

# Measuring the quality and impact of open access youth provision

**Lessons and recommendations from the Youth Investment Fund learning project**

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# 1. Summary

This paper is part of the legacy resources based on the [Youth Investment Fund \(YIF\) learning project](#). It is intended to inform future measurement of the quality and impact of open access youth provision.

## 1.1 About the report

Section 2 provides background to the Fund, and Section 3 provides a brief description of the theory of change and measures used in the YIF shared evaluation. Section 4 provides a review of the YIF theory of change and measures alongside recommendations for future measurement of the quality and impact of open access youth provision.

## 1.2 Summary conclusions and recommendations

Looking to the future, and building on the learning from the Youth Investment Fund, we propose an updated shared [theory of change for open access youth provision](#) (see Figure 4) and a set of revised or alternative measures to help understand and improve impact. These include:

**Feedback** - We recommend the continued use of ‘user feedback’ questions, which provide regular, embedded opportunities for young people to share their experience and perceptions of provision, alongside systematic, real-time data to inform practice. An extended and revised set of feedback questions is provided in Appendix B.

**Quality** –We recommend the continued use and development of the Social and Emotional Learning Programme Quality Assessment (SEL-PQA) to understand and improve the quality of youth provision, and the adoption of the new, simplified version of the UK SEL-PQA across the youth sector once testing and reporting have been completed (Autumn 2021). See Section 3.2.2 for further information about the SEL-PQA.

**Outcomes** – Whilst the YIF outcomes measure was broadly fit for purpose, feedback from grant holders suggested that collecting outcomes data through questionnaires with young people is very challenging. The Centre for Youth Impact has developed a [suite of measures](#), building on learning for the YIF, specifically designed to measure different aspects of youth

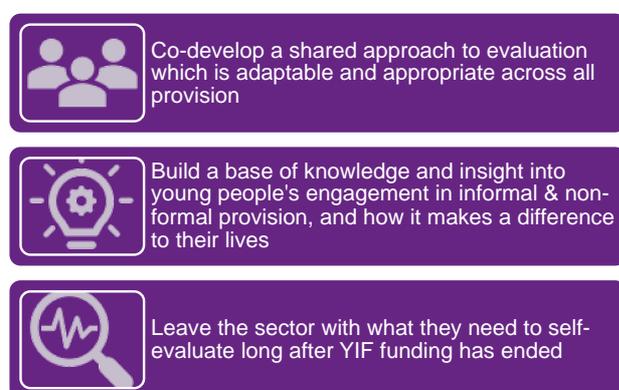
provision and align with practice. This includes an observational measure of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills called the Adult Rating of Youth Behaviour (ARYB - see Appendix A). We recommend considering the use of this measure alongside others within the suite.

We also recommend that measurement takes place as part of a continuous improvement cycle that is embedded in organisations' practice.

## 2. Background

As part of the Youth Investment Fund<sup>1</sup>, the funders commissioned a [learning project](#) led by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC), in partnership with the Centre for Youth Impact and a wider consortium of research partners. The learning project commenced in May 2017 and ended in May 2021. Figure 1 shows the learning project's intended aims.

Figure 1: The YIF project learning aims



This paper forms one of our legacy outputs from the [YIF learning project](#), in line with our aim to leave practitioners in the sector with what they need to self-evaluate long after YIF funding has ended. It draws on the YIF learning team's experience of developing and working with the YIF data collection measures and tools, alongside feedback from grant holders with first-hand experience of using them.

We believe this makes an important contribution to the development of shared measurement in the youth sector, which can:

- improve understanding of both organisational and sector-wide quality and impact.
- support learning across organisations

<sup>1</sup> The YIF was a joint £40m investment between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and The National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) to expand delivery of open access youth services in six regions of England. It was one of the biggest investments in open access youth provision in recent years and supported 90 organisations between 2017 and 2020. The YIF aimed to support young people's personal development by building their confidence and supporting them to become happy, healthy, and economically active adults.

- inform funding and policy decisions
- inform the development of services and provision.

Shared measurement is a resource-efficient and consistent approach that organisations can use to build a stronger, collective evidence base.

