

Professional Development Plan (PDP) for Youth Workers: Focusing on Digital Competence Development

***Credits:** the following content was adapted from the #YOCOMO – an #ETS online course on competence-based development for youth workers.*

Preparing a **Professional Development Plan (PDP)** can be an empowering tool for youth workers seeking to strengthen their digital competencies and navigate the evolving landscape of **digital youth work**. While the PDP is often considered a standard or “classic” method for planning growth, it remains highly relevant, especially when adapted to respond to current digital transformation priorities in youth work.

Formulating a PDP is not a one-time administrative task. It is an **ongoing, reflective process** that helps you take ownership of your digital learning journey, adapt to emerging needs, and align your growth with the values of inclusive, ethical, and innovative youth work practice.

Why Use a PDP for Digital Competence Development?

Digital transformation in youth work is not only about acquiring technical skills, it's about **building capacities to support young people in navigating, shaping, and participating in digital society**.

The PDP helps youth workers make sense of the complex landscape of digital learning and align their development with European frameworks like **DYW SNAC**, **DigComp**, and **AI4YouthWork**.

By committing to your own digital competencies development, you contribute to a more inclusive, innovative, and future-ready youth work sector.

Step 1: Where are you now? (Self-assessment)

Begin with a realistic overview of your current role and your existing digital competencies.

Have you completed the **Assessment Tool for Digital Competences in Youth Work (DYW SNAC)**? Use the results as a baseline. Reflect on:

- Which digital competence domains are your current strengths?

- Which competences do you use most often in your daily practice (e.g. 1.1 Using digital devices, 6.1 Ensuring digital safety)?
- What recent steps have you taken to build your digital capacities?

This step requires honesty and self-awareness. It helps you identify not just what you know, but how confident and competent you feel using those skills in real-life youth work scenarios.

Step 2: Where do you want to go? (Set your digital learning vision)

Define your short- and long-term **digital competence goals**. What kind of digital youth worker do you aspire to be?

Examples might include:

- Becoming skilled in **3.3 Designing digital educational processes**.
- Contributing to your organisation's **4.2 Digital strategy development**.
- Supporting young people's **critical digital literacy** or engagement in online participation.

This is also the place to identify whether you want to lead innovation, support transformation, or simply feel more confident using digital tools with young people.

Step 3: Gather information (Research learning pathways)

Explore what you need to reach your goals:

- What does the DYW SNAC digital competencies framework suggest for the roles you want to take on?
- Which specific skills or attitudes are required for ethical, inclusive, and engaging digital youth work?
- What are emerging needs in your community, organisation, or among young people?

If you're aiming to integrate AI in your youth programmes or develop safe online environments, what frameworks, courses, or peer learning opportunities can help?

Step 4: Set clear goals (Using SMART criteria)

Based on what you've learned, formulate specific, achievable learning goals such as:

- “Within six months, I will co-design one digital activity using open badges to foster youth participation (3.2 and 3.3).”
- “By the end of the year, I will contribute to my organisation’s internal digital safety policy (6.1 and 4.3).”

SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) make your development concrete and trackable.

Step 5: What digital competences and experience do you already have?

Revisit the DYW SNAC digital competencies self-assessment and identify where you already have strengths:

- Maybe you’re confident in **2.2 Creating reliable knowledge through digital means**.
- Or you are active in **5.1 Exploring digital youth cultures**.

List not only technical skills but also transferable attitudes, such as persistence, adaptability, or creative problem-solving, which support your digital growth.

Step 6: What competences do you need to improve or develop?

Identify competence gaps clearly:

- Are you missing pedagogical approaches to designing digital learning (3.3)?
- Do you lack confidence in facilitating hybrid youth work sessions (1.1 or 3.2)?
- Is your understanding of youth online safety limited (6.1)?

Then, decide whether you need:

- Mentorship or peer support,
- Formal training or online courses,
- Practice-based experience in your own projects.

This will shape your learning path.

Step 7: Identify possible resources

You don't need to go it alone. Identify support systems such as:

- Open training courses offered by Erasmus+ or SALTO PI on digital transformation,
- Peer communities or networks (e.g. Cities of Learning),
- Mentors, colleagues, or youth work supervisors familiar with digital innovation.

Also consider tools like:

- www.digitalyouthwork.net online platform with resources.
- The DYW SNAC digital competencies assessment tool.
- The AI4YouthWork competence framework.

Step 8: Develop an action plan and timeline

Using your SMART goals, map a timeline. Plan:

- What actions you will take (e.g. pilot a digital learning activity),
- What support you need (e.g. coaching or training),
- When and how you'll evaluate progress.

You can use a simple matrix like this to stay organised:

Professional goals ->	Goal no. 1	Goal no. 2	Add more goals
Competences required			
What valuable resources or pre-dispositions do you already have to achieve this goal?			
What specific knowledge, skills or attitude do you wish to focus on?			
Where and how you might develop it?			
What resources are needed?			

By when would you like to accomplish it?			
When will you do a progress check?			

This structured approach supports you in moving from reflection to measurable action.

Step 9: Execute your plan

Begin with the first step. Whether that's attending a webinar, scheduling a peer learning session, or creating a new activity, take immediate action.

Remember to balance your development with your existing youth work responsibilities. Use reflective tools like journaling, mentoring sessions, or digital logs to keep track.

Step 10: Assess and revise your plan

Progress is rarely linear. You may need to adjust goals, timelines, or priorities due to:

- New opportunities,
- Organisational shifts,
- Personal growth or changing interests.

Regularly return to your PDP. Discuss it in supervision, team reflection, or peer groups. Use it as a living document that grows alongside your competence and confidence.

Source:

- [How To Write A Powerful Professional Development Plan, 2018, Onpoint consulting.](#)



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