Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EEDIB) Standards

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Welcome from the CEO

At the National Youth Agency, we believe in the power of youth work to create a more inclusive, equitable, and empowering future for all young people. These standards are not just a framework—they are a declaration of our shared commitment to excellence; ensuring that every young person, regardless of background or circumstance, can thrive.

Youth work has the power to transform lives. It creates spaces where young people can develop confidence, resilience, and the skills they need to navigate an increasingly complex world. That is why these standards are so important. They set out what great youth work looks like, championing equity, challenging discrimination and removing barriers to young people feeling seen, heard, and valued.

They reflect the dedication of the entire youth sector - paid and volunteer youth workers, leaders, organisations, and communities - who work together to create safe, supportive, and inspiring spaces for young people. The standards help people develop what is needed to deliver inclusive practice.

As the sector continues to evolve, these standards provide a clear and consistent benchmark for all those looking to improve their practices. Whether delivering frontline support, shaping policy, leading services, or volunteering their time, all those working with young people have a vital role in ensuring high-quality, impactful practice.

Thank you for your dedication to upholding these principles and for your role in ensuring that youth work remains a force for good in the lives of young people.

We would like to extend particular additional thanks to all individuals and organisations that helped shape these standards, including Youth Focus South West, UK Youth, The Proud Trust, Bromsgrove Youth & Community Hub, Young Somerset, Powered by Can, Young Ladies Club, Institute for Outdoor Learning, Power The Fight, Triumph, London VRU and the former YMCA George Williams College.

Leigh Middleton, CEO
National Youth Agency

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Introduction

The principles of equity, equality, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EEDIB) are key to youth work. They help make sure that all young people are treated fairly, have access to opportunities, and feel safe and valued. It is more important than ever that youth work remains committed to values of social justice and inclusion, and to building a society with a sense of belonging for everyone.

These standards are here to help youth workers and volunteers create fair and welcoming services for all young people. They offer practical guidance to make sure young people are treated with respect as equals and their differences are celebrated.

The National Youth Agency (NYA) has developed these standards with youth workers, for youth workers. They are designed for everyone involved in youth work—whether you are a volunteer, a professional youth worker, or a trustee who is providing leadership and governance for a charity or Community Interest Company.

Standards play a vital role in enhancing the professionalism of our work, promoting accountability, and ensuring continuous improvement in both the management and delivery of youth services. They serve as a reminder that our primary accountability is not only to funders, colleagues, or employers, but to the young people we serve.

The standards provide a structured framework to support youth workers, volunteers, and organisations in embedding inclusive and equitable practices into our work. By doing so, we create safe, supportive environments where young people feel valued, empowered, and respected.

These standards are designed to support and to be used in conjunction with the Youth Work Practice Standards[1], Safeguarding Standards for the Youth Sector [2] and the Digital Youth Work Standards [3].

Young people, youth work and the youth sector

Tier one local authorities have a duty to secure youth work provision for young people aged from 13 to 19 years old to meet their needs outside of school or college. Youth work is provided for children and young people from the age of 8 and up to 25 years for those with additional needs.

Youth work happens in a variety of spaces and places, and the trusted adults that deliver this can include volunteers and part-time or full-time professionally qualified practitioners. This can be in traditional youth work settings such as youth clubs or detached projects in communities, and in allied sectors such as the uniformed sector, health, arts, sport and faith-based organisations. Not all youth sector providers call themselves youth workers or uniformed leaders; however, providers apply the same principles and values to their work with young people. For the purposes of these standards, the terms youth work and youth worker apply to all projects, programmes and providers whereby trusted adults build supportive relationships with children and young people and deliver informal education or positive activities. This guidance is intended to inform the practice of all people working with young people through this relational practice.

The NYA defines contemporary youth work as:

'a distinct educational process adapted across a variety of settings to support a young person's personal, social, emotional and educational development. It begins with the development of a unique, challenging and developmental relationship with young people, which is used to:

— Explore their values, beliefs, ideas and issues

— Enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society

— Facilitate learning practical and life skills that will help them to realise their full potential

Youth work is dynamic and fluid. It might include adventure and activities away from home, sports, attending youth clubs (physical or digital) or leadership and advocacy work on issues chosen by young people.

It can be led by skilled volunteers in community spaces, or degree educated professional youth workers in specialised environments such as hospitals and prisons. Youth work is always contextual, addressing the needs of the young people engaged, with an understanding and respect for the communities they are part of.

You can find more information about youth work on the [NYA website](#)[4].

Definitions and frameworks

EEDIB definitions

Equity, equality, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EEDIB) represent a set of guiding principles designed to shape inclusive youth work practice. This is to create fair, inclusive, and diverse environments where everyone can participate fully and feel valued. This is for young people and youth workers alike.

Equity	Equality	Diversity	Inclusion	Belonging
Acknowledges that people may need different types of support to achieve fair outcomes and ensures differentiated resources are available to enable this to happen.	Ensures that all people receive the same opportunities, rights, and treatment, inclusive of all backgrounds and identities.	Recognises and celebrates the unique identities, experiences, and perspectives of people, promoting and valuing differences.	Focuses on creating welcoming environments where everyone feels respected, welcome and able to participate fully in what they choose to.	Goes beyond inclusion to foster a deeper sense of connection and purpose, ensuring that everyone feels valued and integral to the community.

We also include here intersectionality. Although this isn't part of the EEDIB acronym, it is key to good youth work.

Intersectionality
Encourages us to understand the multiple and complex ways that inequalities can overlap and lead to discrimination (for example, the over-representation of young, working-class Black men in the criminal justice system).

The principles are enshrined throughout these standards. When applied to your youth work, they will ensure:

1 Fair treatment for all young people

Ensure fair treatment for all young people, considering their backgrounds, identities, and circumstances. Equity and equality standards promote justice by eliminating discrimination and providing equal opportunities for engagement.

2 Celebration of diversity and community building

Youth work involves engaging with a diverse range of individuals. Incorporating diversity standards acknowledges and celebrates the unique backgrounds, cultures, and experiences of young people, fostering an environment where differences are embraced, and strong, positive relationships and a sense of community are built.

