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# Youth Work in Schools: an Investigation of Youth Work, as a Process of Informal Learning, in Formal Settings

by Dr Tony Morgan, Pat Morgan and Brian O'Kelly

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**YOUTH WORK IN SCHOOLS:  
An investigation of youth work, as a process of informal  
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## Abstract.

In the *Review of Public Administration in NI* (2005) document, it is emphasised,

“...within the Department of Education’s vision for education, youth services play a key role in connecting formal and informal learning and contributing to the development of coherent pathways to learning for all young people” (p89).

Expectations are changing about the nature of learning for those young people perceived as either marginalised or disengaged within the formal educational sector. With the expected development of an extended curriculum leading to an ‘extended schools’ programme there appears to be a movement that involves more emphasis on student-led learning. This research report suggests **that if schools need to expand their remit from a subject-led curriculum to a more student/learner-led curriculum youth workers are well placed as effective partners.** For many years youth workers have been involved directly or indirectly with schools in terms of delivering programmes that complement and supplement the curriculum. As young people become disengaged or, as this study suggests, often become ‘quietly- disengaged’ then the ‘added-value’ of this type of work needs to be given increased recognition.

There is a positive response from young people, principals and teachers to youth work practice. Young people were able to differentiate between youth workers and teachers in terms of learning and interventions.

The use of group work and the building of relationships are viewed as central to effective youth work practice. The nature of this relationship with young people was explored and highlights **the need to understand the difference between youth worker and teacher relationships with pupils; particularly those deemed to be disengaged.**

In order to draw some comparisons the research investigated the **Youthreach** programme in the Republic of Ireland which offers a ‘parallel’ educational experience for marginalised youth. One of the advantages of this programme was that it has **evolved over a long-term period as opposed to short-term funding-led approaches in Northern Ireland.** An interesting new development in Youthreach is the use of a ‘profiling web’ that not only monitors the needs of young people but guides the interventions used throughout their involvement in the programme. The profiling web is a structured mechanism that facilitates the tangible development of young people in three areas of their lives, i.e. personal development, practical factors and education. There are lessons to be learnt from this approach such as a quality assurance process involving inspectorate visits and its independence from schools while continuing to be perceived as an integral part of mainstream provision.

Programmes involving youth work or informal inputs into schools are invariably **viewed by young people as ‘visiting adults’ coming into the schools.** The findings suggest that most young people and some teachers do not differentiate between youth workers and these ‘visiting adults’. This suggests that **some informal educational inputs may not need to be carried out by youth workers.**

A lack of strategic planning has led most youth work providers to offer programmes that are short-term and influenced by factors such as funding. Schools, on the other hand, need to know in advance about the length of the programme and how it will affect their timetable.

Some schools view inputs from youth workers as complementing the subject-led curriculum leading to increased participation and educational attainment. These schools may need to discuss issues such as literacy problems in order to maximise the potential of young people, especially if there is accreditation associated with personal development programmes.

Other schools view the input from youth workers as supplementing aspects of the curriculum which they feel can be delivered more effectively by 'experts' from the community.

For those interested in informal educational approaches to learning this study offers a valuable insight into two disparate but related worlds. Young people who are disengaged from learning can be re-engaged through more subtle and youth work orientated approaches using group work and relationship building as fundamental 'corner-stone' principles. Youth workers and teachers, together, can increase the learning potential of the disengaged and 'quietly-disengaged' by developing partnerships outside the school, with family, the community and other providers. Youth workers can make demands on the school as a conduit between the family and community on behalf of young people and by increasing their understanding of 'expected outcomes' from their interventions.

One interesting point worth noting is the absence of any mention of ICT as a vehicle for engaging disaffected youth.

Readers will get an insight into the potential of youth work in schools and issues associated with interventions for marginalised youth both inside and outside the formal structure. While the research findings are positive about the relationship between the two worlds engaged in the development of marginalised youth there are unintended consequences of bringing youth work into the domain of the formal school system. For example, the nature of 'relationships' with young people, the issues of measuring outcomes for traditional youth work, the changing role of youth work, the power relationship between young people and adults in the context of the school, short-term interventions, issues associated with 'time' and 'timetabling' and the nature of personal and social development in a school setting. However, there is no doubt that new practice involving informal approaches to learning, through **youth work in schools, has something to offer young people in terms of maximising their learning potential.**

## INTRODUCTION.

The fundamental focus of this research is on the interface between informal learning and formal settings. Recent 'experiments' involving youth workers working with those young people who are having difficulty 'fitting' into the education system suggests that this 'informal' approach to learning has a role in 'education'. Research by Harland, Morgan and Muldoon (2005) for the Department of Education [The Nature of Youth Work in Northern Ireland: Purpose, Contribution and Challenges], recommended that there should be further research and discussion about the role, value, purpose and intended outcomes of youth work in schools. The research further suggested that there was tension between informal and formal approaches to learning, assessment and personal development and that this factor should be taken into consideration when **planning and delivering youth work in the school environment. This would involve early discussion to determine the precise role and function of the youth worker and subsequent programming in the context of a formal educational establishment. Harland et al (2005), go on to say that the unique role of the youth worker and the voluntary nature of a young person's participation should not be compromised when working in co-operation with other professions.**

