THE **CENTRE**
FOR **YOUTH**
IMPACT

Youth Programme Quality Intervention (YPQI):
The youth work policy and practice context in Northern Ireland

November 2019

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Acknowledgement

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Introduction

This briefing supports the UK-wide pilot of the Youth Programme Quality Intervention (YPQI) led by the Centre for Youth Impact, and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

The YPQI is a ground-breaking quality improvement process designed for and tested with youth organisations. Developed in the US, extensive research has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving outcomes for young people, promoting a sustainable and supportive culture of organisational reflection and improvement, and refocusing evaluation on the quality of relationships within different settings.

The Centre's pilot programme covers England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and runs until September 2021. The overall aims for the pilot are to test, adapt and encourage youth organisations across the UK to embed the YPQI within their practices, and establish the infrastructure required to train and support these organisations. The pilot seeks to build the evidence base of the correlation between quality of provision and positive outcomes for young people to achieve these aims

From the outset, it has been clear that the potential benefits of the YPQI will only be realised in the UK if we work in close partnership and collaboration with the sector – practitioners, infrastructure bodies, commissioners, funders and policy-makers – to ensure that the process aligns with, and is complementary to, existing policy and practice at both local and national levels. In order for the process to be adopted and sustained over the long term, it must be suitably adapted and refined for practitioners across the four countries of the UK, as well as understood and endorsed by those who support and resource them.

This document sets out the policy and practice context for youth work in Northern Ireland, and provides a summary of how the YPQI process fits within and could support that context. It also highlights some of the key opportunities and challenges for the Centre and its partners as we proceed through the pilot. This briefing is part of a series produced in collaboration with our partners in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England.

We are both heartened by the strong alignment and connections between the YPQI and the youth sector in Northern Ireland, and committed to engaging positively with any potential barriers. We will use the publication of this briefing as a spur to patient, practical work to build meaningful, effective partnerships, with a shared focus on supporting continuous quality improvement across the whole UK youth sector.

This matters to us because, ultimately, the Centre's vision is that all young people, across the UK, have the opportunity to access high quality youth work and provision that supports their social and emotional development. In this pilot, and across all of the rest of our work, we know we can along

achieve our goal by working with and through others. If you support our vision, we hope you find much to encourage you in what follows.

For more information on the YPQI pilot, including how to get involved, please visit our website.

1. Key messages

- **Youth work is an important way to improve lifelong outcomes for young people as well as community relations.**

- **The YPQI has the potential to be a useful addition to youth work practice in Northern Ireland (NI) by complementing existing quality frameworks.**

  The field in NI has seen a shift towards focusing on outcomes for young people. Evidence from the USA shows that the YPQI effectively supports youth workers to value their professional skills, as well as to evaluate the quality of their practice, and how they are changing lives.

- **Given the constrained resources within the sector, managing pressures on time and gaining buy-in will be key challenges to work through.**

  Most practitioners working with and for young people recognise the importance of improving outcomes, but there is disagreement about how best to evaluate such improvement without undermining the relationship-based nature of youth work, particularly with vulnerable young people. It is critical to undertake this type of professional capacity building in order to support sustainable and effective practice within the youth sector.

2. Youth policy and practice in NI

Background overview of landscape

Youth work is a distinctive practice of non-formal education that can take place in both structured and unstructured settings. These include purpose-built youth centres, youth clubs in community buildings or schools, or through outreach or detached work. It is organised and offered by statutory providers, voluntary organisations, social enterprises, local government and faith-based organisations. Staff may be paid or be unpaid full or part-time, or volunteers. Funding is diverse, including government sources such as the Department of Education (DE), private philanthropy and local Councils.

Youth work includes both non-targeted/generic and targeted provision that addresses the needs of specific groups of young people (such as those within the NI Act Section 75 groups or those at greatest risk of social exclusion, marginalization or isolation), groups that draw on shared identity (such as girls work or LGBT groups), and projects based on activities such as sport, art or drama. In NI, much youth work practice is still carried out under the auspices of uniformed and faith-based organisations (such as the YMCA, Boys & Girls Brigade)). Youth work in NI is also important in helping young people to be engaged and informed citizens. Building cross-community relationships can help young people to cope with conflict, contribute to improving good relations and meet young people for other community backgrounds. Open access youth work tends to be less formal. It often involves open-ended engagement with young people in peer group settings that begins from their starting points rather than from pre-defined outcomes, and works with them for as long as they choose to participate. This diversity across youth work can make it challenging to evaluate and to have a clear, consistent understanding of what good practice should look like in diverse settings.

