Education Authority

DELIVERING FOCUS GROUPS

REGIONAL ASSESSMENT OF NEED 2026

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Introduction

Effective youth work helps children and young people to identify their social and development needs and involves them in shaping the services designed to meet those needs. This impacts both their own skills and life chances, in order to create a better future for themselves and their communities.

Strategic planning of Youth Services is informed by an analysis of the educational and social needs of children and young people as articulated by them and their communities.

Priorities for Youth states *"Planning, funding and delivery of youth work will be based on the ESA [EA] composite (local and regional) assessment of need and will support requirements linked to the DE key priorities at local, sub-regional and regional level"* (4.6.1)

This means that we need to identify needs, determine priorities and allocate resources based on the voices of children and young people and evaluate priorities within the scope of Youth Service policy and Statutory Duty. The process of an assessment of need also gives due regard to the Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030, Programme for Government and UNCRC Article 12.

A regional survey focused on the needs of children and young people has been developed in collaboration with young people. Analysis of findings will be carried out to identify key issues, themes and trends to inform focus group engagement. The survey will also use demographic data to provide local council area level reports to support the Local Assessments of Need.

Focus group engagement with children and young people will take place following the survey. Focus groups will include specific communities of interest/section 75 groups also. Focus groups will seek to validate/test the findings from the regional survey and explore with children and young people the proposed delivery action the youth service can take to support addressing the assessed need.

This document provides resources and guidance for effectively capturing the voice of children and young people through focus groups.

Introduction to Focus Groups

Introduction to Focus Groups

A focus group is a method of research involving a small group of people who are guided through activities and discussion by a facilitator. Focus groups used in conjunction with surveys is good practice, as it allows you to get more detail on survey data, find out about young people's experiences and stories, and understand the context and big picture of the need or issue.

Youth Services are delivered with young people aged 4-25, regionally and locally in 12 areas:

1. Ards and North Down
2. Lisburn and Castlereagh
3. North and East Belfast
4. South and West Belfast
5. Antrim and Newtownabbey
6. Mid and East Antrim
7. Causeway Coast and Glens
8. Derry and Strabane
9. Mid Ulster
10. Fermanagh and Omagh
11. Newry, Mourne and Down
12. Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon

We are seeking the views of children and young people through a minimum of 10 focus groups across each area, representative of the different towns and villages located in that region. Focus groups will be facilitated by statutory controlled units, and by voluntary and community sector partners. Each area will seek to engage a group of rural young people and urban young people from each age range. The sought age ranges are as follows: Primary 1-3 (Age 4-8), Primary 4-7 (Age 9-11), Year 8-10 (Age 11-14), Year 11+ (Age 14-17) and young adults aged 18-25. If any area doesn't have access to rural groups, they can omit this from their engagement. We are also seeking views from any organisations who work with specific communities of interest, or young people in Section 75 categories.

Each focus group should have a minimum of 6 young people participating. We recommend a group size of 8-12 young people for optimal focus group engagement and prioritise representation of different gender identities, sexual orientations, ethnicities, special educational needs and disabilities, cultural traditions, community backgrounds and care experienced young people.

Survey results relating to your local council planning area will be made available on Monday 25 November through the Youth Funding Website here in a PowerPoint. This date is because the survey responses will be collected until 22 November to inform focus groups. In addition, for each theme we have included in the PowerPoint a series of trigger questions contained within this pack for your discussion with children and young people. The survey results should be used to inform themes and questions to be addressed during focus groups.

Delivering Focus Groups

Delivering Focus Groups

Education Authority has adopted the Lundy Model of Participation (2007), which is grounded in Article 12 (UNCRC), as its preferred model of practice for capturing the voice of children and young people. This model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC into practice and focuses on four elements, which have a rational chronological order:





Facilitating **'Space'** and **'Voice'** requires youth workers to be knowledgeable and skilled in group work development, setting up safe spaces, and using interactive, creative, and age-appropriate methodologies to engage children and young people in discussion and exploration of their needs. Facilitating **'Audience'** and **'Influence'** require someone to listen AND do something about it, otherwise engagement becomes tokenistic.

The Lundy Model can be used to plan and facilitate effective focus groups.

Space

- Which and how many young people do you wish to engage with?
- Is the focus group diverse and representative of your membership?
- Engagement should be voluntary; how could you motivate young people to take part and feel comfortable to engage?
- Where and when will the focus group take place?
- Is the room private from distractions, with enough time to properly discuss questions? We recommend a duration of 45-60 minutes with at least two different activities to keep them engaged, or longer with a break.
- Who is best to facilitate the discussion? The facilitator should be someone who is approachable, relatable and open minded.
- You might want to do some smaller group or partner discussion as well as whole group interaction. You might also want to provide opportunities for individual feedback by using a comment card.
- Set ground rules at the beginning and reinforce as necessary throughout.
- Don't chastise young people for being open and honest, even if they use inappropriate language. If they feel judged for what they say, they won't participate.
- Set the scene and explain the purpose of the focus group. Be transparent about how the feedback will be used.
- Have a plan in place in case the topics cause someone to get upset or anxious.