Measurement within youth work, while problematic in itself is equally difficult to assess within a formal context as it is assumed to have the same potential as the common curriculum with prescribed outcomes. The need is to measure pupil's personal development and self-esteem and to look at how the effectiveness of schools and various alternative educational approaches can be assessed so that the impact and outcomes from these interventions can be measured, or at least understood in terms of a young persons development. The concept of 'soft outcomes', often linked to informal education, are an important aspect of the learning process for many 'marginalised' young people but are deemed to have little or no currency in the formal credential school system. The concept of assessment, while crucial in itself, needs to be complementary with examinations or awards. Furthermore, it may mean placing informal learning along a continuum of 'lifelong' learning so that young people see progression.

Certain schools are now deemed to be domains that can facilitate not only the 'academic' development of young people but other less obvious aspects of their lives, for example, social and personal development. One might add spiritual to many schools in Northern Ireland. The school, or more specifically, Secondary schools have the captive audience that would normally be difficult to access by professionals. The school setting offers those working with vulnerable young people **a captive audience**. Teachers assess, both consciously (through predefined tests) and unconsciously (by understanding the background of some students) **the needs of young people**. However, as indicated, this suggests a move from academic needs, such as curriculum based subjects including literacy and numeracy, to more individualistic or personal needs. The school now appears to deal with family issues, peer problems, social issues and aspects of the community deemed detrimental to the growth of young people. Some schools have student support staff, others have youth wings and youth tutors, others bring in youth workers for sessions, while others bring in outside agencies to deliver topics such as suicide



awareness, car crime, drugs awareness and health promotion. **Some agencies ‘impose’ themselves on the schools** because they believe they have something to offer the young people. Whatever the reason for ‘youth work’ in schools there is no doubt that it is happening and that it is needed.

This research project investigates the thinking behind youth work in schools from a youth work perspective and a school perspective. It discusses theoretical concepts so that youth work can be understood in a formal context. Youth workers, teachers in relevant schools and young people exposed to this intervention were interviewed. The findings were analysed and discussed and the project concludes with a set of recommendations.

# YOUTH WORK IN SCHOOLS

## SECTION 1.

### Background.

While the focus of this research project is on the use of youth work practices in schools it raises some interesting supplementary questions. These questions relate not only to the nature of youth work in schools but to fundamental issues about two domains that are influential on young people, i.e. ‘youth work’ and ‘schools’. Bringing together these two worlds has invariably created an additional third way of viewing work with young people, i.e. **‘youth working in schools’** or **‘the use of informal learning processes in the formal sector’**. The point is that an investigation into youth work in schools has to **explain what youth work is, why it is needed in schools and what happens when they converge** to create a new dynamic or domain in which learning takes place.

The research also raised the issue of whether there is a strategic movement or a ‘drift’ within youth work towards working with young people in places youth workers normally do not access, i.e. the school setting. The answer to this question raises many issues for the youth work profession in terms of autonomy and the delivery of a professional service. For example, what aspects of youth work should take place in schools and what are the ‘unintended consequences’ for youth work principles and practices? Irrespective of the reasons for youth workers going into schools it is worth considering some of the influences shaping this movement.

### Current thinking.

In the document, **Strategy for the Delivery of Youth Work in Northern Ireland 2005-2008. Department of Education**, it states (page 23) that there are important changes taking place within the **formal education sector**, both within the curriculum and in new and planned initiatives, such as

- Citizenship
- Communities in schools
- EOTAS (Education other than at school)
- Mentoring and Peer Education
- Counselling in Schools
- After-schools clubs
- Educational Action Zones
- Extended Schools
- Young Apprenticeships
- Progress File Achievement Planner
- Employability Initiative.

The strategy goes on to say,

“These are important developments in relation to the personal and social development of young people, which recognise the value of using a youth work methodology, and that need to be reflected in the Youth Work Strategy.”

The strategy suggests that there is a requirement to target social need and that,

“...the youth service recognises the important contribution of youth work with some of the most disadvantaged young people in Northern Ireland, many of whom have become, or may become, **disaffected with formal education and authority in general**. The youth service therefore recognises the importance of targeting resources to young people who have less access to resources and opportunities than other young people...”

