

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32405/2308-3778-2025-29-1-173-180>

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CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL WORK WITH YOUTH IN THE UNITED KINGDOM (INCLUSIVE ASPECTS)

Abstract. *The materials of this article present the results of a study on the characteristics of social work with youth in the United Kingdom, focusing on inclusive aspects and considering the cultural and historical specifics of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales.*

The research methodology involved an analysis of British and Ukrainian sources on social work, materials from official portals of international organizations, regulatory documents, and analytical reports on social work with youth from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, as well as the generalization and systematization of data.

The article actualizes the concepts of inclusion and exclusion within the context of social work. It is emphasized that, for social work with youth in the United Kingdom, creating equal opportunities, ensuring accessibility, fostering involvement, and counteracting discrimination are crucial. Significant attention is paid to supporting vulnerable groups of young people who need to integrate into British society.

The characteristics of social work with youth in the United Kingdom (inclusive aspects) are examined, taking into account the cultural, historical, and religious specifics of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales. The paper presents distinctions stemming from these cultural and historical specifics, such as the emphasis on supporting youth from different ethnic groups and linguistic communities, particularly the Welsh-speaking community (Wales), and the implementation of educational, cultural, and social programs to overcome historical barriers and the consequences of political and religious division between Protestants and Catholics (Northern Ireland). It is concluded that while social work with youth differs somewhat across the four countries of the United Kingdom, the issue of inclusion is essential and relevant for all of them.

Based on an analysis of empirical data from a survey of British youth (from the comprehensive report “Next Generation 2024”), a conclusion is drawn about the significant attention given to the integration of vulnerable groups of British youth. This is particularly evident in young people’s optimistic perceptions of their own future, as noted by 65% of respondents.

This article does not claim to comprehensively cover all inclusive aspects of social work with youth in the United Kingdom. It focuses on the analysis of the cultural and historical specifics of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales in this context.

Key words: *youth; vulnerable groups; social work with youth in the United Kingdom; inclusion; cultural and historical specifics.*

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Introduction. The creation of equal opportunities, accessibility, involvement, and counteracting discrimination are current trends and principles in organizing social work with youth in European countries, including the United Kingdom and Ukraine. An analysis of publications and materials from social sector organizations indicates that in the United Kingdom, considerable attention is given to the mental health of young people and related preventive measures, which is linked to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is also a substantial focus on supporting vulnerable groups of young people who need to integrate into British society and on creating equal opportunities for youth.

Political and sociocultural specifics shape the characteristics of social work with youth in the United Kingdom. Consequently, the differences in social work across England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales merit closer examination.

In Ukraine, amid the challenges of war, social work with youth is aimed at providing social support and rehabilitation for the most vulnerable groups. Accessibility and inclusivity in various spheres of society have become highly relevant. The British experience can be utilized in Ukraine. At the same time, the experience of Ukrainian social sector professionals working in wartime conditions is truly unique.

These factors underscore the importance of examining the characteristics of social work with youth in the United Kingdom (inclusive aspects), taking into account the cultural, historical, and religious specifics of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales.

The study is based on normative documents, strategies, and youth work programs of the United Kingdom (Law “On Children and Social Work”; Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014; Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015; Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015; Together for Children and Young People; Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015; Young People and Peacebuilding: Challenges and Opportunities, and others).

Aim and tasks. *The purpose of this article* is to present the characteristics of social work with youth in the United Kingdom, with a particular focus on its inclusive aspects and the influence of cultural and historical specifics.

The tasks are the follows: to actualize concepts in the context of inclusion in social work; to present the characteristics of social work in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales (inclusive aspects, considering cultural and historical specifics); to provide survey data on vulnerable groups of British youth (based on the comprehensive report “Next Generation 2024” [4]).

Research methods. The main research methods identified are: analysis of British and Ukrainian sources on social work, materials from official portals of international organizations; normative documents and analytical reports on social work with youth in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales; and generalization and systematization of data.

Research results.