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Voice

- What background information do young people need to understand the questions? (You might want to give them this in advance, as your time in the focus group will be better spent in discussion, rather than explaining the theme.)
- Is the information clear and easy to understand for their age and ability?
- What do you want to find out from the focus group? Make the questions clear and focused. Prioritise the important questions; as the group may get distracted, and you may run out of time sooner than you think.
- Prompt young people for more information by asking 'why?', 'could you tell me more?' or 'could you give me an example?'
- Consider how you'd like them to respond – is it a verbal discussion? On flipchart? Creatively?
- Use active listening skills to show that you value each young person's insight and summarise the discussion to make sure you are interpreting it correctly.
- How will you record their feedback? – You may do an audio or video recording (make sure to get consent) or use flipchart to note their main ideas. You may ask another young person or staff member to act as notetaker.

- Wrap up and close the discussion by asking if anyone has anything else they'd like to add, thanking them for their participation and tell the young people what happens next.

Audience and Influence

Education Authority Youth Service will act as **'Audience'** and **'Influence'** and work in partnership with the Regional Advisory Group to analyse the feedback of children and young people, identify needs, determine and evaluate priorities, and allocate resources within the scope of Youth Service policy and Statutory Duty. Feedback will be provided to young people through an easy-read, youth friendly report of the Regional Assessment of Need.

You also have a role as the 'Audience' and 'Influence' as the voice of your children and young people should influence your organisation's own needs assessment, planning and quality assurance processes.

Engaging Diverse Young People

Engaging Diverse Young People

Our engagement model seeks to be inclusive of a range of diverse young people including different age groups, gender identities, sexual orientations, ethnicities, special educational needs and disabilities, cultural traditions, community backgrounds and care experienced young people. It may be necessary to make adjustments to activities and engagement methods to make them accessible and appropriate by considering factors including:

- Use of language.
- Visual aids.
- Physical and intellectual ability.
- Literacy levels.
- Confidence.
- Attention spans.

We have provided some guidance for adapting focus groups to suit different groups of young people, and more activity ideas can be found in the Delivery Materials section.

Engaging younger children

Younger children may have trouble understanding questions or articulating themselves. Imagination and thinking skills will be different and some may not understand that other people have different experiences or opinions than them. Some children may struggle with independent thinking and be more likely to follow or copy others.

It is important to start by helping children to understand what ‘having a voice’ means and the power they have. It’s also important to help them understand how decisions are made, and what is possible or realistic for youth provision.

It is important to keep sessions as simple as possible, using play and game-based activities. Remember to take photographs as a record of young people’s feedback.

- Use **images, colours, and visual aids**.
- Provide **sentence frames** to get them started when responding.
- **Label** relevant objects, resources, key phrases or parts of the room.
- **Explain jargon, idioms or slang**, and avoid using them altogether when possible.
- Use **creative methods** of capturing feedback that require little or no reading or writing e.g. drawing, collages, photography, acting it out, lego, play-doh etc.
- **Flashcards** can be helpful in answering questions.
- Using **physical ways of giving feedback** is also universal e.g. hand gestures, facial expressions/emojis, stand up voting etc.

- **Suggestion boxes** have proved to be useful with younger age groups. You can even involve older young people in sorting through the suggestions of the younger children to begin a consultation process.
- Younger children are very familiar with **circle time** in school, you may wish to use this process to capture verbal feedback.
- Older young people in **peer mentoring** or buddy roles will be able to capture feedback from the younger children they may be supporting.
- Use of **digital tools** like online surveys, forms, polls or Kahoot quizzes.

Engaging children and young people with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND)

Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) may have different physical, emotional, intellectual and communication needs that may present challenges to 'having a voice.' The goal is to empower each young person to have their own unique experience that meets their needs, and we need to be flexible and provide multiple accessible options to give and receive feedback.

Young people whose capacity is not synonymous with their age, want to feel and be treated like others their age but with simpler language and concepts, therefore it is important not to make activities or resources too child-like.

- Use **images, colours, and visual aids**.
- Choose simple **symbols** to represent different actions during the session, and use them consistently so that young people are able to connect them with behaviour and actions e.g. 'yes/no', 'agree/disagree.'
- Provide **sentence frames** to get them started when responding.
- **Label** relevant objects, resources, key phrases or parts of the room with words and symbols.
- **Explain jargon, idioms or slang**, and avoid using them altogether when possible.
- Use **creative methods** of capturing feedback that require little or no reading or writing e.g. drawing, collages, photography, acting it out, lego, play-doh etc.
- **Flashcards** can be helpful in answering questions.
- Using **physical ways** of giving feedback is also universal e.g. hand gestures, facial expressions/emojis, stand up voting etc.
- Use **Assistive Technology** where required for reading, writing and speaking e.g. Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Read and Write, Immersive Reader, Dictaphones, Apps.
- Use of **digital tools** like online surveys, forms, polls or Kahoot quizzes.
- Make the most of **accessibility features** on iPads and computers e.g. screen filters, fonts, sizing and spacing.
- Use of **Makaton, BSL or signing**.

- Use **familiar** people, question types, materials, visuals and logical sequencing to capture feedback.
- Using a mix of **structured feedback and open-ended** responses is important.
- Young people are very familiar with **circle time** in school, you may wish to use this process to capture verbal feedback.
- Providing information in a **range of different formats** will encourage understanding e.g. written format, an infographic, an audio recording.
- During facilitation, it is important to consider any **sensory issues** that might arise e.g. the suitability of the room, group size, noise, materials being used etc.
- Interpreting responses might require more care to not make any assumptions or misunderstand. **Asking the same question in various different ways** will allow you to triangulate data through multiple methods to validate your findings.
- **Positive reinforcement** will be important to raise young people's confidence and alleviate anxiety.

