



Youth Work Ireland

National Office Digital Youth Work Policy

Policy Statement: Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values, and principles as youth work in physical settings.

1. Context for Policy

COVID-19 has resulted in a digital transformation of youth work practices, with much of our regular engagements moving online and utilising new and established online platforms to engage with our membership, stakeholders, and young people. In making this transformation it is important to note that digital youth work should take the same approach to youth work in a physical setting, albeit with additional safeguards. It is about taking what you do offline and moving it into an online context. This might mean doing things differently but fundamentally, it is still youth work, and the same values and principles apply.

2. Digital Youth Work

Digital youth work means proactively using digital media and technology in our youth work activities and work. The breadth and variety of online platforms and apps increases daily, and it can be challenging for practitioners to keep up. This policy does not go into the minute details of different social media platforms and Apps. *The Internet has many resources and tools to support learning on use of different platforms.* Rather, this policy sets out what we in National Office need to be mindful of, what we need to consider when engaging online and what the main risks, opportunities and implications are for moving our practice online.

Fundamentally we need to remember that digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals.

3. Scope of Policy

This document does not change or add to good practice; rather it clarifies how the practices and procedures that currently exist translate into digital engagement.

When staff work online, they must ensure that this is in line with existing best practice guidelines, child protection /safeguarding procedures and other relevant National Office policies. This policy applies to National Office staff, board members, sub-group members, volunteers, and Interns.

Digital engagement within Youth Work Ireland National Office comprises of the following areas:

- Delivery of national programmes, activities, and events to young people.
- Online consultations with young people and youth panels.
- Engagement of adults through online training, consultations, and reviews.

- Engagement with youth practitioners and volunteers through online peer support and learning networks.
- Engagement with staff, board, MYS and working groups to further the operational objectives of the organisation.
- Promotion and communication of our work - to include providing and receiving information from a broad audience of stakeholders.

4. Practice – Digital Practices

As part of digital work this policy gives guidelines around practices, we advise you follow when using digital platforms for any digital youth work.

Overview of various Digital platforms

Firstly, we will give an overview of some of the platforms that Digital youth work can take place.

*Please note this list is **not definite** and the practise provided is applicable to any digital platform you select. The below is merely a sample of some platforms that can be used.*

ICON	PLATFORM	INFORMATION
	Facebook	Facebook is a social media platform which allows users, who sign-up for free profiles, to connect with friends, work colleagues or people they don't know, online. It allows users to share pictures, music, videos, and articles, as well as their own thoughts and opinions with however many people they like. It also allows you set up public and private groups to communicate with groups of people and group chats.
	Instagram	Instagram is a photo sharing app which allows users to assign filters to photos and videos and share them with followers.
	TikTok	TikTok is a video-sharing social networking platform where users can make a variety of short-form videos, from genres like dance, comedy, and education, that have a duration from fifteen seconds to one minute.
	Snapchat	Snapchat is a popular messaging app that lets users exchange pictures and videos (called snaps) that are meant to disappear after they're viewed. It's advertised as a "new type of camera" because the essential function is to take a picture or video, add filters, lenses or other effects and share them with friends.
	What App	WhatsApp is a messaging app that lets users' text, chat, and share media, including voice messages and video, with individuals or groups.
	Zoom	Zoom is a cloud-based video conferencing tool that lets you host virtual one-on-one or team meetings easily. With powerful audio, video and collaboration features, this remote communication tool connects remote team members with each other. Zoom's key features include HD video chat and conferencing.

5. Digital Platform Practices, Procedures: Tips & Guidance for Implementation

Below is an overview of considerations, practices and procedures you should take into account when engaging in Digital Youth work.

- Digital platforms should operate under the same way a physical space does with all supports and activities clearly identified and put in place in advance so those attending, and participating are supported and feel safe to contribute. *Remember; Digital youth work should be underpinned by the same ethics, values, and principles as youth work.*
- When selecting the digital platform, you plan on using, make sure it fits the purpose of the task and has the requirements you need in terms of safeguarding, privacy or security. Please make sure you have a full understanding of the selected platform and how it works. We would advise checking YouTube or the wider internet for tutorials on the selected platform if you are unsure of it or consult a colleague or select a platform you are familiar with if you have not given enough time to familiarise yourself with the platform you initially selected.
- It's important to be clear on how you communicate on the digital platform you are using, and you present yourself, the project or organisation in an appropriate manner in published posts or online activity.
- Please be aware that anything that you do online could potentially be seen by anyone. There is no such thing as a truly secure form of communication and deleting images or content does not mean that they are gone - any digital media can be accessed by others. Staff should also be aware that some communication may be subject to Freedom of Information requests.
- Be conscious that the Internet is not a closed system so think before you post.
- Your engagement with young people on social media must be relevant to the work you are engaging with them on. Workers must be aware of and maintain professional boundaries at all times.
- It is worth considering whether you need a facilitator from the host organisation/youth leader to attend with the young person or group for events or activities or if you need to seek parental consent in advance.
- Please make sure that the account you are logging on with or using on the selected platform does not contain any personal information or data which is not appropriate to work related activity.
- In advance of events and activities clearly communicate to participants the purpose, requirements (if any) and the expectation from them in attending. Make sure to circulate

the agenda/timetable/additional materials if required in advance so there is a clear sense of what is planned to happen and what is expected by attendees.