In the Strategy document (page 5) under values, it states,

**“Youth work is a vital non-formal educational process of personal and social development.....”**

This is a clear indicator that youth work is perceived as using a non-formal approach to development. It does of course use informal processes in terms of youth development but this concept causes problems when measurement is needed. The need to measure outcomes within the formal sector is made easier through examinations and awards. The informal or non-formal approach to learning has difficulty with articulating clearly understood outcomes. However, as the research will show, there are programmes that incorporate social and personal development as part of a curriculum, for example, COPE (Certificate of Personal Effectiveness). Are non-formal approaches to development (or should it be *learning*, author’s italics) more appropriate in the school setting or in the traditional youth work setting? Whatever the answer, there appears to be an emerging understanding that youth workers or youth work practice can be used in the school setting. For example, the strategy document (page 6) continues,

“The youth service has an impressive history of providing a wide range of stimulating personal and social development programmes for young people in N. I. which **complement the work of the formal education sector...**”

This suggests a twin track approach rather than being subsumed by formal education.

It goes on to state (Page 6), under collaborative working, the need to,

“Develop and implement a strategy for the development of youth work practice within the formal education sector (among other domains).”

While it is obvious that youth work in the future may be expected to offer a service to the formal sector, other aspirations contained in the Strategy document may be more problematic. **How then do youth providers prioritise professional intervention?**

### **Developing youth work as an educational process.**

One question asked by youth workers (Harland et al 2005) is whether it is necessary to measure the outcomes from youth work, or indeed, can they be measured in any meaningful way? This is an important point for youth work in schools as it is based on the idea that if schools measure development through curriculum then one can assume youth workers can also measure their own outcomes. Youth work is relationship focused while schooling is curriculum-driven. A comment that reflects the difficulty with seeing youth work and teaching in schools as one and the same thing. ([www.infed.org/youthwork/b-ywscho.htm](http://www.infed.org/youthwork/b-ywscho.htm)). This web site suggests that the notion of a 'youth service' as an arm of education fails to address the relationship of youth work to schooling and further education. However, it proceeds to say that there are new forms of practice emerging in youth work that 'give some ground for optimism' (ibid. p1). Smith (2005:4) states that,

“The Service of Youth, however much politicians have asserted to the contrary, has never been an integral part of the publicly provided system of education, and never can be as long as its operation is limited to the leisure hours of youth.”

A comment that suggests that **the school may be an environment that allows youth workers to work with youth other than in their leisure time**. Smith (2005:4) says that due to the more powerful demands from schools, at a time of financial cutbacks, it may leave youth work on the margins leading to it drifting apart from schools.

Davies, as far back as 1986, says,

“The Fairbairn sub-committee.....pressed for more youth wings on schools and more community use of these; for more teacher-youth tutor posts and for common approaches, techniques and activities which, when listed, made the proposed youth club programme seem indistinguishable from a progressive school or college curriculum. It was logical, therefore, for the sub-committee to conclude that the 'concept of youth service as a separate system should be allowed to atrophy.”

[www.infed.org/youthwork/b-ywscho.htm](http://www.infed.org/youthwork/b-ywscho.htm)

While there is a recognition of 'some fascinating developments' that were not documented the general conclusion was that there was a movement away from school-based youth work to working within schools. For example, detached work around corridors, cafeterias, common rooms and play areas; work with various interest groups; home work and study support clubs; holiday and leisure provision; work with young people experiencing difficulties around schooling and pastoral and personal support (ibid.

p6). Suffice to say that youth work in schools is not a new way of working for youth workers.

The National Youth Agency (NYA) position paper on youth work within the Extended Services/Schools marketplace states that they,

“...welcome the move towards **a more holistic approach to education** which addresses the learning needs of all pupils and contributes to community cohesion....”

([www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk)).

NYA state that providers can offer the experience of their staff to:

- Identify the needs of young people in ways that can complement the hard statistical data accumulated by other needs assessment methods;
- Facilitate participation work that delivers the young people’s voice.

They add,

“Youth service skills will be central to ensuring that young people’s voices are heard in shaping both the demand and the supply side of provision.”

While one might argue about what the youth service has been doing to date the next statement is more telling,

“...it is a competitive marketplace and commissioners will be asking: ‘Who is best placed to deliver the various elements of the core offer’.”

(Extended schools and youth work – briefing in [www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk)).

The core offer has arisen out of Every Child Matters (ECM). This ECM agenda has five key outcomes:

1. Being healthy;
2. Staying safe;
3. Enjoying and achieving;
4. Making a positive contribution;
5. Economic well-being.

Although not a requirement in Northern Ireland the consequence of this type of thinking has major ramifications if NYA are to be believed. They state,

“For schools the five outcomes are built into the latest **Ofsted** inspection framework (Ofsted 2005), and guide schools’ **Self Evaluation Forms (SEFs)**. *It would now be possible for a school to achieve good academic results, only to fail its inspection if it did not also deliver on Every Child Matters issues.*”

NYA view youth work in schools and the guiding principles of ECM as offering youth work, as a process of informal education, a great opportunity,

“...youth work deals with the whole young person **promoting emotional literacy** and anti-oppressive practice....youth work skills will be central to engaging with young people, to the personal, emotional and social development of young people.”

