

# 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

**YouthLink**  
Scotland  
The national agency for youth work

  
**The Scottish Government**  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

## How the Activity Agreement approach can support flexibility and choice in the development of Curriculum for Excellence 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 Agreement<sup>1</sup> is an agreement between a young person and an advisor 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.

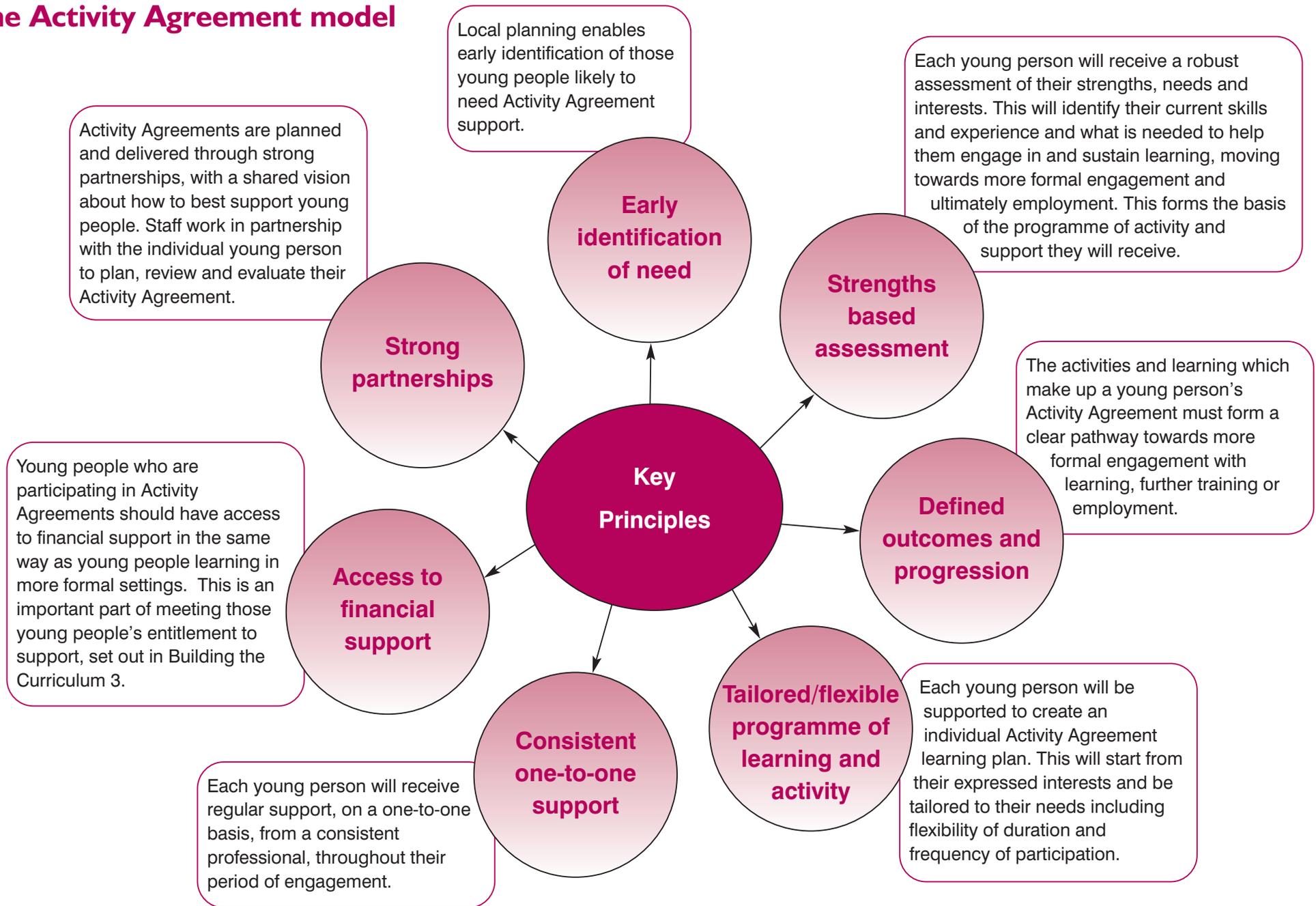
This document outlines the key principles of the Activity Agreement model to inform how the approach can support flexibility and choice in the wider development of senior phase learning and pathways.

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.

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<sup>1</sup> Activity Agreements are for those young people whose 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

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

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 college 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 with young people pre-16, who are appropriate for an Activity Agreement, thereby reducing the number of school leavers 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.

*Practice example:*

### **East Ayrshire Council**

The East Ayrshire Council model for senior phase transition support allows young people in need of support to be identified early in-school and to receive consistent and sustained support post-16, resulting in fewer young people being lost at transition points.

