



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Services and Activities to Improve Young People's Well-being

This is statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under Section 507B of the Education Act 1996. It relates to local authorities' duty to secure services and activities for young people aged 13 to 19, and those with learning difficulties to age 24, to improve their well-being, as defined in Subsection 13.

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Overview

1. This is statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under Section 507B of the Education Act 1996 ('Section 507B').¹ Local authorities must have regard to this guidance when exercising their statutory duty to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, leisure-time activities and facilities for young people aged 13 to 19 and those with learning difficulties or disabilities aged 20 to 24.²

Introduction

Rationale for the statutory duty

2. Over 85% of a young person's waking hours are spent outside of school and formal education. Recreational and educational leisure-time activities provided during those hours can have a significant effect on young people's development and well-being.³ Those activities can:
 - support them to build their skills
 - improve trust and tolerance
 - help them become active members of society
 - champion their voice
3. Not securing such leisure-time activities can mean young people miss out on opportunities to reach their full potential. Those activities can act as a supportive measure that can prevent costly interventions later on. This is true for all young people but is particularly important for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people who might need specific, additional, or early support.
4. Young people's involvement in such activities can also make an important contribution to other objectives, such as economic, social and environmental improvements, community cohesion, safer and stronger neighbourhoods, better health and increased educational attainment and employment.
5. In 2022, a review of spending on out-of-school youth programmes found that youth services are a vital part of the response to the current challenges young people

¹ Section 507B was inserted by section 6(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006

² Section 507B(12) of the Education Act 1996

³ [University of Northampton, Institute of Social Innovation and Impact, 'What is the social impact and return on investment resulting from expenditure on the Cadet Forces in the UK?' \(2021\)](#)

The Behavioural Insights Team, [Evaluating Youth Social Action: Does participation in social action boost the skills young people need to succeed in adult life?](#) (2016)

Centre for Youth Impact, [How Youth Provision Supports Young People in Building Assets for a Healthy Life](#) (2019)

Youth United Foundation, ['Social Integration: The Role of Uniformed Youth Groups'](#) (2018)

National Citizen Service, [Evaluation](#) (2019)

face.⁴ That review, as well as direct feedback from young people, highlighted the importance of prioritising regular clubs and activities, adventures away from home, and volunteering opportunities.

6. Local authorities are uniquely placed to coordinate a 'local youth offer' that answers those priorities.⁵ They are in a position to:
 - set a vision for young people across the local authority
 - establish whether the available provision meets their needs
 - help direct support where it is most needed

They also hold a crucial role in engaging young people, parents and carers, youth providers and practitioners, other providers of activities for young people, educational settings, communities, and neighbouring areas to enhance and sustain provision. In doing so, they can identify valuable links and contributions and where appropriate help build the capacity and provision of public, private and third sector organisations to improve the local youth offer.

Scope of the statutory duty

7. Section 507B requires local authorities to, so far as reasonably practicable, secure access for all qualifying young people to a sufficient quantity of 'youth services'⁶, namely:
 - a sufficient quantity of educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being and sufficient facilities for such activities **and**
 - a sufficient quantity of recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities
8. The two forms of activity are not mutually exclusive but local authorities **must**, so far as reasonably practicable, secure access for young people to sufficient forms of, and facilities for, both types of activities. They include, but are not limited to:
 - sports and informal physical activities
 - cultural activities
 - outdoor residential, weekend or holiday-time activities
 - special interest clubs
 - volunteering activities
9. Both types of activities, and related facilities, must be for the improvement of young people's well-being. Well-being, as defined in the act, relates to:

⁴ [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#) (2021)

⁵ By 'local youth offer', we mean the totality of youth services available to a young person in a local authority area.

⁶ By 'youth services' we mean educational and recreational leisure-time activities, and associated facilities, which are for the improvement of young people's physical, emotional, and mental well-being, especially those which are free or subsidised and voluntary to access.

