

European Guidelines for Digital Youth Work



Digital transformation is affecting our societies in a myriad of ways. Young people's entire lives will be shaped by these changes. Youth work's purpose is to support the personal and social development of young people. The sector's unconstrained non-formal educational approach makes it uniquely placed to respond to young people's needs in a digitalising society and play a significant role in bridging the digital divide and promoting inclusion.

Digital youth work can use technology to make youth work services more accessible and relevant. It can create opportunities and spaces in which young people can develop a critical, innovative and value-based perspective on the digital transformation, and become the co-constructors of a positive digital future.

“The digital world, and our world, it's one at this point because it's so integrated into our lives. So I think it's important, almost vital, that we have rights there.”

Ibrahim, Scotland

“I really enjoy sharing my knowledge with other young people.”

Leon, Germany

What is Digital Youth Work?

Digital Youth Work¹

- Focuses on the digitalisation and digital transformation of the youth work sector and youth work practice
- Means proactively using and/or addressing digital media and technology in youth work practice as a tool, an activity and/or as content
- Includes a broad range of methods and approaches that can be employed in any youth work setting
- Has the same aims and is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work in general
- Can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online settings

¹Based on European Commission expert group on digitalisation and youth - working definition 2017

What are the Outcomes of Digital Youth Work?

Youth Work is Relevant and Responsive

- Youth work and youth policies are proactive and give due consideration to technological development and digitalisation, and they identify the positive and negative impacts of digitalisation on society, including on youth work practices and services
- Youth work services are more accessible and relevant for young people, including reaching those who may be geographically and socially isolated
- Youth workers have an agile and critical mindset towards digital technology, and have competences to deliver quality youth work
- Increased collaboration and international global networks and networking

Young People are²

- Engaged and empowered, active and creative in digital society
- Developing digital, STEAM³ and media literacy skills
- Confident, resilient and optimistic for the future
- Able to manage personal, social and formal relationships in the digital era
- Considering the risks of digitalisation, making informed and reasoned decisions, and taking control of their digital identity
- Expressing their voice and demonstrating social commitment via digital means
- Accessing new opportunities to network, collaborate and participate in society

“As Kate (youth worker) tells us, no idea is too outrageous. She always tries to encourage us to think out of the box.”

Shannon, Ireland



Examples of Digital Youth Work Practice⁴



The focus is on digitalising youth work services to make them more accessible, up to date and relevant

- Participation in decision-making with digital tools
- Using social media applications to reach young people
- Online counselling with vulnerable young people



The focus is on learning by doing and hands-on activities

- Gaming groups to foster a positive gaming culture
- STEAM and maker projects to develop 21st century skills
- Collective learning to create digital media



The focus is on issues related to digitalisation

- Discussing relationships and behaviours online
- Exploring themes relating to digitalisation and digital literacies
- Empowering young people to champion their digital rights

² Based on Scotland's Youth Work Outcomes, YouthLink Scotland 2016

³ Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths (STEM is also commonly used)

⁴ www.digitallyouthwork.eu/good-practices has 36 short film examples

Guidance for Organisational Development of Digital Youth Work

Strategy: Embed digital youth work into your organisation's strategy and vision

Culture: Innovative and experimental - try new approaches, learn from failure and succeed

Governance and Management: Integrate digital considerations into policies, ethical standards, processes and planning

Human Resources: Provide regular training for staff and volunteers to build their competencies and challenge resistant mindsets

Infrastructure: Equip staff and young people with essential software, hardware, equipment, tools and connectivity

Partnerships: Capitalise on cross-sectoral partnerships while maintaining youth work values



Principles for Youth Workers' Development of Digital Youth Work

Practice

- Plan and deliver Digital Youth Work according to youth work goals and young people's needs and aspirations, integrating digital into the youth work offer
- Introduce Digital Youth Work activities, tools and digitalisation as opportunities for the young people you work with, using innovative methodologies
- Facilitate enquiry-based learning: create a space for young people and youth workers to explore, get stuck and unstuck, encounter and solve problems together
- Enable the move from consumer to creator
- Make informed choices about the tools you are using, considering young people's rights, safety, accessibility and enjoyment
- Build engaging evaluation into your planning
- Showcase and increase recognition of the impact of Digital Youth Work

Ethics

- Transfer offline practice basis and decision-making into a digitalised context, but reflect new challenges of the digital
- Maintain professional relationships and boundaries
- Work in a way that is empowering to young people and helps them defend their rights
- Help young people take control of their relationship with digitalisation, digital media and technology through critical thinking

Professional Development

- Seek out training opportunities to incrementally build new knowledge and skills
- Challenge mindsets and contribute to a digitally agile culture in the youth work setting
- Engage in peer learning, knowledge sharing and international collaboration
- An interest towards digital technologies and an agile mindset are more important than being a technical expert

Funders and Policy Makers

There are exciting examples of how Digital Youth Work can be used in practice. So, funders and policy makers, the youth work sector needs your help to make it possible that ALL young people get the opportunity.

The sector needs you to value youth work as an important educational practice which can empower young people within a digitalising society.

Needs from funders:

- Understand that youth work approaches, goals, ethics and professional boundaries should be considered in the context of digitalisation and valued for their impact
- Understand that young people don't have innately high digital literacy and skills
- Embrace iterative processes and learning from failure in evaluation and reporting; encourage experimentation and permit changes to planned activities
- Fund staffing, infrastructure, equipment, and regular training for practitioners - staff and volunteers
- Invest in continued research about the impact of Digital Youth Work
- Support staff within funding organisations to understand the value of digital youth work and promote sharing best practice

Call to policy makers:

- Recognise and advocate the value of youth work in supporting young people to navigate increasingly digitalised lives, in a way that empowers creativity, self expression, resilience and youth voice
- Incorporate digital youth work into youth strategies, policy and legislation
- Embed digital into professional frameworks for the workforce and invest in capacity building
- Facilitate cross departmental working in exploring the role and importance of the youth work sector in the digital age
- Support the youth work sector's needs for platforms to provide appropriate features for educational professional engagement

“I really enjoyed it, it was a great experience because I only watched it from a distance, but never attended, and now I had the opportunity to participate.”

Young Person, Austria



Key resources are: EU Expert Group on Digitalisation and Youth Report, Council of the European Union Conclusions on Smart Youth Work and Council of the European Union Conclusions on Digital Youth Work (to be adopted 2019)



www.digitalyouthwork.eu

