

YOUTH WORK OUTCOMES AND PRIORITIES FOR YOUTH

The development of a reporting mechanism to demonstrate the outcomes of youth work for young people

Youth Service Sectoral Partners Group (YSSPG)
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Background

Whilst the Priorities for Youth (PfY) policy strongly affirms the educative and developmental value of youth work in the lives of young people, it states that the youth service as a whole needs to better demonstrate the contribution of youth work outcomes to DE priorities, and particularly to *Raising standards for all* and *Closing the performance gap, improving access and equality*.

To this end, the Youth Service Sectoral Partners Group (YSSPG)* has been working on the design of a standardised reporting mechanism, capable of collecting evidence of youth work outcomes across all types of youth work provision.

This paper gives a brief overview of YSSPG progress to date, presenting a **Framework of expected outcomes** for youth work, and outlining a **two-tier reporting system** which will generate robust and proportionate data gained from all types of DE-funded youth work provision. The Framework of outcomes offers the potential to provide a unifying and common focus within a diverse sector, strengthening the capacity of the sector to collectively demonstrate its achievements.

It is proposed that the reporting system will be piloted with a range of practitioners and organisations during 2015, with implementation from 2016.

The paper also presents the YSSPG view that, far from being a separate 'add-on', the Framework of outcomes should become a central element of the needs-based planning cycles. Similarly, there is scope for the Framework to provide a common thread which runs throughout key decision-making and accountability processes within the service.

Whilst this paper is intended to give a brief summary of YSSPG progress to date, it is important to highlight that the work has been underpinned by an extended process of research, dialogue and consultation which has been co-ordinated by sectoral partners since 2012. Detailed research papers and theoretical models have been produced to provide an evidence base in support of the proposals. Throughout the design process, the YSSPG has been informed by engagement with stakeholders, and this commitment to involve the sector will continue. In this regard, the paper identifies a number of Next Steps which are necessary before the system can be effectively implemented.

*The Youth Service Sectoral Partners Group (YSSPG) is chaired by the Youth Council for NI, and comprises all Education and Library Boards, University of Ulster, Youthnet, NI Youth Forum, Youth Action NI, Boys Brigade, and YMCA.

A Framework of expected outcomes

ESA, in consultation with sectoral stakeholders, will design a framework of expected outcomes for all types of provision, proportionate to the support provided

[Priorities for Youth, Action 4.6.4]

In response to Priorities for Youth, sectoral partners have developed a Framework of expected outcomes which are generic to all types of youth work provision. These are presented in the format of six capability-based outcomes, and include measurable indicators relating to each outcome (see pg.4 for Framework).

The content of the Framework was informed by evidence from practitioners, dialogue between partners, stakeholder consultation, and a review of research which confirms the connection between youth work and these expected outcomes.¹ The six outcomes reflect the central concern of youth work, ie. the personal and social development of young people, and in this way the Framework is directly compatible with 'A Model of Effective practice'.

It is important to emphasise that the Framework of outcomes is not a definitive list of all potential outcomes of youth work. In a sector which is hugely diverse in terms of workforce, approaches to delivery, range of activities, age groups and needs of young people, it is inevitable that

many outcomes will be nuanced according to context and individual. Rather, the Framework articulates a core of outcomes which are common to, and expected of, all types of youth work provision, and which can therefore be measured on a service-wide basis.

An extensive review of research literature² affirms the association between this Framework of outcomes and the strategic aims of youth work, which are :

- To contribute to raising standards for all and closing the performance gap between the highest and lowest achieving young people by providing access to enjoyable non-formal learning opportunities that help them to develop enhanced social and cognitive skills and overcome barriers to learning; and
- To continue to improve the non-formal learning environment by creating inclusive, participative settings in which the voice and influence of young people are championed, supported and evident in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmes.³

The literature review concludes that there is a substantial evidence base to support the focus on social and personal capabilities as a means for the youth service to demonstrate improved educational outcomes for young people.