- If using a platform that participants will need links to access the platform, please make sure they are password protected where required and that they are not shared publicly. Ensure that this is clearly communicated to all attendees and that participants have a clear understanding of how to access the platform. It is important to manage the chat function during the activity/event if this is applicable to the event/activity and to disable private chat if not appropriate to the event/activity.
- Make sure to create a welcoming atmosphere and clearly communicate any house rules at the start of the activity or event so it's a safe space for those participating. Depending on the platform you are using it might be appropriate to check in on those attending and to ask attendees to keep their cameras on in situations where active participation is required.
- If collecting data from participants have a clear understanding and logic as to why this is being collected and clearly communicate this with participants.
- If recording or taking photos of an event/activity, please make sure that there is consent from all participants where applicable. Some events/activities might be recorded or have photos taken but this must be clearly communicated **in advance to all participants**.
- In the event of a child protection issue arising, staff should report the incident to the DLP. Paul Gralton immediately.
- **National Office staff, board members, sub-group members, volunteers and Interns** must refer and be up to date with [Youth Work Ireland’s Child Protection Policies, Guidelines & Statement.](#)
- **National Office staff, board members, sub-group members, volunteers and Interns** must refer and be up to date with [Youth Work Ireland’s GDPR Policy](#)

- **Consent must in place for online activities if participants are under 18.**
- **This can be done as part of the overall programme consent, or for one off events this can be done via consent forms or e-forms with clear consent given by a parent or guardian**
- **There are many online platforms for generating digital consent forms, including Google Forms or Jotform.**

See Appendix 1 for a sample of an online consent form

6. Risks, Opportunities, and Implications

Upon reviewing the option of online engagement, we have found that the opportunities justify the risks and the risks identified can be managed and effective control measures put in place. It is important to risk assess each activity or intervention to be prepared and address any specific measures required.

Risks

A number of risks come with the use of online engagement which are summarised below:

- Either the young people or the youth workers' device fails, battery runs out, or loses digital connection.
- It is a risk that unknown or unattached young people, or adults, gain access to the digital platform.
- Young people share inappropriate content during the digital meet on the display or chat feature.
- Participants or others are disruptive and sabotage the digital meet.
- Young people are under the influence of drugs or alcohol while in the online meet.
- Explicit consent to participate from a parent/guardian is withdrawn or impossible to acquire.

These risks can be reduced and controlled by the points outlined above under housekeeping.

- **The list above is not exhaustive of all potential risks. It is recommend that you have a clear outline and fill in a risk assessment to understand actions that should be taken.**
- **It is up to the youth worker to determine the actions they need to take to address risks relevant to their activity or programme.**
- **If you are doing a programme or activity with recurring sessions of a similar nature the same risk assessment can be used.**

See Appendix 2 for A Digital Youth Work and Safeguarding Risk Assessment Form.

Opportunities

Despite the risks outlined, online engagement offers us opportunities to reach older young people and isolated young people who perhaps would not feel comfortable joining in a session in a youth club or other face-to-face venue. Online engagement also provided us with opportunities to connect with rural young people, who may not have access to transport to engage in face-to-face

activities. Further to this, online engagement offers us the opportunity to support young people at a time when social isolation has increased for all.

Implications

Accessibility & Privacy

It cannot be assumed that all young people have access to a personal device to engage in online groups but to make the activity as accessible as possible we must use an online platform that is mobile optimal. Further to the issue of accessibility, internet connectivity and reliability may be an issue to be aware of for the young people we are engaging with, particularly those living in rural locations. Lack of digital skill on the part of the young person or the worker may also be a factor. We must consider appropriate days and times for the online engagement to take place. If engaging through schools themselves then this can be done in school time but otherwise we must be aware of allowing time between school and the online group work for young people to transition between the two.

Additionally, as many parents may be working from home, and there may be other siblings in the house, etc. young people may not necessarily have privacy to comfortably engage in group discussions online.

