

The Activity Agreement Model

How the Activity Agreement approach can support flexibility and choice in the development of Curriculum for Excellence senior phase learning and pathways.



The Scottish
Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba



Supporting flexibility and choice in the development of senior phase learning and pathways

Evidence has shown that the Activity Agreement model is successfully engaging with young people furthest from the labour market and supporting them to progress and sustain further learning, training and employment.

An Activity Agreement¹ is an agreement between a young person and an advisor (known as a trusted professional) that the young person will take part in a programme of tailored learning and activity which helps them to become ready for formal learning or employment. This forms a key element of the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence for some of our most vulnerable young people.

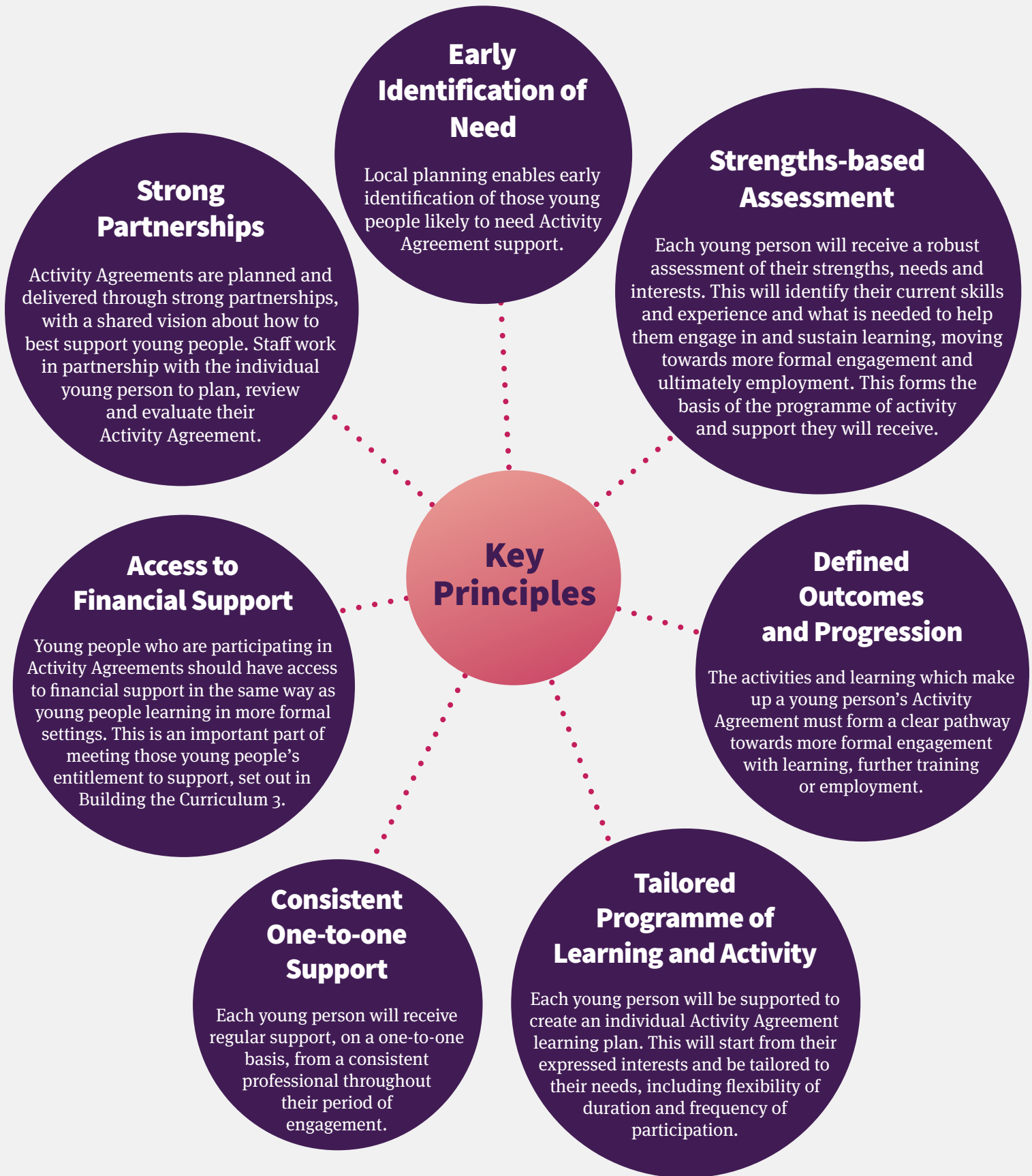
While the title 'Activity Agreement' refers to individualised learning undertaken by a young person after they have left school, there are wider lessons to be applied from the model of intensive support and personalised learning, which will be relevant to some young people throughout their compulsory education and may also have relevancy in approaches for other employability interventions.