In 2017, around 180,000[1] young people here were involved in some form of youth service provision (both setting-based and detached). Nearly 21,000 individuals were involved in delivering and supporting youth work, including over 19,000 volunteers.

Over the last decade, youth work infrastructure has changed substantially. The voluntary sector is still the main delivery mechanism, comprising around 95% of facilities and 90% of youth service memberships. Most youth work is still delivered by volunteers outside of local authority control. Over the last few years, several well-established organisations have closed their doors. Many others face challenges to secure funding for their core work, and uncertainty is further exacerbated by

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[1] Statistical & Geographic Report of the EA Registered Youth Service -
www.eani.org.uk/publications/report/youth-service-statistical-report-2017-data

reliance on short-term funding. Priorities for Youth policy commits to a new converged (local and regional) approach to provision of funding on the basis of identified need. The Education Authority have consulted on proposals for a new regional and voluntary youth funding scheme which is expected to roll-out over the next few months to replace current legacy funding arrangements.

The main statutory funder and policy driver for youth services is the Department of Education (DE). Youth providers registered with the Education Authority are subject to inspection by the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI), which promotes the dissemination of good and innovative practice identified across the education, training and youth sectors through inspection and evaluative work. YouthNet, the former voluntary youth network for NI has closed. Three independent membership organisations represent the majority of youth providers (Network Strategic Forum (RVYOs), Youth Work Alliance (Voluntary Youth Service organisations) and Uniformed Hub (Uniformed organisations)).   The Youth Council NI (YCNI) is a statutory body which was established to advise the Department, the Education Authority and other bodies on the development of the youth service as well as encouraging cross community activity, provision of youth work facilities and effective use of youth service resources. YCNI has been non-operational since 1 April 2019 due to the inability to appoint new members to its Board in the absence of local Ministers following the expiry of the term of office of the previous board members. Although Assembly Members generally value youth work, the current suspension of the Assembly creates a void that limits progress. The absence of ministers has impacted on the ability of the NI Civil Service to respond to current issues and events. There are emerging new demands as well as an increasing backlog of key public policy issues which cannot be taken forward in the absence of local Ministers.

The Education Authority (EA), established in 2015, has been transforming structures and functions, and provides a mandate for a converged statutory youth service that will work with key sector partners in the voluntary sector to ensure young people's needs are met. This includes providing services to more than 180,000[2] young people taking part in services supported by the EA, and delivering on several key responsibilities under the Priorities for Youth policy around developing a youth service.

Key frameworks

Priorities for Youth sets the overarching policy framework for the delivery of the youth service in NI. The Priorities for Youth policy states "*investment in youth work should contribute to achieving agreed defined outcomes for young people in a cost-effective manner. Statutory and voluntary organisations*

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[2] Statistical & Geographic Report of the EA Registered Youth Service shows 139,389 young people in membership organisations and 41,993 involved in non-unit based work.

should be expected to report against agreed proportionate outcomes set out in approved plans. Numbers of young people who take part in youth activities continue to be an important indicator of engagement, but not the sole basis of performance measurement. Youth work must demonstrate the difference between those outcomes achieved through planned programmes, projects, accreditation and training, and those achieved through taking part, association and participation generally."

The policy also highlights that the Department recognises the significant contribution of the entire workforce and the increasing demands placed upon it, both in enhancing youth work practice and managing administration and governance. It notes that "*structures will be put in place to ensure appropriate, timely and relevant support is available to enable continuous professional development across the workforce, paid and unpaid.*" It stresses that "*a clear focus is required on the provision of measurable, quality learning experiences for young people.*" Although Priorities for Youth relates solely to the Department of Education's responsibilities, some have criticised Priorities for Youth for placing too narrow an emphasis on youth work by focusing on educational implications, and not taking sufficient account of the contribution to other civic domains such as health, community development, rural development, employment, economy, justice and so on.[3] Over recent years, there has been evidence of a move towards further engagement by the youth service on these issues in collaboration with the relevant authorities[4], in line with the Priorities for Youth Policy commitment to support the needs of specific groups of young people.