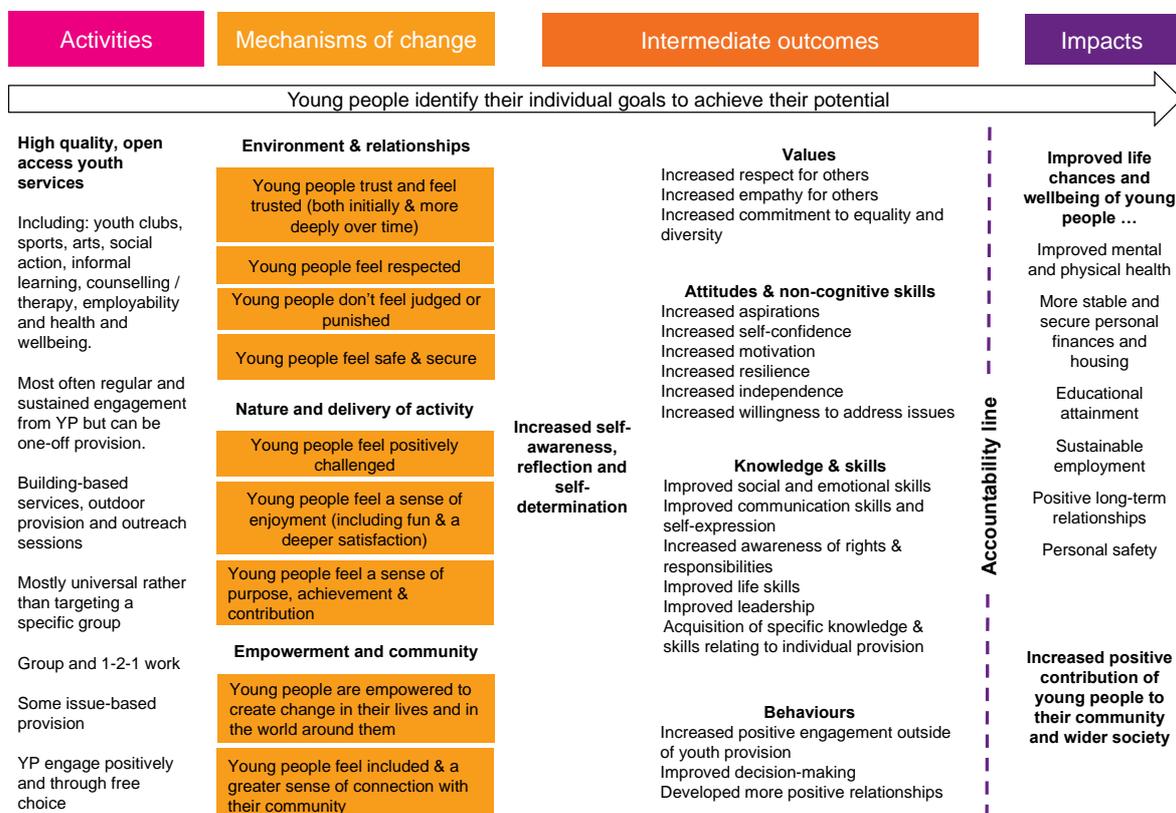
### 3. What we did: an overview of the YIF measures

In this section, we provide a summary of the YIF data collection measures and the process we used to co-design and develop them with grant holders, including the theory of change on which they are based. Full details of the process have been described in previous [Insight Papers](#), which are referred to throughout.

#### 3.1 The YIF theory of change and evaluation framework

The original YIF theory of change (Figure 2) was co-created with grant holders in the early stages of the YIF learning project. This formed the basis for the development of measurement tools. Further information about the development of the theory of change and associated evaluation framework can be found in [YIF Insight Paper 1: A shared evaluation framework for open access youth provision](#).

Figure 2: The Youth Investment Fund Theory of Change



Rather than focus purely on outcomes, the YIF evaluation framework focused on five types of data that map to the theory of change (see Table 1). This enabled us to look beyond simply ‘does funded provision work?’ to ‘what works, for whom, in what conditions and why?’. The addition of systematic feedback from young people and an observational measure of the quality of provision meant that grant holders gained actionable and timely insights during the learning project about what was working and what could be improved.

Table 1: The five types of data collected through the YIF learning project

	Type of data	What is it?	Element of Theory of Change it addresses
<b>Appropriate for all grant holders</b>	<b>Beneficiary (user)</b>	Administrative data on the young people taking part, including gender, age, ethnicity, and postcode.	<b>Activities</b>
	<b>Engagement</b>	Administrative data about the activities young people were engaging with and how often.	<b>Activities</b>
	<b>Feedback</b>	Systematic feedback from young people participating in provision.	<b>Mechanisms of Change</b> – evidence from young people
	<b>Quality</b>	Grant holder self-assessment data on the quality of provision.	<b>Mechanisms of Change</b> – evidence from practitioners
<b>Appropriate for some grant holders</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	Pre-post questionnaires to understand whether short-term outcomes have changed for young people.	<b>Intermediate outcomes</b>

### 3.2 Overview of measures used in the YIF Learning Project

Beneficiary and engagement data was administrative data collected about who was attending YIF provision and what types of activities they were attending. For the remaining three types of data – feedback, quality and outcomes – measures were identified or developed for use in the learning project. These are outlined below:

### 3.2.1 Feedback measure

A 'bank' of 17 feedback questions (see Table 2) was developed based on the mechanisms of change in the theory of change. Grant holders were able to choose the questions that felt most relevant to their work and were of most interest organisationally. The response scale used for all questions except for question 2 was 'A great deal', 'Somewhat' or 'Not at all'. For question 2, the response options were 'Very likely', 'Somewhat likely' or 'Not at all likely'. Originally, there was an additional set of feedback questions designed for younger beneficiaries, which used a 2-point response scale ("yes" or "no" response options). Because very little usable data was gathered using the 2-point response scale, only the 3-point response scale data was used in the YIF analysis.

Grant holders could gather data through a paper questionnaire, an online questionnaire or through more interactive methods such as asking young people to throw balls into buckets that corresponded with their answers.

Table 2: YIF feedback questions

Question	
1	How included do you feel whilst at [organisation]?
2	How likely do you think it is that [organisation] will make changes as a result of your feedback?
3	How much do you enjoy your time at [organisation]?
4	How much do you feel a sense of purpose and achievement through the activities at [organisation]?
5	How much do you feel positively challenged by the activities at [organisation]?
6	How much do you feel the staff and volunteers at [organisation] trust you?
7	How much do you feel valued as an individual while at [organisation]?
8	How much do you influence how the services are run at [organisation]?
9	How much do you trust the staff and volunteers at [organisation]?
10	How much do you value [organisation]?
11	How respected do you feel whilst at [organisation]?
12	How safe do you feel whilst at [organisation]?
13	To what extent do you feel it is worth your time and effort to come to [organisation]?
14	To what extent do you receive the support you need from [organisation]?

15	To what extent do you think the services you receive from [organisation] are good quality?
16	When you are at [organisation], how empowered do you feel to make a positive change in your life?
17	When you are at [organisation], how much do you feel a sense of community?