3 Accessible and inclusive environments

Make youth work services accessible to everyone, including those with hidden and visible disabilities, to ensure no young person is excluded. This involves making reasonable adjustments, removing physical and social barriers, and using inclusive communication methods. Inclusion standards ensure that youth work environments are welcoming places, where young people feel valued, respected, and included, promoting a sense of belonging essential for personal development and well-being.

4 Addressing systemic inequalities

EEDIB standards help address systemic issues that perpetuate inequalities. By actively promoting equity and challenging discriminatory practices, youth work can contribute to dismantling barriers that could limit the potential of young people, both individually and collectively.

5 Enhanced learning, growth, and well-being

In an inclusive and equitable environment, young people are more likely to engage actively, learn effectively, grow personally, and experience greater wellbeing. EEDIB standards support the holistic development of young people through the Youth Work Curriculum by removing obstacles and providing opportunities.

6 Social responsibility and advocacy

Youth work shapes the values and perspectives of young people and youth workers. By applying these EEDIB standards, practitioners can demonstrate values of social responsibility, empathy, and respect, supporting young people in contributing positively to a diverse and inclusive society. Youth workers aim to ensure every young person has a fair chance, providing opportunities to learn about challenging issues, develop advocacy skills, and work together for positive social change.

Youth work should always respond to young people within their contexts, requiring an understanding of all the communities they are part of. Additionally, youth workers need to recognise their own privileges and disadvantages and how this shapes them as individuals and professionals. By being aware of these personal factors and the needs of young people, we can strive towards better youth work and a fairer society.

As youth workers, it is essential to embrace challenges, engage in critical conversations, reflect courageously, listen actively, and learn from our mistakes. Understanding privilege and addressing power imbalances are fundamental to our work. EEDIB standards guide us in creating shared spaces with young people where openness and intentional inclusivity are integral to our culture.

Understanding visible and invisible diversity in youth work: the importance of not making assumptions

To create an inclusive and supportive environment, youth workers must understand the diverse backgrounds and experiences of young people. Diversity in youth work includes many different characteristics—some that are easy to see and others that are not immediately visible.

What is visible diversity?

Visible diversity includes aspects of a young person's identity that may be immediately noticeable. However, it is important to avoid assumptions based solely on appearance. These aspects can include:

Race and ethnicity: a young person's physical features may lead to assumptions about their ethnic or cultural background.

Gender expression: a young person's expression of gender might lead to assumptions about both their sex and gender. This can include the way they dress, interact with the world, or present themselves in terms of masculinity and femininity.

Age: physical development and maturity may give an indication of a young person's age, but this might not be accurate.

Physical abilities: some disabilities may be more apparent due to the use of assistive devices, such as a walking frame or wheelchair.

While these aspects are often the first to be noticed, they represent only a fraction of a young person's identity. Recognising visible diversity is important, but youth workers must go beyond surface-level observations to understand each person's unique experience.

What is invisible diversity?

Invisible diversity includes aspects of a young person's identity and experiences that are not immediately noticeable. These factors can significantly shape their lives and interactions but may not be openly shared or recognised.

Sexual orientation: a young person's sexual orientation is personal and only known if they choose to share it.

Gender identity: a young person's gender identity (the gender they identify with as part of their sense of self) is important to who they are as a person.

Religion: faith and spiritual beliefs may not always be outwardly expressed, especially in environments where a young person may not feel comfortable sharing them.

Socioeconomic status: financial backgrounds are not visible but can impact a young person's experiences, access to resources, and opportunities.

Mental health and neurodiversity: conditions such as anxiety and depression, or neurodivergence such as ADHD or autism may not be apparent but can significantly influence a young person's daily life.

Chronic illnesses: many long-term health conditions are not visible but may affect a young person's participation in activities, energy levels, and well-being.

Recognising invisible diversity helps youth workers develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of life young people navigate, fostering more meaningful connections and effective support.

Current legislation and frameworks

As youth workers, it is necessary to be aware of the key frameworks and legislation that you should be familiar with when considering the 'what, where and how' of youth work and your responsibilities as an employer.

The principal legislation relating to all activity across EEDIB is the Equality Act 2010[5] (and amendments 2023).

This protects everyone from discrimination because of the following nine 'protected characteristics':

— age

— gender reassignment

— being married or in a civil partnership

— being pregnant or on maternity leave

— disability

— race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin

— religion or belief

— sex

— sexual orientation

The 2010 Equality Act specifies that anyone with any of the protected characteristics listed above is protected from:

— **Direct discrimination:** Treating someone with a protected characteristic less favourably than others.

— **Indirect discrimination:** Implementing rules or arrangements that apply to everyone but unfairly disadvantage someone with a protected characteristic.

— **Harassment:** engaging in unwanted behaviour related to a protected characteristic that violates someone's dignity or creates an offensive environment for them.

— **Victimisation:** treating someone unfairly because they have complained about discrimination or harassment.

The Act allows for "positive action" but not "positive discrimination."

Positive action means taking steps to help disadvantaged or underrepresented groups have fairer opportunities. This could include targeted training programmes or outreach activities to remove barriers that prevent equal access. For example, a youth project might create a safe space for LGBTQ+ young people, or an employer might choose a candidate from an underrepresented group if two applicants have identical qualifications and experience (e.g., hiring a disabled woman to improve workplace diversity of thought and experience.

Positive discrimination, however, is not allowed. This means a person cannot be hired, promoted, or given an opportunity, solely because they belong to a particular group, as this could unfairly disadvantage others. The only exceptions are specific legal exemptions, such as hiring only women for roles in women's refuges.

This approach aims to increase diversity and equality while ensuring fairness. This distinction is important when designing services for specific groups, ensuring they are inclusive without unfairly excluding others.

The Human Rights Act 1998[6] is an important part of EEDIB, as it sets out the rights and freedoms that everyone in the UK is entitled to. It brings the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)[7] into UK law, meaning these rights can be enforced.