One of the principles underpinning Priorities for Youth is that young people should expect "*high quality services that follow best practice*". This includes "*using robust, high-quality and proportionate reporting systems, along with clear performance indicators and measurable evidence of the progress and achievements of the young people. This should demonstrate the contribution of youth work to improved educational outcomes for young people and, consequently, its public value.*"

Responsibility for capacity building in this area lies with the EA, which supports and encourages the development of robust and proportionate quality assurance systems in all parts of the youth service. This will include designing a framework of expected outcomes for all types of provision, proportionate to the support provided and in line with the Regional Youth Development Plan (RYDP) to measure expected outcomes and will take account of the broad range of youth work educational outcomes, including those focusing on personal and social development. The EA has designed and

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[3] Smyth, P. (2017). VCSE Opinion. We need to talk about Youth Work – reimaging the youth sector. Building Change Trust. Accessed at: https://www.buildingchangetrust.org/VCSE-Futures/opinion/We-Need-to-Talk-About-Youth-Work-~-Reimagining-the-Youth-Sector

[4] Examples include health and well-being (eg: joint project on mental health with the Public Health Agency) and justice (eg: work with the Department of Justice on lawfulness)

implemented a comprehensive management information system covering all registered youth work providers, which will help inform future planning and evaluation.
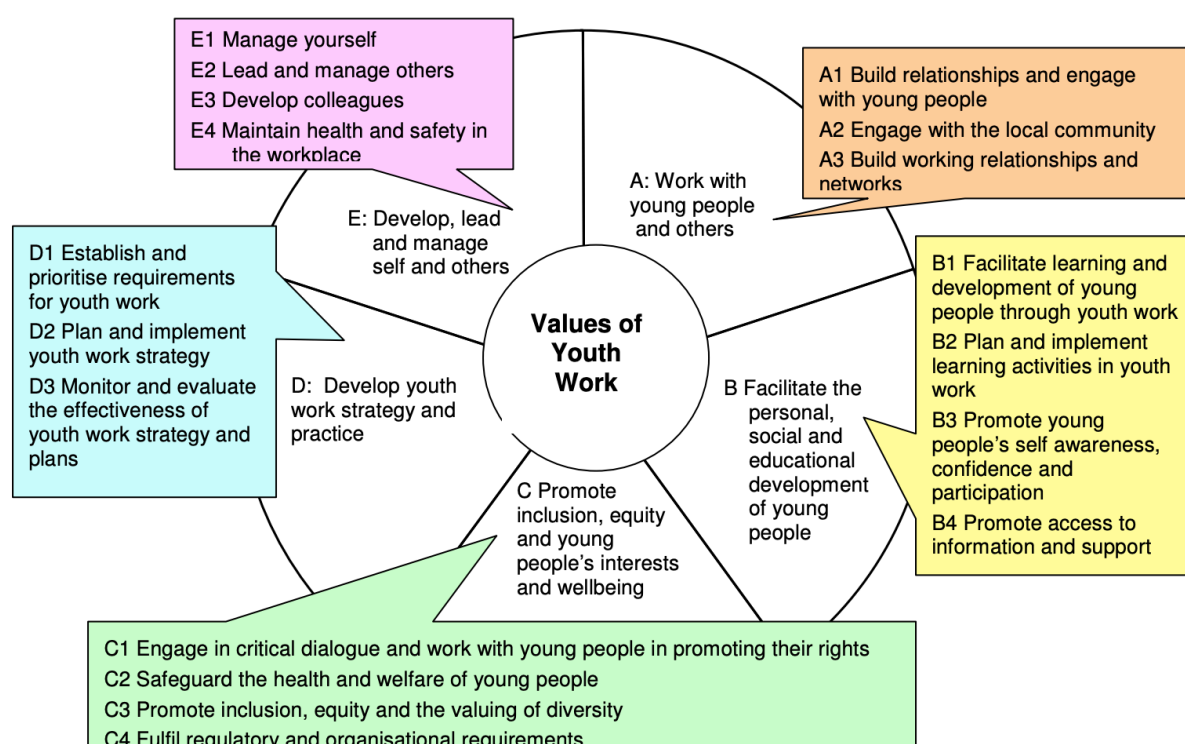
Another initiative where youth work is particularly important is Shared Education. This is the provision of opportunities for children and young people from different community backgrounds to learn together for better education and reconciliation outcomes. Priorities for Youth highlights Shared Education as "*a way to provide valuable opportunities for young people to build upon their school-based learning, learn new skills, foster new relationships and develop themselves as citizens.*" The "Sharing Works"[5] policy aim is to increase opportunities for children and young people have to learn and work together in a sustained and meaningful way, the more they will develop positive and inclusive attitudes towards one another. The Shared Education (NI) Act 2016[6] provides a definition of the core minimum requirements of Shared Education. The legislation defines a "relevant provider" as a person providing education at a grant-aided school, or services of any kind (including youth services) which provide educational benefit to children or young persons.

