learning
- Resource perspective (building on the young person's potential)
- Youth advocacy

## Practices and messages

The expert group examined a wide range of initiatives involving youth work, across the EU, to support and promote the employability of young people. In doing so this report provides an insight and guidance for all those working with young people as to how the application of youth work principles and practice can support their work.

The analysis of practices proved that youth work principles – such as voluntary participation, youth-centeredness and mutual respect – were appealing for young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds and as a result more productive in delivering outcomes for all concerned.

The practices in this report also demonstrate that youth work often collaborates with other and different sectors, policy-makers, employers, Public Employment Services and other relevant actors to address the needs of young people.

From the practices the expert group mapped the youth work practices against the challenges young people are facing which shows the clear correlation between them. The different messages and outcomes are also detailed here, outlining what that contribution of youth work is in each context.

The result of this mapping exercise is presented in messages illustrating the contribution of youth work focusing on four main target groups: Public Employment Services (PES) and other Youth Guarantee providers, employers, policy-makers in different fields, and young people.

### **(A) Public Employment Services (PES) and other Youth Guarantee providers:**

- (1) Youth work has the potential to reach and empower diverse young people, including NEETs, and can be your partner in facilitating their integration into the labour market.
- (2) Youth work develops the life management and social skills of young people which assists their transition to the labour market.
- (3) Youth work unlocks the potential of young people and increases their motivation to actively enter the labour market.

The youth work approach assists the PES not only to reach more young people, but also to ensure that more young jobseekers are better prepared and motivated to engage successfully with the PES. This not only benefits the young person, but it can decrease the costs and workload of the PES and improve its performance and outcomes.

### **(B) Employers:**

- (4) Valuable work skills such as responsibility, reliability, planning, problem solving and managing – but also entrepreneurial skills – can be gained through youth work.
- (5) Establishing partnerships with youth work actors is an investment in the development of your business or company.
- (6) Youth work offers safe and reliable ways for young people and potential employers to reach each other.

Youth work strengthens many transversal skills useful for professional life and the world of work and enables young people to gain valuable practical experience. By engaging in partnership with youth work employers can reach motivated and committed young people who will be beneficial for their business.

### **(C) Policy-makers:**

(7) Investing in youth work can ensure a better response to a wide range of societal challenges, including the social inclusion of young people, enhanced active citizenship and easing the transition of young people from education and training to the labour market.

(8) Youth work identifies the challenges and new trends among young people.

(9) Youth work brings a systematic and holistic approach to cross-sectoral youth policy.

As a sector with expertise, experience and a good knowledge of the current situation of young people, youth work can link and coordinate actions for young people with other key stakeholders. Youth work can be the initiator and facilitator for creating and developing cross-sectoral initiatives to address the challenges young people are facing. Therefore youth work should also be involved at all levels in relevant policy-making processes.

### **(D) Young people:**

(10) Youth workers help you to become aware of your skills and competences gained through youth work and other learning opportunities.

(11) Present the skills which you gained in youth work to help you get a job.

(12) Youth work can support you to seek employment and assist you to better match your skills and interests with employment opportunities and career goals.

A positive view of young people is the key principle of youth work. The youth work process engages with young people, builds relations and trust and promotes social inclusion. A core attribute of youth work is its contribution to the development of young people's soft skills such as personal and social skills, team working, problem solving, leadership skills. The holistic approach employed by youth work seeks to maximise the full potential of young people.

## **Conclusions**

The report of the expert group clearly demonstrates the link between youth work principles and practice and its contribution to addressing the challenges young people are facing. The report further provides evidence for this connection, with examples of practices, especially in the transition from education to employment.

This connection and the findings should be acknowledged and taken into account by all those working to enhance the employment and employability of young people. The expert group is of the view that awareness of the broad contribution and further potential of youth work in the lives of individuals and society as a whole should be raised. This not only concerns its role in providing young people with opportunities to develop their skills and improve their employability, but also its role in the inclusion of young people in society and unlocking their potential.

The findings and results can be used by many different groups and stakeholders working with and for young people, but are primarily directed at the target audience addressed in the report, namely Public Employment Services, employers, policy-makers and young people.

The outcomes of this expert group should be broadly disseminated to all those working in the youth field. Therefore the expert group urges all stakeholders to ensure that the principles and practices articulated in this document result in concrete action and ultimately enhance the employment, employability and social inclusion of young people in Europe.

**Full report:** [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/reports/contribution-youth-work\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/reports/contribution-youth-work_en.pdf)