(Extended Schools and Youth Work – briefing in [www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk)).

### **The Northern Ireland context.**

With the Review of Public Administration the youth service is positioning itself to deal with a changing society. The previous model operational in the rest of the U.K. (under the principles of Every Child Matters) may be an indication of the future. The outcomes and suggested practice outlined above is based on an understanding of exactly what the youth service can and should achieve in collaboration with schools and other providers. Interestingly, in the Strategy for the Delivery of Youth Work in Northern Ireland 2005-2008 there is a statement that may require some deconstruction. The mission of the youth service, among other things, should ensure,

“.....high quality youth work is inclusively and effectively delivered to facilitate the personal and social development of young people within a supportive public policy framework.....”

Sentiments that no doubt complement the Model of Effective Practice in terms of guiding principles. However, the statement does not end there, it goes on to state,

**“....Youth work may engage in all aspects of a young person’s development – personal, social, educational, political, cultural, spiritual, physical and vocational.”**

The question to be asked, given the nature of youth work in schools, is whether this is realistic in terms of resources and practice. How and in what way do youth workers decide on the prioritisation of these obviously important elements in young peoples’ lives? Does the inclusion of so many variables strengthen the aims of youth work or create ambiguity leading to a blurred focus? What aspects of these many faceted outcomes should youth workers in schools address?

### **Problems with Schooling.**

#### **Disengagement and dropping out of school.**

Is youth work practice in schools only about personal and social development? Is it an attempt for some schools (mainly secondary as opposed to grammar) to use lateral thinking to develop new approaches to teaching/learning/development that help reduce **the disengagement of the most vulnerable** young people from schooling? Is it also

about reducing the dropout mentality for some young people? While few young people dropout of schools in Northern Ireland there are many that mentally ‘switch-off’ school and, de facto, may disengage from the learning process.

For example, if we look at the number of young people leaving schools in N. I. without qualifications it becomes obvious that even if they do not drop out some leave without any or few qualifications:

**Young people leaving school with no GCSEs** (Includes those who undertook no GCSE examination or obtained no graded results but who obtained other qualifications such as RSA, Pitman, City and Guilds etc.

| <b>2000/01</b>   | <b>2001/02</b>   | <b>2003/04</b>   |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>1462 5.8%</b> | <b>1446 5.8%</b> | <b>1439 5.6%</b> |

**No Formal Qualifications** (Includes only those with no qualification of any kind)

| <b>2000/01</b>   | <b>2001/02</b>   | <b>2003/04</b>   |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>1220 4.8%</b> | <b>1308 5.2%</b> | <b>1268 4.9%</b> |

(Source: NISRA. 2006. [N. B. No figures available for 2002/03])

The above figures are used to illustrate that even those who do not dropout from school may eventually leave with few if any formal qualifications. In the US research has concentrated on the concept of dropout and what it means, not only for the individual but for the economy.

Peck et al (1987) state,

“Increasingly, it is being recognised that the issues of dropping out and dropout prevention cannot be separated from issues affecting our total economic and social structure. These issues include poverty, unemployment, discrimination, the role of the family, social values, the welfare cycle, child abuse and drug abuse.”

For Peck et al the need to benefit from schooling is paramount for many ‘at risk’ young people. One may infer that the dropout rate is important but equally important are the qualifications that young people gain while at school.

The question to be asked is whether youth work in schools is about redressing the dropout rate (either physically or mentally) or something else?

Asche (1993) states,

- As the pool of dropouts continues to grow, employment opportunities for them are more limited, because today’s economy requires of the labour force increased literacy, more education, enhanced technological skills and lifelong learning.
- The rate of engagement in high-risk behaviours such as premature sexual activity, early pregnancy, delinquency, crime, violence, alcohol and drug

abuse and suicide has been found to be significantly higher among dropouts.

- Dropouts are more likely than other citizens to draw on welfare and other social programmes throughout their lives.
- Income differences between dropouts and other citizens can be expected to widen as the economy evolves.
- A growth of unskilled labourers in low wage jobs will increase the trend towards developing a large '**American**' **underclass** which some analysts argue threatens the continuing existence of a democratic way of life.

### **Other factors that influence participation in school.**

Although much of the research has taken place in the USA the trends in British society are similar. However, the responsibility does not lie exclusively at the door of the school system. Asche (1989) suggests that there are four domains in which young people can be put at risk:

1. School;
2. Student related;
3. Community;
4. Family.

The likelihood of a student **dropping out of school increases** as the combination of risk factors becomes more multifaceted, i.e. **they experience more than one risk factor** (Asche. 1989:10).