This document outlines the key principles of the Activity Agreement model to inform how the approach can support flexibility and choice in the wider development of senior phase learning and pathways.

It will also be useful for local authority multi-agency partnerships in delivering Activity Agreements as a learning offer option within the Opportunities for All commitment to young people.

¹ Activity Agreements are for those young people whose immediate and future learning and skills needs have been assessed and it has been recognised that without this first-step engagement and support, they would not make a successful transition toward and into further learning or training and ultimately employment.

The Activity Agreement Model



Early Identification of Need

Robust transition planning with schools and other partners, such as local authority Opportunities for All staff, career guidance specialists, CLD, social work, third sector providers and colleges, enables early identification of those young people likely to need support and allows Activity Agreement partners to ensure that the responding range of learning options available in the local area offers choice and flexibility.

Early identification also allows for Activity Agreement partners to begin individual planning and preparation, pre-16, with young people who have been assessed as appropriate for an Activity Agreement, to ensure they are not lost at point of transition. This has been especially crucial in re-engaging those young people who have disengaged from school, allowing partners to determine an appropriate post-16 learning opportunity.

Local planning enables early identification of those young people likely to need support.

Practice Example

In South Lanarkshire, young people at risk of not entering a positive destination are identified early and offered in-school support during their last months of school, through the Council's Aspire Vocational Development Programme.

Pupils are identified via the 16+ Matrix that has been implemented in all schools and their needs are discussed at a 16+ meeting. Young people are allocated a dedicated vocational development worker who will provide consistent one-to-one support throughout their period of engagement. Wellbeing and employability needs are assessed and inform the development of an individualised programme. Support is flexible and fits around any subjects and/or SQA awards the young person is working towards. Young people who are completely disengaged are supported to re-engage with school where possible and/or participate in activities outwith the school setting. The aim of the programme is to remove any barriers and to assist with the transition from school into a positive destination including, in some cases, assessing suitability for an Activity Agreement post-school.

Strengths-based Assessment

Strengths-based assessment is vital to ensuring that young people are offered a highly personalised programme of learning and activity which will improve their individual skills.

Assessment supports young people to recognise and value their current skills, interests and experience, and to consider how they can use and build on these strengths during their Activity Agreement. The assessment will also encourage the young person to take ownership of their learning, identifying what is required to help them to engage, to develop learning and training skills, and which moves them towards sustained participation in more formal learning, training or employment.

To ensure that the post-16 Activity Agreement forms part of a coherent senior phase learning pathway toward and into employment, the assessment must recognise the wide range of influences on vulnerable young people's lives, for example health, housing and family circumstances and will acknowledge the learning and experiences of the young person within and outwith school. In line with the Getting It Right For Every Child approach, this assessment will be informed by and subsequently form part of any existing Child's Plan.

Given the interdependent nature of working around transition, a common process for assessment should be in place across the local partnership area, with robust, agreed processes and protocols regarding information exchange with key partners. This should include a clear understanding about the suitability of the Activity Agreement intervention.

Assessment is focused on helping young people to identify their strengths and the support they need (to engage in and sustain learning, which moves them towards more formal engagement and ultimately employment).

Strengths-based Assessment

Practice Example

Falkirk Council use an employability assessment tool to help young people identify their strengths and learning needs at the start of their Activity Agreement. This assessment informs the creation of an individual learning plan that details the young person's goals and the activities and learning that will be undertaken to reach them.

Throughout their Activity Agreement, young people meet with their trusted professional for regular reviews. The strengths-based assessment is used within these review meetings to measure progress against the targets and goals the young person has set for themselves. Regular reviews and having a clear picture of progress also keep the young person forward focused and motivated.

The assessment is used to identify progress, achievements and a pathway for their progression onto a positive destination.

Defined Outcomes and Progression

Young people being offered an Activity Agreement will be clear and in agreement that the intended outcome of their participation is to move them on to employment or further learning. They will have been assessed as capable of making such a transition.

Personalised planning facilitates progression within the Activity Agreement and beyond. From the outset, young people are supported to articulate their goals in terms of their development and progression. With the support of their trusted professional, each young person creates an individual Activity Agreement plan detailing what is required to achieve this; the activities, learning and any specialist input, but also other things the young person has agreed to do such as increase their attendance or improve their behaviour in a group. The plan is crucial to ensuring that all activities have value in terms of contributing to the young person's development and is treated as a working document that will adapt and change as they explore different options and revise their goals.