With respect to training and qualifications for youth workers, there are no minimum qualifications standards, but there are established National Occupational Standards (NOS), which sit across youth work practice for the whole of the UK. These set out a framework of competencies required to carry out the functions of a youth worker and the summary functional map outlining key areas within the NOS is shown in Figure 1 below. These standards are also well aligned with the YPQI: **Annex A** below provides a mapping of both the 2012 and newly updated NOS against the YPQI Domains of Practice.

Figure 1: Functional map of competencies from the Youth Work National Occupational Standards (NYA, 2014)

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[5] https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/Sharing%20Works%20A%20Policy%20for%20Shared%20Education%20Sept%202015.PDF

[6] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/20/section/1

The diagram shows "Values of Youth Work" at the centre with five segments:

E1 Manage yourself
E2 Lead and manage others
E3 Develop colleagues
E4 Maintain health and safety in the workplace

E: Develop, lead and manage self and others

A: Work with young people and others
A1 Build relationships and engage with young people
A2 Engage with the local community
A3 Build working relationships and networks

D1 Establish and prioritise requirements for youth work
D2 Plan and implement youth work strategy
D3 Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of youth work strategy and plans

D: Develop youth work strategy and practice

B Facilitate the personal, social and educational development of young people
B1 Facilitate learning and development of young people through youth work
B2 Plan and implement learning activities in youth work
B3 Promote young people's self awareness, confidence and participation
B4 Promote access to information and support

C Promote inclusion, equity and young people's interests and wellbeing
C1 Engage in critical dialogue and work with young people in promoting their rights
C2 Safeguard the health and welfare of young people
C3 Promote inclusion, equity and the valuing of diversity
C4 Fulfil regulatory and organisational requirements

The EA gather yearly data on the EA funded youth service workforce, however this only applies to statutory services and registered groups. Consequently there is limited data across the whole of youth services in NI.

A review in 2011 showed that around a quarter of paid youth work staff in NI have a Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) qualification with 3% being locally OCN or NVQ youth work accredited.[7] Whilst JNC qualifications are open to all those delivering youth work, it is not clear how much they are used within the voluntary (unpaid) youth work sector.

The North-South Education and Training Standards Committee (NSETS)[8] was established in 2006 in recognition of the need for an All-Ireland framework for the professional endorsement of youth work education and training which would ensure and support best practice and facilitate professional mobility and exchange on both a north/south and an east/west basis. NSETS is a member of the Joint ETS Forum that includes the ETS in each of England, Scotland and Wales. NSETS is responsible for the professional endorsement of under graduate and post graduate youth work education programmes in higher education institutions on the island of Ireland. Professional

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[7] Courtney Consulting (2011), A Profile of the Youth Work Workforce in Northern Ireland. Bangor: Courtney Consulting.
[8] https://www.youth.ie/programmes/projects-initiatives/nsets/

endorsement represents a non-statutory formal recognition by the youth work sector itself that given qualifications, awards or programmes have reached certain minimum standards or met prescribed criteria. It is to be distinguished from academic validation which will continue to be a matter for the relevant educational institutions and authorities, north and south.

The establishment of a professional status for youth workers has been important for ensuring minimum standards. This also needs to balance with valuing the contribution of those without formal qualifications, in particular the significant number of volunteers who deliver services. In line with the Priorities for Youth policy, which states "*The contribution of the volunteer workforce within the youth sector is invaluable and should be acknowledged, supported and celebrated*" the EA recently introduced its 'Volunteer Awards'. The 2019 ceremony held during Volunteering Week, acknowledged 270 volunteers nominated by Uniform, Youth Work Alliance and Regional Voluntary Sector, for their outstanding contribution to youth work and the lives of children and young people.

The EA Workforce Development Strategy[9] forms the basis for support, within existing resources, over the next 3 years for Voluntary youth organisations; Statutory Youth Sector; and voluntary and statutory managers, professionally qualified staff, part-time staff, volunteers and young adults. The Strategy recognises that volunteers make up over 90% of the youth service workforce and commits to consider and implement a plan that supports the particular skills, knowledge, and capabilities of volunteers engaged in the delivery of youth work.