While all ECHR rights matter, some are particularly relevant to youth work. These include:

— **Article 9:** Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

— **Article 10:** Freedom of expression

— **Article 11:** Freedom of assembly and association

— **Article 14:** Protection from discrimination

— **Article 17:** Protection from the misuse of rights

Young people's rights are specifically outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC[8]). Youth workers put many of these rights into practice every day, creating spaces for young people to lead, advocate and be heard, as set out in Article 12. This states that every child has the right to express their views and to have them taken seriously. This is especially important when it comes to decisions that specifically affect them, such as during immigration proceedings, care decisions, or decisions about their everyday life.

Other key responsibilities:

If your youth work is funded or delivered by a local authority, it must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty[9] which requires organisations to promote equality and eliminate discrimination.

The **National Occupational Standards for Youth Work** (NOS[10]) set out the key skills and principles for professional youth work. Several NOS standards relate specifically to EEDIB, as set out in the table below.

You can find more information on the National Youth Agency (NYA) website.

Actively demonstrate commitment to inclusion, equity and young people's interests and health and wellbeing	Assist young people to recognise, realise and defend their rights	
	Promote equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion (management and leadership)	
	Develop a culture and ethos that promotes inclusion and values diversity	
Manage and develop yourself	Work as an effective and critically reflective youth work practitioner	
Encourage engagement of young people in their community	Support inclusive and collective working	
	Relate to different communities	
Engage with communities to promote the voice and needs of young people	Promote the needs, rights and interests of individuals and groups in the community	

Checklist

Growing in confidence with EEDIB

In youth work, reflection and learning must be continuous in order to adapt and evolve in line with the changing world and needs of young people. Inclusion and belonging are key to this and whilst this document sets out what EEDIB is and how to embed it in your youth work organisation, there are other steps that will help you embed it across your practice.

This is a learning journey for everyone, and acceptance of that is part of embracing diversity and inclusivity. Knowing when to be honest about what you do and don't know, and where to go to get additional help, advice and guidance will improve your practice and create better experiences for young people.

Be curious
Ask questions of yourself and others on all things EEDIB and explore different views and perspectives to understand a range of experiences.

Reflect on your practice
Regularly reflect on your approach and interactions. Consider how your own biases might affect your work and seek ways to improve inclusivity.

Seek feedback
Encourage feedback from the young people you work with to understand their experiences and perceptions. Use this feedback to make informed improvements.

Stay open-minded
Be willing to change your views based on new information.

Educate yourself
Complete continuing professional development (CPD), engage in critical discussion, listen and read up on related topics to understand these concepts better.

Stay informed
Keep up with new developments and discussions that will make you a more inclusive and culturally sensitive practitioner.

Advocate for EEDIB
Promote EEDIB values within your organisation and the wider community. Advocate for policies and practices that support fairness and inclusion.

The who

Staff and volunteers

The EEDIB (equity, equality, diversity, inclusion, and belonging) standards are essential for all those involved in youth work, particularly the professionals delivering it. These standards are there to guide you in developing practices that reflect the diversity, complexity, and lived experiences of those you serve, ensuring that your approach is inclusive, equitable, and just.

EEDIB is fundamentally about people. While awareness and activism around EEDIB and social justice have grown, many youth workers may feel unsure about how to approach these topics and are worried about how to get it right. This is especially felt where youth workers and volunteers might lack personal or professional experience in certain areas.

Good youth work doesn't require you to share the same identity or experiences as the young people you support. It's about how we model acceptance, inclusion, curiosity, empathy, and compassion. We create spaces where all young people feel welcome, respected, and valued, celebrating diverse backgrounds, experiences and identities.

To challenge discrimination effectively, youth workers must encourage open, respectful conversations, especially on sensitive topics like racism and ableism. This means listening actively, maintaining professional boundaries, and creating opportunities for learning and reflection for young people – and ourselves.

Embodying these principles in your daily interactions and decision-making processes creates environments that promote fairness and belonging for everyone.

When considering how to implement EEDIB standards, there are several key factors for youth workers to reflect on:

Personal awareness and reflection: youth workers must actively engage in self-reflection, understanding their own privileges, biases, and the societal factors that influence their perspectives and interactions. By recognising how our backgrounds and identities shape our approach to youth work, we can more effectively support diverse groups of young people and foster inclusive spaces. Training sessions such as NYA's Youth Work Insights[11] can help youth workers develop confidence in these areas.

Cultural competence and sensitivity: understanding and respecting the cultural backgrounds, values, and experiences of the communities we work with is essential. Youth workers must strive to ensure that our practices reflect the diverse cultural needs of the young people we support, while also challenging cultural stereotypes or assumptions we may hold.

Addressing systemic barriers: youth workers can challenge the structures and systems that perpetuate inequality, both within the institutions we work in and the wider community. This involves recognising and actively addressing the systemic barriers that may affect the professional development, progression, and well-being of colleagues, young people, and ourselves.

Inclusive leadership and teamwork: as leaders and role models, youth workers should create an environment where inclusivity is a priority. This includes promoting diverse leadership within teams, empowering colleagues from underrepresented groups, and encouraging a collaborative approach that values diverse perspectives and experiences. Steps should be taken to diversify recruitment and leadership pipelines to better reflect society and create diversity of thought, experiences and knowledge in leadership. Resources from organisations like the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)[12] can offer guidance on inclusive hiring practices. This approach, known as positive action, helps organisations confront and change structural barriers to more equitable workplaces.

Representation matters: diversity within youth work teams is vital. A mix of genders, abilities, ethnicities, identities and cultural backgrounds within staff teams helps create a more inclusive environment. This is important for young people accessing youth work projects, and for staff teams. For example, if an organisation's leadership is White British, this does not reflect the ethno-cultural make-up of the UK, and mirrors some of the inequalities that are felt in wider society.

Commitment to ongoing learning: EEDIB standards require youth workers to engage in continuous professional development, staying informed about current issues in diversity, equity, and inclusion. This knowledge allows us to refine our practice, ensuring it remains responsive to the changing needs of the communities we serve. It helps to manage anxieties and uncertainties, equipping teams to engage effectively and support young people holistically.

By applying the EEDIB standards, youth workers contribute to creating environments where all individuals - both young people and practitioners - feel respected, valued, and supported. This work is an ongoing commitment to promoting social justice, equity, and belonging within the youth work sector, ensuring that practices are not only inclusive but also actively transformative.