Engaging children and young people from different ethnic backgrounds

Our youth provision; and Northern Ireland as a whole, is becoming more diverse and multi-cultured and it is important to get feedback from young people from different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Some may be able to communicate in English better than others, and some may have cultural needs which also need to be considered.

- Use **images, colours, and visual aids**.
- Provide **sentence frames** to get them started when responding.
- **Label** relevant objects, resources, key phrases or parts of the room in both English and in the young person's native language if possible.
- **Explain jargon, idioms or native slang**, and avoid using them altogether when possible.
- Use **creative methods** of capturing feedback that require little or no reading or writing e.g. drawing, collages, photography, acting it out, lego, play-doh etc.
- **Flashcards** can be helpful in answering questions.
- Using **physical ways** of giving feedback is also universal e.g. hand gestures, facial expressions/emojis, stand up voting etc.
- Use group activities where young people can gain **support or guidance from their peers** who many understand better.
- Use **translator apps**. (Although be cautious about overreliance on these as they are not always accurate.)
- When you're organising feedback sessions or focus groups, keep in mind that some young people might not be available on particular dates or times during the day, due to **religious holidays and practices**.

- If you’re offering **food and refreshments**, make sure they are appropriate for all young people.
- Be aware that some young people might not feel comfortable **discussing certain topics** due to their cultural backgrounds, and we should do everything possible to make them feel comfortable and safe to engage.

Focus Group Themes

Focus Group Themes

A regional survey focused on the needs of children and young people has been developed in collaboration with young people. The survey asks a series of questions based on the eight outcome areas in Our Children and Young People Strategy (2020-2030). The focus group will follow the same themes, and this section outlines suggested discussion questions. These suggestions are not mandatory or exhaustive and focus groups should be shaped by the young people participating.

It is not essential to discuss all eight themes during your focus group and we encourage facilitators to choose 2-3 themes to explore in detail, based on practice knowledge of your young people, and feedback from the survey results relating to your local area.

The aims of the focus group are to:

- Explore issues from the survey in more detail.
- Gain feedback regarding the response of Youth Services in meeting assessed and expressed needs.



Health and Wellbeing

Children and young people are physically and mentally healthy.

All children and young people should enjoy good physical and emotional health and get the right support and help when they need it.

Discussion points may include:

- What influences or impacts your physical health?
- What influences or impacts your mental and emotional health?
- Where are you able to find support and how useful is it?
- What opportunities can Youth Service provide to improve or maintain good physical health?
- How can Youth Service better support mental and emotional health?
- Young people may want to explore specific issues, which may include body image, relationships, loneliness, financial pressure, bullying, cyber bullying, sexuality, family problems, depression, anxiety, stress, nutrition, smoking, vaping, substance use, alcohol use, fitness or sleep.

Play, Hobbies and Interests

Children and young people enjoy play and leisure.

All children and young people should have time and space to enjoy their free time, play and take part in fun activities like sports, culture and the arts.

Discussion points may include:

- Where do you have the opportunity to take part in play and leisure activities in your area?
- Where are safe spaces for you to socialise?
- What sports, cultural or artistic activities are you currently able to avail of?
- What sports, cultural or artistic activities can Youth Service provide to improve your play and leisure?
- What impact do you think play and leisure has on your wellbeing?

Education

Children and young people learn and achieve.

All children and young people should have access to the best education possible and develop their talents and skills to be the best they can be.

This may be through school, EOTAS or through accredited or skills development programmes in Youth Services. Support with educational transitions is also important for young people, to set them up for success in a new context.

Discussion points may include:

- Which skills do you learn through Youth Service?
- Are there any skills you think should be taught by Youth Service but aren't?
- How important is it for Youth Services to provide accredited qualifications?
- What are some of the barriers you experience in your education or learning journey?
- Are there any external pressures or circumstances which impact your ability to do well in education?
- How can Youth Service help you to overcome those barriers?
- How can Youth Services support you in educational transitions to make them a positive experience?

Safety

Children and young people live in safety and stability.

All children and young people should feel safe from harm at home, in school and in the area where they live.

Discussion points may include:

- What makes you feel safe at home, in school, in youth provision or in your local area?
- What risks or dangers are present at home, in school, in youth provision or in your local area?
- What can Youth Services do to make you feel safer and reduce worries or concerns?
- Young people may want to explore specific issues, which may include crime and disorder, alcohol misuse, substance misuse, anti-social behaviour, racism, sectarianism, paramilitary activity or influence, domestic violence, levels of policing, social media, online abuse, homelessness, violence against women and girls or hate crime.

Your Future

Children and young people experience economic and environmental wellbeing.

All children and young people should be able to find jobs and take care of themselves when they are older. They should be able to live in a country where the air, land and sea are not polluted.

This theme may be more challenging for younger age groups as employability and financial wellbeing may not be familiar concepts.