1. Analysis of the evidence underpinning the YSSPG draft outcomes framework, Youthnet on behalf of YSSPG, 2014
 2. A review of evidence which connects the Framework of Outcomes with the PfY strategic aims of youth work, Youth Council NI on behalf of YSSPG, 2014
 3. Priorities for Youth : improving young people's lives through youth work. DE, 2013

FRAMEWORK OF OUTCOMES

INDIVIDUAL	GROUP/COMMUNITY/SOCIETY CONTEXT
<p>Enhanced Personal Capabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Confidence and self-esteem • Empathy • Resilience • Managing feelings <p>Improved Health and Well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction with life/self • Awareness of health issues (sexual, physical and/or mental) • Ability to make healthy choices (reduction in risk taking behaviours/ reduced substance misuse) <p>Development of thinking skills, life and work skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision making • Planning and problem solving • Leadership and communication • Creativity 	<p>Development of positive relationships with others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to work with others (teamwork) • Positive peer relationships • Positive relationships with adults • Engagement with others from diverse backgrounds • Respect for difference <p>Increased participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of belonging to community • Communication between young people and adults • Influences others, advocates on behalf of others or takes on a representative role <p>Active citizenship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering (local and international) • Awareness of local & global issues • Social action • Employment, Education or Training

Proportionate reporting systems

Robust qualitative and proportionate reporting systems, along with clear performance indicators and measurable evidence of progress and achievement of the young people, will demonstrate the contribution of youth work to improved educational outcomes for young people and, consequently, it's public value [Priorities for Youth, Para 4.4]

Priorities for Youth emphasises the need for **proportionate** approaches to data collection, and so the YSSPG has developed a two-tier system for practitioners to report on outcomes. This enables light-touch reporting for volunteer-led and part-time groups, whilst groups and projects in receipt of substantial funding will be supported to provide fuller evidence of young people’s individual progression. An important feature of the system is that it will yield standardised data which can be aggregated to report on the entire sector, as required by Pfy.

Tier 1

Tier 1 will comprise an annual data collection exercise which is appropriate to **all** youth work contexts. The aim at Tier 1 will be to collect data, in a standardised format, which will be aggregated on a service-wide basis to provide evidence of the contribution of the sector to educational outcomes.

More specifically, Tier 1 entails a reflective exercise which asks practitioners to use their personal judgement to place the young people they work with against an

Engagement Framework (see pg.6). The Engagement Framework is adapted from the exemplar provided at Annex 1 of the Pfy policy, and describes four categories of engagement for young people, from Contact, Engagement, Active Participation to Maximising Potential.

At Tier 1, all youth service groups will be asked to reflect on the young people they work with, and specifically to submit numeric data as follows:

CATEGORY OF ENGAGEMENT	Number of children and young people
Contact	
Engagement	
Active Participation	
Maximising Potential	
TOTAL	

Guidance notes have been developed to assist practitioners with this annual exercise, and the Tier 1 reporting system will be piloted during 2015. Based on the pilot, additional guidance, information or training may be developed. Although Tier 1 relies on personal judgements and is not moderated, practitioners will be encouraged to retain the evidence used to support their judgements.

ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK Tier 1 (all practitioners)

Categories of Engagement	Indicators of Engagement		
	Intensity and commitment of engagement	Distance travelled for Children and young people	Children and young people's influence in decision making
Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attends, e.g. to meet friends and takes part in social, creative, recreational or sport activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced Personal Capabilities Improved Health and Well-being Positive relationships with others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes personal decision on participation in activities designed by others
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engages in, short term, group programmes Makes new relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced Personal Capabilities Improved Health and Well-being Developed thinking, life &/or work skills Positive relationships with others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributes to decision making with others relating to a specific programme or activity
Active Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participates in planned, long term, group work programme with youth work outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced Personal Capabilities Improved Health and Well-being Developed thinking, life &/or work skills Positive relationships with others Increased Participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involved in decision making, planning and problem solving either around a single activity or within the club, unit or project generally
Maximising Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participates in the design and/or delivery of programmes or activities for self and others Acts in a leadership role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced Personal Capabilities Improved Health and Well-being Developed thinking, life &/or work skills Positive relationships with others. Increased Participation Active Citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positively influences others, advocates on behalf of others Takes on a representative role within and/or beyond the your club, unit or project e.g. as part of a local or regional youth council or forum

Tier 2

Tier 2 will relate to the comparatively small number of full time youth groups and projects which receive substantial funding. At Tier 2, practitioners will be supported to select and apply measurement tools which relate to outcomes and indicators from the Framework of outcomes. The aim at Tier 2 will be to collect data which provides **measurable evidence of progression and achievement of individual young people** in relation to expected outcomes of youth work.

An important feature of Tier 2 is the intention that the Framework of outcomes should be used flexibly, giving practitioners the scope to identify a mix of relevant outcomes and indicators from across the Framework, rather than being limited to one outcome cluster or being expected to achieve / measure all.

