DELIVERING BETTER:
A COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR YIACS

The skills, knowledge and behaviours for the effective delivery of Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services
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ABOUT THIS FRAMEWORK

This Competency Framework for YIACS is part of Youth Access’ wider work to develop a coherent and consistent approach to service delivery and commissioning of Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS), a nationally recognised model of integrated provision.

The competencies set out in this document were developed through national consultation with providers and young people centred around two overarching questions:

- What should young people expect from YIACS?
- What is important in how they work with young people?

The competencies have been aligned with a number of relevant existing competency frameworks and National Occupational Standards relating to youth work, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, counselling and psychological therapies and legal advice amongst others to ensure that they reflect wider national standards.

The Framework sits alongside a suite of complementary resources produced by Youth Access, including:

- Another Way: Defining the functions and characteristics of YIACS
- Altogether Better: a charter created by young people for person-centred mental health and wellbeing services
- Purpose, Values and Principles of YIACS
- Young person-centred: a guide to commissioning YIACS

A wide range of other good practice guides and reports have been produced by Youth Access to inform and champion the development of YIACS over a number of years. For example, Youth Access’ Quality Standards for YIACS are a resource that may be particularly helpful to consider in relation to the competencies set out in this document.

Youth Access’ resources are freely available at: www.youthaccess.org.uk

USING THE FRAMEWORK

Organisations can make practical use of this Framework in a variety of ways. This includes as a tool to:

- Help organisations to meet young people’s Altogether Better charter for YIACS
- Assist reviews of job descriptions and person specifications
- Support recruitment, selection and induction processes
- Assist line management supervision
- Support performance review across the whole staff team
- Inform individual continuing professional development
- Help the planning of whole organisation training
- Improve cross-team working

The competencies may also help commissioners to commission an appropriate range and level of services for young people up to the age of 25 by mapping the YIACS competencies with others available in the local area.
WHICH ORGANISATIONS DOES THE FRAMEWORK APPLY TO?

This Framework is specifically aimed at those organisations that want to be recognised as part of Youth Access’ national network of YIACS.

It has been designed in recognition of the diversity of organisations that make up the network of YIACS – both in terms of size and workforce – and is therefore intended as a tool that individual organisations can use flexibly to meet their own strategic and management needs.

The Framework offers the potential for a common platform of competencies for all organisations that identify themselves as a YIACS.

The Framework may also be of value to commissioners and others interested in and wanting to understand how YIACS fit within the wider local service offer to young people, particularly in relation to their mental health and wellbeing.

WHICH STAFF ROLES DO THE COMPETENCIES APPLY TO?

The minimum expectation is for the full range of competencies to be available through the combination of staff making up your workforce.

How you apply the competencies to particular job roles in your organisation is entirely your decision.

One option would be to apply some of the competencies to all job roles.

Alternatively, you could opt to focus attention on specific professional groups in your workforce to extend their competence beyond their immediate job role. For example, counsellors might develop more competencies in identifying young people’s rights, while staff such as advice workers and youth workers might be expected to extend their skills and knowledge in common mental health problems and young people’s psychological development.

Both of the above options offer the potential benefit of enhancing the service to young people and also improving team working across different disciplines.

It should be noted that the competencies are not intended to necessarily apply to all the individual staff employed in YIACS. Central to the delivery of YIACS’ integrated health and wellbeing model is organisations’ need to employ staff (paid and unpaid) from various disciplines and backgrounds and with a variety of job titles. While the competencies in this document do not replace the need for individual staff to meet their own professional competency requirements, some of the competencies are likely to overlap with an individual’s existing professional competencies.

We would also encourage you to think about how and when to apply the relevant competencies to face to face, telephone and/or online provision.
STRUCTURE OF THE FRAMEWORK

Cluster Areas:
This provides the overarching description of one main area of competence for working in a YIACS context. There are four Cluster Areas.

Key Competencies:
Within each of the Cluster Areas are a number of Key Competencies. These are further defined into Level 1 and Level 2 skills and knowledge.

Level One skills and knowledge:
This Level includes the likely areas of skills, knowledge and behaviours that could apply to a wide range of staff working in a YIACS, including staff in administrative roles and volunteers, as well as practitioners and managers.

Level Two skills and knowledge:
This Level includes the skills, knowledge and behaviours that it is suggested a staff member with more experience and seniority might be expected to hold in addition to those at Level One.

NB: The skills and knowledge set out in the Levels 1 and 2 are not intended as an exhaustive list, nor are they exclusive to any specific job role or group of staff.