Further information about the development of the YIF Feedback questions can be found in [YIF Insight Paper 1: A shared evaluation framework for open access youth provision.](#)

### 3.2.2 Quality measure

Quality of provision was measured using the Social and Emotional Learning Programme Quality Assessment (SEL-PQA). The SEL-PQA is an assessment tool that, at the time of the YIF learning project, contained 70 ‘items’, each of which focuses on a specific element of observable practice when working with young people. It is based on the Quality Pyramid (Figure 3) that comprises 18 scales, which group into four overarching domains: safe space, supportive environment, interaction, and engagement. The [latest version of the SEL-PQA](#) has been refined based on piloting work in the UK and now contains 41 items that relate to 10 scales.

The YIF grant holders conducted a peer observation of their provision, spanning multiple sessions and staff members, taking detailed and objective notes of what they observed. Team members then met to determine a score (high=5, medium=3, or low=1) for their provision against the items in the SEL-PQA tool and to agree the supporting evidence. These scores were entered into ‘Scores Reporter’, an online platform hosted by the [David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality](#), the developers of the SEL-PQA.

You can read more about the quality process in [YIF Insight Paper 1: A shared evaluation framework for open access youth provision](#)

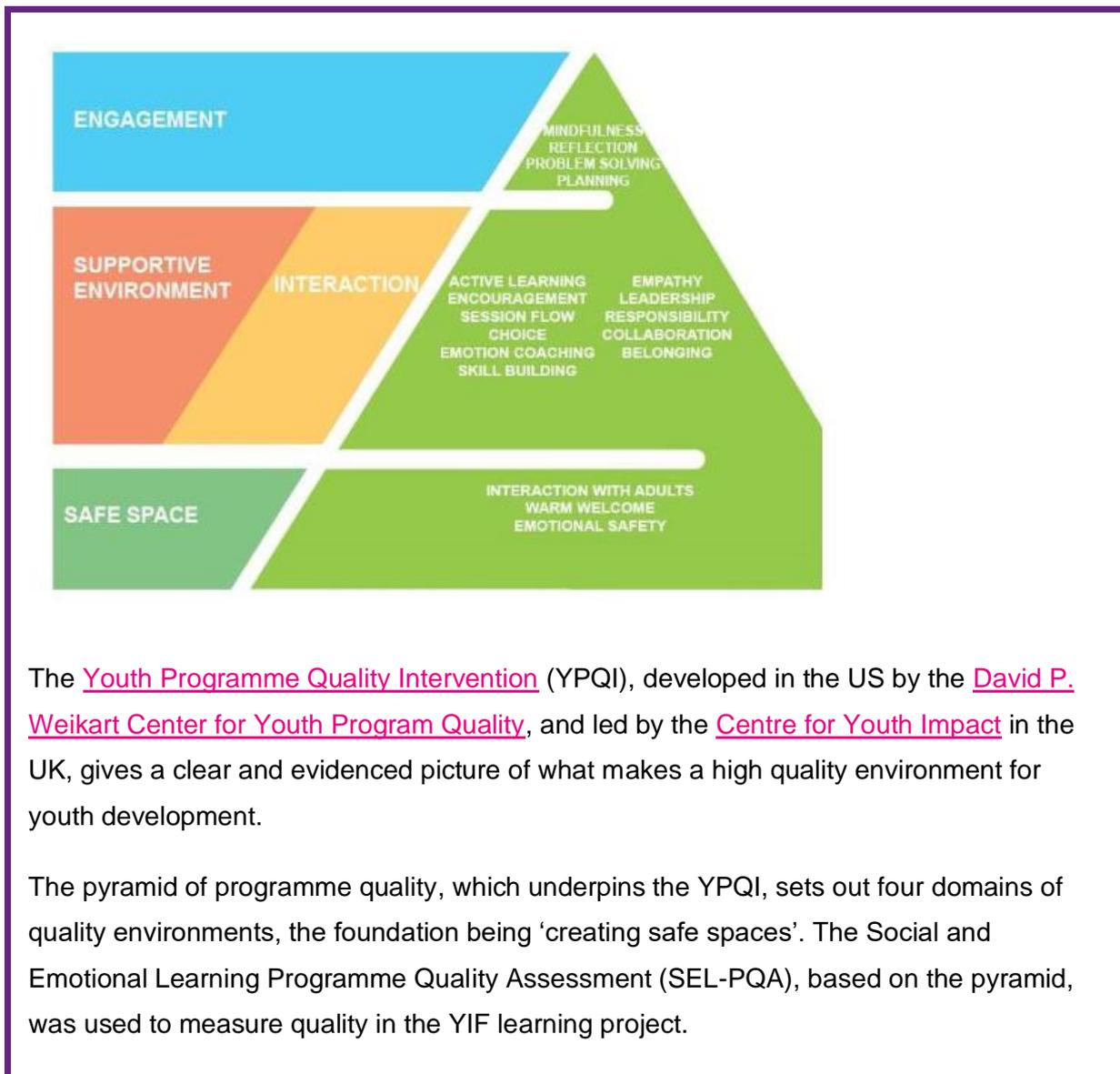
### 3.2.3 Outcomes measure

Outcomes data were collected through a repeated survey (see Table 3) measuring change over time in the intermediate outcomes identified in the YIF theory of change. For young people who were already attending YIF provision, this was intended to be collected at baseline with a follow-up survey after six months.<sup>2</sup> There was an additional survey for young people new to provision after three months. In reality, data was collected at varying intervals,

<sup>2</sup> For young people already attending the YIF provision, the baseline is the first questionnaire completed. It is not necessarily a baseline relative to registration.

but only data collected at baseline with three and/or six-month follow up is included in the impact analysis. This is because the intervals between questionnaires needed to be approximately the same as the data collection intervals for the comparison group used in the analysis.

