

Guide to setting up a regional youth work unit

July 2021

**Network of
Regional**

Youth Work Units

1 - Introduction

Six of the nine English regions currently have an organisation fulfilling the functions of a Regional Youth Work Unit (RYWU). The Network of Regional Youth Work Units, which represents those organisations is sometimes approached by organisations in the regions without a RYWU to explore ways of setting one up in their region. This guide provides more information about RYWUs and some guidance on establishing them in new regions.

Throughout the guide we have used examples of activity in various RYWUs to demonstrate what can be done at regional level.



2 - What is a Regional Youth Work Unit?

Regional Youth Work Units (RYWUs) act as hubs for developing and supporting youth work in their regions, working with commissioners, providers and young people themselves to ensure the sector is well-informed, skilled and responsive to changes in government policies and young people's needs. They are a core element of infrastructure support for the youth sector in their regions.

RYWUs are independent organisations, based in the region they cover, with governance arrangements that reflect the voices of youth organisations in the region.

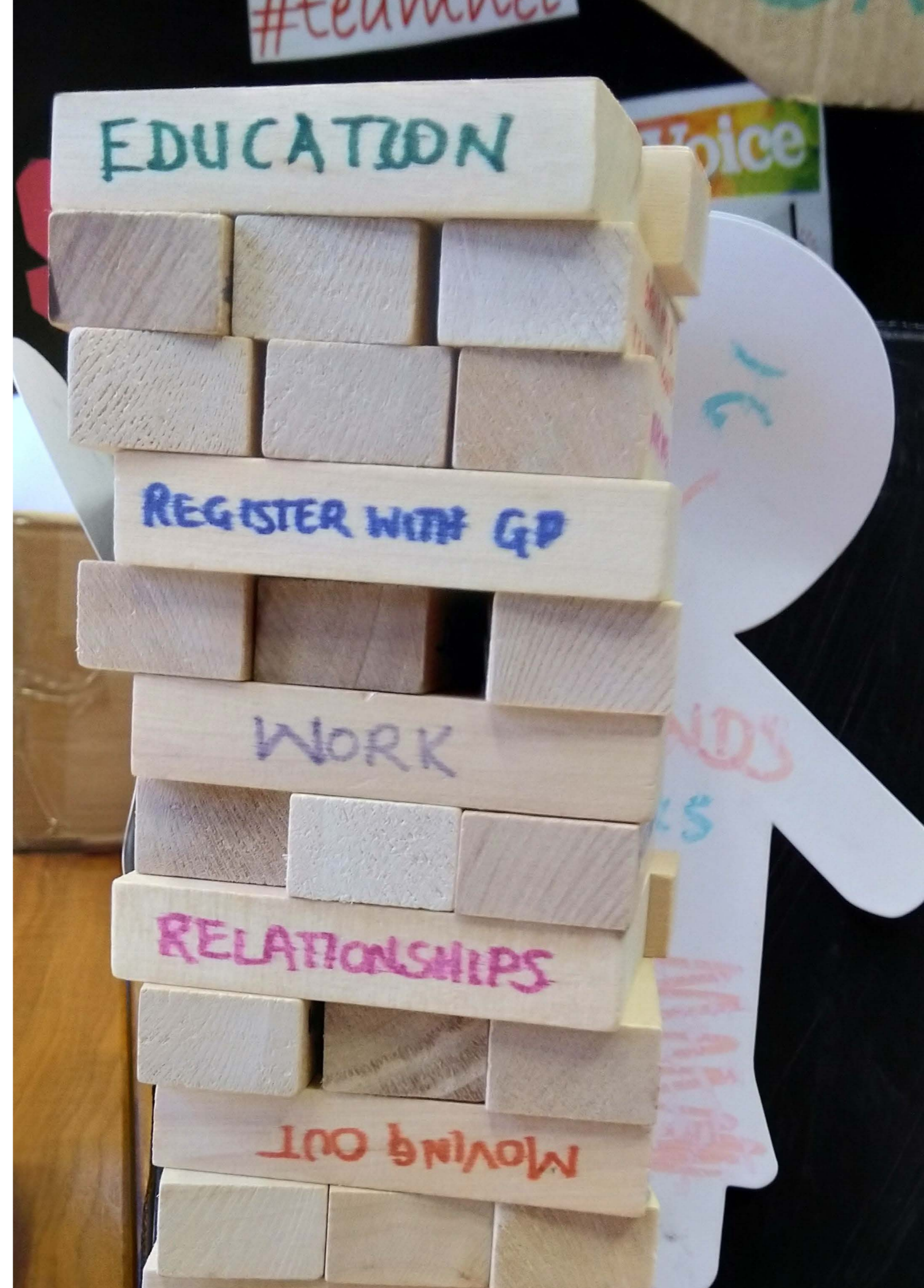
RYWUs collaborate with a wide range of local, regional and national organisations with an interest in supporting and developing youth work. They may lead on multi-organisation partnerships in their areas or might undertake regional roll-out of national programmes in collaboration with national bodies. At the heart of a RYWU is the needs of young people and the youth sector in their regions.