- physical and mental health and emotional well-being
- protection from harm and neglect
- education, training and recreation
- the contribution made by young people to society
- social and economic well-being

10. To do so, the educational leisure-time activities **must** include sufficient activities which are for the improvement of young people’s personal and social development. These are the types of activities traditionally provided through youth work⁷, which for instance:

- connect young people with their communities, enabling them to develop a strong sense of belonging and contribute actively to society
- champion them to have a voice in decisions which affect their lives
- take place in local and fit-for-purpose environments in which they can socialise safely with their peers, spend time with people from different backgrounds and develop trusting relationships with adults
- offer opportunities to take part in a wide range of activities through which young people build skills for life and work and the capabilities they need to make a successful transition to adulthood
- raise young people’s aspirations in education, training, or employment, encouraging them to realise their potential
- help disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, as well as young people at risk of not realising their full potential, informing their decisions and thereby reducing risky, anti-social behaviours

11. Section 507B covers the requirement for local authorities to secure access to these services for young people aged 13-19. To ensure young people who require specific or additional engagement receive the support that they need, Section 507B also applies to young people aged 20-24 with learning difficulties or disabilities.⁸

12. Local authorities should consider designating a lead official, with suitable seniority, who is responsible for compliance with the duty and can coordinate engagement with young people, youth providers and other partners. Primary responsibility for meeting the duty is likely to fall within the remit of the Director of Children’s Services and Lead Member for Children’s Services.

13. The duty is qualified by the term ‘reasonably practicable’. This means that the determination of whether the local authority is acting reasonably in its actions will depend on the specific circumstances of the local authority and the particular requirements for access to such activities and facilities.

⁷ By ‘youth work’, we refer to the National Youth Agency definition as a distinct educational process adapted across a variety of settings to support a young person’s personal, social, and educational development.

⁸ This is often referred to as SEND (Special educational needs and disability).

Aim of this guidance

14. The government recognises that each local area is different. This guidance does not aim to standardise provision but to clarify requirements and outline a standard that local authorities can benchmark themselves against. It has been developed taking into account views from local authorities, regional youth work units, youth providers and practitioners, and young people, as well as existing and past guidance and best practice documents.
15. This guidance sets out the practical and reasonable steps local authorities **must** take, so far as reasonably practicable, to meet the duty whether they are directly providing, funding, commissioning, coordinating, or maintaining oversight of the local youth offer. This guidance also covers suggested activities that local authorities should undertake as well as examples of best practice. We use the term 'must' when local authorities are legally required to do something and 'should' when the advice set out should ideally be followed.
16. We encourage local authorities to develop and capture their own strategy, processes, and partnerships, tailored to their local area, to meet the duty. The step-by-step guide and checklist in Annex A can be a helpful tool to do so.
17. In discharging the duty, it may be useful to consider other relevant duties and guidance. Additional resources and materials that support the provision of youth services have been collated in Annex B.

Assessing young people's needs and current provision

18. This guidance does not dictate what provision should look like on the ground as the offer should be shaped by, and tailored to, local needs. Local authorities **must** determine what activities and associated facilities should be available to young people in their area. In doing so, local authorities should aim to improve the local youth offer and be mindful of the needs of young people facing particular barriers to accessing sufficient provision, such as disadvantaged young people and vulnerable young people.
19. Local authorities should start by establishing what the needs of the young people in their area are, both in terms of activities and facilities, through a needs assessment. Needs assessments should be a collaborative process involving, but not limited to:
 - young people
 - the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector
 - youth workers
 - parents and carers
 - schools and colleges

- health, care and well-being workers and bodies
- businesses and employers
- family support services
- agencies including youth justice and police

20. A needs assessment can be achieved by:

- Analysing available quantitative and qualitative data, such as demographics, socio-economic data, public health data, policing and crime statistics, educational attainment and attendance⁹
- Taking views from voluntary, community, educational and private providers and practitioners
- Benchmarking their approach and offer relative to other similar areas with effective provision

21. Under Section 507B local authorities **must** consult, and take into account the views of young people in their area on:

- current provision
- the need for additional activities and facilities
- access to those activities and facilities

22. Local authorities can determine what is the best way to do so but they should ensure that they engage with a diverse group of young people and that young people receive the support they need to participate effectively, particularly those who may not otherwise have a voice. This can be done through a variety of methods such as:

- surveys
- visits to youth groups
- feedback sessions in schools
- council committees and youth councils

It can also be facilitated by commissioning or supporting youth-led peer reviews as well as commissioning or working with organisations skilled in engaging young people. Whatever the approach, local authorities should feed back the consultation findings to young people, along with their response to their views on and desires for the local youth offer.