Are youth workers brought into schools to reduce the dropout rate or to create an environment that reduces the need to dropout? **What does this mean if the youth work in schools can not address community or family related categories of risk?**

In an article on the Regional Educational Laboratory web-site under 'School Improvement Research Series (SIRS): Research you can use, Woods (1995) gives the following categories that have been researched in relation to reducing the tendency to drop out of school:

- a. data collection and tracking of at-risk students and dropouts;
- b. group behavioural therapy;
- c. variables that are instructionally effective with students from low-income backgrounds;
- d. in-school factors that might influence dropout rates;
- e. collaborative efforts between schools and communities on dropout prevention programming;
- f. grading practices;
- g. parental involvement.

Asche (1989) says that the outcomes of these areas of interest to researchers include:



- h. reduced dropout rates/increased retention of dropout-prone students;
- i. behavioural changes leading to academic progress;
- j. identifying characteristics of dropouts;
- k. school-controllable factors influencing dropping out;
- l. variables that distinguish graduates from non-graduates (US context).

While not wanting to get into the minutiae of the above research there were some recurrent themes permeating the findings, for example, the use of experiential learning, learning content associated to the real world, the whole child, intensive individualised attention, mentoring, identification of problems at an early age, student centred teaching, to name a few.

Worth noting is Woods (1995) view on **ineffective practices** (which he says still exist). For example:

- *State mandated promotion policies* If standards and requirements are raised without support for school improvement and without personal attention to the varied populations of high-risk students and their specific learning requirements, the effect will be to push more young people out of school.
- *Ability grouping* Students' self-concepts suffer as a result of labelling them average or below. Placements in lower ability groups are associated with lower teacher expectations and reduced learning.
- *Early intervention without follow-up*
- *Basic skills teaching itself*
- *Work experiences and on-the-job training with no other interventions* There is a need for some kind of individual attention or mentoring as well.
- *Grafting* additional staff and programmes onto existing ineffective structures, e.g. extending the school day or adding more courses.
- *Increasing the number of attendance officers* to cut down on truancy.

Finally, Woods (1995) lists many programmes developed to counteract school dropouts. For example:

The Adopt-a-student programme;  
 Project Coffee;  
 The Alternative Schools Network;  
 State funded educational clinics;  
 City-as-School;  
 The Coca Cola valued youth programme;  
 The Lincoln Educational alternative programme;  
 Upward bound;  
 The New York City dropout prevention programme.

Recommendations from these programmes include the following:

- Establish state and local policies encouraging the development of new curricula and teaching strategies designed for diverse groups of at-risk students.

- Develop broad-based community partnerships aimed at serving at-risk youth.
- Select and train teachers who are interested in working with at-risk students.
- Recognise that there is no one solution to this problem; risk factors are interrelated. Provide a broad range of instructional programmes to accommodate students with different needs.
- Identify, target and monitor potential dropouts early in their school careers and continue to monitor their progress as they move through school.
- Enrol targeted potential dropouts in a planned programme of vocational and academic study.
- Use applied instructional strategies to teach basic competencies.
- Use an interdisciplinary team of vocational, academic and support personnel to plan and monitor curriculum and to provide extra instructional support to targeted students.
- Involve parents as parental involvement in programmes has produced effects on students' achievements ten times as large as that of socioeconomic status.
- Reassess the relevance of all educational programmes which should reflect students' current and longer-term social and economic interests.

(Source Woods 1995)

Although the above examples are ideological and practical developments relating to the USA, the authors feel that those involved in youth work in schools in Northern Ireland can learn from these experiences. The first lesson is that it is not a new phenomenon for young people to drop out of school or more importantly to stay in school with little to show at the end of 12 years or more. The question is whether there is a systematic strategy to deal with young people, not necessarily dropping out but who are not getting the most out of exposure to the school/educational system. One might go further and ask if some young people are disengaged from the school system or if they are disengaged from the process of learning after formal schooling? Being in a school, for some young people, seems an anathema, although a legal requirement. Are youth workers and other external services brought into schools to reduce dropouts, to supplement the curriculum, to complement the curriculum or to offer an alternative? Are outsiders brought into the school to change behaviour or make the young person compliant? Does all youth work, in schools, take place in the secondary not the Grammar schools? If so, is there a reason? Is youth work targeted mainly at youth at risk or marginal young people? Are marginalised or disengaged young people in school homogenous? In other words **how do youth workers and teachers decide who is in need of personal and social development and how is this linked or integrated into the rest of the young person's school-based learning experience?**

### **Categories of youth in schools.**

Following on from the above sections it appears clear that young people in schools are not a homogenous group. Given the differentiation through the Secondary and Grammar schools in Northern Ireland it might be assumed that a further

differentiation could be suggested. The researchers feel that the concept of youth needs to be deconstructed into more meaningful groupings of young people so that youth workers can specifically discuss with whom they are working. This is not to exclude any group of young people, however, it does suggest that in the main we cannot 'generalise' about the nature of the groups that youth workers are brought into schools to work with without some debate and discussion about their 'academic' potential. The following set of groupings are meant to stimulate further debate about different groupings of young people in schools and to avoid generalisations about academic potential. It also highlights possible different expectations about the outcome of school for certain young people.