Discussion points may include:

- Do you feel hopeful for the future? Why or why not?
- How confident do you feel that you could live independently?
- What might stand in the way of achieving your full potential?
- How can Youth Services support you with employability and preparing for your future?
- How do you think poverty impacts young people and families in your area?
- How can Youth Services reduce the impact of poverty on young people?
- What concerns you about climate change?
- Do you think enough is being done to prevent climate change?
- What can Youth Services do to educate or contribute towards climate change?

Citizenship

Children and young people make a positive contribution to society.

Children and young people should be able to say what they think about things that affect them, and should be listened to and taken seriously. They should have the chance to make their school, youth programmes and community better.

Discussion points may include:

- How do you currently make a difference in your school, youth provision or community?
- Do you feel that citizenship or making a positive contribution is important? Why?
- How can Youth Services provide more opportunities for you to make a positive contribution to society?
- Do you feel that young people are listened to and valued? Where and how?
- Do you feel that young people have the power to change things? How?
- How can Youth Services listen to you and value your opinion more, or include you more in decision making?
- Young people may want to explore specific examples, which may include volunteering, fundraising, campaigns, social action, charity work, social enterprise or youth voice and participative structures.

Your Rights

Children and young people live in a society which respects their rights.

Children and young people should know their rights and their rights should be respected.

Discussion points may include:

- Do you know your rights? Where do you find information about your rights?
- How could Youth Services educate young people on their rights more?
- Do you feel like your rights are respected in society? Where and how?
- Do you feel that Youth Service respects your rights? Where could they improve?
- Do you feel confident in standing up for your rights? How?
- How can Youth Services support or advocate for your rights?

Equality

Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.

Children and young people should be treated equally and should be able to get along well together, even if they are from different backgrounds.

Discussion points may include:

- Do you feel that people are treated equally in your area? How?
- Is there prejudice or discrimination in your area?
- What impact does this have on young people?
- Do you feel that Youth Services are welcoming and inclusive? How could they improve?
- Do you think young people treat others who are different with respect?
- How could Youth Services promote better relationships between different communities and young people from different backgrounds?

Delivery Support Materials

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Delivery Support Materials

This section provides a range of activities which can shape your focus group, including icebreakers and energizers, activities to explore themes and evaluation. All activities can be adapted to suit different age ranges and contexts.

You can find more activities in our Youth Participation Toolkit, which can be downloaded from www.youthonline.org.uk/toolkit or scan the QR code.

SCAN ME

Icebreakers and Energizers

Icebreakers and Energizers promote a relaxed and informal atmosphere. They are a good start to creating a comfortable space for young people, fostering trust, and helping groups get to know each other. The games can also be adapted to get feedback from young people through play, which could be useful with younger age groups.

One of Us	
Duration	10 minutes
Resources	Post-it notes and pens
Instructions	Each person writes down a fact about themselves on a post-it note and gives it to the facilitator. The facilitator reads out each fact and the group have to guess which person it belongs to. **Alternative:** For younger age groups, give them a category and ask them to draw their favourite e.g. fruit

Pulse	
Duration	15 minutes
Resources	A coin and a pen
Instructions	Split the group into two teams and line them up facing each other holding hands. Have a chair at one end with a pen on it and the facilitator at the other end with a coin. Everyone closes their eyes apart from the two closest to the facilitator. Facilitator flips a coin. If it's heads, the group have the squeeze hands down the line and grab the pen from the chair. If it's tails, they do nothing. The groups are not allowed to speak. The first team to grab the pen gets a point, the person at the front moves to the other end and game continues.

Connect Me	
Duration	10 minutes
Resources	None
Instructions	Each participant will be given 5 random words (everyone will have the same). The participants will then get some time to come up with something about themselves that associates or has a connection with the words given. For example, if one word is 'London' they may say "I went to London last month" or "London is where I'd like to live one day". Each person reads out their association with that word for the five words given. This gives the participants time to make connections with each other and find common interests. **Adaptation:** Choose 5 words that are relevant to the themes you are exploring in your focus group. Ask the young people to tell you something about themselves relating to the 5 words.

Jenga	
Duration	15 mins
Resources	Jenga game
Instructions	On each Jenga block, write a question that the young person has to answer, or a challenge they have to complete. Play Jenga with the group and ask them to carry out whatever is on the block they remove. **Adaptation:** Write themed based questions on the Jenga blocks to gather feedback.

Rock, Paper, Scissor Hoops	
Duration	10 minutes
Resources	Hula hoops
Instructions	Lay the hoops on the ground, creating a random path from one side of the room to the other. Split the group into two teams and each team goes to either side. The team members must jump into the hula hoops to cross the room. When they meet an opponent, they must play Rock Paper Scissors. The loser goes back to the start, and the winner can continue to the other side. The losing team can send a new team member to meet the winner and try to beat them. The game finishes when one team has successfully crossed to the other side. **Adaptation:** You could add questions to the hoops which are relevant to the themes you are exploring. When a person loses Rock, Paper, Scissors, they have to answer the question before returning to the start, or when they successfully reach the other side.

Landmines	
Duration	10 minutes
Resources	Paper
Instructions	Set out a grid using A4 paper on the floor and decide a path that you want the young people to follow (you may wish to write or draw this on a separate page for you to refer to.) It can be as big or small as you wish depending on the size of your group but recommend at least 12-16 pieces of paper. The aim is for the young people to figure out the path without stepping on a landmine. One person steps on the grid and the worker says “Yes” or “No” each step. If they step on a landmine they go back to the beginning and the next person starts. The group must memorise the correct steps that the previous person took. You can add a forfeit in for every time someone stands on a landmine. **Adaptation**: Each time someone stands on a landmine, they have to answer a question relevant to the themes being explored in the focus group.