23. Local authorities should also determine the current provision in their area, considering services that are run or funded by them as well as services run or funded by others. This can be achieved through regular local audits, engagement with providers or an up-to-date index of available provision across local authority, voluntary, community and private sector providers. In doing so, local authorities should have regard to whether all young people in their area, in particular those who

⁹ A variety of actors hold valuable data such as local public bodies, schools and colleges, Public Health and Police agencies, local youth forums. Local authorities may also want to use data from existing surveys such as the British Youth Council [Make Your Mark survey](#) and the National Youth Agency's [Youth Work Census](#).

face barriers to participation, can access some form of provision. Local authorities should take into account:

- cost
- location
- timing
- safety
- age range
- protected characteristics
- young people's perceptions of the offer
- accessibility of the facilities, including transport links

Determining a sufficient local offer

Deciding on priorities

24. Once local authorities have determined the extent and nature of youth services that should be available to young people, they **must** work to secure access to them. In doing so, local authorities may directly organise, provide or fund services, but may also coordinate or assist provision and funding of services by voluntary, community, educational or private providers and practitioners. Local authorities should determine what is reasonably practicable based on their resources, capabilities and priorities, as well as that of other organisations that offer services to young people in the area.
25. It is critical to decide where local authorities can have the greatest effect within their budget. This means determining priorities and looking at potential gaps in provision relating to geography, age range, content, accessibility or other factors. It will be for each local authority to decide what is 'sufficient'. A local authority may not be failing to fulfil the duty because an individual young person's particular need is not being met at a particular time, because it may not be reasonably practicable to do so.
26. Whilst costs or resources may be prohibitive in some cases, local authorities do not have to directly fund services themselves and can charge for some services. In judging what is reasonably practicable, lack of funding alone should not be considered sufficient justification not to secure services. Local authorities can take steps to secure sufficient access to provision by acting as a local coordinator or by assisting provision by local organisations.
27. To ensure transparency, local authorities should document and publish their assessment of local needs for youth services as well as the rationale for their actions and decisions. This should help demonstrate that local authorities have done what is reasonably practicable to secure sufficient services.

Addressing barriers to participation

28. Local authorities should consider how all young people can access activities and facilities. This means that local authorities will need to identify and, where possible, address barriers to participation for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in their area.
29. Provision should meet the needs of young people from different backgrounds, cultures, genders and sexual orientation. In doing so, local authorities should aim to secure access to safe, supportive and welcoming environments for disadvantaged and vulnerable young people. This includes considering:

- the right mix of open access services and targeted services, as providing a mix of both is crucial to meet the needs of all young people in the area. Decisions regarding that mix should be informed by the needs assessment. If there are no accessible open access services available in the area, then qualifying young people could argue that their local authority is not providing a sufficient offer to them under the act
- the introduction of digital offers into services provided to engage young people in new ways and increase accessibility
- the right balance between volunteers and trained youth workers, as well as the necessary skills to meet all young people's needs, particularly relating to safeguarding and professional practice
- the use of facilities to ensure an appropriate balance between location-based and detached youth services
- the cost of access. Section 507B expressly permits local authorities to levy charges in relation to any services it provides as part of the local youth offer; however, they should take care to avoid creating new or greater barriers to participation through access fees. Where significant fees are imposed, local authorities should review the effect of these fees on young people's participation, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- ways that local authorities can effectively meet their other duties in regard to safeguarding and corporate parenting responsibilities. In particular, local authorities should fulfil their duties under this legislation with rigour in regard to young people in care and care leavers

30. Local authorities should take how well they manage to address those barriers to participation as an indicator of the adequacy of their approach to securing a sufficient offer.

Providing for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities

31. Section 507B defines qualifying young people as those aged between 13 and 19 and those aged 20-24 who have a learning difficulty or disability. Local authorities should identify the specific needs of, and address the specific barriers to participation faced by, young people with learning difficulties or disabilities to determine a sufficient provision for them. In doing so, they should ensure appropriate coordination with their officials who are responsible for services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Providing the offer