Young people in schools in Northern Ireland **could be categorised** as:

Passing or not the 11+;

Going to Grammar School;

Going to Secondary School;

Going to a Comprehensive type school;

Staying in school to study for A Levels or other qualifications until 18 years of age;

Leaving with GCSEs or other qualifications at 16;

Leaving with no qualifications at 16;

Dropping out in last year(s) of schooling or attending sporadically;

Joining an EOTAS (Education other than at School) or similar programme;

Staying in school until 16 years of age but with behavioural issues;

In school with literacy issues;

In school with literacy issues but no behavioural issues;

In school but switched-off learning.

This crude categorisation is meant to stimulate debate and challenge the concept of understanding and dealing with young people in school as a homogenous group. Agreeing that it is worth consideration might allow youth workers to specifically design programmes for particular groups rather than working with those identified by the school.

## SECTION 2

### Understanding youth work as a model of practice.

#### Introduction.

**Irrespective of a ‘theoretical’ discussion it is important for this research project to have some form of underpinning model from which to measure or gauge the impact of youth work in schools. To this end Brendtro et al (1983) offers a useful tool for exploring youth work in schools.**

Brendtro et al (1983) offer youth work a template for understanding practice. They produced six tenets for working with youth at risk. This group of young people (however defined), are similar to the majority of those that youth workers are directly involved with, ‘in’ or ‘out’ of the school setting in Northern Ireland. The terminology may be different but the nature of work with these young people is the same. However defined there are processes, procedures or guiding principles that shape youth work practice. Brendtro et al suggest the following:

1. The relationship is primary;
2. Assessment is ecological;
3. Behaviour is holistic;
4. Teaching is humanistic;
5. Crisis is opportunity;
6. Practice is pragmatic.

Without going into detail it is interesting to analyse the significance of the first tenet for youth work practice. Most youth workers would agree that they need to **build a relationship with young people before they can carry out any effective interventions.** Brendtro et al (1983) state,

“The quality of human relationships is the most powerful determination of successful programmes for the education and treatment of troubled children; methodology is less important than relationships.”

If we agree that relationship building is important for work with vulnerable at risk young people we have to agree on the nature of this relationship. One question that might be asked is whether youth workers build a different relationship with young people than teachers do? If the answer is yes then youth work in schools may be assumed to be different from teaching in terms of the nature of the relationship between youth workers and young people, and teachers and young people. If we accept this basic principle then **the practice of youth work may be compromised in a school setting.**

The concept of assessment being ecological is important. Brendtro et al state,

“Behaviour must be understood as part of a child’s life-space, which includes the transaction between the child and adults, peers, task, and educational system.”

They go on to say that through ongoing assessment and communication with and about the child, one learns to know the person and the environment in all facets. They say that no behaviour is 'crazy' when one comes to appreciate the idiosyncratic rationale that produced it. A sentiment echoed by many youth workers who work with perceived marginal youth.

Another of Brendtro et al's tenets brings this difference to prominence in terms of teaching, i.e. teaching is humanistic. They say quite categorically,

“All learning takes place within the context of an interpersonal relationship with teachers. Behaviour is the verbal and nonverbal expression of the total person, and thus the person, not the expression, is the most important.”

Again we see that those charged with working with young people 'at risk' need to understand the process of humanistic teaching. Brendtro et al (1983) state that students need the opportunity to exercise choice if they are to learn responsibility and self-control. Schools are often structured to restrict self-direction and thereby distort the learning process (Brendtro et al., 1983:22). They state three major educational distortions that restrict flexibility and self-actualisation as:

- a. *Externally dictated academic tasks* that fail to recognise the child's needs, interests, or abilities, and thus lead to passive conformity or resistance;
- b. *Restrictive competition for grades and recognition*, which pits children against one another and limits positive reinforcement to a small number of 'superior' students; others are devalued. This situation fosters feelings of inferiority, envy, and distrust.
- c. *Focus on narrow academic products*, which leads to the regurgitation of specific facts in the absence of meaningful understanding.