The Who

Good Practice	Great Practice
Encourage staff to reflect on how their personal identities and experiences influence their practice and impact on others.	**Create a culture of ongoing critical reflection,** in which staff are regularly supported through feedback and professional development to understand how their intersecting identities shape their practice and decision-making.
Provide learning opportunities to support staff in understanding and respecting cultural differences, ensuring cultural sensitivity is integrated into day-to-day interactions.	**Embed cultural humility and competence as core values across all levels** of the organisation, actively supporting staff in developing a deep understanding of anti-oppressive practice, unconscious bias, and intersectionality, reflected in policies, recruitment, training, and practice.
Recognise and address barriers within the organisation and in your work with young people that may limit opportunities for certain groups. This could include unequal access to services, resources, or support based on background or identity.	**Proactively identify and dismantle systemic barriers** that limit equal access to opportunities for staff and young people. This includes embedding equity-focused practices and regularly reviewing policies both within the organisation and in youth work delivery to ensure fair, transparent, and accessible pathways for all.
Ensure all staff are included in decision-making processes, and leadership roles are accessible to everyone, promoting a collaborative and inclusive team environment that prioritises diversity of thought, experience and identity.	**Model equitable and accountable leadership at all levels,** ensuring diverse representation in leadership roles and that leadership decisions reflect the lived experiences and contributions of all staff members.
Provide clear opportunities for leadership development, empowering staff from underrepresented backgrounds to take on leadership roles and influence change within the organisation.	**Create structured pathways for progression,** ensuring that leadership development includes targeted support, sponsorship, and mentoring for staff from marginalised groups, including racialised communities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and disabled staff.

Good Practice	Great Practice
Actively create a culture where staff and young people feel respected, valued, and psychologically safe, with policies and practices that support inclusivity. Provide regular opportunities for staff to connect, seek guidance, and feel part of a team.	**Foster a proactive and intersectional culture of belonging,** where inclusion is actively practised and reinforced daily. Implement structured and sustainable support systems, such as identity-based mentoring or groups, and peer networks, to empower staff and young people.
Recruit individuals from diverse backgrounds to reflect the community served, ensuring recruitment and retention practices are inclusive and accessible.	**Actively recruit, retain, and advance a workforce that reflects the demographics** and lived experiences of young people and the wider community, embedding cultural sensitivity training, transparent progression pathways, and retention strategies into all processes.
Provide access to training focused on equity, equality, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EEDIB), supporting staff in understanding and applying these principles in their practice. Ensure all training materials and opportunities are accessible and inclusive for everyone.	**Promote a culture of lifelong learning,** encouraging staff to engage with emerging research, intersectional perspectives, and best practice models. Ensure professional development opportunities related to EEDIB, anti-racism, and inclusive leadership are regularly available, and promoted.
Promote a culture of respectful and constructive challenge, where people feel confident to speak up and speak out. Respond promptly and fairly to complaints of discrimination or harassment, ensuring that issues are addressed and resolved.	**Take a proactive and restorative stance against discrimination and harassment,** creating a safe and transparent and actively anti-discriminatory environment where harms are addressed immediately, Ensure staff and young people are equipped with the tools, training, and confidence to disrupt bias, challenge oppressive behaviours, and advocate for inclusion.

The where

The locations youth work takes place

Youth work takes place in a wide range of settings; Indoors, outdoors, online. It happens in spaces where young people choose to be or where they may be required to be, such as schools, hospitals, or secure estates. The environment in which youth work happens plays a vital role in shaping young people's experiences. It is more than just a location; it influences how included, safe, and valued young people feel.

The setting must be accessible, welcoming, and adaptable to the diverse needs of young people. This includes physical accessibility, emotional and psychological safety, affordability, and cultural relevance. Whether youth work takes place in a community centre, a detached setting, an online space, or a residential environment, it should create a sense of belonging and ensure that all young people can fully engage and be included.

A youth work setting is shaped not only by its physical features but also by its culture, atmosphere, and the relationships within it. The way a space is managed, decorated, and used should reflect the needs and identities of the young people who access it. Thoughtful consideration of practical factors such as transport, affordability, and the suitability of shared spaces ensures that no young person is excluded due to financial, physical, or social barriers.

Online youth work extends the reach of provision, offering access to those who may not be able to attend in person due to location, disability, or caring responsibilities, or simply for those that prefer digital youth work. It must be designed with the same principles of safety, accessibility, and inclusion as in-person settings.

Residential experiences provide unique opportunities for growth, independence, and learning. However, they require careful planning to ensure they are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of participants. Risk assessments should consider both physical and emotional safety, and young people should be supported in voicing their individual needs to prevent barriers to inclusive engagement.

Wherever youth work takes place, the environment must be designed and managed with intention. Spaces should reflect the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring that all young people feel safe, respected, and able to participate fully.

> **Residential experiences provide unique opportunities for growth, independence, and learning.**

General Accessibility and Location

Places

— Involve young people in the design and improvement of spaces.

— Make spaces inclusive for young people with physical and hidden disabilities.

— Work with young people to co-create solutions for improving accessibility.

— Collaborate with local organisations and experts to implement necessary adaptations.

— Regularly review and update spaces based on feedback and changing needs.

— Ensure facilities are welcoming, safe, and compliant with health and safety regulations.

— Address all accessibility barriers for young people with physical and hidden disabilities.

— Create a safe and positive space.

— Provide quiet spaces for those that want it, including neurodiverse young people, those with mental health needs, and those requiring areas for prayer or contemplation.

— Decorate spaces in an inclusive way that reflects the diversity of young people using them.

Online spaces

— Ensure online provision is equipped in the same way as in-person, with accessibility and inclusion at the forefront of design.

— Work with young people to design services that are inclusive and accessible.

— Adapt services based on young people's input to better meet their needs.

— Use platforms and tools with built-in accessibility features.

— Provide alternative content formats where needed (e.g., subtitles, screen-reader-friendly content).

— Develop content and activities that are relevant and sensitive to diverse cultural backgrounds.

— Offer flexible session times to accommodate different schedules and commitments.

Shared spaces

— Find ways for young people to feel belonging in the space, even when sharing with other groups.