3 - What does a Regional Youth Work Unit do?

RYWUs need to be able to respond to policy trends and changes that affect young people and youth work. They support the sector and young people to collaborate to share experiences and practice and to influence policy and decision makers to better engage young people and improve services for them.

A fully functioning RYWU is likely to engage in these key functions:



3a - Workforce Development

RYWUs are up to date with developments in training, qualifications, recruitment and retention issues affecting the youth sector, including specific positive achievements and challenges for youth organisations in their region.

They provide guidance to youth organisations and to training providers about workforce needs, and often run Networks/Communities of Practice for those with responsibility for training and development in their region. Most RYWUs also run training in their regions on issues that affect youth workers and young people. In some cases, RYWUs have become Training Providers themselves in order to support youth workers to achieve qualifications. At present, RYWUs are co-ordinating the Bursary Scheme for Level 2 and 3 qualifications, in collaboration with the National Youth Agency.

Responding to youth work training needs

Youth Focus West Midlands (YFWM) supports the youth sector across the West Midlands by supporting workforce development and training.

The initiative was driven by strategic youth leads in the region who recognised there was no capacity to support workforce development in the region and few opportunities to support staff and volunteers to gain Level 2 and 3 qualifications in youth work.

YFWM established itself as an approved centre for delivering accredited training alongside establishing a regional training partnership model to ensure delivery could be supported in sub-regional areas, not just from a central hub.

This work was established in early 2020 and since that time over 70 learners have been supported to gain accredited qualifications at Level 2 and 3.

YFWM has also delivered bespoke training to support workforce development in local areas and recently hosted bereavement training for over 60 practitioners from across the region.

3b - Partnership Development

RYWUs are often in a good position to be able to develop regional and local partnerships to enhance work with young people. They can act as 'honest broker' to bring together providers, funders and other interested parties to pool resources and build new initiatives that benefit young people. The RYWUs reputation as infrastructure support can make it a trusted partner and leader in regional and local developments.

North East Youth Alliance

The North East Youth Alliance (NEYA) has been created to support the development and sustainability of the people and the organisations working to improve the lives of young people across the North East region.

The youth work sector in the North East has faced significant challenges over time, not least through reductions in public sector funding and an increasingly competitive environment of grant funding. At various points over the years, youth work organisations have sought to come together more effectively and efficiently, but this has been hampered by a lack of capacity to meet the day-to-day challenges alongside finding ways to deliver work in a more cohesive manner.

As a response to these challenges, Youth Focus North East and NE Youth have joined forces to create the NEYA.

Youth Focus North East is the lead body for the NEYA and in its role as the RYWU was instrumental in brokering a partnership approach across the region, which was ultimately successful in securing investment of £993,950 from The National Lottery Community Fund to support the delivery of a five-year programme of work.

A major achievement of this partnership approach was that the funding was secured from the NLCF National England Committee. This meant that the funding has come from the national, rather than from the regional, allocation of lottery funding, leaving more NLCF resources available to support local organisations.

There are three main strands to the work of the NEYA:

1. supporting organisations to develop ground-up local partnerships/alliances,
2. supporting meaningful workforce development,
3. increasing the influence of young people's voices.

Simply put, their goal is: Improved youth services through collaboration. 70% of the total amount awarded has been allocated as support for the sector. This primarily takes the form of full-time posts, development workers and youth voice workers, that bring capacity to local organisations and local/regional networks. There are also budgets to support local/themed pieces of work, the use of which will be determined by participants.

One of the key early actions to ensure strategic 'buy in' across the sector was the establishment of a reference group – a group of experienced professionals who bring a level of support and challenge, on the focus of the Alliance work.

The reaction and response to the NEYA has been overwhelmingly positive. There is excitement and enthusiasm by lots of people who are interested in the Alliance and see the opportunities that supported collaborative working can have.

The NEYA is for everyone who wants to be part of it – what it actually becomes will evolve over time shaped by the voices of the growing number of people who get involved in its work.



3b - Getting started as a Regional Youth Unit

RYWUs normally have regular e-bulletins to keep their members/partners/ contacts informed of local, regional and national developments in policy, research, funding and more. RYWUs reach hundreds, sometimes thousands, of youth sector organisations through their regular mailings and briefings.