Every young person should be able to recognise and articulate their progress in moving towards the labour market. They will be supported by their trusted professional to develop this ability through frequent reviews and during their regular one-to-one support sessions.

Young people's participation will form a clear pathway towards progression, providing opportunity to develop their skills for learning, life and work, with a continuous focus on literacy and numeracy, health and wellbeing, and including vocational content, where this will support young people's goals. The Activity Agreement will include other activities specifically designed to prepare young people for progression, such as taster sessions at college and with training providers, mentoring, peer mentoring opportunities and innovative group projects.

Defined Outcomes and Progression

Practice Example

In East Lothian, each young person's Activity Agreement is structured across three distinct stages (engagement, barrier removal/skills development and transition). Personalised planning is key to ensuring that, at each stage, the activities and learning form a clear pathway towards employment, each stage moving them closer to their intended outcome. Regular reviews of progress help young people recognise their development and keep them moving forward.

The trusted professional ensures that young people progress within their Activity Agreement at the point they are ready. For example, when a young person is ready to commit to working on their barriers, is motivated and engaging they will progress to the barrier removal/skills development stage.

Young people are supported to set their own targets and identify an end-goal. Before moving to the transition stage, young people will have participated in a range of learning opportunities that have built on their existing skills and interests and which are clearly linked to their individual pathway to employment.

Stage 3 prepares young people for transition beyond the Activity Agreement. They will be able to demonstrate the attitudes and aptitudes required for their next destination and can sustain a full day at work, college or training.

Tailored Programme of Learning and Activity

A young person's Activity Agreement consists of participation in a package of heavily personalised learning, determined by their assessment needs, activities tailored to their interests, and consistent one-to-one support.

The Activity Agreement is also tailored in terms of frequency of participation, in response to the level and intensity of support needed by each individual. For the most vulnerable young people, intensive advice and guidance is a central element of their participation – particularly when their learning activity must fit in with other issues such as health and wellbeing. The nature of this one-to-one support will vary depending on the individual but may involve building the young person's ability to participate in group activities. In this way Activity Agreements are able to engage and sustain participation from vulnerable and disengaged young people.

Within this flexibility, there is a clear focus on the young person's progression towards more formal learning, training or employment; with the expectation that a young person's participation in Activity Agreements might evolve or become more demanding resulting in longer periods of participation as they progress.

Activity Agreements are delivered in venues and on days and times that recognise young people's needs and other commitments. The provision available to young people will take into account their different starting points in terms of learning, development and other needs, and will provide opportunity to try new things and explore options in a safe environment. The duration of a young person's Activity Agreement participation is also determined by the individual – allowing progression to their next destination at the point they are ready.

Each young person will be supported to create an individual learning plan. This will start from their expressed interests and be tailored to their needs including flexibility of duration and frequency of participation.

Tailored Programme of Learning and Activity

Practice Example

West Dunbartonshire Council deliver tailored Activity Agreements using partners and sourcing provision to meet the needs of young people. The young person's barriers are taken into consideration and appropriate support and flexibility built in. This may include offering intensive one-to-one or small group support at the start of the period of engagement. The trusted professional works with any partners, building participation in terms of hours and challenge.

For example, they established a nurture group which ran for young people beginning their Activity Agreement who were unable to participate in a mainstream group or engage for more than a few hours a week. Trusted professionals monitored each young person's participation in close partnership with partners and reviewed their progress regularly. When a young person was ready, they moved onto an employability skills development programme, delivered by the trusted professional and local partner. Local stage 2 and 3 providers were part of the programme, informing the young people of their programmes/opportunities for progression in relation to their learning and progression goals.

Consistent One-to-one Support

Consistent personal support underpins the Activity Agreement approach and its success in helping young people engage with and sustain participation in the opportunities it offers and to move into positive and sustained destinations.

Activity Agreements offer young people one-to-one support from a consistent professional throughout their period of engagement. These professionals are referred to as trusted professionals. Trusted professionals come from a range of professions, including community/youth work, education, health and careers. Each local authority area has developed a trusted professional workforce to meet the needs of young people. A strong relationship with a trusted professional, acting in an advisory and guidance role, is a critical element of the Activity Agreement model. Evidence suggests that this advisory role is central to a young person's participation in an Activity Agreement.

Those undertaking the trusted professional role have empathy with young people and are not seen as a person of authority. They have a wide skills base that enables them to build supportive, open and truthful relationships with young people, respond to the needs of the individual and work in partnership to best support the young person.

Practice Example

In East Renfrewshire, consistent one-to-one support and the relationship with a trusted professional underpins the Activity Agreement journey from engagement to progression.