— Use cost-effective solutions like movable boards, youth-designed displays, or flexible furniture.

— Involve young people in venue decision-making (e.g., bringing youth representatives into management discussions).

— Secure dedicated time slots to ensure young people have protected access to the space.

— Ensure shared buildings are secure, welcoming, and accessible for all.

— Work with young people to identify and implement safety and comfort measures.

— Proactively address concerns about other user groups that may affect young people's sense of safety or comfort.

— Collaborate with building management and young people to create an inclusive and respectful environment.

Cost of provision

— Ensure services are affordable and accessible to all young people.

— Reduce financial barriers through flexible pricing models (e.g., "pay what you can") to limit socio-economic barriers and stigma.

— Seek additional funding to cover accessibility and inclusion related costs.

Travel

— Choose locations that are easy and affordable to reach.

— Ensure locations are easily accessible, safe, and close to home or school.

— Support attendance by offering travel passes or collaborating with local authorities for reduced fares.

— Ensure travel arrangements consider the needs of those with mobility challenges.

— Ensure safe access routes for young people traveling to and from provision.

— Work with local authorities to address risks, provide detached youth workers, or arrange community transport.

Residential experiences

— Ensure all aspects of the residential are accessible and inclusive.

— Consider factors such as gender identity, disability, faith, and lived experiences in accommodation and facility planning as standard, rather than by exception.

— Use anonymous needs assessments to help young people feel comfortable sharing their requirements.

— Conduct thorough assessments of venues and activities to ensure inclusivity for all participants.

— Address physical, emotional, cultural, and accessibility concerns to ensure safety and inclusion.

— Provide trained staff and accessible resources for emotional and practical support.

— Offer clear channels for young people to voice concerns or needs.

— Gather feedback after the residential to assess effectiveness.

— Use young people's input to improve future programmes.

Risk assessment and safeguarding wellbeing

— Consider diverse abilities, body types, and inclusivity needs explicitly in risk assessments.

— Involve young people in identifying risks and co-creating mitigations rather than making assumptions.

— Assess risks in real time based on young people's emotions and needs (dynamic risk assessment).

— Collaborate with colleagues to respond to emerging situations to meet the needs of young people.

— Create a safe and supportive environment for emotional well-being.

— Ensure the environment is free from hazards and compliant with health and safety regulations.

— Conduct regular inspections and address safety concerns promptly.

— Ensure there is a safe space where young people feel comfortable sharing concerns.

— Ensure all data and information is protected and treated with respect to protect the dignity of young people.

The Where

Good Practice	Great Practice
Ensure youthwork spaces (physical and online) are safe, accessible, welcoming, and inclusive for all young people, including those with physical, sensory, cognitive, cultural, or mental health needs. Foster environments where young people feel comfortable, valued, and respected.	**Actively work with young people to design, review, and improve spaces,** ensuring they are fully accessible, identity-affirming, culturally inclusive, and responsive to evolving needs.
Decorate and design spaces to reflect the diversity of young people using them, ensuring those currently attending feel represented while also fostering inclusion for those not yet engaged.	**Embed anti-oppressive practice by involving young people in co-creating environments** that celebrate race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, faith, disability, and other aspects of identity. Ensure spaces actively challenge bias and promote belonging.
Create safe and secure spaces by addressing health, safety, and safeguarding requirements and ensuring quiet spaces for those who need them.	**Take a proactive approach to physical, emotional, and psychological safety** by regularly reviewing risk assessments, adapting spaces based on young people's input, and embedding culturally competent and neuroinclusive safeguarding in all settings.
Adapt environments in shared spaces to be flexible, inclusive, and trauma-informed, ensuring they cater to diverse needs, cultural considerations, and intersectional experiences. Encourage young people to take an active role in these adaptations to promote a sense of belonging. Work collaboratively with building management to ensure young people feel safe and comfortable in shared spaces.	**Facilitate a sense of belonging and ownership** by providing young people with meaningful decision-making roles in how spaces are designed, used, and maintained. Establish formal agreements with venue management to ensure young people have protected time and space and that their voices are represented in decision-making.
Provide alternative methods for engagement, including online platforms, to support young people who may face geographical, economic, disability-related, or other barriers to attending in person.	**Ensure online spaces are fully inclusive** by using accessible platforms, adapting content formats, and incorporating multiple modes of engagement that reflect diverse needs and lived experiences.

Good Practice	Great Practice
Choose accessible locations where possible, and minimise travel costs if they are not covered through funding support.	**Work in partnership** with transport providers, local authorities, and funding bodies to ensure travel and participation costs are never a barrier for any young person.
Plan residentials and outdoor activities that are inclusive, with accessibility considerations and risk assessments in place to support participation.	**Actively involve young people in shaping residential experiences,** ensuring their diverse needs, cultural considerations, accessibility, and safety are prioritised from the outset. Use anonymous needs assessments to ensure all young people can participate equitably.
Regularly collect feedback from young people to improve spaces and accessibility.	**Embed a culture of co-production and ongoing reflection,** in which young people lead discussions on how spaces can better meet their needs and where their ideas actively shape future developments.

The how

Doing youth work

Inclusive youth work is not just about who is present in the space, but also about considering who isn't and why they might not be there. It requires a proactive approach to engagement, planning, and reflection to ensure all young people feel welcomed, valued, and able to participate fully.

High-quality youth work is intentional, embedding equity, equality, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EEDIB) in every aspect—from activity design and communication to decision-making and leadership. This means ensuring that spaces, content, and opportunities reflect the diversity of young people, challenge exclusionary practices, and actively remove barriers to participation.

Delivering inclusive youth work involves listening, adapting, and co-creating with young people. This includes:

— Embedding inclusive planning: thinking critically about how activities are designed, promoted, and delivered to ensure they are accessible and welcoming to all, considering language, representation, and engagement styles.

— Creating space for reflection: supporting youth workers to examine how their own perspectives and biases might shape their approach, and ensuring they seek input from young people, colleagues, and external sources to continuously improve inclusivity.

— Prioritising youth voice and feedback: actively involving young people in shaping their experiences through open conversations, safe feedback mechanisms, and shared decision-making.

