

Teachers, school and college leaders: What is youth social action, how does it benefit young people?

What is youth social action?

Youth social action refers to activities that young people do to make a positive difference to others or the environment. There are lots of ways in which young people can take practical action to make a positive difference.

It can take place in a range of contexts and can mean formal or informal activities. These include volunteering, fundraising, campaigning and supporting peers.

Teachers, employers, parents and other members of the community can all support youth social action.

What activities count as youth social action?

High quality youth social action is:



Reflective

recognising young people's contributions as well as valuing critical reflection and learning.



Challenging

stretching participants while being enjoyable



Youth-led

being owned and shaped by young people's needs, ideas and decision-making.



Socially impactful

having a clear benefit to a community, cause or social problem.



Progressive

providing links to other activities and opportunities



Embedded

being accessible to all, and well-integrated with other activities.

High quality youth social action meets the six principles outlined, above.

The youth social action toolkit contains lots of examples of youth social action projects.

Activities might include:

- **Volunteering**
- **Campaigning**
- **Tutoring and mentoring**
- **Fundraising**
- **Other activities or projects through which young people come together to solve an issue or improve something in their community**



"I believe youth social action will lead to real change."

Alvin Owusu-Fordwuo, 18, #iwill ambassador

"My social action has really built my confidence, especially in public speaking, and I will continue to take action and to inspire others to do the same."

Amy Meek, 15, #iwill ambassador

How does youth social action benefit young people?

Research and evidence shows that youth social action has a range of benefits for young people.

Youth social action:

- **Improves young people's clarity and commitment to their future careers. Specifically, it can boost young people's:**
 - Confidence in their future job prospects
 - Aspirations for the future
 - Self-reflection
 - Expectations and clarity about future career pathways

- **Boosts skills, attitudes and competencies that can be valuable in school and life including:**
 - Empathy
 - Problem solving
 - Interpersonal skills and networking
 - Grit and resilience
 - Attitudes towards education

Employers value these skills, and highlight them as critical for future jobs.

Young people and adults engaged in youth social action say it can improve young people's confidence, positivity, communication and team-working skills. You can use the youth social action toolkit to learn more about these benefits.



"I was motivated to take part in social action by my interest in the people that lived around me, both old and young, and realising I could enhance their lives."

Gabrielle Matthews, 18, #iwill ambassador

How can youth social action support the work of your school or college?

Youth social action can improve careers provision in your school or college by:

- **Helping you to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks**
- **Developing young people's careers knowledge, skills and aspirations**
- **Helping you to meet Ofsted's inspection criteria**
- **Supporting young people's character development**
- **Providing benefits to your local community**

Youth social action is something that is often already happening in schools and colleges, and the Youth Social Action Toolkit is designed to help you find out what activity is already happening in your school or college, and understand how it supports a high quality careers programme that meets the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Youth social action can also help you develop partnerships with employers and businesses by designing innovative opportunities and activities that keep community and social action at the heart of relationships. The case studies and vignettes available in the toolkit will give you concrete examples to help you do this.

How can youth social action help schools meet the Ofsted inspection criteria?

Youth social action is particularly relevant to students' personal development, which forms part of Ofsted's judgement about the quality of schools. This is based on Ofsted's school (page 58) and further education and skills (page 59) inspection handbooks published in May 2019 and applicable to inspections of schools and college from September 2019.

Ofsted's handbooks for school and college inspection state that settings should support students' personal development through "developing responsible, respectful and active citizens who are able to play their part and become actively involved in public life."

The handbooks also emphasise that – to be graded 'Good' or 'Outstanding' – settings must have effective careers programmes and give young people access to a "wide, rich set of experiences".

How can youth social action support young people's character development?

Youth social action can also play a role in 'character education', another important aspect of Ofsted's inspection criteria for both schools and colleges.

Ofsted defines 'character' in its inspection handbooks for schools and colleges as:

"...a set of positive personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs their motivation and guides their conduct so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly, behave with integrity and cooperate consistently well with others. This gives pupils the qualities they need to flourish in our society."

The Department for Education and Ofsted, as well as a range of other organisations, recognise youth social action's potential to support the development of young people's character.

How can Careers Leaders track the skills their students develop through youth social action?

Young people will gain many different skills through participating in youth social action and it is beneficial for both the student and the school to be able to track the new skills they are developing effectively. There are many different skills frameworks that exist for you to do this, but the Skills Builder Framework is one that is used by The Careers & Enterprise Company.

