

ABSTRACT

DIGITALISATION OF MUNICIPAL YOUTH WORK IN 2019 is the fourth report compiled by Verke – the National Centre of Expertise for Digital Youth Work in Finland – on the digitalisation of municipal youth work, and digital youth work. The previous reports were published in 2013, 2015 and 2017. The report explores the digitalisation of municipal youth work from the perspective of five themes: 1) attitudes towards digitalisation, 2) use of digitalisation, 3) digital competences, 4) operating culture, and 5) development of the digitalisation of youth work. The report also examines how the digitalisation of municipal youth work has changed in recent years.

The information in the report is based on a survey conducted in March of 2019 in Finnish and Swedish. The target group of the survey comprised all Finnish municipal youth workers and youth work managers, who were asked to answer an online questionnaire between 12 and 26 March 2019. A total of 1,250 respondents answered the survey, of whom 1,001 (80%) were youth workers and 249 (20%) were managers. The respondents represented 267 of Finland's 311 municipalities. The response rate was approximately 40%.

According to the answers, municipal youth workers and youth work managers have an extremely positive attitude towards digitalisation. A total of 95% of the respondents wanted to stay abreast of digital and technological developments. Four in five (80%) felt that digital media and technology should be used more extensively in youth work in their municipality. Almost half of the respondents (49%) also considered interacting with young people in digital environments to be just as real as face-to-face encounters.

A total of 64% of youth work managers believed that the digital services available to young people in their municipality had improved in the last year. A total of 56% of youth workers felt that their opportunities for engaging in digital youth work had improved in the last year. Two in three respondents also felt that they were being encouraged to engage in digital youth work and to boost their digital competences at work.

Municipal youth workers actively use a wide range of digital tools. On average, a youth worker regularly uses seven different digital services in their work with young people. The most popular services are WhatsApp (84%), Instagram (79%) and Facebook (79%). The popularity of digital games, YouTube, Snapchat and survey tools has increased considerably since 2017.

Youth workers still mostly use digital media and technology for communication and interaction. A total of 91% of youth workers had interacted with young people via social media or messaging applications in the last three months. More than half (54%) said that they had counselled young people online. Digital media and technology are also being increasingly used intermixed with existing youth work

practices as a tool, an activity or a content. Three in four youth workers (77%) had discussed digital phenomena with young people, and one in four (25%) had used digital technology in group building activities. The growing popularity of digital games has also affected youth work activities: almost one in five youth workers (19%) said that they had organised activities that incorporated digital games in the last three months.

The availability of mobile devices continues to grow steadily. Practically all municipal youth workers (98%) now use a smartphone provided by their employer. The popularity of games consoles and tablets has also increased since 2017, and virtual technology has begun to play a more important role in youth work: more than one in four youth workers (27%) said that they use VR headsets in their work.

A total of 90% of youth workers and youth work managers rated their own digital competence as at least average. One in ten felt that they had significant gaps in their digital competence. The respondents identified media and information literacy as their biggest strengths and programming and digital content production as their weaknesses. The under-40s rated their own digital competence considerably higher than older respondents.

A total of 38% of the respondents had taken a training course relating to the digitalisation of youth work through their employer in the last year. Training appeared to have links to several different factors: those who had been trained had more positive attitudes towards digitalisation, used digital tools and services more extensively in their work, and rated their digital competence higher than others.

The respondents still identified gaps in competence and lack of objectives and time as the biggest challenges of digital youth work. One in three youth work managers (33%) said that their team had no policy or strategy for digital youth work. These teams also allocated less time for the youth workers to focus on digital youth work, were less likely to mention digitalisation in youth workers' job descriptions, and made less use of young people's opinions, stakeholders' best practices and studies on digitalisation as sources of inspiration for improvements. Less than half of the respondent (45%) felt that they knew how to systematically incorporate digital technology into their work.

There has been some positive development in terms of the systematic use of digital media and technology. When, in 2017, a total of 17% of youth work managers said that they had set their team objectives relating to digital youth work, the 2019 figure was 30%. More and more youth work managers (44%) have now also incorporated digital youth work into their youth work strategy or action plan. In addition, a growing number of municipalities have introduced both qualitative and quantitative indicators for the success of digital youth work. The most common ways in which success is measured include team talks (48%) and feedback and satisfaction surveys targeted at young people (33%). A higher percentage of youth work managers (22%) now also have access to key figures on digital youth work defined by their employers.