— Fostering safe and empowering discussions: facilitating conversations about identity, inclusion, and social justice, equipping young people with the confidence and skills to navigate and challenge inequalities.

— Challenging assumptions: recognising that visible and invisible aspects of diversity affect how young people experience youth work and ensuring that no one is excluded based on preconceptions or unspoken barriers.

An inclusive approach should be the foundation of youth work, not an afterthought. By embedding EEDIB principles into everyday practice, youth workers can create spaces that build confidence, belonging, and agency for all young people, equipping them to thrive within their communities and beyond.

Why challenging assumptions is essential in youth work

Inclusive youth work requires more than good intentions. It demands active reflection, continuous learning, and a commitment to equitable practice. One of the biggest barriers to inclusion is unconscious assumptions about young people based on visible and invisible characteristics. These assumptions can shape interactions, influence decision-making, and unintentionally exclude or disadvantage certain groups.

This section is included to help youth workers recognise, challenge, and change assumption-based thinking, ensuring that all young people -inclusive of all backgrounds, identities and abilities - feel seen, heard, and valued. By demonstrating curiosity, active listening, cultural openness and a willingness to learn, youth workers can create environments where every young person can fully participate, thrive, and feel a genuine sense of belonging.

How to challenge assumptions and centre inclusion

Practice active listening:

— Engage with young people with curiosity and openness, allowing them to share their perspectives without judgment.

— Listen to understand rather than to respond, acknowledging that lived experience differs from individual to individual.

— Ask open and respectful questions:

— Avoid making assumptions about a young person's needs, identity, or background.

— Use sensitive and inclusive questions such as:

— "What can we do to make this space feel more comfortable for you?"

— "Is there anything that might make it harder for you to join in?"

— "Are there any barriers that might make it harder for you to participate?"

— "What's the best way for you to share your thoughts and ideas?"

Commit to continuous learning:

— Stay informed about different cultures, identities, disabilities, and lived experiences.

— Seek out training, lived-experience-led discussions, and youth-led opportunities to expand your understanding of inclusivity.

Be open to correction and growth:

— If a young person corrects an assumption, thank them for sharing their perspective rather than reacting defensively.

— Model humility and willingness to learn, showing young people that challenging biases is a shared responsibility.

Create an environment in which assumptions are actively challenged:

— Build a culture where young people feel safe correcting misconceptions and advocating for their needs.

— Make sure all staff and volunteers feel confident in using inclusive language and understanding different perspectives.

— Use diverse and representative materials, activities, and language that reflect diverse backgrounds and experiences, so inclusion is part of everything that happens, not just an extra step.

Challenging assumptions, being authentic, and listening to young people creates spaces where everyone feels valued, heard, and empowered to participate fully. This builds stronger relationships, trust, and a more inclusive, impactful youth work experience where everyone can thrive.

The value of protected spaces for young people

Creating protected spaces for young people based on their identity and lived experiences can be an essential part of youth work that promotes inclusivity, belonging, and personal growth. These spaces, such as young women's projects, LGBTQ+ youth groups, or other identity-based groups, allow young people to explore who they are in a safe, supportive environment where they can be themselves freely without fear of judgment or discrimination.

Young people, particularly those from marginalised or underrepresented communities, often face challenges and barriers in society that others may not experience. Protected spaces give them the opportunity to connect with others who share similar identities, validate their experiences, and receive support tailored to their needs. These groups can become places of empowerment, where young people are encouraged to develop confidence, build self-esteem, and strengthen their sense of belonging.

These protected spaces are not about excluding others but about creating opportunities for young people to be themselves without the pressures of a more general or potentially unwelcoming environment. For example, young women's spaces provide an opportunity to address the unique experiences of women in a world that often marginalises their voices. Similarly, LGBT groups offer a space where young people can explore their identity and connect with others who understand their experiences.

Holding these spaces is a powerful way to show young people that their identity matters, that they are seen and valued, and that they deserve a space where they can explore and express who they are safely. They give young people the tools and confidence to face the challenges that come with their unique identities and experiences while helping to build a more inclusive community for all.

Creating protected spaces also teaches the wider community about the importance of diversity, empathy, and respect, and how these qualities contribute to building stronger, more connected societies.

As youth workers and volunteers, holding these spaces with care is an act of affirmation. It's about empowering young people to be proud of their identities, offering them the chance to share their voices, and supporting their journey toward a more confident and self-aware future. These spaces are crucial because they show young people that who they are is enough, and that their identity deserves to be celebrated.

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Facilitating conversations on EEDIB with young people

Facilitating discussions on equity, equality, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EEDIB) with young people as part of your youth work helps promote understanding, openness, and inclusivity. These conversations help young people build resilience, challenge societal biases, and gain the skills and confidence needed to advocate for themselves and others. By encouraging discussion, we can empower young people to tackle injustice and inequality, creating spaces where everyone feels heard, respected, and included.

The steps below provide a framework for youth workers and volunteers to engage effectively in these conversations, both with young people and colleagues. These practices not only create inclusive environments but also encourage personal growth, understanding, and a culture of active listening and respect.

Prepare and learn

Understand EEDIB: make sure you understand the core principles of EEDIB before starting a conversation. This allows you to speak with confidence and knowledge.

Know the context: be aware of the specific issues and needs of the group you're engaging with. This ensures the conversation is relevant and addresses their experiences.

Create a safe environment

Encourage openness: make sure everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts without fear of judgment. If any young people don't feel safe, ask them what would help them feel more comfortable in the conversation.

Set ground rules: agree on respectful discussion rules, such as listening without interrupting and avoiding personal attacks. For example, you might say, "Let's agree to listen to each other and speak respectfully."

Listen actively

Show empathy: listen with the intention to understand, not just to respond. Acknowledge and respect others' experiences. Reflect on what they say to show you are actively engaged.

Ask open questions: encourage deeper discussion by asking questions that invite more than yes or no answers. For example: "How does this issue affect your experience?" or "Can you tell me more about how you feel?"

Be respectful and open-minded

Respect different views: even when you disagree, respect others' perspectives. If a young person or colleague has a different view on a topic, listen to their reasoning and acknowledge their perspective.