RYWUs connect the youth sector in many ways, through Networks/ Communities of Practice for practitioners, managers, researchers and others. These provide opportunities to share practice, learn from each other, and extend the influence of good practice. Because RYWUs are well-connected to national organisations, and RYWUs in other regions, they draw in expertise from elsewhere, and provide a route for local practice to influence national developments.

Connecting care-experienced young people and those who work with them

The Youth Work Unit Yorkshire & Humber (YWU Y&H) supports both the youth sector and young people through facilitating youth voice and social action networks and programmes that cross geographical borders. The YWU Y&H offers this service where;

- issues that concern young people need addressing at a regional or national level, such as equality of access to services such as transport, mental health, education.
- At local level, funding prevents workers using resources to work outside their immediate area, though they can access support and opportunities for the young people they work with outside of their geographical area.

The YWU is ideally placed to co-ordinate cross-LA working as they are regarded as neutral and able broker partnerships between groups.

An example of this service is the partnership with Children in and Leaving Care Councils (CiLCC) across the region.

YWU Y&H has supported the CiLCC workers network since 2017, providing a supportive space for staff who facilitate children in or care leavers voice group. Through this network, it became apparent that care experienced young people's councils / groups across the region, were working on similar issues, some of which need to be addressed at either a regional or national level, to enable positive change. In addition, young people felt they wanted to meet others with similar lived experience and have opportunities to try new things. Consequently, the YWU hosts quarterly, (although during Covid-19 these went to weekly, then fortnightly and now monthly) CiLCC Workers Network Meetings.

In addition, YWU Y&H convene a regional CiLC young people's event every 6 months, bringing care experienced young people together from across the region, to explore themes that young people have identified and undertake supported networking activities. YWU Y&H has hosted two residentials, providing some care experienced young people with their first opportunity to go on residential.

The impact of this work included:

- Support to one LA to ban the use of bin bags to transfer young people's belongings between placements.
- Produced a report and comparison table on the different Care Leaving Packages and Support available to care leavers across the region.
- Introduced young people to different forms of mental health and emotional well-being support and to learn basic DIY skills for independent living.
- Enabled young people to go on residentials to build confidence and life skills in a supportive environment.
- CiLCC workers also feel supported by peers. The workers network has been a safe space to share successes and challenges, developing practice across the region.

3d - Quality, Impact & Practice

RYWUs can collate information on the impact of policy locally and regionally to help shape national policy and practice and drive up the sector awareness on data and research available linked to youth services. Most RYWUs host networks that focus on impact of youth work practice, in collaboration with Centre for Youth Impact. Some RYWUs have worked with youth organisations in the region to develop regional quality assurance systems, and/or supported local organisations to pilot nationally recognised quality approaches.

Engaging with youth sector impact

Youth Focus West Midlands (YFWM) runs the regional impact network for the Centre for Youth Impact. The network brings practitioners and managers together to develop their approaches and practice in quality and impact.

The network has engaged in the development of the Outcomes 2.0 framework developed by Centre for Youth Impact, commissioned by Local Government Association, and has explored the development of theories of change in the context of their own organisation.

More recently a sub-group has developed exploring data capture and the use of various platforms and systems to improve how to best capture data around young people's journeys, outcomes particularly but not exclusively in the context of detached work.

YFWM is currently supporting the implementation of the Young People's Quality Intervention programme which has a specific focus on social and emotional learning. This is a quality improvement programme so enables organisations to better understand the work they are doing to support young people's social and emotional; learning and ways that they can further improve their practices.

3e - Youth Voice

RYWUs work in partnership with the youth sector to develop and strengthen the voices of young people locally, regionally and nationally. They facilitate regional youth voice activities and networks and support young people's participation in national activities. They also support the development and quality of youth voice work through networks/communities of practice, training and initiatives that enable young people to have a say in developing policy and practice.

Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority

Following the Mayoral Elections for Greater Manchester in 2017 Youth Focus North West (YFNW) was awarded the contract to support young people's (aged 11-19 years) voice into the decision-making structures of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). Emerging from an idea of two young people from Salford, YFNW supported young people who led a number of campaigning and lobbying exercises targeting the mayoral candidates during the campaign journey, enforcing youth voice onto the agenda.

After becoming Mayor, Andy Burnham committed to setting up a Youth Combined Authority (GMYCA). Now made up of forty-two young people representing twenty-one youth organisations / services (11 voluntary sector / 10 Local Authorities) the YCA continues to have impact on Greater Manchester policy and service design / delivery for young people.