Exploring Themes

The first stage of Exploring Themes, is finding out what is important and relevant to young people, we should never assume to know what young people might, or might not be interested in. Young people need to be able to make informed decisions; if we ask for feedback around a topic they don't understand, or don't see as being relevant, then it won't be meaningful. Young people should also have the freedom to express their 'Voice' in a range of ways that best suits their needs. This may include reading, writing, talking, movement, creative or digital methodologies, or a combination of different methods.

Stay Standing	
Duration	20 minutes
Resources	None
Instructions	Ask the group to stand and read the following questions. If the young person feels the statement applies to them, they stay standing. If not, they sit down. To those still standing, ask for examples and how they would have liked to be able to change this. Feel free to add more statements which are appropriate to your group or session. <u>Stay standing if you have ever been unhappy with…</u> Rules at school or youth club. Your community or where you live. Public transport. Your employer. <u>Stay standing if you have had ideas to improve …</u> Activities at school. Your youth provision. (Club/group) Your community. Your environment. Your Rights. **Adaptation:** Tailor the statements to be relevant to the themes you are exploring during your focus group.

Community Mapping	
Duration	40-90 minutes
Resources	Flipchart, markers, magazines, newspapers, scissors, glue
Instructions	Split the group into smaller groups and assign a specific area to each one, it could be where they live e.g. different estates, town centre. Ask them to create an area map as creatively as possible with the following prompts: • Mark all the important places and landmarks – places that are part of your everyday life. • Where do you hang out?

	• Are there any funny names or stories for things in your area? • What parts make you proud to live in your area? • What parts do you wish you could change? • What parts are an eyesore and make the area look bad? • Are there any parts which are more disadvantaged/poorer than others? • What parts show diversity in your area? • What issues or problems does the area have? • What services/organisations are there when people need help? E.g. a foodbank, GP surgery, emergency services, charities • Where is a safe place / or a dangerous place in your area? • Who are the important or influential people in your area? (Can be positive or negative) • Are there opportunities for you to progress in education or employment? • What is the housing like? • What is transport like? Is it easy to travel outside your area? • Are there places where crime is more likely or prevalent? Each small group should present their map to the rest of the group. Facilitator should then facilitate a discussion around the common issues or areas for concern identified by each group. **Alternative:** You could carry out community mapping physically by walking around your area and asking young people to identify different aspects of the area. It could also be done as a photo scavenger hunt. You could also carry this out as a sensory walk while paying attention to the things you can see, smell, hear and feel. **Adaptation:** Tailor the prompt questions in your community mapping to be relevant to the themes being explored in the focus group.

Child's Rights Community Mapping Activity	
Duration	40-90 minutes
Resources	Flipchart, coloured flags or post-it notes, scissors, glue, UNCRC Poster
Instructions	This is an effective follow-on activity from the previous Community Mapping activity to explore where child rights are being respected, and where they are being violated or could be improved. Choose a coloured flag or post-it note to represent rights being respected, and a different colour for rights being violated. Using the maps completed in the previous activity, ask the group to add a flag or post-it note to areas on the map. It would be

	helpful to provide the UNCRC poster to prompt ideas. The questions below might also help to get young people thinking: • Where do you feel really welcome? • What do you like about the places you hang out? What could be better about them? • Where is it easy to make friends? • Where can you go to get help? • What helps you to stay healthy? • How do you like to relax? • How do you access information about the world around you? • What does your family need from your community to feel supported? • What gets in the way of you enjoying your community? • How are you able to influence decisions made in your community? • What helps you to learn and develop the talents and ideas that you have? • What do you think your community can be most proud of for young people growing up here? • What are the challenges in your community and what needs to improve? Each small group should present their flags to the rest of the group and provide feedback. Facilitator should then facilitate a discussion around the common issues or areas for concern identified by each group.

Hot Potatoes	
Duration	45-60 minutes
Resources	Post-it notes, pens, flipchart
Instructions	Give everyone some post-it notes and a pen. Ask the group to write down a key issue that they think needs to be addressed within the local area/club for young people, then stick it onto the flipchart. Split into small groups and ask them to pick 2-3 of the topics. In their groups they should discuss and feedback why they feel this is a key issue for young people in the area and what needs to change. The group should consider what they could/would do as an advocate for this issues/topic. Each small group then provides feedback to the larger group.

First Thoughts	
Duration	10 minutes
Resources	None
Instructions	This is a good starting point to look at an issue. List a series of things related to the issue and ask the group to write down the first thing that comes into their head. Try not to censor their thoughts. Discuss the group's thoughts and where they came from.

Build it	
Duration	15-20 minutes
Resources	Lego/Duplo/Playdough/Clay/Peg boards/Building materials/Loose parts/White Boards and markers
Instructions	Provide a creative way for young people to express their views on a topic or issue. This will work particularly well for younger age group or young people with SEND. Allow them to make their piece, and then present it to the rest of the group.