Avoid assumptions: don't assume you know someone's experiences based on their background. For example, don't assume a quiet person is disinterested—there might be underlying reasons such as social anxiety or a neurodivergent condition. Approach each person with an open mind.

Use clear language

Be Specific: use clear and straightforward language to explain EEDIB concepts. Provide examples when necessary to ensure understanding. Avoid jargon or terms that could be confusing for some individuals.

Use inclusive language: be mindful of the language you use. Choose words that respect everyone's identity, experiences, and preferences. For instance, ask young people about their preferred pronouns and use them consistently.

Focus on solutions

Find common goals: Look for shared objectives to help build practical solutions together. Acknowledge any disagreements but focus on what everyone can agree on.

Plan actions: after identifying issues, discuss concrete steps that can be taken to improve EEDIB practices. This ensures that the conversation leads to real-world changes.

Encourage continuous learning

Promote learning: encourage everyone to continue learning about EEDIB, diversity, and inclusion. Share relevant resources and materials to support ongoing education.

Provide resources: offer access to additional learning opportunities such as workshops, reading materials, or training sessions to help deepen understanding and knowledge of EEDIB topics.

Reflect and improve

Review the conversation: after each discussion, take some time to reflect on what went well and what could be improved. Ask for feedback from young people and colleagues to ensure that future conversations are more effective and inclusive.

Ask for feedback: request feedback on how comfortable participants felt, what they learned, and how you can make future discussions even more welcoming and engaging.

Be flexible

Adapt your approach: Be prepared to change your approach based on feedback or new information. Stay open to adjusting how you facilitate conversations to ensure they meet the needs of everyone involved. Flexibility is key to fostering an inclusive environment.

Additional considerations for creating safe, inclusive conversations

It's important to create a space where young people feel empowered to express their thoughts, opinions, and experiences without fear of judgment. This includes acknowledging the invisible barriers some young people may face, such as social anxiety, neurodiversity, or health conditions.

Remember to avoid making assumptions about young people based on visible traits or behaviours. For example, a young person who is quiet might not be disinterested; they might need time to process or feel anxious in social settings. Instead of assuming, practice active listening, ask open questions, and create opportunities for everyone to share their experiences.

It's equally important to maintain an environment where young people can ask questions and seek clarity about sensitive topics, allowing them to navigate and challenge social biases in a safe and supportive way. Acknowledge that your role as a youth worker is to learn and grow alongside the young people you work with, challenging biases and assumptions together.

By following these steps, youth workers and volunteers can help create spaces where young people feel safe, respected, and empowered to actively engage in meaningful conversations about equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging. These discussions are not just about addressing current issues - they also play a key role in shaping the future, where young people are confident advocates for themselves and others.

Managing differences of opinion and encouraging safer space dialogue

In youth work, managing differences of opinion is a key aspect of creating an environment that encourages open dialogue, mutual respect, and personal development. Encouraging young people to express themselves, even when their opinions differ from those of others, creates a safe space where learning can happen.

At times, youth workers may encounter challenging or controversial views. It's important that we provide the tools and structure to manage these discussions constructively. This involves negotiating boundaries, setting clear expectations for respectful communication, guiding conversations through active listening, and creating opportunities for young people to reflect on their opinions in a way that promotes empathy and deeper understanding.

Creating a safe environment for differing opinions doesn't mean that harmful or discriminatory views should be allowed to stand. It means creating an opportunity to address and explore those views in a way that encourages critical thinking, self-reflection, and learning. By providing this space, we help young people not only understand others but also expand their own perspectives, creating an environment where everyone can be heard and feel valued.

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These practices not only create inclusive environments but also encourage personal growth, understanding, and a culture of active listening and respect.

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The How

Good Practice	Great Practice
Celebrate and affirm young people for who they are, helping them build confidence in their identity and empowering them to challenge barriers they may face.	**Create a culture of affirmation and celebration, where young people are not only supported but also actively celebrated for who they are.** Work to ensure they feel proud of their identity and equipped with the skills and confidence to challenge systemic barriers that they or others face.
Create an environment where young people feel comfortable expressing their opinions, even when they differ from others. Encourage respectful listening and ensure that everyone's perspective is valued.	**Create a space where different opinions are not only respected but encouraged** as a way to learn from one another. Ensure that young people feel safe to express differing views and have opportunities to challenge each other's perspectives in a positive and respectful way.
When difficult or sensitive topics arise, guide discussions in a way that keeps everyone safe and engaged. Set clear expectations for respectful communication and offer support if emotions run high.	**Proactively manage challenging conversations by facilitating open dialogue where young people can express controversial or difficult opinions without fear of judgment.** Ensure these conversations are safe spaces for growth, where young people can respectfully disagree and learn from each other in a way that promotes understanding and empathy. Create a culture where young people understand that disagreement is part of a process, and that expressing different perspectives can lead to personal growth and group cohesion. Encourage continuous learning, supporting young people in challenging their own biases and expanding their understanding through respectful conversation.
Encourage young people to reflect on their opinions and consider how their views might affect others. Use open-ended questions to explore differing perspectives.	**Provide opportunities for critical reflection, supporting young people to question and consider their views,** especially if those opinions conflict with the experiences of others. Encourage them to see differing opinions as a learning opportunity rather than a barrier to connection.