THE FOUR CLUSTER AREAS

The competencies are clustered under four inter-related ‘Cluster Areas’:

- **Positive relationships**
- **Integrated support**
- **Performance & accountability**
- **Influence & innovation**

The four Cluster Areas are underpinned by the agreed Values and Principles of the Youth Access YIACS model (see *Purpose, Values and Principles of YIACS, Youth Access, 2018*).
Demonstrate respect and acceptance towards everyone who contacts the service
Actively listen to everyone who is in contact with the service and support them to feel heard and understood
Respond to every young person with honesty and clarity about their options and choices
Foster and maintain a proactive approach to building and sustaining relationships with young people

Maintain and apply knowledge of the range of issues impacting on young people as they make the transition to adulthood
Understand and maintain an awareness of the context in which young people are growing into adulthood
Conduct collaborative initial assessments of young people’s needs and/or concerns
Plan and offer appropriate interventions relevant to the needs and goals assessed and agreed with young people
Review and evaluate with young people the continued relevance and helpfulness of the interventions offered

Support the safety and protection of all in contact with the service
Establish a collaborative approach to evaluating outcomes with young people
Supports and encourages young people’s engagement and involvement
Demonstrate reflective practice and make effective use of supervision
Contribute proactively to the efficient and effective management of the service’s resources

Act as a representative for the organisation and its work with young people
Demonstrates effective leadership in all areas of work
Maintain a solution focused approach
Capacity to adapt and change
CLUSTER AREA ONE:

Positive relationships
**KEY COMPETENCE:**

Demonstrate respect and acceptance towards everyone who contacts the service.

**LEVEL ONE**

► Able to offer a welcoming and responsive approach to all who contact the service.

► Able to demonstrate understanding and sensitivity to the different communication needs and styles of those who contact the service.

► Knows and understands the importance of clear boundaries in relationships with all those contacting the service.

**LEVEL TWO**

► Understands and is aware of how their own values may differ from those who contact the service.

► Able to demonstrate fairness and consistency in decision-making.

► Able to challenge constructively when differences and/or tensions arise between individuals and the organisation.

**KEY COMPETENCE:**

Actively listen to everyone who is in contact with the service and support them to feel heard and understood.

**LEVEL ONE**

► Able to communicate non-judgementally both verbally and non-verbally.

► Able to make use of appropriate questions to help clarify initial concerns and needs.

► Able to reflect back clearly their understanding of any concerns and/or needs communicated.

**LEVEL TWO**

► Able to work in ways that are inclusive and respectful of different perspectives and values.

► Knows and understands the potential for more complex concerns and risks present in an initial contact.

► Able to offer support to other team members engaged in providing initial responses to those contacting the service.
KEY COMPETENCE:

Respond to every young person with honesty and clarity about their options and choices.

LEVEL ONE

▸ Able to clearly communicate the range and level of help and support available in the organisation.

▸ Knows and understands the potential range of options and choices available to young people external to their organisation.

▸ Knows and understands their role and the limits of their competence.

LEVEL TWO

▸ Able to communicate clearly the relevance and potential value of the options available to a young person based on an understanding of their individual concerns and/or needs.

▸ Knows and understands the difference between signposting and referral.

▸ Able to support a referral or signpost appropriately based on a clear understanding of a young person’s needs and choices, particularly recognising those who have complex needs.
Foster and maintain a proactive approach to building and sustaining relationships with young people.

LEVEL ONE

▸ Able to encourage young people to reflect on their strengths, goals and aspirations.

▸ Able to offer relationships to young people to enable them to develop coping strategies and to manage setbacks and difficulties.

▸ Able to recognise and respond sensitively to new issues and needs that may emerge through the building of a trusted relationship.

LEVEL TWO

▸ Able to adapt their approach based on an understanding of young people’s preferences.

▸ Able to challenge discrimination and advocate for young people’s rights and needs to be recognised and responded to by others, where agreed with a young person.

▸ Able to sensitively and positively manage the endings of a relationship with a young person.
CLUSTER AREA TWO:

Integrated support
KEY COMPETENCE:

Maintain and apply knowledge of the range of issues impacting on young people as they make the transition to adulthood.

LEVEL ONE

- Knows and understands the key issues impacting on young people’s psychological, emotional and social development.
- Knows and understands basic information in relation to young people’s rights and access to housing and money, including money management.
- Knows and understands the range and responsibilities of the main services impacting on young people’s health, safety and wellbeing.

LEVEL TWO

- Able to apply first line support and advice in response to common mental health problems experienced by young people.
- Able to apply first line support and advice in recognition of a housing, financial or other practical need.
- Knows and understands how and when to support a young person’s referral to a specialist service and how to appropriately involve them in the process.
**KEY COMPETENCE:**

Understand and maintain an awareness of the context in which young people are growing into adulthood.

**LEVEL ONE**
- Knows and understands the local social, educational and economic context in which young people in the organisation’s target group are growing into adulthood.
- Knows and understands the barriers and discrimination faced by particular groups of young people.
- Maintains an awareness of youth culture and trends.