Online Fatigue

A lot of young people's interaction is currently reliant on online platforms. Due to COVID-19 restrictions it is necessary for them to engage in their schoolwork via online learning platforms, Zoom, and/or Microsoft Teams. Additionally, their social engagement is primarily occurring through online platforms due to these restrictions also. The excessive amounts of time required to engage online can be draining and can lead to Online fatigue and thereby have a possible negative impact on young people's interest in/willingness to/ability to engage online for youth programmes. It is good to consider the timing of your online activities and the recommendation around best practice is that sessions ideally should take no longer than 60 minutes (without a break). Although some activities will vary depending on the content and engagement of young people.

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years, however there may be a need to revisit this should new online platforms or technology need to be incorporated into it.

Young people from Youth Work Ireland's National Youth Action Group, and staff from National Office were consulted in the development of this policy.

This policy was approved by the National Board of Youth Work Ireland on ***Friday 3rd September 2021***

Appendix 1: Sample of an Online Consent form

This is an example of an online consent form which was built in Jotform – www.jotform.com and gives parents / guardian's the ability to electronically sign and give consent to a young person taking part in online events and activities.

Name of Young Person

First Name

Last Name

What is your local Youth Work Ireland Youth Service? (if you don't know please type NA).

Your email

example@example.com

Your phone number

Please enter a valid phone number.

Your Address

Date of Birth

Day Month Year

Permissions

Please complete this section with your parent/guardian if under the age of 16. A signature from your parent guardian will be required. If you would like more information about YWI's safeguarding of youngpeople, please follow this link:

[https://www.youthworkireland.ie/images/uploads/general/YWI_Child_Protection_and_Safeguarding_Guide_lines_November_2019_-_Layout_Document\(002\).pdf](https://www.youthworkireland.ie/images/uploads/general/YWI_Child_Protection_and_Safeguarding_Guide_lines_November_2019_-_Layout_Document(002).pdf)

I and my parent/guardian agree that Youth Work Ireland may contact me via video conferencing/online meetings (using Zoom) for focus group purposes.

Yes

No

I and my parent/guardian agree consent that with my involvement, photos/videos of my participation in this group can be used to promote the work of the group.

Yes

No

Parent's information (if participant is aged under 18)

First Name

Last Name

Parent's email

example@example.com

Parent/Guardian Phone

Please enter a valid phone number.

Signature of Parent/ Participant if participant is aged under 18.

Signature of Young Person

Submit

Appendix 2: Digital Youth Work and Safeguarding Risk Assessment

Digital Youth Work and Safeguarding Risk Assessment

Name of assessor:

Date:

	Hazard	Risk Rating		Control measures	New Risk Rating	
		Severity LMH	Likelihood LMH		Severity LMH	Likelihood LMH
A	Access to the Digital Platform					
1	Young People are unable to use the Digital Platform due to lack of hardware					
2	Young People are unable to use the Digital Platform due to lack of finances to buy data					
3	Young People are unable to use the Digital Platform due to lack of skill					
4	Young People are unable to use the Digital Platform due to lack of disability access					
5	Young People are unable to use the Digital Platform due to lack of privacy at home					
6	Youth Workers, Youth Work Programme and Youth Work organisation.					
7	Reputational risk: that your youth project is not meeting targets, outcomes, deadlines, cancelling events, with potential impact on funding and partnerships					
8	Information about the Digital Youth Work Meet fails to reach young people and numbers attending decline					
9	Young People get bored and leave the Digital Platform					

10	Youth Workers lack digital skills to facilitate youth work on a Digital Platform				
11	Youth Workers digital device fails, battery runs out, loses digital connection.				
B	Safeguarding				
1	Risk of contracting COVID-19- because Young People plan to use the Digital Platform as a group together in real life.				
2	Older independently living young people feel pressured to invite other young people to their homes as they have no- where else to meet				
3	Older independently living young people invite younger young people to their homes inappropriately.				
4	Unknown young people gain access the Digital Platform				
5	Young People are outed at home and face LGBT phobia				
6	Digital Platforms linked to email addresses, that the name can't be changed on, and reveals young person's <i>dead name or previous name</i>				
7	Young people share inappropriate content during the Digital Meet on the display or chat feature.				
8	Young people are disruptive and sabotage the Digital Meet				
9	Young people express increasing negative impact on their mental wellness during the COVID-19 crisis.				

10	Young People indicate they are considering self-harm / are self-harming during the Digital Meet				
11	Young Person refuses to voluntarily end contact at end of Digital Meet set time				
12	Young People indicate they are considering taking their own life/ attempt to take their own life during the Digital Meet				
13	Young people continue on the Digital Platform once the session has ended				
14	Having an increased-on line life during COVID-19, young people take more risks online e.g. sharing nude images, connecting with strangers (risk of grooming), cyberbullying, sexting, online gambling, exposure to LGBT phobia, Digitally self –harming				