Figure 3: The Programme Quality Assessment Pyramid



The [Youth Programme Quality Intervention](#) (YPQI), developed in the US by the [David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality](#), and led by the [Centre for Youth Impact](#) in the UK, gives a clear and evidenced picture of what makes a high quality environment for youth development.

The pyramid of programme quality, which underpins the YPQI, sets out four domains of quality environments, the foundation being 'creating safe spaces'. The Social and Emotional Learning Programme Quality Assessment (SEL-PQA), based on the pyramid, was used to measure quality in the YIF learning project.

[The YIF outcomes framework](#) was developed primarily with YIF grant holders in mind, but it also closely aligns with the Centre for Youth Impact's Outcomes Framework ([A Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.0](#)), which was developed in collaboration with its regional networks and with the support of the Local Government Association (LGA). The YIF outcomes framework aimed to be relevant and applicable to other open access providers.

The outcomes measure was developed through consultation and pilot testing with grant holders (see [Insight Paper 3](#)). The questions were taken or adapted from freely available, fully standardised outcomes tools where available. Table 3 show the outcomes survey questions and their source.

Table 3: Outcomes questions and source

Domains	Outcomes questions	Response Options	Source
Self-confidence and personal locus of control <sup>3</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am confident that I have the ability to succeed in anything I want to do</li> <li>I can handle things no matter what happens</li> <li>My life is mostly controlled by external things<sup>4</sup></li> <li>My own efforts and actions are what determine my future</li> </ul>	1 (False/not like me) to 8 (True / like me)	Adapted from ROPELOC (Review of Personal Effectiveness and Locus of Control)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have a lot to be proud of</li> </ul>	1=Very True 2=Partly True 3=Not True at all	NPC well-being (tool available on request from info@thinknpc)
Leadership	How confident do you feel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being the leader of a team</li> </ul>	1= Very confident 2= Confident 3= Not sure 4= Somewhat confident 5= Not at all confident	Adapted from the <a href="#">Personal Development Scale (NCS)</a>
Social skills	How confident do you feel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having a go at things that are new to me</li> <li>Working with other people in a team</li> <li>Meeting new people</li> <li>Dealing with conflict between friends</li> <li>Being in large groups of people</li> </ul>	1= Very confident 2= Confident 3= Not sure 4= Somewhat confident 5= Not at all confident	Adapted from the <a href="#">Personal Development Scale (NCS)</a>
Self-regulation	How confident do you feel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting things done on time</li> </ul>	1= Very confident 2= Confident 3= Not sure 4= Somewhat confident	Adapted from the <a href="#">Personal Development Scale (NCS)</a>

<sup>3</sup> Locus of control is defined as 'the tendency to take responsibility for self-actions and successes'

<sup>4</sup> This is a reverse scored item and has been dropped from the impact analysis as the data suggested that young people misinterpreted the coding for this negatively worded question.

		5= Not at all confident	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can stay calm in stressful situations</li> </ul>	1 (False/not like me) to 8 (True / like me)	<a href="#">Life Effectiveness Questionnaire</a>
Communication and self-expression	<p>How confident do you feel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Putting forward my ideas</li> <li>Explaining my ideas clearly</li> <li>Standing up for myself without putting others down</li> </ul>	<p>1= Very confident                  2= Confident                  3= Not sure                  4= Somewhat confident                  5= Not at all confident</p>	Adapted from the <a href="#">Personal Development Scale (NCS)</a>
Social connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have family and friends who help me feel safe, secure and happy</li> <li>There is someone I trust who I would turn to for advice if I were having problems</li> <li>There is no one I feel close to</li> </ul>	<p>1= Very True                  2= Partly True                  3= Not True at all</p>	<a href="#">Millennium cohort study</a>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How often do you feel lonely?</li> </ul>	<p>1= Often/always                  2= Some of the time                  3= Occasionally                  4= Hardly ever                  5= Never</p>	<a href="#">ONS</a> recommended loneliness questions
Happiness and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How happy are you with your life as a whole?</li> </ul>	<p>0-10 response scale                  0 = Very unhappy                  5 = Not happy or unhappy                  10 = Very happy</p>	<a href="#">Good childhood index</a>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I've been feeling optimistic (positive) about the future</li> <li>I've been feeling useful</li> <li>I've been feeling relaxed</li> <li>I've been dealing with problems well</li> <li>I've been thinking clearly</li> <li>I've been feeling close to other people</li> <li>I've been able to make my own mind up about things</li> </ul>	<p>1= None of the time                  2= Rarely                  3= Some of the time                  4= Often                  5= All of the time</p>	<a href="#">SWEMWBS</a>

## 4. What we learnt: review and recommendations for future measurement

### 4.1 Theory of change review

Using results from the [YIF shared evaluation](#) and the YIF qualitative [process evaluation](#), alongside insights from '[A Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.0](#)' and '[A Narrative Review of the Impact of Open Access Youth Work \(Hill, 2020\)](#)', the YIF learning team have produced an [updated theory of change for open access youth provision](#) (see Figure 4). Our Advisory Group of grant holders has reviewed this new version.