According to Brendtro et al (1983) humanistic teaching must provide opportunities for exploration and accommodate a variety of styles and channels of learning. One might add, do youth workers and teachers understand the learning process that relate to their respective clients? However, the 'teaching' process is more than just a formal educational process, it is explicitly about learning and the ability to bring about learning. If this is correct then **what is the learning outcome or process associated with youth work as opposed to that of teachers in the formal school system?**

Brendtro et al (1983) says that teaching must be attuned to the affective dimension, i.e. the attitudes, values and feelings and that while academic skills can enhance self-esteem he does not favour a sterile, exclusively cognitive or skill-oriented educational experience for either normal or disturbed children. They state (1983:22),

“Cognitive and affective processes are in continuous interaction.....learning must be invested with feelings to give it interest, meaning and purpose.”

They say (1983:22),

*“...Positive feelings about the subject matter **enhance learning.**  
.....Positive feelings about the teacher **enhance learning.**  
.....Subjects that enhance self-esteem.....**are more easily learned.**”*  
[Fagen, Long and Stevens, 1975).

One might assume that youth workers entering a school will, in some way, be offering subjects that enhance self-esteem leading to an positive engagement from the young people in the ‘subject matter’ leading to enhance learning. The creation of positive feelings about the youth worker as teacher is something that will be worth exploring during this research. Whatever the outcome the relationship between the ‘teacher’ and the pupil appears to influence the learning outcome.

Finally Brendtro et al (1983) talk about ‘crisis is opportunity’ as a concept that may not sit well in many schools, for obvious reasons. But many youth workers are brought into schools for exactly this reason, i.e. to deal with certain crisis. Often youth workers will be given a group of disruptive or disillusioned youth to work with who often do not want to be in school irrespective of the statutory requirement. Brendtro et al (1983:23) say,

“Troubled children behave in immature and destructive ways during periods of stress. **Their behaviour can elicit corresponding problem behaviour in others, including the adult.** Thus aggressive children can create aggressive adults, withdrawn children can get others to ignore them, and immature behaviour in children can produce immature or angry responses from adults.”

They go on to say,

**“If properly managed,** conflict can be used productively to teach children new ways of understanding and coping effectively with stress. Crises are **excellent times for adults to teach and children to learn.**”

Youth work in this instance is about a process of learning. That means that youth workers view the young person as an individual who has individual needs different or similar to the person sitting beside him or her in school. The class is a group of individuals whereas the teacher may see them, or is forced to deal with them as a homogenous group, for the sake of teaching a prescribed curriculum. While one might not accept that young people can articulate or even understand themselves during the formative years, in terms of emotional development, they nevertheless need support and understanding. The role of the youth worker is to offer that support, more importantly to be available to intervene in the young person’s life when they need this support. Youth work has traditionally flourished in areas of disadvantage and is available to marginal youth. Moving this traditional ‘process-driven approach’ to support a ‘subject-based’ curriculum in schools is something that may need to be addressed by youth workers as they see their role changing. Some youth worker may believe that there are opportunities in schools for teachers to assist the personal growth of young people. Many teachers may infer that it is not possible to deal as effectively with crisis as they would like as they have a ‘curriculum’ to follow while others will say that the ‘pastoral care’ session is set up to deal with these issues. But, if Brendtro et al are correct, then the concept of ‘behaviour

being holistic' cannot be ignored. This means that young people's behaviour cannot be disconnected from their overall life world.

One is not arguing that teachers should be therapists or counsellors but many youth workers would see the six tenets outlined above as representing the basic principles of their practice. Youth workers **invest long periods of time on the relationship building process with youth**. Some, in fact, feel that this is the most important aspect of their work and without it the opportunity to create progressive learning experiences will not occur. The question is **how do these youth work principles fit the 'structured' school system?**

### **Youth workers as informal educators or teachers as formal educators.**

Rogers (2003:37) suggests that it is 'hopelessly unrealistic' to believe that teachers can relate as persons to their students. He says,

“...I have heard scientists at leading schools of science and scholars in leading universities arguing that it is absurd to try to encourage all students to be creative, we need hosts of mediocre technicians and workers, and if a few creative scientists and artists and leaders emerge, that will be enough.”

This cynical perspective of Rogers is an attempt to view schooling more realistically than idealistically. He is referring to the use of interpersonal relationships as a means of releasing potential (Rogers: 2003:37). This principle is central to youth workers who do not have the restraint of a prescribed curriculum. However, Rogers is much more forthright, stating,

“...unless we give strong positive attention to the human interpersonal side of our educational dilemma, our civilisation is on its way down the drain.”

While we might think that Rogers is being too dogmatic about educational potential he has a simple message, a move from 'teaching' to 'learning' and the conditions that facilitate learning. He says (2003:38) that one of the most important of these ingredients (*in the learning process*) “... is the attitudinal quality of the interpersonal relationship between facilitator and learner.”