Trusted professionals engage young people prior to their school leaving date. The ability to build a trusting and non-judgemental relationship is key to encouraging vulnerable young people to participate in an Activity Agreement.

Strengths-based assessment is carried out by the trusted professional, helping young people identify their existing

Consistent One-to-one Support

Practice Example continued

skills and interests in addition to the barriers they need to address to move towards employment.

Trusted professionals support young people to create individual learning plans, identifying personal goals and agreed steps to reach them. The relationship between the trusted professional and young person here is crucial for an open and realistic discussion regarding expectations and support needs.

Trusted professionals provide one-to-one support on a regular basis. These sessions are used to monitor progress, provide advice and guidance, offer impartial support and solution focused problem solving, develop the young person's personal/social skills and qualities, motivate and encourage. They review progress with young people at key points during their Agreement, using the same assessment tool to help young people visualise their progress and achievement.

Progression is discussed regularly so that the end goal is always a priority. Trusted professionals help young people to revise and re-adjust their progression pathway plans as they develop their interests and experiences. They also play a key role in knowing when young people are ready for progression.

Once young people move on, the trusted professional offers them support for around six weeks, to ensure they sustain their participation.

Each young person will receive regular support, advice and guidance, on a one-to-one basis, from a consistent professional, throughout their period of engagement.

Access to Financial Support

Young people participating in an Activity Agreement are able to apply for an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). This recognises the learning through an Activity Agreement alongside more formal settings and acknowledges the impact of poverty on attainment for this cohort.

Evidence has shown that some young people would be unable to participate without EMA and for others it encourages them to participate.

All young people undertaking Activity Agreements are considered vulnerable. Local authorities have developed processes to support young people in taking up their entitlement to EMA. This ensures that vulnerable young people do not face barriers to financial support. This has impacted on the number of young people receiving the financial support they need to complete their Activity Agreement and progress to further participation.

Young people who are participating should have access to financial support in the same way as young people learning in more formal settings. This is an important part of meeting those young people's entitlement to support, set out in Building the Curriculum 3.

Practice Example

EMA support through West Lothian Council helped one young person participate and learn valuable skills. When Rosie started her Activity Agreement she had a keen interest in childcare, but lacked confidence and self-esteem, was socially isolated and unable to self-travel. Through participation in a tailored programme of activities, and with support from her trusted professional, Rosie gained the skills and confidence she needed to undertake her first experience of work, with a work taster in the toddler's group in her area.

Living in a low income household, EMA supported Rosie to access the opportunities offered through Activity Agreements and gain some financial independence. During her Activity Agreement, Rosie became pregnant. Rosie said that being able to access EMA has also helped her learn how to budget.

After a short break from her Activity Agreement, Rosie came back ready to tackle the new challenge of learning alongside being a full-time mum and continues to work towards employment within a childcare setting.

Strong Partnerships

The need for strong partnerships is evident across the Activity Agreement model, recognising that senior phase support for young people cannot be delivered in isolation. At a strategic level, partners work alongside business and industry, colleges, schools, and third sector training providers to ensure that young people have access to meaningful opportunities within a local pipeline of delivery, and that this is linked to real opportunities within the local labour market. Operationally, local authority partnerships harness the willingness, skills, expertise and knowledge of a wide range of partners to offer attractive and meaningful pathways for those at greatest risk of disengagement.

Practice Example

The Activity Agreement Service in Glasgow has developed a strategic and operational business model that is supported by a range of key partners in the city. At a strategic level they have developed partnerships such as the positive participation and progression forums across the city, involving Skills Development Scotland and the Youth Partnership Consortium, who are a consortium of third sector organisations. This ensures a co-ordinated approach to identification, re-engagement and planning for employability support.

At delivery level, Glasgow has also developed local partnerships to support those communities who are on the periphery of the city boundary, with little provision, longer travel time for young people to attend central provision, or where cultural barriers have been identified. In one area, a trusted professional attends the local community forum and has established strong links with the housing association, community workers, translators and other local projects who support BME and Roma communities.

Provision is developed and delivered in local community venues in partnership with third sector providers. For example, in one area Activity Agreements offer an 8-week personal development/employability programme. Local business partners are identified who may provide potential progressions or tasters for young people.

Acknowledgements

YouthLink Scotland would like to thank local authorities, Activity Agreement partners and young people for contributing to this publication.

Further information about Activity Agreements, including case studies and key documents can be found at:

www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes



YouthLink Scotland, Rosebery House, 9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5EZ

T: 0131 313 2488 **E:** info@youthlinkscotland.org **W:** www.youthlinkscotland.org

YouthLink Scotland is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in Scotland No: 164547. Charity Ref: SC003923