The Council have put in place a School Transitional Support Team to work with young people at risk of disengaging from education and those who have already done so. Young people receive one-to-one support from the team, building a trusting relationship through which they can co-design a senior phase to meet their individual needs. The team works in partnership with schools and other local partners offering young people an alternative, informal, environment in which to engage in relevant and meaningful activities.

The team is responsible for the delivery of Activity Agreements post-16, which has been the most appropriate post-school destination for many of the young people the team support. This allows young people to receive consistent and sustained support post-16, continuing to work with their support worker who undertakes the Trusted Professional role for the Activity Agreement.

## Strengths based assessment

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

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 needs.

Young people are supported to recognise and value their existing interests, qualities and skills 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 they need help with, to engage in and sustain participation, and ultimately to move towards more formal engagement and ultimately 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 take into account other factors which might be impacting on their ability to participate in and sustain learning, for example health, housing and family circumstances and will acknowledge the learning and experiences of the young person within and out with 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 and times of change, 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. The Scottish Government have developed a common assessment framework to assist with this.<sup>2</sup> Many assessment processes have now been developed by local authority partnerships.

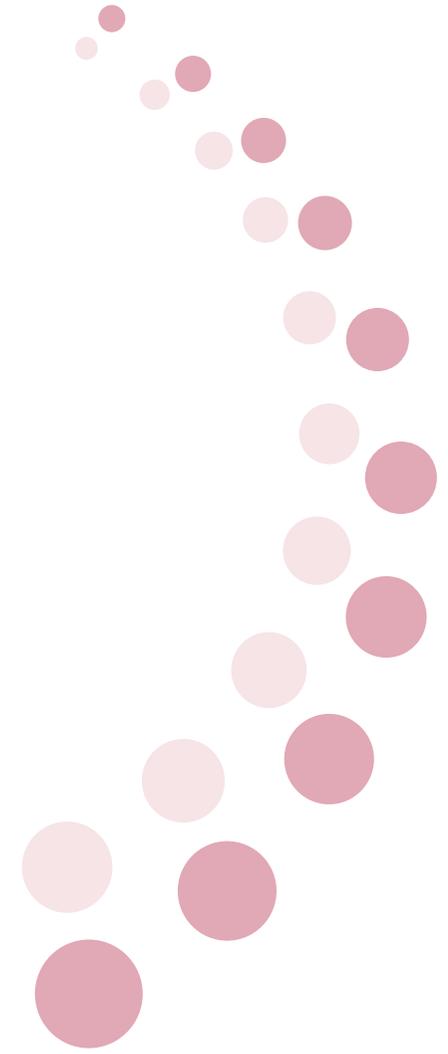
*Practice example:*

**North Ayrshire Council**

North Ayrshire Activity Agreement partnership has developed a common approach to assessment, involving a shared understanding about the suitability of Activity Agreements and information exchange required.

Young people are referred to Activity Agreements through partners including Skills Development Scotland, school, North Ayrshire Council Extended Outreach Service, social services and Community Learning and Development. Each referring service uses its own established methods of assessment. This allows those working with the young person to take account of other factors which might be impacting on their ability to participate in and sustain learning and acknowledge their experiences within and out with school. Information is shared with those delivering the young person's Activity Agreement activities to ensure that individual need is met.

The Opportunities for All Co-ordinator maintains regular communication with Activity Agreement partners and facilitates partnership meetings, to ensure that there is continued clarity regarding the agreed common approach. Sessions are also delivered with new referring partners.



## Defined outcomes and progression

The activities and learning which make up a young person's participation must form a clear pathway towards more formal engagement with learning, further training or employment

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.

*Practice example:*

### **East Renfrewshire Council**

In East Renfrewshire the Trusted Professional uses the young person's Activity Agreement learning plan to ensure that each young person's participation has defined outcomes and progression.

The individual strengths based assessment identifies young people's strengths and areas for development. The Trusted Professional encourages the young person to consider how they can build on these strengths, what they need to change to progress to further learning, training or employment and what support they would need to do this. Discussion takes place between the Trusted Professional and the young person on what the defined outcomes are for each activity and how these will contribute to their eventual progression. These defined outcomes are agreed and captured in the individual learning plan, detailing the activities, support and learning opportunities that are required to achieve them.

The Trusted Professional timetables regular one-to-one meetings with the young person and reviews progress against the outcomes identified in the learning plan. The plan is revised where necessary, to reflect the young person's progress.

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, they will create 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 young people 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 well-being and including a 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.



**Tailored/flexible  
programme of  
learning and  
activity**

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

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 or building trust through sessions in their home. In this way Activity Agreements are able to engage and sustain participation from vulnerable and disengaged young people.

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.