Issue Thermometer	
Duration	45-60 minutes
Resources	Flipchart, post-it notes, markers, thermometer printed or drawn
Instructions	Ask the group to identify issues that they feel are important to local young people and write these on post-it notes. Read out each issue and group and apply the thermometer exercise to each one. 'Hot' on the thermometer indicates the negative things that they feel strongly about regarding the issue especially those things that anger, annoy, or frustrate them about it. 'Cold' on the thermometer indicates the things that they feel are positive about the issue or those things that address the issue well. Young people can decide individually, or in small groups and feedback to the larger group. Facilitator should question the groups to reflect on and clarify which issues are important and the aspects which need action. **Adaptation:** Instead of exploring issues generically, ask young people to identify different factors of the themes being explored in the focus group.

Traffic Light Issues (Alternative to Issue Thermometer)	
Duration	45-60 minutes
Resources	Traffic light printed or drawn, flipchart, markers
Instructions	Ask the group to identify issues that they feel are important to local young people and write these on post it notes. Read out each issue and group and apply the traffic light exercise to each one. 'Red' indicates the issue that they feel strongly about especially those things that anger, annoy, or frustrate them about it. 'Amber' indicates the issues that they feel ok about but could have the potential to get worse if not addressed or improved (or things that are almost good but just missing the mark.) 'Green' indicates the issues that they feel more positive about, or those things that address the issue well. Young people can decide individually, or in small groups and feedback to the larger group. Facilitator should question the

	groups to reflect on and clarify which issues are important and the aspects which need action. **Adaptation:** Instead of exploring issues generically, ask young people to identify different factors of the themes being explored in the focus group.

S'not Fair	
Duration	20 minutes
Resources	Paper, pens
Instructions	Draw or print a picture of a miserable face, with a cold. Young people write what is not fair about a theme on green snot shaped pieces of paper then stick these all over the face.

Thought Wall/Graffiti Board	
Duration	20 mins
Resources	Flipchart/whiteboard/noticeboard
Instructions	Write a question on the board and ask young people to write or draw their answers. This can be anonymous, or they can write their names, the group should agree the rules. This activity can also be done as an informal way of collecting feedback during centre activities like drop-in.

Post-It Note Races	
Duration	10-15 minutes
Resources	Post-it notes, pens, masking tape
Instructions	Mark a start and finish line in the room using string or tape. Divide the group into small teams and give each team a pack of post-it notes each. Give them a set amount of time to come up with as many different ideas about a certain theme as possible. The group should line up their post-it notes at the start line. The first team to cross the finish wins the challenge and can receive a prize. Each group shares some of their post-it notes with the rest of the group, or the facilitator can read them out to the rest of the group.

Exploring Physical Space	
Duration	30 mins
Resources	Red and green stickers, or post-it notes and pens
Instructions	This activity is useful for workers who are reviewing their centre and the local provision. It can work very well for young people with SEND to provide feedback on how inclusive and comfortable the space is, and to identify possible triggers or sensory issues. Invite participants to walk around the building, room or outside space exploring ‘what is working well’ and ‘what could be improved’.

	You may like to give them different coloured post-it notes to add a visual dimension allowing them to stick 'green' to positive spaces and 'red' to spaces that need to be improved. Agree key actions they would like to do as a group, or advocate to be taken forward by others. Ensure that young people understand the limitations of what you can change within the space e.g. 'we can rearrange furniture, but we can't knock a wall down', or 'we can't afford a new pool table so we would need to fundraise for it.' **Adaptation:** Use this activity to explore your youth setting in the context of a theme e.g. Identify what is working well or what could be improved for health and wellbeing.

Glitter Jar	
Duration	20 mins
Resources	Glitter in different colours, teaspoons, water, fairy liquid, small jars or transparent tubs/bottles
Instructions	Each jar should be filled with water and a drop of fairy liquid and mixed. Each colour of glitter should represent an aspect of your theme being explored in the focus group e.g. blue glitter represents health and wellbeing, green glitter represents safety. Young people will put more blue glitter in if health and wellbeing is more important to them. Each person chooses which colours they want to add and adds a spoonful of glitter into their jar. Each person gives feedback on what they put in their jar to the large group and why. **Alternative:** Instead of glitter, you could use other materials with the same idea e.g. beads, marbles, sand, salt coloured with chalk.

Human Board Game	
Duration	45-90 mins
Resources	Foam dice, Human Board Game Resource Pack
Instructions	This template can be adapted to look at any theme or issue. The game has three activities; quiz questions, challenges, and 'What would you do' scenarios. You should also add positive actions to allow them to move forward, and negative actions which move back. E.g. If your topic is climate change, you could write 'Uses a reusable water bottle – move forward 1' or 'You left the lights on while you were out – move back 2) Print out the resource pack and set up on the floor in a square or loop depending on the room size. With a smaller group, young

	people can play individually or play in teams. If playing in teams, each team should designate a counter who will move around the board. Each team rolls the dice, the highest roll goes first. They move forward the number on the dice and follow instructions on the square. Quiz questions – Ask each team to come up with a buzzer noise or action. If the team answers correctly, they can move forward one square. Add some fun, general knowledge questions as well as issue-based ones. Challenges – Ask each team to carry out an activity related to the theme e.g. If your topic is mental health, you could ask them to list as many coping mechanisms as possible and the winning team has the most. Add some fun challenges e.g. the young person who can do the most push-ups. What would you do – Provide a scenario related to the theme and ask young people to feedback what they would do and why. You could provide options, or let the group come up with their own options. Once you have some options, it might be useful to take a vote to gain statistics if needed. Add some Would you Rather questions to keep it fun e.g. would you rather have a bath in baked beans or a shower in custard? It's important to keep notes or take photos of challenges and scenarios as they can provide you with useful consultation feedback. The team that gets to the final square first is the winner. This can take as long or short as you wish. For reference, six teams can play 30 squares in approx. 45 mins.