Trends in provision and approach to measuring outcomes and impact in youth work

One of the objectives of the YPQI pilot project is to allow the value of this approach to be assessed against its potential contribution to reporting outcomes for social and personal development. Hence it is important to have a clear understanding of current practice and approaches as regards outcomes and impact. Measurement and evaluation have become increasingly prioritised in youth work, in a similar way to other sectors. Central and local government are increasingly focused on demonstrating value for money, accountability and transparency, and there has been an increase in outcomes-based commissioning. Other factors include a change in the profile of philanthropic support, and greater focus on enterprise and social investment.

The draft Programme for Government (PfG) 2016-21 prepared by the NI Executive was consulted on during 2016 and uses an **outcomes-based** approach. As the draft PfG was not approved prior to the dissolution of the NI Assembly, the Executive Office published an Outcomes Delivery Plan

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[9] https://www.eani.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-11/YS_Workforce_Dev_Srategy_and_Action_Plan_2018_to_2021%5B1%5D.pdf

which is based on the draft PfG. The drive towards outcome based accountability has impacted on the youth sector with more focus on outcomes based reporting.

While pressure has grown on services need to be increasingly targeted, clunky, inappropriate monitoring mechanisms can get in the way of building mutual and trusting relationships that start from young people's interests, experiences and wishes. They can also incentivise workers to favour those young people who are most compliant in relation to fulfilling the requirements of audit. As government departments, funding agencies and private philanthropists throughout the world become more outcome-focused, this is having a significant influence on youth work practice. Many have seen a move away from qualitative evaluation, at first through the introduction of targets and performance measures, and more recently towards more sophisticated impact measurements and mechanisms.

Over the last decade there has been considerable local activity around evidence-informed practice and generating better quality and more useable local evidence. This has included training and capacity building work by organisations such as the Centre for Effective Services, National Children's Bureau, Children in Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI), Queens University, the University of Ulster, Youthwork Alliance, YouthNet, Youth Link and Youth Action, and many others, as well as initiatives from funders including the Atlantic Philanthropies, the National Lottery Community Fund, Building Change Trust, and Community Foundation. We now have a Programme for Government that follows Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA), and many funders and commissioners require that services provide evidence of the need they are addressing and their impact on outcomes. Resources have been produced to support practice development such as the Model for Effective Practice, the New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) Four Pillars Framework, and from Charities Evaluation Services and the Centre for Effective Services, although it is not clear to what extent these are being used, and how useful practitioners are finding them in improving their practice.

Given the nature of youth work, and its variety in delivery and focus, it can be hard to robustly assess good practice and meaningful impact. Some are concerned that using approaches such as theory of change or logic modelling, and organising youth work around concepts like outcomes, targets, curriculum and issues, will diminish the impact of individuals' progress, and alienate young people. The building of relationships, which is seen as the key ingredient for youth work 'success', is often harder to describe and to measure than outputs or specific activities. This issue of 'product versus process' has presented considerable challenges for youth work in Northern Ireland. The building of relationships is further at risk because of pressure to reduce the amount of time youth workers spend with young people, due to the shortage of resources.

Popular outcomes measures being used by youth workers, particularly in the community and voluntary sector, include the Outcome Stars, the Rickter Scale, the SOUL Record, CORE and

numerous others. Many organisations may 'tweak' measures previously shown to be psychometrically robust, or they may be are unsure how to make best use of the data they collect to prove or improve the impact of their services.

Priorities for Youth highlighted that the youth service as a whole needs to better demonstrate how youth work contributes to DE priorities. In 2015 the Youth Service Sectoral Partners Group (YSSPG) designed a standardised reporting mechanism, capable of collecting evidence of generic youth work outcomes for young people across all types of youth work provision. These are presented in the format of six capability- based outcomes (enhanced personal capabilities, improved health and wellbeing, development of thinking skills, life and work skills, development of positive relationships with others, increased participation and active citizenship), and include measurable indicators relating to each outcome. Proportionate reporting systems were recommended, so groups in different Tiers report in different amounts of detail. This enabled light-touch reporting for volunteer-led and part-time groups (Tier 1), whilst groups and projects in receipt of substantial funding will be supported to provide fuller evidence of young people's individual progression (Tier 2). The system was intended to yield standardised data that could be aggregated to report on the entire sector, as required by Priorities for Youth. This was seen as an opportunity to provide a unifying and common focus within a diverse sector, strengthening the capacity of the sector to collectively demonstrate its achievements.

