Digital Natives Project

Embedding Digital Skills and Leadership for Young People in Oxfordshire

By combining Intel® Skills for Innovation with youth work principles, Oxfordshire Youth have embedded a digital approach to the ILM Accreditation for Leadership.

Oxfordshire Youth is a dedicated and highly professional youth development charity working directly with young people aged 8-25 years, and the grassroots leaders, volunteers, and youth organisations that support them. With over 75 years of expertise, we are doing whatever it takes to ensure that wherever a young person's starting point in life may be, or whatever challenges they face, they have the skills, support, and connections to thrive.

Oxfordshire

As part of the Digital Natives project, Oxfordshire Youth have been working to address the digital divide in Oxfordshire through supporting youth work practitioners and young people. The programme targets young people aged 11 - 21 living in OX4 and other areas of Oxfordshire experiencing higher levels of deprivation. The pandemic and cost-of-living crisis severely exacerbated socio-economic disadvantage across Oxfordshire, with 1 in 6 children living in poverty.

Youth Work is a distinct educational process adapted across a variety of settings to support a young person's personal, social, and educational development. It aims to support young people to "explore their values, beliefs, ideas, and issues; enables them to develop their voice, influence, and place in society; acquires and/or facilitates the learning of a set of practical or technical skills/competencies that enable them to realise their full potential." (National Youth Agency).

Young Leaders

The Oxfordshire Youth Young Leaders Programme is a bespoke leadership programme, which caters for young people 14 – 21 years old. Completion of the the Programme leads to a Level 2 Award in Leadership and Team Skills, and is accredited by the Institute of Leadership & Management - ILM. As the programme is nationally recognised and is very well regarded by employers, colleges and universities, it can be a real boost to a young person's CV.

The Young Leaders programme was reimagined in 2025 with a digital lens to increase digital competencies and make the programme more accessible. Equipping young people with leadership skills, confidence and self-esteem, whilst embedding digital skills such as typing, editing and manipulating documents, allowed us to address key skills gaps as a result of digital inequality.

Young people taking part in team building activities during the Young Leaders residential.

"It is incredible to watch the change in the young people during the course of the programme. You can really see the young people's confidence levels increase, and they start considering themselves to be a leader and can see the impact they can have on others."

[Senior Youth Work Programmes Manager]

Above: two youth work practitioners facilitating a workshop

Young Leaders 2025

In May 2025, Oxfordshire Youth delivered the Young Leaders programme, consisting of three workshop sessions and a 3 day, 2 night residential. The programme consists of a series of workshops looking at a variety of leadership theories, set alongside outdoor activities where the young people can put the theory into practice, testing their own leadership and team skills.

All participants are required to complete a logbook of evidence to demonstrate their learning. Young people attending the programme achieve either a ILM Level 2 Award in Leadership and Team Skills or a series of equivalent AQA Unit Award Scheme certificates.

Who took part?

11 young people aged 13-19, with 8 young people having taken part in the Digital Futures Workshops in February and April 2025. The other young people were recruited from other youth sector organisations across Oxfordshire.

What did they do?

The young people attending the young leaders programme participated in a wide variety of outdoor activities including; climbing wall, crate stack and leap of faith and team activities such as photo scavenger hunt, catapult building challenge and multi-task challenge.

In each of the activities one of the young people took the role of leading a group, group members then provided feedback to their leader, following the activity, to help them identify their leadership strengths and any areas for development.

Each element of the programme is recorded in their log book of evidence which was completed digitally by this cohort for the first time. This allowed us to empower young people to use tools such as speech to text through their headsets allowing them to authentically and swiftly record their thoughts to the questions and problems posed.

Above: young people in a team building exercise

"Adding a digital focus to the programme has improved the experience for the young people, allowing them to develop their digital skills alongside their leadership and team skills."

[Senior Youth Work Programmes Manager]

Young Leaders workshops include:

- What is a leader?
- How to give and receive feedback
- Time management
- Authority and Accountability
- How teams develop and the different roles within a team
- Stress and relaxation
- Barriers to effective team working

Youth Leadership in practice:

- Young people are required to complete an independent leadership activity to demonstrate that they can put their leadership and team skills into practice independently, away from the residential.

- Following the residential, we ask young people to go back to their youth groups, communities or schools and run an activity or take responsibility for something new.

Above: two participants working on their logbooks

Before and after the workshops...

We asked young people what they think it means to be a leader. They said things like be 'in control of a group', 'get listened to', 'let people follow you' and 'give orders'.

After taking part, we asked them the same question. We saw a meaningful shift in how young people described leadership as something constructive, inclusive and supportive. Their answers were about 'guiding others', 'taking responsibility', 'helping', 'encouraging', and 'respecting others' and 'making everyone feel included'.

"The combination of youth work and Intel's SFI allowed us to empower young people to connect leadership and team skills with digital problem solving. It gave them an enriching experience whilst building informal learning and core soft skills to help them in the future."

[Digital Skills Coordinator]

Feedback and Impact

- 8 Young People achieved the ILM Level 2 Award in Leadership and Team Skills
- 3 Young People each achieved 9 AQA Unit Award Scheme Certificates covering a range of leadership topics
- 90% would recommend Young Leaders to others
- After taking part, 100% said they knew what it meant to be a leader

Above: young woman delivering a leadership activity

What are the three most important ways that this course has impacted you?

Impact	Count
Learning new leadership skills	8
Meeting new people	6
Building confidence	4
Building new/stronger relationships	4
Developing communication skills	4
Conquering fears	3
Feeling more motivated	2