In the first year, their involvement was about inputting to policy and service design: this evolved in year two and three to leading on some issues and is now flourishing into becoming all the above as well as a firm critical friend towards decision making and decision makers. Key to the development of the YCA is YFNW's youth work process and the development of constructive relationships with and between adults and young people and young people and young people.

3f - Influence

RYWUs use the knowledge we gain from our local and regional networking to inform and influence government and national youth sector bodies and the initiatives they develop. RYWUs work with local government and other public bodies (Police and Crime Commissioners, Public Health etc) to influence strategies and initiatives affecting young people and youth work in their region. They also enable local youth work providers and young people to have a voice in design and co-creation of initiatives and strategies that affect young people and youth work.

Youth Sector Data Collaboration

Partnership for Young London has been working with London Youth to establish the Young Londoners Coalition. This group seeks to collaborate to both support the youth sector and improve outcomes for young people as part of the Covid-19 regional recovery process. One of the key areas of work agreed across all partners was data and insight and the approach consisted of the following:

1. Data from the youth sector on the impact of Covid-19 by Centre for Youth Impact
2. Insight from local authorities on youth sector provision
3. Insight from youth people on the impact of Covid-19 on themselves and their ideas for the future.

The focus was on collaboration to draw data and insight together from multiple sources, putting youth voice at the core of future planning. The insight from young people was gathered in the following way:

- An online survey of 1500 young Londoners co-created with young people.
- Focus groups and peer research with young people looking at key themes - housing, mental health, access to youth provision.
- Gathering specific existing research available.

Anticipated Outcomes - The work is focused on creating a youth manifesto which will be used both to inform mayoral elections as well as future work plans across the Young Londoners Coalition. Driving collaboration at this time is seen as vital by all partners to ensure that we are sharing resources, reducing duplication and making sure that young people's views are at the core of future recovery processes.

Collaboration - the partners engaged in this regional coalition are London Councils, London Funders, the GLA, the Housing Association Youth Network, Specialist Youth Sector Infrastructure, Health, Princes Trust, Faith and Community sector, Centre for Youth Impact, Impetus PEF among others.



4 - Why set up a Regional Youth Work Unit?

The functions in the last section show how useful a RYWU is in a region. Because RYWUs operate across the whole youth sector they can bring together colleagues who might otherwise never cross paths and can help to exert influence for the benefit of young people and youth organisations who might not otherwise have a voice.

Opportunities to join Networks and Communities of Practice can be greatly increased leading to enhanced quality of youth work practice.

Young people have ways of coming together to influence policy more widely than in their local area, with opportunities to engage with national and international fora.

The sector as a whole has a stronger voice and is better informed and equipped to respond to new developments in policy and practice. RYWUs can often access funding streams for training etc that individual organisations would be less likely to achieve.

Individual RYWUs are members of the Network of Regional Youth Work Units: England which is in regular dialogue with national bodies and policy makers in local and central government. The Network of RYWUs undertakes some joint projects, such as our current online free training programme for youth workers. The Network is represented on the National Youth Advisory Board which works closely with government departments. At present (April 2021) there are functioning RYWUs in 6 of the 9 English regions and the Network of Regional Youth Work Units is supporting organisations in the remaining 3 regions to establish RYWUs themselves.

Supporting the sector in the COVID pandemic

The youth sector has been hard hit by the COVID pandemic, with much provision closed due to restrictions and new ways of working with young people being devised and created as organisations seek to meet young people's needs in challenging circumstances. While individual RYWUs have been working in their regions to support the sector, collectively the Network of RYWUS (NRYWU:E) sought funding from Paul Hamlyn Foundation to develop a series of online training programmes for youth workers from across the country.

The day-to-day links between individual RYWUs and local youth workers and managers has meant that we could design a training programme to directly respond to needs.

Between November 2020 and March 2021 NRYWU:E has hosted a series of sessions on each of:

- Detached youth work (in collaboration with the Federation of Detached Youth Workers)
- Trauma-informed practice
- Engaging young citizens – political youth work in action
- Fostering resilience in leadership

Hundreds of youth workers have been able to attend these sessions which have all been held on Zoom, and they have provided opportunities for workers to engage across local and regional boundaries, build their toolkit of skills and knowledge and develop their practice to respond to young people's needs and the constraints imposed by COVID