Coordinating and commissioning provision

32. Local authorities must secure access to sufficient services; however, this can take the form of different models that suit the local area. There are many models of provision which take into account local needs, resources and capabilities and aim to improve provision and reach. In some cases this may be local authorities directly providing or commissioning services, in others they may support the facilitation of those services by other organisations, coordinating or maintaining oversight of the services. It may be helpful for local authorities to look at available case studies and consult other local authorities, partner agencies, professional organisations or other independent bodies or individuals to receive advice and support.
33. Local authorities should identify the most appropriate providers, utilising where appropriate the capacity of local partners. Significant partners in shaping and providing the local youth offer can include:
- young people
 - central government
 - district and parish councils
 - youth workers
 - schools, colleges and other educational settings
 - the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector
 - businesses and employers
 - health, care and well-being workers and bodies
 - family support services
 - agencies including health and police
 - other organisations offering activities for young people
34. Where local authorities commission youth services, internally or externally, they should seek to manage their resources as effectively as possible and engage in a transparent commissioning process, considering how to best support and grow the role of public, private and third sector organisations where appropriate. We encourage local authorities to explore different collaborative approaches such as joint commissioning arrangements, supported, where helpful and practicable, by joint budgets, as well as multi-agency team working or co-location.
35. Local authorities should also assess how youth services secured relate to other functions they carry out, such as:
- other children's services
 - early help
 - education and skills
 - recreation and leisure
 - health and well-being
 - public health

- community safety
- parks and the natural environment

Using youth work practice and youth workers

36. Under the act, the educational leisure-time activities and associated facilities to which access is to be secured **must** include sufficient services which are for the improvement of young people's personal and social development. To do so, those services should be run by adults with the appropriate skills and qualifications to engage with and support the young people they work with, whether they are volunteers, employed by the local authority or by external partners.
37. Qualified youth workers and youth support workers have specific training to support young people in this way through the practice of youth work. In securing the offer, local authorities should recognise the contribution of youth work practice and should aim to employ or to encourage employment of individuals with youth work skills and qualifications for all youth services.

Securing the right facilities

38. While this can differ from person-to-person and authority-to-authority, efforts should be made to ensure spaces are set up to be safe, welcoming and attractive to all qualifying young people. Effective youth services can take place in settings such as youth centres, community halls or schools but they are also equally productive in less traditional settings as long as those settings are fit-for-purpose and appealing. Spaces for younger children may not always be appropriate for older young people covered by Section 507B and this guidance. In assessing spaces, local authorities will need to be mindful of young people who have specific accessibility needs.
39. As part of their local needs assessment and steps to secure services to address those needs, local authorities should be looking at all available spaces in their area, not simply spaces they own. In doing so, local authorities should consider location and travel time for young people in their area. Local authorities will also want to consider provision of services outside of location-based settings, including through the use of detached youth work to reach more isolated young people.
40. It may be helpful for local authorities to consult youth workers and organisations skilled in engaging disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, particularly young people with disabilities, to receive advice and support in identifying the needs for specific facilities and securing those spaces.

Ensuring a safe offer

41. Regardless of how the services are being provided, and whether in-person or online, local authorities should take reasonable steps to assure themselves of the safety of the services and that standards of practice and safeguarding are maintained. Where local authorities fund or commission organisations directly to provide services to

young people, local authorities will be responsible for assuring themselves of the safety of the young people accessing those services - for example, through outlining clearly expected safeguarding arrangements within funding agreements. Local authorities should ask about, and take seriously, young people's concerns about safeguarding and the safety of services provided.

Publicising the offer

42. Local authorities **must** publicise information about the available youth services in their area and keep the publicised information up to date.
43. Local authorities should determine the scope of the services covered in the publicised information, including services that local authorities fund as well as services provided by other actors. In doing so, local authorities should ensure that the information is comprehensive, accurate and accessible and provided via appropriate publication channels for young people.
44. Involving young people in the design of that publicity plan can help identify appropriate and appealing channels and content. Those channels are likely to go beyond simply the use of existing local authority websites. In particular, young people have said that schools and other education providers are a crucial route to inform them, as well as their parents and carers, of available youth services.
45. Local authorities **must** ensure that the information publicised is regularly updated on the relevant channels within an appropriate time frame so it remains accurate. Local authorities should also ensure young people can contact them about the information publicised.

Reviewing the offer

46. Local authorities should aim to review and update their assessment of young people's needs, their contribution to the local youth offer and their strategy to meet the duty. When and how frequently to review the offer will be for each local authority to decide, but it may be helpful to do so alongside local authorities' financial planning to ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of the offer.
47. Local authorities should assess whether their actions and those of their partners have improved the available youth services and access to those services. In doing so, they should look at a number of local measures based on young people's engagement in services such as number of participants, geographic reach or demographics. This could be done through peer-led research, visits, data collection by providers or feedback sessions. When reviewing the available services and access to those services, local authorities **must** ascertain young people's views.
48. Local authorities should also assess whether the local youth offer has had a positive effect on young people's well-being and development, consistent with the aims of the act.