Work in this area has been further developed through the EA's Quality Assurance Framework[10] (QAF) which provides a common and flexible framework to support the continuous improvement in the quality of youth work at all levels, including at local part-time and voluntary unit level. Endorsed by the then Education Minister, the QAF provides a self-assessment mechanism for youth work providers to use to improve the quality of delivery. The QAF has three strands which are interdependent: developing people, developing the organisation and developing youth work practice. Though its use is not mandatory, youth work providers are encouraged to use some form of quality assurance mechanism to evaluate and improve delivery. The YPQI pilot will allow an assessment of its potential to complement the QAF.

Another self-evaluation framework developed locally by the Education & Training Inspectorate (ETI) to support the Sharing Works policy is the Shared Education Framework (2018). This was developed to provide youth setting partnerships with the means of self-evaluating the extent and quality of their shared education provision and to set targets for development. Youth settings are at different starting points and stages of development along this continuum in regard to their shared education journey. The ETI works alongside youth settings in supporting the development of shared

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[10] https://www.eani.org.uk/publications/youth-service/quality-assurance-framework

education through honest and robust self-evaluation, recognising the time, resources and strategic planning needed to progress shared education effectively. A key feature of using the framework is that each partnership identifies the progress made in demonstrating measurable educational outcomes and delivering social change by achieving conditions whereby young people demonstrate positive attitudes, dispositions, behaviours, understanding of reconciliation and respect for others. The framework includes indicators for the quality of provision demonstrating effective practice such as young people, part-time staff and volunteers being involved in the design of the curriculum.

The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF) is common to all phases from Early Years through to Further Education, and work-based learning inspected by the ETI. The ETI developed the ISEF to provide a more holistic overview of good practice. Each phase, including youth, is supported by characteristics of effective practice and self-evaluation questions that are phase-specific, including questions for organisations relating to outcomes for learners (standards attained, progression, wider skills and dispositions/ capabilities), quality of provision (quality of curriculum, effectiveness of guidance and support, effectiveness and impact of planning, engagement/ teaching/ training and assessment), and leadership and management (strategic leadership, middle leadership and actions to promote and sustain improvement including self-evaluation and the development planning process).

Even with these developments, many providers continue to collect more *output* data than *outcomes* data. Some see evidence gathering as a burdensome requirement of funders, rather than valuing the potential of collecting data to improve their practice.

YCNI (2018) highlighted a need for more support to practitioners around shared education via training, support for local volunteers who cannot attend events, and support for organisational change to enable trustees to understand the policy and actions required. They suggested that there needed to be a more thorough assessment of what the training needs of practitioners and trustees actually are, and how they manifest. YCNI noted that there are already many training resources available for the sector, and suggested that a mapping exercise to confirm this is desirable, and offers the opportunity to update existing materials.

Key drivers within the next few years

There are several key drivers for the development of youth work in NI.

Pressures on public sector budgets mean there is a need to manage finances effectively and efficiently to ensure best value. Funders now focus more strongly on what they see to be core activities, but at the same time there is often pressure on organisations to be creative and innovative, in order to deliver their activities effectively with less resource.

The current economic climate in NI is challenging, although progress is being made on previously high rates of youth unemployment. There has been a growing focus of the contribution of youth work to employability e.g. increased focus on accreditation, on developing career paths and leadership skills among young people, providing opportunities to gain experience through volunteering, softer skills, and interventions with NEETS or pre-NEETs. Recent work undertaken through the European Social fund to assist over 1,000 NEETs into employment, education and training have been exceeded, with over 2,042 NEETs being supported.[11]

The post-conflict context of NI is also still very relevant as a driver for youth work. The Department of Education's , Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED)[12] policy and addendum recognises the important contribution of youth work to building good relations. The NI Executive's Together: Building a United Community Strategy[13], also recognises the value of youth work in promoting and developing good relations. The EA delivers the TBUC Camps programme in collaboration with voluntary and community youth work providers.

Participation, which has always been a feature of youth work, continues to have a central role, with the difference being that over the past decade other government departments have also recognised the need to engage with and involve young people in decision making. This is reaffirmed in policies such as the Priorities for Youth policy and the draft Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027. The Model of Effective Practice developed by the Youth Service provides a flexible framework for the delivery of good youth work practice. It puts participation of young people at the centre of youth work, and the extent and success of their participation is a major emphasis in any inspection activity. Priorities for Youth notes that practitioners within individual units, projects and programmes will be required to provide evidence of how they have supported an ethos and culture of active participation, and how the young people are provided with opportunities to be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmes/projects, proportionate to the level of support provided. ETI continues to evaluate the quality of participation, including the culture of participation, within units during inspection.