Skills Builder identifies eight essential skills that may equip children and young people for success. It breaks down each skill into fifteen tangible, teachable and measurable steps. This framework could help you and your colleagues identify and track pupils' skills development before, during and after participation in youth social action. Young people can also use the framework, themselves.

See our tools for Guided Preparation and Reflection Frameworks on how to build the Skills Builder into young people's youth social action.

The Skills Builder Toolkit can be downloaded free from the **Skills Builder website** (www.skillsbuilder.org/toolkits), and includes skills frameworks for mainstream primary and secondary settings, colleges, special schools and employers.

How can youth social action help me meet the Gatsby Benchmarks?

Youth social action can help schools and colleges to deliver a career guidance programme shaped by the Gatsby Benchmarks:



Benchmark 1: A stable careers programme

Youth social action can form part of a broad, structured and stable careers programme, building on other careers-focused and classroom-based learning.

The relationships that Careers Leaders, other staff and young people initiate, develop and sustain through youth social action can provide consistency for current and future cohorts of pupils. Our case studies and examples talk about this in greater depth.



Benchmark 2: Learning from career and labour market information

Youth social action can provide an opportunity for young people to understand, use and apply labour market information in their local area and beyond.

For example, any employer engaged in youth social action activity could run a session for students on job roles in their sector. Students volunteering in organisations such as schools, care homes, libraries, hospitals or hospices should be encouraged to interact with staff and find out about the range of jobs available within the organisation and wider sector.

This can help young people identify opportunities and 'gaps in the market', enabling them to pursue youth social action responsive to local need. It may also help young people (and their teachers) forge new relationships with employers, and subsequently gain experience and skills in areas they identify as relevant and important. You can use our guided preparation and reflection resources to help young people make these links.



Benchmark 3: Addressing the needs of each student

Youth social action can provide a way of addressing and celebrating students' individual needs, giving young people agency over their decisions while also providing stretch and challenge. Support to access these opportunities should be made available to the most vulnerable groups. Our examples show a variety of projects that have enabled individual students to develop and undertake youth social action that aligns with their priorities and passions and also challenges preconceptions and stereotypes. Youth social action opportunities should be made available to young people from all backgrounds, gender and diversity groups, including those with special educational needs and disabilities to enable them to develop a range of skills and competencies. Schools and colleges should be proactive in planning activities and have discussions with students to explore opportunities available to them, using social action activities as a chance to explore career options.

This information should be stored and integrated as part of the student careers guidance records to enable students to evidence the skills gained through youth social action activities to employers.



Benchmark 4: Linking curriculum learning to careers

Youth social action gives students opportunities to apply their classroom learning in new contexts, as well as a chance to develop new knowledge and skills. It also enables individual teachers to support projects that relate to their subject areas and areas of passion. For example, students could take part in environmental campaigning linked to science or geography. This is explored in more detail in one of our case studies showing how passion for youth social action can be developed through curriculum links.

Any youth social action activity which allows the student to develop numeracy, literacy or is subject specific should be followed up by the subject teacher in lessons so that students can identify the relevance between their subject learning and real-world experience. It's a great idea to involve or inform subject teachers about youth social action projects during the planning stages.



Benchmark 5: Encounters with employers and employees

Youth social action can give students the opportunity to work with a range of stakeholders both inside their educational settings, and beyond, including employers. For example, where employers or employees support youth social action activities there should be an opportunity for them to speak to students about their career journey, job role, skills and experience of the workplace.

Youth social action activities particularly focused on enterprise skills should be championed. See our examples for a range of different projects that have provided students with encounters with employers and employees.



Benchmark 6: Experiences of workplaces

Youth social action can involve students visiting and experiencing workplaces, as well as opportunities to link these experiences back to their classroom learning. Our examples showcase a range of different projects that have provided young people with experiences of different workplaces.

Any project-based youth social action activity where students take on a particular role which is relevant in the workplace or any activity which requires a visit to a workplace where the students learn about that working environment should be counted.



Benchmark 7: Encounters with Further and Higher Education

Youth social action can involve forging relationships and working with a wide range of stakeholders, including Further and Higher Education settings, apprenticeship and training providers.

For example, where a youth social action activity takes place in a FE or HE institution there should be an opportunity for students to learn about the range of courses available at that institution.



Benchmark 8: Personal Guidance

The government's expectation is that every student should have an interview with a qualified careers adviser by the age of 16 and a further interview by age 18. Youth social action gives young people the opportunity to experience a wide range of activities and projects and they should be encouraged to talk about these experiences when they meet their qualified careers adviser as part of the interview.