

Department for Education's 16 to 19 study programmes guidance

United Kingdom

[16 to 19 study programmes guidance: 2025 to 2026 academic year - GOV.UK](#)

DESCRIPTION

The Department for Education has developed a **guidance document outlining the policy on 16 to 19 study programmes for the 2023-2024 academic year**.

The policy applies to all 16 to 19 education providers and is intended for everyone involved in the **design, planning or delivery of these programmes**, including technical and vocational qualification courses across all settings.

Among the sections of the guidance referring to providers involved in the delivery of the programmes, there are references to:

a. Youth social action

In this section, **providers are encouraged to incorporate youth social action into study programmes alongside other work experience**. Youth social action involves young people taking practical action in the service of others to create positive change.

In a work experience context, social action can take the form of **young people improving their work-related skills and behaviours to have a positive community impact**. Evidence shows that young people who participate in social action show robust improvements in the skills and behaviours that employers are calling for, including **resilience, problem-solving and a sense of community**. Young people participating in social action projects have **stronger personal networks, higher life satisfaction and reduced anxiety**.

The **common principles of a high-quality youth social action project** are that it is:

- **youth-led**: led, owned and shaped by young people's needs, ideas and decision making
- **socially impactful**: has clear and intended benefits to a community, cause or social problem
- **challenging**: stretching and ambitious as well as enjoyable and enabling
- **embedded**: accessible to all, and well-integrated into existing pathways to become a habit for life
- **progressive**: sustained and providing links to other activities and opportunities
- **reflective**: recognising contributions as well as valuing critical reflection and learning

Activities can include **volunteering, campaigning, fundraising and mentoring**, where the activity has a **'double benefit' to both the young people participating and the community** they are serving.

b. Other non-qualification activity

In this section, all students are expected to take part in other **meaningful non-qualification activity alongside work experience**. This should **take account of their needs and career plans, as well as preparation for adult life** more generally. For example:

- activities to develop confidence, character and resilience
- group work to develop team working, communications skills, leadership and problem solving – skills that employers often say are lacking in school and college leavers

- tutorials and seminars, including career education
- life skills, such as travelling independently, cooking and eating healthily, staying safe, making sustainable choices, managing personal finances, and preparing for adult or university life

Such activities should also help students to build experience for their CV and personal statement. External programmes such as the [National Citizen Service](#) (NCS) can be delivered alongside study programmes to offer students **additional opportunities to develop their character, skills, attitudes and confidence, and to support progression.**

For example, the **NCS is a government-backed, part-residential youth programme** that develops the skills and confidence of young people. Young people work in diverse teams of 12 to 15 building skills for work and life, taking on exciting challenges, meeting people from different backgrounds and contributing to their local area. [National independent evaluations](#) have consistently shown the **positive impact the programme has on young people, particularly on team-working, leadership, resilience, wellbeing and anxiety reduction.**

NCS is managed locally, and providers can tailor activities and materials to suit the student cohort and deliver the programme at a time that best meets their needs. There is **no cost to a school or college** to get involved and **a young person will pay no more than £50 to take part, with bursaries also available.** However, as NCS is government funded, **the hours the student spends on the programme must not be recorded as planned hours.**