Envelope Investments	
Duration	20 mins
Resources	Envelopes, paper money
Instructions	After the group have come up with a list of issues or actions for improvement, ask each person to take one of the issues to be responsible for. Give each person an empty envelope and £100 in paper money (a mix of notes). Each person should come up with a one-minute pitch for their issue and why it's the best one. The group go around everyone, listen to each person's pitches and decide if they would like to invest in an issue and how much. They hand over money to the other person to put in their envelope. Finish the activity once everyone has heard all the pitches. The envelope that has the most money is the issue that the group are most passionate and interested in.

	Alternative: Use this is an interactive voting method with other young people attending the centre/project as part of a consultation.

Hot Air Balloon	
Duration	40-60 minutes
Resources	Basket or hot air balloon printout, pictures
Instructions	On each table you have a basket (the hot air balloon) and photos of items relevant to the theme you are exploring in your focus group. For example if you were asking what activities they would want to see in their youth club, you might have a photo of a pool table, table tennis etc. First you ask them to pick all the items they want at the club and put them into their hot air balloon. Then say 'your hot air balloon is losing power, what would you throw out first?', then second etc. **Alternative:** You don't have to throw things out, but how can you reduce the weight? Is there a middle ground or compromise? You could also attach costs to each item and allow young people to develop their own budget.

The below methods are perfect for engaging young people during drop-in or youth club activities in an informal way. These methods will also work well in a focus group with younger age groups or young people with different abilities.

Interactive Voting Methods	
Hula Hoops	Set up two hula-hoops on the floor so that they are next to each other but overlapping. The idea is to create a 'Venn diagram'. One side would be 'yes', one would be 'no' and the middle section would be 'unsure.' Young people can stand in the hoops or place a sticker or post it note in the hoop.
Emojis	Young people choose between different options by drawing emojis next to each option to represent how they feel about each one. Alternatively, use emoji stickers or simple smiley / sad face stickers.
Dots	Each young person is given a set number of sticky dots to vote by sticking them next to their preferred option(s). They can use all their dots for one option or spread them between different ones.
Marbles	Young people are given five marbles each and they use them to vote for different options, represented by jars with labels on them. Children can put all five marbles in one jar or put some in each, depending on their preferences. (Sweets could also be used as alternative)
Vote with your feet	Ask young people to move to different parts of the room as their answer to questions. Make sure to record the numbers at each stage.

Thumbs Up	Traditional hands up to indicate if they agree or disagree with different options/choices. Can also use thumbs up/down/middle.
On the Scale	Ask young people to stand or place something on a linear scale e.g. a piece of string, rope or tape on the ground or the wall.
Secret Ballot	Young people vote for their preferred option(s) by indicating their choices on a piece of paper which is folded and placed in a voting box. The facilitator then empties the box and counts the votes up.
Ranking	Write or print the different options onto cards and cut out. Young people then rank their choices from first to last depending on their preferences.
Knock Out	The young people vote for different options from a list. The option with the least number of votes is 'knocked out' of the running. The young people then vote again, and another is knocked out of the competition. This process continues until there is only one left and we have a winner.
Balloon Pop	Get the young people to write or draw their ideas on balloons and the group have to choose which ones to pop and get rid of.
Wishing Well	Using whatever materials you can, set up a wishing well. Young people write their thoughts, suggestions, or ideas on a piece of paper (printed coin) and throw into the wishing well.
Balls	Provide different hoops or baskets that represent different options. The group throw or kick a ball (or beanbag) into the hoop they vote for.

Ideal Island	
Duration	40-60 minutes
Resources	Art materials, magazines, flipchart, pens (Or iPads as alternative)
Instructions	Facilitate an Ideal Island exercise in small groups where they create a world where the theme being explored in the focus group has been improved. What would look different? Consider family life, school, health, relationships, society, laws, public services, careers, and the future.

Scenarios of Change	
Duration	30 minutes
Resources	Flipchart, coloured pens
Instructions	Based on their chosen theme, what changes would they like to see? Use two different colours to circle the changes, one colour for most important, and one colour for most realistic. The changes that are both important and realistic are the top priority to give feedback on. Sometimes the changes that young people want to see aren't possible, so it helps for the groups to consider how much they are willing to compromise. Consider the requests, and categorise them into three sections –

	1. The Bare Essentials – The minimum changes that are needed by decision makers to show they are taking the feedback seriously. 2. The Middle Ground – a scenario where not all of the changes are implemented, but the young people are still happy with progress made. 3. The Dream – a scenario where all changes are implemented and have a great impact. **Expansion:** Get your decision makers (Senior Management staff in the organisation) involved in this activity so they can feedback on which changes are realistic and within their power.

Future News	
Duration	30 minutes
Resources	Flipchart, pens, or a newspaper front page template
Instructions	Split into small groups and give each small group a different year in the future. The group must consider their theme and what they would like to see changed by that year. They will now design a newspaper front page for that year and what headlines or articles they would like to see. Facilitate a discussion on the steps or actions needed to achieve those goals and start to develop an action plan.