There have been substantial changes to the infrastructure supporting youth services in NI, and the overall shift towards demonstrating impact on outcomes more explicitly. It may be challenging to implement additional changes to practice on top of this.

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[11] The Executive Office (2019). *Outcomes Delivery Plan, 2018-2019 End-Year Report. Improving wellbeing for all – by tackling disadvantage and driving economic growth.* Accessed from: *https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/execoffice/odp-2018-19-end-year-report_0.pdf*

[12] https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/promoting-community-relations

[13] https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/about-together-building-united-community-tbuc

3. The YPQI in context

The YPQI is a structured process which supports teams of youth practitioners to improve the quality of practice, with a focus on creating the conditions to support social and emotional learning. The YPQI could provide a useful framework for improving practice, which has been shown to be effective elsewhere, but there is a need to ensure it aligns with other ongoing work. A key objective of the pilot is to provide an opportunity to assess its relevance to the youth sector in NI and how it could complement existing quality assurance frameworks.

Its widespread use in the US indicates that the YPQI could provide important capacity building support to youth work organisations to help them value professional practice, as well as become more evidence-informed. There is already funding and plans in place for capacity building through the Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations and the Youth Work Alliance. It is important that the YPQI pilot complements this. Given the stretched resources that many youth organisations operate with, providing this at no cost to participating organisations will help with engagement and uptake, and it may enable capacity building with volunteers who are not necessarily working in projects supported by the EA.

Priorities for Youth focuses on specific work domains which include raising standards for all; closing the performance gap, increasing access and equality; developing the non-formal education workforce; improving the non-formal learning environment; and transforming governance and management of non-formal education. These primary areas of focus are well supported by YPQI. For example, the "Developing the non-formal education workforce" domain highlights the following as key actions, all of which are supported under the YPQI domain of "Interaction":

- Supporting youth work staff, particularly volunteers is essential to successful youth work delivery
- The voluntary sector works in partnership with the statutory sector. Strengthened governance and accountability arrangements are key to effective performance management systems. Proportionate accountability is essential across a diverse range of providers
- Training and support is fundamental in achieving and maintaining a consistently high quality of service to young people. The workforce needs a range of support systems to enable it to share practice, drive up quality standards and access enhanced support for specific issue-based youth work and administration and governance
- Staff development and training should enable youth workers, volunteers and managers to:
  1. Articulate the value of the service and celebrate its educational achievements
  2. Evaluate their work effectively through evidencing progression, measuring the learning outcomes for individual sand demonstrating the positive impact of youth services on communities

3. Support the active and meaningful participation of young people in various youth work settings
4. Provide ongoing and specialised training for specifically identified needs

It is critical to recognize that much work has already been done around outcomes for young people in the NI youth sector. The YPQI needs to build on this and complement existing quality frameworks. The pilot should aim to demonstrate added value and clearly show that the model does not displace or duplicate existing quality frameworks, especially the EA Quality Assurance Framework. In particular, links should be made with the University of Ulster as they provide undergraduate and postgraduate training in community youth work. The work should also link with the EA and ETI to ensure that it aligns with and complements the work they are responsible for around assessment frameworks for measuring outcomes and quality assurance.

At an organisational level, the provision of the support in the YPQI at no cost will be favourable. Assessing readiness for implementation and key drivers for successful changes to practice may be beneficial if these are not already addressed within the YPQI model. It is critical that the pilot involves the right people from each organisation in order to have a meaningful and sustainable impact on practice. This should include engaging senior managers as well as front-line staff to ensure that sufficient support is provided within each organisation to implement the changes to practice effectively.

4. Summary and next steps

The YPQI has the potential to support the professional and practice development of youth work in NI by providing a much-needed emphasis on valuing professional expertise and the core of good practice, as well as a focus on outcomes for young people. This will support youth workers to be better equipped to assess the quality of their practice, and to strive for improvement. It will be strategically important to engage with the sector so that organisations best placed to make the most of the opportunity, and ready to implement the changes to practice, are encouraged to participate.