The Tier 2 reporting system will enable the sector to collate, compare and aggregate data, to share good practice, and to provide standardised, robust evidence which demonstrates the contribution of youth work to improved educational outcomes for young people and, consequently, it's public value.

YSSPG recognises that there are a variety of reporting systems currently in use among full-time groups and projects, and that the introduction of a common system, based on the Framework of outcomes, may change the way youth work is evaluated for some. There is a commitment to fully pilot Tier 2 prior to implementation, and provision of ongoing support and training.

Benefits and opportunities

The collection of information under Tiers 1 and 2 brings a range of benefits and opportunities for different youth sector stakeholders and investors. For example, it will:

- Support practitioners to reflect on, identify and celebrate the level and range of young people's engagement in all aspects of the club, unit or project's operation
- Create space for practitioners to identify, promote and encourage alternative and /or further opportunities for enhancing young people's engagement with the club, unit or project
- Help practitioners, managers and funders to articulate the value and impact for young people of participation in youth service provision
- Enhance the level and quality of data reported to the Department of Education
- Help to promote the value of youth work to a range of external stakeholders and investors

Wider use of the Framework of Outcomes

The development of a common language about outcomes within the sector, through the use of a shared Framework, creates the opportunity to promote a ‘corporate understanding’ of youth work. In effect the Framework of outcomes articulates the purpose of youth work, and as such YSSPG propose that the Framework should be integral to cross-cutting actions contained within Priorities for Youth. These include :

Wider use of Generic Outcomes

- Planning
- Procurement of Services
- Targeting of services
- Proportionate monitoring
- Standard measurement of impact
- Reporting/evidence base/value of the service
- Quality assurance
- Evidence the progression of young people

a) *Integrating the Framework of Outcomes with planning, procurement and targeting services*

It is proposed that the Framework of outcomes should be used flexibly, giving practitioners the scope to identify a mix of relevant outcomes and indicators from across the Framework rather than being limited to one outcome or being expected to achieve all.

The selection of expected outcomes would be informed by the process of needs-based planning (for both generic and targeted

provision) and expected outcomes would thus be stated within procurement and funding processes. For Tier 2 groups, agreed outcome measurement plans would be in place prior to delivery, which would enable ‘up-front’ clarity in terms of funders’ expectations, and a defined route for the measurement of expected outcomes.

In this way, planning and evaluation become more outcomes-focused, in line with the statement in Priorities for Youth that ‘*Investment in youth work should contribute to achieving agreed defined outcomes for young people*’ [PfY, Para 2.21]

b) *Integrating the Framework of Outcomes with measuring impact, evidencing the progression of young people and reporting on the value of youth work*

PfY introduces an obligation for the Education Authority and YCNI to publish a sector-wide Annual Report on Youth Work. The policy comments that “*The meaning of youth work in education has been diluted over the years, and the important contribution good quality youth work makes to achieving a range of education and wider social aims has not been sufficiently recognised outside the youth sector*”. [PfY Para 2.17]. The compilation of the Annual Report, informed by a common reporting system and a shared language of outcomes, provides a powerful opportunity for the sector to build recognition and to demonstrate its collective value in the lives of young people. The ongoing compilation of data

will also provide a cumulative body of evidence which will enable the sharing of good practice within the sector.

c) Integrating the Framework of Outcomes with quality assurance

PfY highlights the need for robust and proportionate quality assurance systems, and in this respect there is scope to cross-reference the Framework of outcomes with the quality assurance strand of 'Developing youth work practice'. This strand of quality assurance provides a process for: identifying the needs of young people; a youth work development strategy that reflects the needs identified, and; *measuring progress in personal and social development to inform programme development.*

Given this shared aim, there is opportunity to dovetail the process of quality assuring youth work practice with the new reporting system on youth work outcomes.

Next Steps

YSSPG has identified a number of important actions needed before the reporting mechanisms can be effectively implemented.

The action plan for 2015 includes:

1. Continued and widened stakeholder engagement, including promotion of the Framework and encouraging the use of a common language on outcomes
2. A meeting will be sought with ETI to discuss linkages between the Framework of outcomes and ETI quality indicators
3. A meeting will be sought with the CDU management board to discuss linkages between the Framework of outcomes and Quality Assurance of youth work practice
4. A meeting will be sought to update DE officials on progress to date
5. Publication of relevant background papers, including literature reviews
6. Piloting of the two-tiered system will be carried out during 2015, with implementation of the system from April 2016