**LEVEL TWO**
- Knows and understands how adversity and trauma may impact on young people.
- Maintains awareness of potential and emerging risks to young people’s mental health and wellbeing, e.g. online or in local communities.
- Maintains an awareness of national policy impacting on the lives of young people.

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**KEY COMPETENCE:**

Conduct collaborative initial assessments of young people’s needs and/or concerns.

**LEVEL ONE**
- Knows and understands the purpose and application of different tools and frameworks for conducting an initial assessment of needs, concerns, circumstances and/or risks.
- Able to appropriately use a variety of question types to enable a young person to reflect on and define ‘problems’ and ‘strengths’, including helping to explore any risks to their physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Able to forge a collaborative relationship to enable a shared understanding of a young person’s concerns in relation to their mental and physical health and their wellbeing.

**LEVEL TWO**
- Where relevant, and with a young person’s permission, able to draw on other agencies’ and/or individuals’ (e.g. family, carers) information to help support an understanding of the young person’s concerns and needs.
- Able to draw on knowledge of young people’s development and/or rights to share a wider understanding of their concerns and goals.
- Able to support a young person to shape and define their initial and/or longer term goals.
**KEY COMPETENCE:**

Plan and offer appropriate interventions relevant to the needs and goals assessed and agreed with young people.

**LEVEL ONE**

- Able to ‘contract’ with young people to enable a shared understanding of how they will work together to meet the young person’s goals and aspirations.

- Able to support, encourage and enable young people to be informed participants in the intervention offered.

- Knows and understands whether and how to communicate with other individuals or organisations a young person agrees as relevant and important in supporting their engagement in the intervention offered.

**LEVEL TWO**

- Able to provide positive challenge to enable young people to consider new ways and opportunities to meet their interests and/or wider support or relationship needs.

- Able to respond flexibly and adapt practice to new and emerging issues presented by the young person.

- Knows and understands the evidence base for a range of interventions relevant to young people’s health and wider wellbeing needs.

**KEY COMPETENCE:**

Review and evaluate with young people the continued relevance and helpfulness of the interventions offered.

**LEVEL ONE**

- Able to plan and agree with a young person a time point and process for reviewing and evaluating the intervention offered.

- Able to employ tools and techniques to support and enable a young person to reflect on any changes and progress made.

- Able to facilitate and respond appropriately to young people’s positive and negative feedback.

**LEVEL TWO**

- Able to share and communicate the meaning and results of outcome measures to support the review and evaluation process.

- Able to adapt their practice and respond to a young person’s feedback and experience of what is working well and not so well.

- Able to maintain a supportive relationship where a planned transfer of support is agreed with a young person.
CLUSTER AREA THREE:

Performance & accountability
KEY COMPETENCE:

Support the safety and protection of all in contact with the service.

LEVEL ONE

► Knows and understands the legal framework regarding safeguarding, consent, confidentiality, information sharing and data storage and the operation of their organisation’s policies.

► Able to provide clear information to a young person to enable them to be clear about their rights in relation to consent, including information sharing and confidentiality.

► Knows and understands their specific responsibilities for safeguarding young people and their role in supporting a referral where required.

LEVEL TWO

► Able to put in place strategies with a young person to manage any potential risks, where these are assessed and agreed as manageable through the organisation and the young person’s own support networks.

► Where consent is required, able to communicate sensitively and appropriately with parents or carers and maintain the confidence and trust of the young person concerned.

► Maintains an awareness of and adapts policies and procedures to respond to new and emerging safeguarding issues and national guidance.

KEY COMPETENCE:

Establish a collaborative approach to evaluating outcomes with young people.

LEVEL ONE

► Knows and understands the purpose and range of measures and other feedback tools implemented in the organisation and young people’s right to consent to their completion.

► Able to sensitively implement measures and tools to support young people to understand their purpose and complete them.

► Able to integrate the use of measures and feedback tools in their work with young people.

LEVEL TWO

► Able to use knowledge of different measures and tools to select those appropriate to the intervention offered to a young person.

► Able to score and interpret the results of measures and service feedback tools, particularly for the benefit of young people.

► Knows and understands the relevant strengths and limitations of different measures and feedback tools.
KEY COMPETENCE:

Supports and encourages young people’s engagement and involvement.

**LEVEL ONE**

- Knows and understands different participation models and methods.

- Able to implement participation methods to engage and involve diverse groups of young people, particularly those who lack confidence and a voice.

- Knows and understands different rights and responsibilities frameworks, e.g. UNCRC and other human rights and equalities frameworks.

**LEVEL TWO**

- Able to develop and deliver training to help prepare young people to engage in a range of participation activities, including peer work and social action.

- Able to prepare and facilitate young people’s engagement in local, regional and national policy and decision-making forums.