Overall, we found that the original YIF shared theory of change was generally fit for purpose, but four main revisions have been made in response to what we learnt:

#### 1. Including activities, mechanisms and outcomes that are focused *outside* of the youth provision setting

The updated theory of change pays greater attention to the role of youth provision in the wider context of young people's lives, including families, community and broader society. For example, in our [YIF process evaluation](#), grant holders frequently described how they build relationships with the wider community so that activities are perceived as safe, inclusive, appealing and reliable. This wasn't explicitly described in the original theory of change. Furthermore, youth organisations fundamentally support young people to engage with and make a positive contribution to their communities.

#### 2. Refining the activity descriptions

Activities will vary from organisation to organisation, so we've attempted to capture the key characteristics representing the breadth of activities offered through open access youth provision. To do this, as part of the YIF learning project, we developed a set of six paired characteristics to represent key features of activities. Provision can be either detached or building based; group or individual; targeted or universal; drop-

in or fixed; time-limited or open-ended; and unstructured or structured (see [theory of change user guide](#) for further details).

### 3. Expanding the mechanisms of change

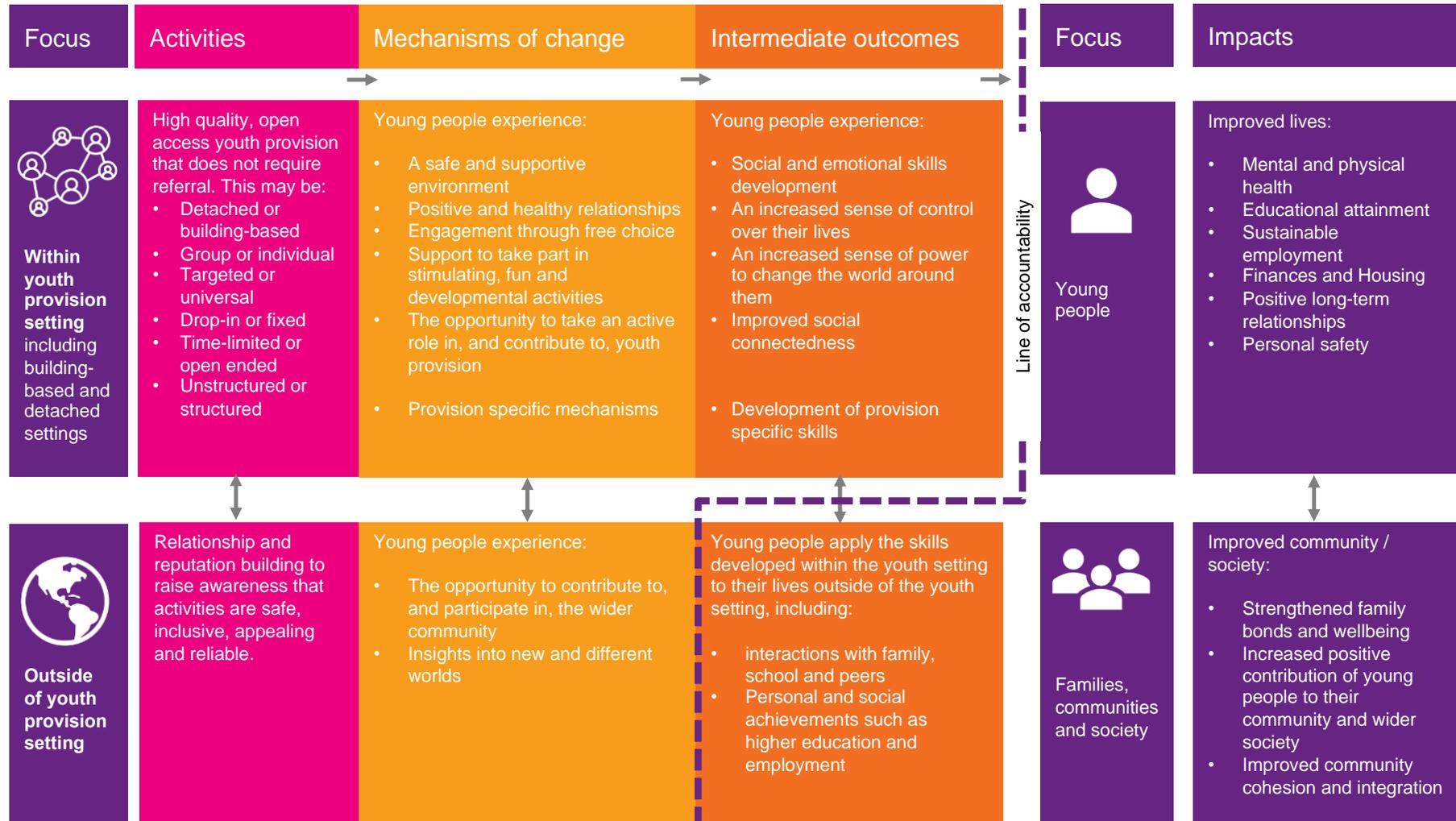
Mechanisms of change are a relatively new development in theories of change. They describe *how* activities are expected to lead or contribute to intended outcomes, including how activities are experienced (in this case by young people) that will make them more or less effective. Grant holders found the process of thinking about mechanisms of change useful as it helped them identify and interrogate the processes through which their activities contribute to changes in young people's lives. In doing so, YIF grant holders were able to focus on the quality of provision and improvements in service design and delivery. Figure 4 and the [theory of change user guide](#) present an extended set of mechanisms identified through the review.

### 4. Refining the intermediate outcomes

The original co-design process identified a wide range of 'intermediate' outcomes that young people may experience as a result of taking part in open access youth provision. On the whole, these can be classed as social and emotional learning (SEL) skills – the essential, transferable skills, such as empathy, that support young people to make healthy transitions, form strong relationships and live fulfilled lives. There are many frameworks of SEL skills, often using different language to describe the same thing, which can be unhelpful when trying to gain a common understanding. To avoid this, we have used a core set of SEL outcomes that map across to the main frameworks used in the youth sector, taken from the [Centre for Youth Impact's Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.0](#).