Key Concepts in the Context of Inclusion in Social Work

Based on a theoretical analysis of Ukrainian and foreign publications, it can be summarized that the following concepts are relevant to the theory and practice of social work:

exclusion – the partial or complete removal of individuals or social groups from the social structure of society and social processes;

inclusion – the process of increasing the degree of participation of all citizens in society, especially those with physical or mental impairments.

Yanicki S.M., Kushne K. E., and Reutter L. (2015) [10] consider social inclusion/exclusion as phenomena that involve just/unjust social relations and social structures that create or limit opportunities for participation and health.

Characteristics of social work in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales (Inclusive aspects considering cultural-historical context)

Social work with youth in the United Kingdom aims to support and develop adolescents and young people, creating favourable conditions for their self-realization and well-being. The foundations of youth policy in the UK are based on the key principles of the UN and the Council of Europe. The normative basis for social work in the United Kingdom consists of several documents, including the *Law “On Children and Social Work”*, which defines the rights and obligations of social workers and establishes mechanisms for control and accountability.

In the United Kingdom, youth work is an officially recognized profession; the *Youth Work National Occupational Standards* apply throughout the UK, defining common approaches while allowing for differences between the four countries (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales) in their approach to youth work.

Thus, social work with youth in the United Kingdom has common principles at its core but differs in the four countries due to socio-political, cultural-historical, and religious specifics.

In *Scotland*, there is a strong emphasis on inclusive approaches that particularly highlight the importance of involving young people in decision-making processes. Scottish social work legislation, such as The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 [6], promotes social cohesion and ensures equal opportunities for all young people, including those from marginalized groups. Scottish organizations actively work to guarantee access to services for youth with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, aiming to dismantle barriers that limit opportunities for these individuals (Scottish Social Services Council). Furthermore, Scotland's approach to social work with youth is distinguished by a significant focus on community empowerment, a principle enshrined in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 [2]. This act enables communities, and particularly young people, to play an active role in the planning and delivery of public services, thereby fostering a more participatory and inclusive environment. An example of Scotland's commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities is the “Keys to Life” strategy [3], which has improved access to social and healthcare services for young people with learning disabilities. In contrast to England, where approaches can be more centralized, Scotland's autonomy in social policy allows for the implementation of localized initiatives tailored to the needs of diverse youth groups.

Wales implements an inclusive approach through strategic initiatives focused on ensuring equality and social justice, notably through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 [8]. Wales emphasizes the importance of collaboration across different sectors to support young people in complex social circumstances. A distinct feature of Wales is its focus on cultural diversity and national identity, including support for youth from diverse ethnic groups and linguistic communities, particularly the Welsh-speaking community. Thanks to the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 [9], young people who speak Welsh have access to services in their native language, thereby promoting linguistic justice and enhancing social workers' cultural competence.

In contrast to England, where cultural and linguistic aspects are somewhat less integrated into social work, Wales actively promotes these values. For instance, the “Together for Children and Young People” programme demonstrates an innovative approach to supporting youth mental health through cross-sectoral collaboration. Due to its decentralized system of governance, Wales can adapt social services to its unique cultural and social specifics.

The approach to social work in *Northern Ireland* is centered on ensuring inclusivity through legislation such as the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 [1], which aims to integrate services for young people and foster collaboration among different social services. The approach is also crucially shaped by historical, political, and religious differences. Social work in Northern Ireland focuses on reconciliation among youth from different religious and ethnic groups, particularly between Protestants and Catholics. This is a vital aspect of social work, as Northern Ireland endured a decades-long conflict that divided communities along religious and political lines. The roots of this conflict can be traced to the 17th century, when English Protestants colonized Ireland. As a result, Ireland was divided between two politico-religious communities: the predominantly Catholic community, which sought the unification of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland, and the predominantly Protestant Unionist community (those in favour of Northern Ireland's incorporation into the United Kingdom). In the second half of the 20th century, the conflict intensified and led to armed confrontation, which officially ended in 1998 with the signing of the peace treaty known as “The Belfast Agreement”. This agreement established the legal and institutional framework for the continued existence of Northern Ireland as a country within the United Kingdom. Although violence has significantly diminished and many aspects of life have stabilized, the political and religious division between Protestants and Catholics is still reflected in cultural, social, and economic spheres. Notably, segregation between the communities remains apparent in education, housing, and even political institutions. The process of reconciliation is ongoing, and while the conflict is over, certain tensions persist.