5 - Principles of a Regional Youth Work Unit

- Regional Youth Work Units are based in and serve their region. They understand the geography and demography of that region and their actions are driven by the needs of young people and youth organisations within that region.
- RYWUs aim to work with and engage the whole youth sector in their region, not just some elements (for example, local authorities or voluntary organisations of a particular size and scale). Youth organisations across the region need to feel confident that the RYWU has their interests at heart.
- Young people and youth work in all its forms are the core concerns of a RYWU: individual RYWUs may work in a broader range of spheres but the heart of their work is about promoting and supporting good quality youth work to meet young people's needs.
- A RYWU should be seen by the youth work field as an independent agency, usually with youth work organisations and young people involved in its governance arrangements. RYWUs aim to promote collaboration across the youth sector and between the sector and other interested parties, nationally, regionally and locally – and sometimes internationally. To maintain the RYWU's role across the whole youth sector, we need to ensure we are not seen as 'belonging' to one or other national body – rather we need to maintain relationships with all national bodies with a role in developing youth work and supporting young people.

6 - Minimum expectations to be a Regional Youth Work Unit

- RYWUs need to be 'incorporated bodies' so that they can hold contracts and potentially employ staff. There are a number of frameworks for this – Community Interest Company (CIC); Charity and Company Limited by Guarantee; Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) amongst others.
- The name of your organisation should include the name of the region it serves.
- A transparent governance arrangement that enables influence from the sector the RYWU serves
- Thorough understanding of and commitment to the value of youth work for young people's development
- Demonstration of engagement with a wide range of youth organisations across different parts of the sector
- Capacity to reach and work across the whole geographical region
- Appropriate insurance cover and policies for safeguarding, health and safety and data protection
- Commitment to engage with other RYWUs via the Network of Regional Youth Work Units and to develop relationships with key policy, practice and funding bodies in the region and nationally.

5 - Principles of a Regional Youth Work Unit

Here are some key steps to take if you are considering setting up a RYWU.

Actions for a potential RYWU	Role of Network of RYWUs
What do you aim to achieve? Contact the Network of RYWUs for support and advice. Set out your aims and potential ways to achieve them.	Offer support and advice to potential new RYWUs in regions with no existing RYWU
Map key regional partners/ beneficiaries/ potential funders Consult with the regional youth work field.	Suggest groupings and organisations that should be contacted/engaged
Adapt aims and develop Theory of Change (ToC)	Provide support on developing ToC
Agree appropriate organisational structure and governance so you can fulfil the requirements in the 'Principles of RYWUs' (Section 5 above) Recruit new Board members where required	Share examples of relevant structure/governance arrangements from existing RYWUs Once an agreed organisational structure/governance is in place, Invite the potential RYWU to formally become a member of Network of RYWUs. Include it on NRYWU communications including NRYWU website
Establish your initial offer, linked to your ToC, consultation with the field and the functions of a RYWU in Section 3 above	Provide tailored support on establishing initial offer

Actions for a potential RYWU	Role of Network of RYWUs
Identify the resources (funding, staff, technology etc) you will need. Consider models for income generation – membership fees? Trading services? grant funding? (Probably a mix of all or some of these)	Provide tailored support on establishing initial offer
Communications and marketing: launching the RYWU; regular information sharing, website, branding etc. How will this be resourced?	Support and advice on regional communication and marketing
Develop a strategic/business plan for 3-5 years and use this as the basis for monitoring progress and identifying areas for expansion. Keep the functions and principles of RYWUs at the centre of planning and monitoring	Support and advice on relevant elements of the strategic/business plan
Engage with Network of RYWUs and their partners, to keep informed and in the loop for new initiatives and potential collaborations	New RYWU is a recognised member of NRYWU and part of any joint funding/contract arrangements

8 - Network of Regional Youth Work Units

Managing a small regional infrastructure organisation can be a lonely business and it is important to make connections with others doing similar roles in other regions. Networking and sharing experience and good practice was a key driver of establishing the Network of Regional Youth Work Units <https://www.regionalyouthunits.com>.

NRYWU:E has also enabled the RYWUs to speak with a collective voice in national policy arenas and collaborate on a wide range of projects and contracts.

All current RYWUs are members of the Network. There is no payment for membership, just an assumption that members will share their expertise and play a role in representing RYWUs in national and international initiatives and forums.

The Network is keen to support the development of a RYWU in each of the English regions and our members are committed to providing support, advice and guidance to organisations in 'fallow' regions who want to start a RYWU. Section 7 shows some of the ways in which we can support new and potential RYWUs to be successful. Membership of the Network of RYWUs will be offered to organisations that can demonstrate that they act within the principles of RYWUs (Section 5) and are able to meet the minimum requirements set out in Section 5 of this document.

For more advice on setting up a Regional Youth Work Unit in your region, including funding, governance and ways of running networks and communities of practice, contact the Network of Regional Youth Work Units <https://www.regionalyouthunits.com/contact-us>