Appendix A – Mapping the YPQI Domains of Practice against National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Youth Work

nb *Both the 2012 and 2019 NOS are included in the table below. The 2019 NOS have only recently been approved, and hence many training programmes and qualifications are still working from the 2012 NOS.*

YPQI Domains of Practice	Youth Work NOS (2012)	Youth Work NOS (2019 Updated)
Safe environment Creating safe spaces	YW01 Initiate, build and maintain purposeful relationship with young people YW18 Explore with young people their well being YW20 Embed organisational policy for the protection and safeguarding of young people YW22 Ensure that youth work activities comply with legal, regulatory and ethical requirements.	YW01 Initiate, build and maintain relationships with young people YW03 Comply with legal, regulatory and ethical requirements when carrying out youth work YW16 Equip young people with safeguarding techniques YW17 Monitor and review your organisation's policy and practices for the protection and safeguarding of young people and self YW18 Engage with young people to promote their emotional wellbeing and mental health YW19 Develop a culture and ethos that promotes inclusion and values diversity
Supportive environment Emotional coaching Scaffolding learning Fostering growth mindset	YW06 Enable young people to work in groups YW14 Facilitate young people's exploration of their values and beliefs YW16 Enable young people access information to make decisions YW18 Explore with young people their wellbeing	YW02 Assist young people to learn and engage with the youth work process YW06 Explore the concept of values and beliefs with young people YW07 Apply youth work values and principles in group work YW08 Engage with and empower young people to make use of digital media in their daily lives YW13 Access information for and with young people to inform decision making YW15 Assist young people to assess risk and make informed choices in the management of their health and well being YW18 Engage with young people to promote their emotional wellbeing and mental health

Interaction Fostering teamwork Promoting responsibility and leadership Cultivating empathy	YW07 Encourage young people to broaden their horizons to become effective citizens YW15 Advocate on behalf of young people and enable them to represent themselves to others YW17 Work with young people in promoting their rights YW21 Develop a culture and systems that promote inclusion and value diversity YW27 Facilitate and engage young people in the strategic development and delivery of youth work.	YW07 Apply youth work values and principles in group work YW09 Support young people to become responsible citizens through active involvement in youth work YW11 Plan, prepare and facilitate learning activities with young people YW14 Assist young people to recognise, realise and defend their rights YW19 Develop a culture and ethos that promotes inclusion and values diversity. YW23 Engage young people in the strategic development of youth work
Engagement Furthering learning Supporting youth interests Supporting goals and plans	YW05 Enable young people to use their learning to enhance their future development YW11 Plan, prepare and facilitate activities with young people YW12 Work with young people to manage resources for youth work delivery YW13 Support young people in evaluating the impact of youth work activities	YW02 Assist young people to learn and engage with the youth work process YW05 Enable young people identify, reflect and use their learning to enhance their future development YW11 Plan, prepare and facilitate learning activities with young people YW12 Manage resources with young people for youth work activities YW23 Engage young people in the strategic development of youth work
Professional Learning	YW04 Develop and maintain productive working relationships in collaboration with colleagues and stakeholders to support youth work YW24 Influence and develop youth work strategies YW29 Monitor and evaluate the quality of youth work activities YW30 Work as an effective and reflective practitioner YW31 Provide youth work support to other workers	YW04 Develop and maintain productive working relationships in collaboration with colleagues, agencies and stakeholders for youth work YW22 Influence and develop youth work strategy YW24 Monitor and evaluate the impact of youth work strategy and delivery YW25 Work as an effective and critically reflective youth work practitioner YW26 Provide leadership to other youth work practitioners and volunteers

The Centre for Youth Impact is a community of organisations that work together to progress thinking and practice around impact measurement in youth work and services for young people. Our vision is for all young people to have access to high quality programmes and services that improve their life chances, by enabling embedded approaches to impact measurement that directly inform practice. Our work, therefore, is dedicated to three objectives, together with our expanded networks and other organisations from across the youth sector: curating the debate, building the movement and shaping the future.

Find out more about the Centre for Youth Impact at www.youthimpact.uk and follow us on @YouthImpactUK.

David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality
The YPQI was developed in the US, by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. Extensive research has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving outcomes for young people, promoting a sustainable and supportive culture of organisational reflection and improvement, and refocusing evaluation on the quality of relationships within different settings. The Youth Programme Quality Intervention (YQPI) is the intellectual property of the David P Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. The Centre for Youth Impact hereby acknowledges the Weikart Center's ownership of the YPQI, the Program Quality Assessment (PQA) tool, and associated materials.

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