Reconciliation involves fostering an inclusive environment and creating opportunities for mutual understanding and cooperation, especially among young people who grew up amid tension

and animosity. Social workers facilitate youth participation in joint educational, cultural, and social programmes that help overcome historical barriers, build new intergroup relationships, and promote the development of social cohesion. The concluding document, “Young People and Peacebuilding: Challenges and Opportunities” [11], underscores the special role of Youth Work and youth workers in the reconciliation process.

Therefore, social work with youth in the United Kingdom differs somewhat across the four countries (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales). Nevertheless, the principle of “*Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion*” is central to social work across the UK. On the “Social Work England” portal, this approach is interpreted as a framework of distinct but interconnected issues that may require different strategies.

In this context, particular attention is given to preventing and resolving the problems faced by British youth, as well as to their socialization and social integration. Sociological data support these conclusions. The findings from the “Next Generation 2024” [4] survey of British youth are particularly relevant to this study. The comprehensive report examines the diverse experiences, attitudes, and challenges that young people face in the United Kingdom.

Among the respondents for this survey were representatives of vulnerable groups of British youth. Pertinent to this discussion is the following aspect presented in the report: «Individual and collective futures: contrasting levels of optimism», which assesses how optimistically young people view various aspects of the future.

In response to the question, “How optimistic are you about the future?” respondents expressed a higher level of optimism about their personal prospects compared to broader societal outcomes (the future of the country, the future of the global community):

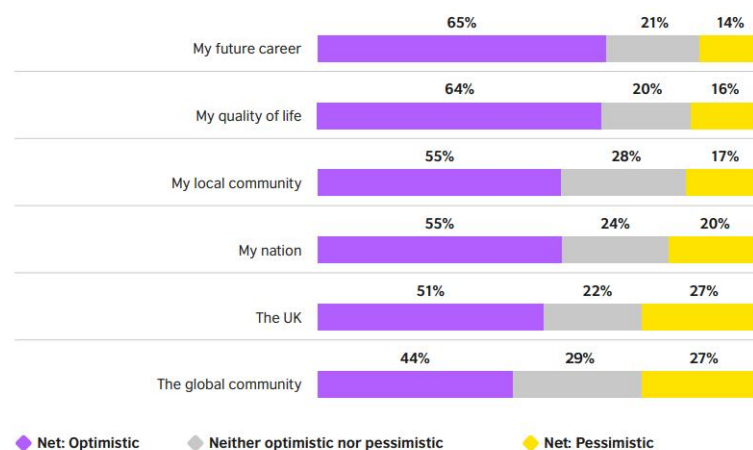


Figure 1. Results of responses to the question, “How optimistic are you about the future?”.
Next Generation 2024 [4].

65 % of young people were more optimistic about their own future career and future quality of life (64 %). However, when considering the collective future, the level of optimism decreased:

51 % were optimistic about the future of the United Kingdom, while 44 % were optimistic about the future of the global community (Figure 1) [4].

Therefore, the level of optimism among vulnerable groups of British youth regarding their own future (65 %) suggests the presence of significant support, particularly within the context of social work.

Discussion. Ukrainian and foreign scholars have examined the problem of researching social work with youth. Ukrainian researchers (O. Bezpalko, T. Kunytsia, N. Seiko, V. Shakhrai, T. Fedorchenko and others) consider social work as a holistic institution of support for the younger generation, combining pedagogical, legal and social integration practices. In particular, O. Bezpalko emphasizes the need to synthesize national and international experience to form an effective system of social work [12]. In the works of T. Kunytsia, an emphasis is placed on the transformation of youth's social orientations in the context of modern challenges, particularly war, which radically alters the value orientations and social expectations of the younger generation [13]. We share the author's view that social work should serve as a tool to support youth in adapting to new realities.