Good Practice	Great Practice
Ensure that all activities are safe and follow safeguarding policies that protect everyone. Make resources and guidance accessible to all, including those with physical or hidden disabilities.	**Create a safe environment in every activity by regularly reviewing safeguarding practices** and making sure young people can easily access support when needed. Ensure all spaces are welcoming and inclusive, and ensure safeguarding practices reflect diversity of people and thought.
Co-create with young people a working agreement that sets out clear boundaries and responsibilities. Ensure the agreement is accessible in different formats, using inclusive language.	**Continuously update the working agreement with young people, ensuring it reflects their needs, ideas, and feedback.** Adapt it to ensure it is accessible, inclusive, and representative of everyone's experiences and perspectives. Actively challenge and address discriminatory behaviours when they arise, ensuring that inclusivity is embedded into every activity and conversation. Proactively create environments that are welcoming for everyone, where discrimination is not tolerated.
Listen actively to diverse perspectives and encourage open dialogue in a safe space. Ensure that everyone has a chance to participate, considering different communication styles and needs.	**Promote an environment of respect and fairness, where everyone's voice is valued.** Create spaces for critical thinking and discussions that actively include different viewpoints and experiences, ensuring that young people feel equally heard and respected.
Plan activities that are inclusive, offering a range of experiences that meet the diverse needs of young people. Encourage open, respectful discussions on important topics such as identity, culture, and social justice.	**Work with young people to design activities** that actively celebrate diversity and ensure that everyone has a chance to participate and enjoy them. Proactively engage all young people in planning youth work to make sure everyone's interests and needs are included.
Provide dedicated spaces or sessions where young people can explore their identity and experiences, such as young women's groups or LGBTQ+ youth spaces. Ensure these spaces are safe, supportive, and welcoming.	**Actively champion and facilitate protected spaces where young people can fully express themselves,** free from judgment or discrimination. Ensure these spaces are not only safe but also empowering, with tailored activities and support that address the unique needs and challenges of each group.
Ensure that youth work practices are compliant with equality and anti-discrimination laws, such as the Equality Act 2010.	**Actively uphold and embed legal frameworks into everyday youth work.** Make sure everyone understands their rights and feels confident in advocating for them.

Resources and support

There are lots of resources and support to help you with inclusive youth work. These are just some that were recommended when developing these standards.

https://nya.org.uk/national-youth-work-curriculum/

https://nya.org.uk/safeguarding-hub/

#MyNameIs - Name Pronunciation Tool - Race Equality Matters

Inclusive language and communication guide | NCVO

03753e_03c2cbbc93a84b24a33c39a4456159bf.pdf- Radical Safeguarding Workbook

How do I know how I'm doing? The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion tool | Youth Music Network

Person-Centered Thinking Tools - Helen Sanderson Associates

https://www.maslaha.org/gender

The Conscious Use of Self in Youth Work Practice – Youth & Policy (youthandpolicy.org)

https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/for-young-people/gender-identity/

https://lgbtyouth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/YP20-Trans-and-Non-Binary-Coming-Out-Guide.pdf

Exploring Your Gender Identity | Mental Health Blog | YoungMinds

Resources | The Clare Project

https://travellermovement.org.uk/

Acting for healthy relationships - Tender

Milk Honey Bees https://milkhoneybees.co.uk/

The new podcast 'smashing the box' of disabled feminism - BBC News

Child_Exploitation_Appropriate_Language_Guide_2022.pdf

https://connectfutures.org/resources/countering-the-manosphere-supporting-young-men-against-toxic-online-narratives-a-new-zealand-teachers-perspective/

Youth Aspire Connect (Anti racism Campaign group) and Hull's Young Mayor Campaign Team – Anti-Racism Film - "JUST IGNORE IT" https://youtu.be/fis wcxh7jcw

www.theproudtrust.org

New research shows how to counter violence against women and girls | Youth Endowment Fund

https://www.educateagainsthate.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Incels-A-guide-for-those-teaching-Year-10-and-above-1-1.pdf

Youth at Risk - West Bowling Youth Initiative

Men and boys | Voices and experiences - SafeLives

https://www.educateagainsthate.com/

https://www.intercomtrust.org.uk/

YAY Youth Groups - Intercom Trust

https://thelowdown.info/lgbtq-support/

https://www.lgbtqyouthdevon.org.uk/

Young people step up to challenge misogyny and improve safety for women and girls in Youth Council podcast – www.kingston.gov.uk

Girls Empowerment Initiative UK CIC

Good for Girls - London Youth

Projects & Videos | Integrate UK

https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/lipp/documents/300620-changing-minds-comic.pdf

https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/lipp/documents/10th-sept-2020-e-changing-minds-comic-resources.pdf

https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/lipp/research-projects/misogyny.aspx

https://www.youthaction.org/practical-resources

https://www.safeguardingni.org/latest/boys-and-young-men-animations

https://www.thebrunswickcentre.org.uk/services/youth-services/youth-research-report

https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/11350226/Taking_Boys_Seriously_DE_FINAL_PDF.pdf

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1511242/UU-TBS-Principles.pdf

https://www.beyondequality.org

https://youtu.be/aG5hdyHSGuw?si=P5m1lUZve9fuMlIh

https://youtu.be/3dp08bAUwi8?si=wweCM2ujH3TCYVpa

https://youtu.be/yMXKIAd1MtA?si=DDFTT-bNDOnsFYs7

https://youtu.be/GTwoo35hkAc?si=QZAZFpyk5L89IA0V

'Down with the kids'? Examining the male youth worker as role model and mentor to young men involved in violence – Youth & Policy (youthandpolicy.org)

Harm Free Futures - COMMUNITYCRIMINOLOGYPROJECT.CO.UK

The Gender Unicorn – understanding sexuality and gender diversity - transstudent.org/gender

sabahchoudrey.com/supporthub

https://www.allsortsyouth.org.uk/lgbt-training

Books

— *Me and White Supremacy* (young adult edition) by Layla F Saad

— *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* by Reni Eddo Lodge

— *Supporting Trans People of Colour - How to Make Your Practice Inclusive* by Sabah Choudrey

— *How to Understand Your Gender* by Alex Iantaffi and Meg-John Barker

— *The Trans Self-Care Workbook* by Theo Nicole Lorenz

— *Labels are for jars not people* by Mark Harrison (www.socialaction.info)

Endnotes

1   https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/NYA_Publications-2023_Youth-Work-Standards_DOWNLOAD_AW-FINAL-050623-1.pdf

2   https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/NYA_Safeguarding-Standards-for-the-Sector-April2025_update.pdf.pdf

3   https://nya.org.uk/digital-youth-work/

4   https://nya.org.uk/

5   https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

6   https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents

7   https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG

8   https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/

9   https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-sector-equality-duty-guidance-for-public-authorities/public-sector-equality-duty-guidance-for-public-authorities

10 https://nya.org.uk/national-occupational-standards-and-english-youth-work-policy-new-document-published

11 https://nya.org.uk/events/

12 https://www.cipd.org/uk/