*Practice example:*

**Renfrewshire Council Youth Employability Service**

Renfrewshire Council developed an Engagement Group to meet the needs of young people who had been engaging well in one-to-one sessions, but required support to progress within their Activity Agreement to participate in group activities.

The group size and frequency of participation are carefully controlled to ensure young people can sustain engagement. Young people participate in small groups, for 2 short sessions per week, over a 4-5 week period. Outwith these times young people will continue to receive regular one-to-one support from their Trusted Professional.

The focus of the group is employability skills, with the content determined by the ability of the participants. Sessions are also delivered by the Community Learning and Development Youth Literacy Team, allowing staff to introduce support at this early stage that will help young people sustain their participation.

The group has ensured young people can progress within their Activity Agreement, developing the confidence to engage with other opportunities and increase their participation. It has also allowed staff to determine young people's commitment before moving them on to other activities.

## Consistent one-to-one support

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

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.

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.

### Young people participating in an Activity Agreement say they need support from someone who:

- ◆ Knows what activities are available for them
- ◆ Doesn't judge them
- ◆ Keeps in regular contact and helps them review their progress
- ◆ Is the same person throughout
- ◆ Knows about Welfare
- ◆ Helps them when things go wrong
- ◆ Builds their confidence, will motivate them and encourage and support them to attend activities
- ◆ Will help them prepare for moving on to their next destination

*Activity Agreements, Participants Research, Blake Stevenson/YouthLink Scotland (2014)*

More detailed information regarding consistent one-to-one support can be found in the document **Providing Support for all Scotland's Children and Young People, The Activity Agreement approach to providing personal support in the senior phase**, YouthLink Scotland (2014). <http://tinyurl.com/kkz72bx>

## Access to financial support

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.

Young people participating in an Activity Agreement are able to apply for an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).<sup>3</sup> This recognises the learning through an Activity Agreement alongside more formal settings.

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

***“it gives you a sense of earning your own money, not relying on your mum and dad and an idea of what it would be like if you had a job, feels like you've earned it”***

*Activity Agreements, Participants Research, Blake Stevenson/YouthLink Scotland (2014)*

Local authorities have developed processes to support young people in taking up their entitlement to EMA. This ensures that vulnerable young people, with, for example, literacy and numeracy difficulties or where they are living on their own 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. Further information about one local authority's streamlined process can be found on the YouthLink Scotland website at <http://tinyurl.com/pluuzwq>

<sup>3</sup> [www.emascotland.com](http://www.emascotland.com)

## Strong partnerships

Senior phase support is planned and delivered through strong partnerships; professionals with a shared vision about how to best support young people, and with the young people themselves.

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, school, and 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 young people attractive and meaningful pathways for those at greatest risk of disengagement.

*Practice example:*

### Highland Council

In Highland Activity Agreements are planned and delivered through strong partnerships. A wide range of partners, third sector providers local employers, college, SDS and school work closely together to provide a co-ordinated approach to engaging those young people furthest from the labour market. Partners offer a range of individualised experiences for young people participating in Activity Agreements including work tasters, volunteering, mentoring and activities with a focus on education pathways. This has increased the available learning opportunities; ensuring young people can access relevant activities in their local community or surrounding area.

Many of Highland's partners are involved in both early identification and preparation initiatives through school – this learning plan is then transferable to an Activity Agreement and ensures that young people experience continuity from school to Activity Agreement.

The alignment of opportunities and the ability to create person-centred experiences has been central to ensuring improved progression and outcomes for young people furthest from the labour market.

An important partnership that should not be overlooked is that between the Trusted Professional and the young person. The nature of this partnership, based on trust and mutual respect, is essential to the success of the Activity Agreement approach. Further information can be found in **Providing Support for all Scotland's Children and Young People**, *The Activity Agreement approach to providing personal support in the senior phase*, YouthLink Scotland (2014) <http://tinyurl.com/kkz72bx>

## Further Information

### **Providing Support for all Scotland's Children and Young People,**

*The Activity Agreement approach to providing personal support in the senior phase,*

YouthLink Scotland (2014) <http://tinyurl.com/kkz72bx>

### **Activity Agreements Participants Research,** Blake Stevenson/YouthLink Scotland (2014)

<http://tinyurl.com/kkow8b3>

### **The Link Employability Special Edition,** YouthLink Scotland (2013)

<http://tinyurl.com/k4om9ng>

### **Activity Agreement Guidance 2014/15,** Scottish Government (2014)

<http://tinyurl.com/pobo85l>

Case studies and learner journeys providing examples of how the key Activity Agreement principles are supporting vulnerable young people across Scotland can be downloaded from the YouthLink Scotland website [www.youthlinkscotland.org](http://www.youthlinkscotland.org) or by following this link

<http://tinyurl.com/ph79cgm>



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