As noted above, the updated theory of change also recognises that *young people develop SEL skills when they engage with high-quality provision*. Over time, they can *apply* these skills to other parts of their lives, such as interactions with family, school and peers. This *transfer of skills* contributes to longer-term impacts, such as improved educational attainment, securing and progressing in 'good work', and positive health and well-being.

Figure 4: A shared theory of change for open access youth provision



## 4.2 Review of measures and data collection

The measures identified and developed for use in the YIF learning project (outlined in section 3) were reviewed following completion of the data collection process in Summer 2020. This section summarises what we've learnt about the measures, based on our experience of collecting and working with the data, alongside feedback from 31 grant holders who were interviewed as part of the YIF learning project.

### 4.2.1 Beneficiary and engagement data

Generally, grant holders found this straightforward as they already collected this data. It appears that challenges were mainly related to recording and reporting the data. Some participants also discussed challenges with collecting demographic data as a result of young people not wanting to disclose information or the questionnaire response options not feeling representative to young people.

We recommend that:

Researchers and/or youth organisations work with young people to develop more sensitive, appropriate and reflective ways of collecting demographic (beneficiary) data, especially related to ethnicity and gender.

### 4.2.2 Feedback

Participants generally felt that the feedback data collection process was simple and very helpful. One participant described it as being most immediately useful to youth workers because it offered clear and swift metrics on where they could improve practice with and for young people. They described how user feedback helped them identify gaps and areas for improvement and where they were doing the right things. Implementing changes and improvements in response to user feedback was described as having had a positive impact on young people.

Participants also found it useful to compare user feedback across their different settings and activities and would have liked the opportunity to compare their user feedback data with the wider cohort. This cohort level dataset was not available for participants to view during the two-year YIF data collection period. However, a comparative dataset for the YIF cohort is now available via the [YIF open access data dashboard](#). Organisations made use of the flexible ways in which the data could be collected (e.g. throwing balls into buckets to represent answers to the feedback questions) to make it more engaging for young people, and a small number felt the wording of questions could have been simplified. The number of

responses received for each feedback question is shown in Table 4, which indicates the questions that were asked most (and least) frequently by grant holders.

Table 4: Number of times feedback questions were used by grant holders

Item	Count
<b>Theme: Safe and supportive environment</b>	
How much do you trust the staff	3395
How safe do you feel	3240
To what extent do you receive the support you need	2981
How much do you feel a sense of community	2148
How much do you feel valued as an individual	1899
How respected do you feel	1764
How included do you feel	1540
How much do you feel the staff trust you	997
<b>Quality and value of provision</b>	
To what extent do you think the services are good quality	2241
How much do you value the organisation	1232
To what extent do you feel it is worth your time and effort	987
<b>Stimulating, positively challenging and fun activities</b>	
How much do you feel a sense of purpose and achievement	3525
How much do you enjoy your time	2878
How much do you feel positively challenged by the activities	1679
<b>Empowerment and voice</b>	
How much do you influence how the services are run	2712
How empowered do you feel to make a positive change in your life	1792
How likely will changes be made as a result of your feedback	683

Based on the grant holder feedback and our experience working with the data, we make the following recommendations related to the collection of feedback from young people.

1. Providers of open access youth provision should continue to use feedback questions to collect systematic data from young people about their experiences. This data is

relatively easy to collect, offers young people regular and routine opportunities to share their views, and the findings are relevant and actionable.

2. We recommend an updated feedback question bank (Appendix B), which is aligned with the mechanisms of change set out in the revised theory of change (see Figure 4). We also suggest using a 5-point response scale as we believe this will enable greater insight into the variation that exists in young people's experiences. To ensure the response scale is appropriate for all questions, we have rephrased the questions into a set of statements that can be rated by young people on a 5-point agreement scale.
3. When planning a user feedback exercise with young people, organisations should refer to the 'feedback question bank' and choose those that are of most interest or most relevant to their work. We recommend that the wording of these questions is *not* adapted so that data can be compared.
4. There is no set format for collecting user feedback, and organisations should consider whether a standard questionnaire is the best method for collecting data or using more interactive methods. It is important to ensure that young people are comfortable responding in a group where group methods are used (that is, where their individual responses may not be anonymous).
5. Organisations should collaborate to submit and collate aggregate user feedback data. This will help to develop a national picture and facilitate sector-led benchmarking. We recommend that this is supported by funders of open access youth provision and builds on the existing [YIF dashboard](#).
6. In administering the feedback questions, let young people know that they can ask for clarification if they do not understand any of the words used in the measure. This will actively improve the process, rather than compromise its validity.
7. Consider using the feedback questions alongside the Centre for Youth Impact's Youth Engagement Survey (YES), which is a measure of young people's mental engagement with provision. This is important because young people's mental engagement with provision is expected to promote growth in social and emotional skills (see Appendix A for further information).

### 4.2.3 Quality

The grant holders who participated in the quality process generally described it as time-intensive but high value. Some participants described how staff were initially sceptical or

resistant to the process but changed their minds after participating. Several participants felt they made the most changes to practice based on the quality process. Participants described how the SEL-PQA gave them a shared language for organisational discussions about their work. The experiences of individual grant holders are described below:

**Grant holder A** described the PQA as a ‘huge’ piece of work but felt they could still see the benefit through their staff. This included small things like welcoming young people by name when they enter the building. They found it was useful for youth workers to go through the organisational self-assessment process because they are much stronger youth workers as a result. This grant holder had funding to continue with some YIF activities and still use the quality approach.