Also relevant are the works of foreign scholars who consider social inclusion/exclusion in the context of social work (Yanicki S.M., Kushne K. E., and Reutter L. [10]. We agree with the authors' opinion that youth problems cannot be considered only at the level of individual adaptation.

Conclusions. In summary, the concepts of inclusion/exclusion, accessibility, involvement, and counteracting discrimination are central to social work with youth in the United Kingdom. Significant attention is paid to supporting vulnerable groups of young people who need to integrate into British society, as well as to creating equal opportunities for all youth. It is also vital to consider the historical, political, and religious differences in approaches to social work.

The characteristics of social work with youth in the United Kingdom are shaped by the country's political and sociocultural specifics. It is, therefore, possible to conclude that while common approaches and principles exist, there are also distinct differences in social work with youth (inclusive aspects) that reflect the cultural, historical, and religious specifics of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales.

Applying British experience in Ukraine opens up opportunities to strengthen social inclusion, foster a culture of participation, and build resilient communities.

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СПЕЦИФІКА СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ РОБОТИ З МОЛОДДЮ У ВЕЛИКІЙ БРИТАНІЇ (ІНКЛЮЗИВНІ АСПЕКТИ)

Анотація. Матеріали статті представляють результати дослідження специфіки соціальної роботи з молоддю у Великій Британії (інклюзивні аспекти з урахуванням культурно-історичних особливостей Англії, Шотландії, Північної Ірландії, Уельсу).

Методологія дослідження передбачала аналіз британських, українських джерел із соціальної роботи, матеріалів офіційних порталів міжнародних організацій; нормативних документів та аналітичних звітів із соціальної роботи з молоддю Англії, Шотландії, Північної Ірландії, Уельсу; узагальнення і систематизація даних.

У статті актуалізовано поняття інклюзії та ексклюзії в контексті соціальної роботи. Наголошується на тому, що для соціальної роботи з молоддю у Великій Британії актуальним є створення рівних можливостей, безбар'єрність, залучення, протидія дискримінації; суттєва увага приділяється підтримці уразливих груп молоді, які мають інтегруватися у британське суспільство.

Розглянуто специфіку соціальної роботи з молоддю у Великій Британії (інклюзивні аспекти) з урахуванням культурно-історичних, релігійних особливостей Англії, Шотландії, Північної Ірландії, Уельсу. Представлено відмінності, зумовлені культурно-історичними особливостями (як то акцент на підтримці молоді з різних етнічних груп та мовних спільнот, зокрема валлійської мовної спільноти (Уельс); реалізація освітніх, культурних і соціальних програм, що дозволяють подолати історичні бар'єри, наслідки політичного та релігійного розділення між протестантами і католиками (Північна Ірландія) тощо). Зроблено висновок про те, що соціальна робота з молоддю у Сполученому Королівстві децю відрізняється у чотирьох країнах, утім питання інклюзії є важливими і актуальними для усіх країн.

На основі аналізу емпіричних даних опитування британської молоді (за матеріалами комплексного звіту «Next Generation 2024») зроблено висновок про значну увагу до інтеграції уразливих груп британської молоді. Про це, зокрема, свідчить оптимістичне сприйняття молодими людьми власного майбутнього (про це зазначили 65 % респондентів).

Стаття не претендує на повне висвітлення інклюзивних аспектів соціальної роботи з молоддю у Великій Британії. Зосереджується на аналізі культурно-історичних особливостей Англії, Шотландії, Північної Ірландії, Уельсу в такому контексті.

Ключові слова: молодь; вразливі групи; соціальна робота з молоддю у Великій Британії; інклюзія; культурно-історичні особливості.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 12.07.2025
Стаття прийнята до публікації 27.08.2025