Evaluation

As in all youth work projects, taking time to reflect and evaluate is essential. This helps the focus group members to take stock and recognise their own learning and development, but also allows for successes to be celebrated, projects to be developed and built upon, and for changes to be highlighted to enable growth. Some of the evaluation activities included can also be used to capture feedback from young people on the chosen theme.

Head, Heart, Bin, Bag	
Duration	15-20 minutes
Resources	Printout of a head, heart, bin and bag
Instructions	You can either do this as a worksheet with each image on it and get the young people to write on it. Or you could stick up a printout of each image around the room and ask young people to add post it notes to each one. Head – Something they learned. Heart – What they loved or felt was good about the session. Bin – What they would change or get rid of. Bag – What they will take away with them, or something to bring back for further discussion.

Roll a Dice	
Duration	10 minutes
Resources	Large foam dice
Instructions	Each person rolls the dice and answers a question depending on the number they land on. 1. I want to remember… 2. Something I learned today. 3. One word to sum up the session. 4. Something I would change about the session. 5. I'm still confused about… 6. An 'Aha' moment I had today… **Adaptation:** You could also use this activity to explore different questions for feedback related to your theme.

Washing Line	
Duration	30 minutes
Resources	String
Instructions	Tie a piece of string across the room and explain one end is 'high' and the other 'low' and the rest of the string is points between them. Read out statements about the session or programme and ask participants to move along the string to indicate their opinion.

	Alternative: Use pegs to pin photos or post-it notes rather than standing. **Adaptation:** You could also use this activity to explore different questions for feedback related to your theme.

The 4 F's	
Duration	10 minutes
Resources	None
Instructions	Facts – What happened? What did you see and hear? Feelings – How did you feel during the session or programme? Findings – What did you learn? What could be improved? Future – How will you use what you have learnt? You could also do this using 4 flipcharts around the room. **Adaptation:** You could also use this activity to explore facts, feelings, findings and future based on the theme being explored in your focus group.

Sharing Focus Group Feedback

Sharing Focus Group Feedback

After you have facilitated your focus group, it is important to provide feedback so that we can identify needs, determine priorities and allocate resources based on the voices of children and young people and evaluate priorities within the scope of Youth Service policy and Statutory Duty.

We encourage you to assign a notetaker in your focus group, and use activities which will provide you with evidence to assist you in sharing feedback.

We have developed a **feedback form** which can be accessed at https://forms.office.com/e/uxEQ7WLqWd or scan the following QR Code. Please complete this form within one week of facilitating your focus group.



The form allows you to provide feedback on all eight themes, but please focus on the themes that were explored in your focus group. There is also opportunity to provide direct quotes from young people, and note other issues emerging from your focus group that have not been previously captured.

If you have any problems with this form, please contact youthoperations@eani.org.uk and feel free to forward any other supporting evidence from your focus group e.g. photographs, videos, flipcharts.

The online form will seek the following feedback from focus groups in the following areas. We have provided this information below to help you form your notes as part of the focus group feedback.

Question	Explanation of Response
Project or Centre or Organisation Name	Name of the Centre/ Project/ Organisation responding. We intended to provide a list of organisations publicly who responded with focus group information. We will not provide any personal information, only the name of the organisation.
Council Area	We are using this information to ensure we have a representation of focus groups from all areas.
Was your focus group engagement with young people a particular community of interest or section 75 group?	We using the information ensure we have a representative response from all children and young people.
Responsible Youth Worker and Email Address	In event we have follow up questions, we would like to be able to explore these directly with the facilitator
Focus Group Date & Venue	We use this information to consider when and where the information was gathered against the assessed need at the time

Question	Explanation of Response
How many young people attended	This is to provide an indication of the level of engagement through focus groups
Age Range	This is to attribute the needs and proposed youth service actions to priority age bands
Which themes did you discuss during your focus group?	This is to help us build data around the most talked about and explored themes important to young people
Feedback Questions on the 8 areas	We do not need facilitators to provide feedback on all areas, only those that were discussed. **It is important for us to hear under the themes if the needs from the survey are accurate, if there are other needs within that theme that are not considered and how children and young people think youth services can respond** to support them in this area.
Are there any other issues emerging for children and young people from your discussions?	Whilst we have a survey, it does not limit other needs being expressed by children and young people for youth services to respond. If you have these, we will welcome this feedback. We will look at this information to see and consider if it is locally specific or if the same theme has appeared in other areas or regionally
Do you have any direct quotes from young people that you'd like to include?	We want to hear what young people think and feel about youth work. We may consider these quotes for inclusion as part of the regional assessment of need report.
Anything else we haven't covered?	Each focus group will be inherently different, and in some cases the questions we ask on the form may not facilitate a space for you to provide that information. This question is to provide a space for other things children and young people have said that we should consider.

Next Steps

Next Steps

The Education Authority will use the information provided through focus groups to inform its Regional Assessment of Need Report. Once drafted this will be equality impact assessed and published online for a 12-week public consultation.

For children and young people, we will provide a short young person friendly summary of what young people have told us through focus groups and how the Education Authority has considered this information and how it will be used to information decision making for youth work delivery.


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