**Grant holder B** described the quality process as ‘*the most valuable thing through the whole project*’. They were initially a bit sceptical because they were concerned it wouldn’t fit the context of youth provision in England and felt it was cumbersome. Staff found it daunting, but with the support of the learning team, they were able to break it down into ‘bite-sized chunks’ to think through what it meant. Staff were really engaged and took ownership of the process. Reflecting on the experience, this grant holder felt that the quality process had really helped staff to look at their practice and understand what they are offering.

**Grant holder C** is continuing to use the quality process, including peer observations. They described this as a complete turnaround from being the part of the YIF evaluation to which staff were most resistant. They intended to focus on specific aspects of the quality process to make it ‘*less time consuming*’. They also intended to introduce this across other services. Once the team grew more comfortable with observing a colleague, they were able to see how they could use it as a positive tool to celebrate the good things they do, but also to inform changes in how they worked with groups of young people. By observing not just the individuals but also the dynamics and the flow, it has enabled the grant holder to run better group sessions and to operate more smoothly.

In addition to the above, several participants felt the quality approach would have been more beneficial with an external ‘assessor’ and felt that self-evaluation had limitations. Outside of the YIF, as part of the [Youth Programme Quality Intervention](#), external assessment using the SEL-PQA is available. One grant holder was able to access this support and described how it was useful to get an outside perspective. Some organisations found that they didn’t have the capacity to participate in the quality process as part of the YIF learning project but were interested in doing so in the future. Suggested improvements included providing a condensed version of the PQA for smaller organisations and less frequent data collection to reduce the burden on staff.

**Grant holder D** decided not to take part in the quality process because their staff team was not ready, and they felt that feedback would be taken personally because of the culture within the team at the time. The grant holder described how you need a real team spirit and commitment to doing better, and they believe it is important that observations are not taken as individual criticism but as a wider issue of practice. They felt that some staff members would not respond well to individual observations.

Based on this feedback, and our experience of working with the quality process, we make the following recommendations:

1. Providers of open access youth provision should continue to use the SEL-PQA process to observe and measure the quality of youth provision. The Centre for Youth Impact has already worked with the developers to produce a shorter version of the SEL-PQA, and the content has been adapted to be more appropriate for the UK. The Centre is continuing to pilot the quality approach as part of a fuller programme of support ([Youth Programme Quality Intervention](#)), and findings will be reported in September 2021. To find out about using the SEL-PQA to measure the quality of provision, please contact [hello@youthimpact.uk](mailto:hello@youthimpact.uk).
2. Consider how to prepare organisations and staff for taking part – feedback clearly suggests that staff valued and benefited from the process once they were able to overcome initial reservations about being observed and felt clear about what was required. Staff teams where trust is low need support and development before taking part in the quality process.

#### 4.2.4 Outcomes

The collection of outcomes data was the most challenging of all the data collected in the YIF evaluation. We asked grant holders for their insights into the reasons for this, which included:

- a. **Not being prioritised by the sector** – some grant holders described a general lack of appetite from some organisations to *measure* outcomes despite there being a strong appetite for *data* that demonstrates impact. One grant holder described outcomes data collection as a weakness within the sector. They felt that organisations are very good at working with young people, engaging them and building relationships, but they are not so good at thinking about why they're doing it, what the outcomes are, and how to reflect on that. They described a lack of discipline across the sector in reflecting on what it is trying to achieve.

- b. **Needing greater clarity and direction** – some felt the learning team could have held grantees more accountable for the lack of outcomes data received and that making the process optional hampered data collection.
- c. **Appropriateness of outcomes data for the funded activities** – some grant holders felt that the YIF activities were too short-term to gather meaningful data. One grant holder described how outcomes data collection works better on a longer-term project. It should be noted that guidance explicitly stated that the outcomes measure should not be used with young people attending provision that is light-touch, fleeting or irregular. Some also felt that it is a challenge to collect this type of data when working with groups (compared to one-to-one work), particularly where attendance is open and can therefore be infrequent or one-off. One participant described how young people were not interested in how ‘recreational’ activities impacted on outcomes such as health and wellbeing.
- d. **Alignment with existing practices** – some organisations already collected their own outcomes data and felt it would be too much of a burden to collect more.
- e. **Quality of the outcomes survey tool** – some participants had questions about the relevance of the YIF outcomes survey tool, including how it fitted with their activities. Some found the language difficult and described the questionnaire as not very visually appealing, and some young people found it long and ‘boring’. They described a need for more fun and engaging ways of collecting outcomes data. Organisations had to help some young people to understand the questionnaire, particularly those in the younger age groups. Some participants questioned the reliability of outcome measures with young people and felt that responses were affected by day-to-day events and moods.

Grant holders made the following suggested improvements for the YIF outcomes measure:

- Use digital data collection methods – one participant described how they’ve found it easier to collect data since they’ve been doing more online work as they can send a link immediately after the session. An online link to the outcomes survey was available through the YIF learning project but was not used by many grant holders.
- Relationships with young people are important – help them to understand why you are collecting the data and what will be done with it.
- Identify and work with a small cohort of young people who you are likely to be able to track over time.