- Able to develop and implement relevant recognition and reward schemes in response to young people’s participation.
KEY COMPETENCE:

Demonstrate reflective practice and make effective use of supervision.

LEVEL ONE
► Knows and understands the purpose of (and difference between) line management and clinical and/or casework supervision.
► Able to work with a supervisor to set agendas, agree roles and responsibilities.
► Able to reflect and discuss openly and honestly what is working well and not so well.

LEVEL TWO
► Able to select and use evidence and issues from their work to make best use of supervision.
► Able to respond appropriately to feedback and suggestions and act upon any agreements.
► Able to use supervision to enhance their understanding of their own continuing professional development needs.

KEY COMPETENCE:

Contribute proactively to the efficient and effective management of the service’s resources.

LEVEL ONE
► Knows and understands the resources available to meet targets and outcomes relevant to their job role and workplan and how these relate to the wider organisation.
► Able to meet their specific responsibilities for providing timely and accurate monitoring and financial information required by the organisation to meet its reporting and other requirements.
► Able to work within the financial constraints of the organisation and to seek ways and opportunities for maximising the available resources.

LEVEL TWO
► Knows and understands their responsibility to look for ‘best value’ when purchasing goods and services for the organisation.
► Able to cost services and set and monitor budgets to enable the organisation to continue its services to young people.
► Able to meet the organisation’s legal, financial and other reporting duties in a transparent and timely manner.
Influence & innovation
KEY COMPETENCE:
Act as a representative for the organisation and its work with young people.

LEVEL ONE
- Knows and understands the organisation’s mission and services and its specific contribution to the local area’s wider service offer to young people.
- Able to communicate effectively (in print, online and in person) the strengths and evidence of the organisation’s work with young people and the outcomes achieved.
- Able to develop a collaborative approach with a wide range of stakeholders to promote and develop the best services for young people locally.

LEVEL TWO
- Able to critically assess the organisation’s work, performance and its operating context.
- Knows and understands the roles, responsibilities, culture and practice of other individuals and organisations that are important to improving responses and services to young people.
- Able to negotiate, build and sustain formal and informal partnerships with other organisations.

KEY COMPETENCE:
Demonstrates effective leadership in all areas of work.

LEVEL ONE
- Able to demonstrate in all work the principles of: empathy; integrity; objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty.
- Able to act as a champion for young people.
- Able to build trust and confidence with a wide range of individuals and organisations (both internal and external to the organisation).

LEVEL TWO
- Able to think and act strategically to enhance their service’s work with young people and improve services generally for the benefit of young people.
- Knows and understands the local and national networks that can support their organisation to develop the range and quality of its services to young people.
- Able to manage and resolve conflict and differences with diverse stakeholders.
KEY COMPETENCE:

Maintains a solution focused approach.

LEVEL ONE

► Able to identify and be willing to respond pro-actively to gaps, barriers and challenges.

► Able to critically assess and evaluate the factors contributing to gaps, barriers and challenges.

► Able to persevere in the face of difficulties and to change and adapt to meet long term goals.

LEVEL TWO

► Knows and understands the potential resources available and, when relevant, how to mobilise these to respond to gaps, barriers and challenges.

► Able to think creatively and imaginatively to support the development of ideas and new opportunities.

► Able and willing to take manageable risks.
KEY COMPETENCE:
Capacity to adapt and change.

LEVEL ONE
► Knows and understands the potential of research and policy, rising trends and innovations in other sectors to inform the development of new service responses.

► Able to articulate and maintain focus on outcomes of relevance to the organisation’s work with young people in the development and design of new “service products”.

► Able to connect the delivery of a long term vision through the setting and negotiation of shorter term achievable goals and tasks.

LEVEL TWO
► Able to enthuse and harness the skills and aspirations of others, including young people, to form alliances for change and innovation.

► Able to anticipate and be sensitive to the potential impact of change on different stakeholders.

► Knows and understands the value of testing ideas and how to collect and use relevant data to inform, refine and further develop a new product/concept.
ABOUT YOUTH ACCESS

Youth Access is the advice and counselling network. We believe that all young people have a right to access young person-centred advice and counselling services where they will be:

► Welcomed, listened to and respected;
► Given free, high quality help on their own terms;
► Helped to make their own decisions based on a clear understanding of their rights and options.

We promote the Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) model as part of local services for young people everywhere. YIACS break down the barriers to getting help. They support young people to address a wide range of social, legal, practical, emotional and mental health needs in a coordinated way. YIACS are focused on alleviating distress, defending rights and supporting wellbeing. They deliver a combination of advice, counselling, health clinics and youth work in young person-centred settings.

Youth Access works towards its objectives by:

► Providing YIACS with the tools they need to deliver high-quality services to young people
► Building the evidence to shape policy and services that meet young people’s needs
► Promoting young people’s right to be heard.