Conclusion

49. Local authorities **must** do all that is reasonably practicable to secure a sufficient local offer for young people in their area. This guidance clarifies statutory requirements and outlines a standard that local authorities can benchmark themselves against. To meet their duty under the act, this guidance sets out practical and reasonable steps to which local authorities must have regard.

50. Recreational and educational leisure-time activities can have a significant effect on young people's development and well-being. To meet the needs of young people in their area to best effect, local authorities should:

- put young people, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, at the centre of their decision-making and planning
- benchmark their approach and performance relative to other similar areas to identify how they might improve the breadth and reach of their offer
- secure or support an appropriate local workforce with the skills and qualifications to meet the needs of young people
- engage and coordinate with relevant actors, drawing on their support and challenge to encourage continuous improvement in local provision

Annex A: Step-by-step guide and checklist

The practical and reasonable steps outlined below provide a guide for local authorities to carry out their statutory requirements. The way local authorities choose to act regarding those steps will depend on the area, as well as their resources, capabilities and priorities.

The questions outlined below, for each step, provide a helpful checklist that local authorities can use to guide their approach and strategy regarding their statutory requirements. Those questions are not comprehensive and local authorities should explore which additional considerations are needed for their local area.

STEP 1: WHAT DO YOUR YOUNG PEOPLE NEED?

- What are young people telling you about what is needed? Have you taken into account the views of all young people, including those who face barriers to participation?
- What are parents and carers, schools and educational settings, service providers, health, care, justice and police partners telling you about what is needed?
- What data do you or your partners have that could help assess local needs?
- Have you considered needs relating to outcomes, geography, timing, age range and accessibility?

STEP 2: WHAT DO YOU HAVE ALREADY?

- Which youth services do you have in your local area (not just ones that you fund)? Where, when and what do they offer?
- Who are they for?
- Who provides and funds the current available services in your local area?
- How many qualified providers and workers are working in your local area?
- How accessible are the current activities and facilities?
- Have you assessed the safety and safeguarding policies of current provision?
- Where are your gaps based on your needs assessment? Which areas or groups are underserved?
- Do providers have the capacity and skills to carry out effective services for young people?

STEP 3: WHAT SHOULD YOU PRIORITISE?

- Working together with young people and partners, which areas of service should be prioritised?
- How can you best address barriers to participation?
- How could services be funded? By you or other funders? By using current funding and resources differently?

STEP 4: PLANNING YOUR LOCAL OFFER

- What are you, as the local authority, specifically going to provide for young people?
- What coordination role for the local youth offer will you play? How will you support provision by other actors?
- How will you secure individuals with the appropriate skills and qualifications to support your local offer?
- How will you secure safe and fit-for-purpose facilities?

STEP 5: PUBLICISING YOUR LOCAL OFFER

- How do young people want to receive information about youth services?
- How do parents and carers, school and educational settings, service providers and other relevant bodies want to receive information about youth services?
- How are you going to work with partners to promote the local youth offer, including services you do not fund or provide directly?
- How are you going to ensure information about available youth services reach all young people and is kept up to date?
- How are you going to monitor the effectiveness of your promotion?

STEP 6: REVIEW

- Did your plan work as intended?
- What do young people think of the local youth offer?
- How many young people access youth services in your area? Who? Where?
- How effective was your role in coordinating, providing and promoting the offer?
- How did your partnerships work?
- What lessons have you learned and what improvements can you explore?

Annex B: Useful information

- [Education Act 1996 - Section 507B](#)
- [Children's Act 2004 - Local arrangements for safeguarding and promoting welfare of children](#)
- [Department for Education - Working together to safeguard children](#)
- [Department for Education - Keeping children safe in out-of-school settings: code of practice](#)
- [Department for Education - Participation of young people: education, employment and training](#)
- [Special educational needs and disability \(SEND\): detailed information](#)
- [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#)
- [National Youth Agency - National Occupational Standards](#)
- [National Youth Agency - National Youth Work Curriculum](#)
- [National Youth Agency - Safeguarding Hub](#)
- [Local Government Association - Must know for Youth Services](#)