Building on these suggestions, our experiences of overseeing the YIF outcomes data collection process, and our wider experiences of collecting outcomes data on different youth project evaluations, the learning team make the following recommendations for future outcome measurement of open access youth provision:

1. Outcomes data should only be collected from young people attending youth provision when the following conditions are met:
  - Provision is *intentionally designed* to improve outcomes (e.g. SEL skills). If activities are designed to be purely recreational, it is not useful to attempt to measure outcomes for young people. A key indicator here is whether youth organisations feel they need to pause or adapt regular activities in order to ‘fit in’ the SEL elements.
  - The young people attending provision are experiencing sufficient exposure to provision to improve intended outcomes. For SEL skills, this is likely to be *at least* regular weekly attendance over a minimum of two months. Attending one-off activities will not lead to SEL development.
  - It is possible to practically track young people’s outcomes over time. Working with smaller subsets of young people (rather than an entire group or cohort) may make this more feasible.
2. Alternative ways of collecting outcomes data should be considered instead of, or alongside, using self-report outcome surveys. The Centre for Youth Impact is piloting the use of a suite of measures (see Appendix A), including the Adult Rating of Youth Behaviour (ARYB), an observational rating of SEL outcomes. This reduces the burden on young people to fill out questionnaires. Observation of behaviours is also more sensitive to change, and as the ARYB is based on observations of a pattern of behaviour over approximately two weeks, it is less affected by mood or situation.
3. For organisations still interested in using a self-report outcomes tool with young people attending open access youth provision, we suggest using the YIF outcomes measure shown in Table 3 but with the removal of the item ‘My life is mostly controlled by external things’, as the YIF data suggested that young people misinterpreted this negatively worded question. However, we believe the ARYB (outlined in point 2) is a more suitable measure and should be considered as an alternative.

## Appendix A: A summary of the Centre for Youth Impact Measures

Name	What it measures	Description
<b>Programme Quality Assessment (PQA)</b>	The quality of your provision based on observable staff behaviours that support youth engagement and development.	The PQA is a quality framework used for observing and scoring the quality of practice. It involves an assessment team of staff in youth organisations and/or trained external assessors observing and rating provision against a detailed list of staff behaviours that promote social and emotional learning as part of an assess-plan-improve cycle.
<b>Youth Engagement Survey (YES)</b>	Young people's engagement with your provision	The YES is a short self-report questionnaire that asks young people to rate 10 statements about the thoughts and feelings they experienced while participating in provision as a measure of mental engagement. This is important because young people's mental engagement with provision is expected to promote growth in social and emotional skills. The YES can be completed regularly by young people at the end of a provision session, and questionnaires can be completed anonymously.
<b>Adult Rating of Youth Behaviour (ARYB)</b>	Young people's social and emotional skills within the supportive environment of your provision.	The ARYB asks staff to rate young people's social and emotional skills-based on behaviours displayed within the environment of the youth provision settings, as observed during several provision sessions. This is a good indicator of how young people are likely to 'perform' in settings where they are well supported. It measures skills in six domains of SEL functioning: emotion management, empathy, teamwork, responsibility, initiative and problem-solving.
<b>Youth Report of SEL Skills (YRSS)</b>	Young people's social and emotional skills in their lives outside of your provision (e.g., with their family, in schools, and in employment).	The YRSS is a self-report questionnaire that asks young people about mental and behavioural aspects of their social and emotional skills in general (i.e. beyond the youth provision setting and into environments such as home and school). This also measures the six domains of SEL outlined above.

## Appendix B: Revised bank of feedback questions to be used with young people

The following table provides an updated set of items (i.e. statements that can be included in a survey) that can be used to gather feedback from young people about their experiences of youth provision. Data can be collected using a paper or online questionnaire as well as more interactive methods such as throwing balls into different buckets that represent the five possible responses. However, it is important to ensure that young people are comfortable responding in a group where group methods are used. The item bank is intended to be used as a flexible set of items from which you can select those that are of most interest and most relevant to your work. We also recommend using these questions alongside the Centre for Youth Impact's Youth Engagement Survey (YES - see Appendix A), which is a measure of mental engagement. This is important because young people's mental engagement with provision is expected to promote growth in social and emotional skills.

We recommend including demographic questions (e.g. age, ethnicity and gender) where data collection is anonymous. This will help you understand how different young people are experiencing your provision.

All statements are scored on the following response scale: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree. Young people should be asked to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the statements.

Mechanism of change	Feedback items
<b>Inside of youth provision</b>	
A safe and supportive environment	I feel safe whilst at [organisation] I receive the support I need from [organisation] I feel included whilst at [organisation] I feel a sense of community when I'm at [organisation]
Positive and healthy relationships	I trust the staff and volunteers at [organisation] I feel respected whilst at [organisation] I feel valued as an individual whilst at [organisation] I feel the staff and volunteers at [organisation] trust me
Engagement through free choice	I come to [organisation] because I want to I choose how I spend my time when I'm at [organisation]
Support to take part in stimulating, fun and developmental activities	I feel a sense of purpose and achievement through the activities at [organisation] I feel positively challenged by the activities at [organisation] I enjoy my time at [organisation]
The opportunity to take an active role in, and contribute to, youth provision	I influence how the services are run at [organisation] I influence what activities are on offer at [organisation] [organisation] will make changes as a result of my feedback
Provision specific mechanisms	NA – added by individual organisations
<b>Outside of youth provision</b>	
The opportunity to contribute to, and participate in, the wider community	[organisation] helps me to get involved with my local community [organisation] helps me to make a positive difference to my local community
Insights into new and different worlds	[organisation] introduces me to new and different ideas I've tried new and different things because of [organisation] I meet people who are different to me because of [organisation]
<b>Overall views about quality and value of provision</b>	
NA	I value [organisation] I feel it is worth my time and effort to come to [organisation] I think the services I receive from [organisation] are good quality?
NA	Please use the space below to tell us anything else you'd like us to know about your experiences of [organisation] (open text question).