Rogers is alluding to the 'teacher' as a facilitator of learning. He is reiterating what was previously stated that there needs to be a move away from a teaching, subject-led curriculum to a learning curriculum. Youth workers might add that they have always been associated with the idea of 'learning' but that the outcomes or outputs were not easily identified, at least in the short-term. Again this point of outcomes is another variable in the relationship between teaching and youth work. Teachers have a clear set of indicators that one assumes measures some form of accredited outcome, i.e. students passing examinations and some idea of outputs, i.e. how many passed the examinations this year as opposed to last or how many grades the students received and if more are passing? These quantifiable measurements are in stark contrast to those of the youth worker (assuming we exclude, for the time being, specifically designed youth work type

courses such as COPE (Certificate of Personal Effectiveness) which is equal to approximately two GCSEs).

Rogers (2003) takes most of his conceptual thinking from the ‘counselling world’; one that resonates with youth work practice and training. For example, Rogers (2003:38) describes appropriate conditions for effective ‘teaching’ as a transparent realness in the facilitator (teacher/*youth worker*...author’s *italics*); a willingness to be a person and to be and live the feelings and thoughts of the moment. He says emphatically,

“When the realness includes a prizing, caring, a trust and respect for the learner, the climate for learning is enhanced.”

These views are central to the principles of many youth workers and the question that must be asked is whether they are appropriate in the school setting or **do some aspects of youth work become suffocated in the school context? Also do teachers identify with this type of ‘learning’ agenda through the use of interpersonal development?**

Rogers (2003:38) is in no doubt about his view on the importance of relationship building in the learning process, saying,

“The student is trusted to develop.”

The link between youth work and this type of approach to learning may suggest that the learning potential will exist as an integral part of a person’s lifelong experience, thus making or creating learning on a continuum from youth to adulthood. However the context in which the learning process takes place may, in a direct or indirect way, shape not only the learning outcomes but the learner’s perspective about future learning.

### **The school perspective.**

Youth workers are often taken into schools to deal with disaffected young people. Muldoon et al (2000) states that disruptive pupils do nothing to enhance a school’s placement on league tables, and parents tend to send their children to schools that have good examination results. Porter (2000) says that when there is a disruption in a classroom the offending students are to blame. There is something wrong with them, and the job then becomes one of diagnosing the ‘personal deficiency’. **Youth work in the context of a school setting may need to take cognisance of the ‘school ideology’ when making decisions.** By school ideology we are referring to **what a school expects from a pupil** including the legal requirement to attend school, something that influences the **power relationship between young person and teacher.** Martin et al (2000) outlines six approaches for dealing with disengaged young people often found in schools;

1. Behavioural approaches based on the theory that students who misbehave are looking for more attention. The behavioural approach is perceived as rewarding inappropriate behaviour which is continued and that unrewarded appropriate



- behaviour ceases leading to behaviour being controlled by its consequence. Behavioural modification is used by some youth workers in schools in Northern Ireland.
2. Cognitive therapy approaches that use thought processes such as emotional development, self-esteem and the socialisation of students. Workers believe that work with adolescents in terms of their emotional and self-awareness can lead to changes in behaviour, attitude, values and outlook to life.
  3. Limit setting approach is a teacher focussed approach to behaviour. It incorporates assertive and positive discipline and the imposition of order upon the students. Consequences for the individual and group can be positive or negative in relation to teacher expectations. Some youth workers in schools use 'solution focussed brief therapy' in this domain.
  4. Humanist approaches look for a solution rather than a punishment and rely on students' intellectual, social and emotional needs being met and that this will initiate appropriate behaviour.
  5. Choice theory believes that students misbehave out of choice and therefore the key to appropriate behaviour is choice modification to meet individual needs and reduce infringements on other students.
  6. Person centred approach, attributed to Carl Rogers emphasises the importance of personal experiences and motivation of students. It relies on the teachers' trust and positive regard for each student as Rogers believed in the inherent tendency in everyone to be good. An approach used extensively in youth work training in Northern Ireland.

(Martin et al 2000)

The above six approaches, or adaptations of them, offer an insight into methods used by teachers to create compliance within the school setting. They also suggest that teachers are aware of the need to use a variety of approaches depending on the student's behaviour and their own propensity towards an approach that reflects their philosophy of teaching.

### **A group work approach.**

Although the above section alludes to a framework within which youth work in schools can be understood it is important to say something about how youth workers operationalise their practice. Most youth workers are trained in individual and group work processes that complement the nature of working with marginalised young people in a variety of settings. Therefore, the use of youth workers in schools suggests a need to explore this approach to see if it is as effective within the formal sector as it is outside in the youth service world. The group process, or how groups function and maintain themselves, may offer a model of practice that informs the knowledge base about why group work is used as a tool for youth workers in schools. The group may also offer an analytical framework in which the concept of learning as either a formal or non-formal process can be further explored as a vehicle in which the notion of learning can be understood. Central to this assumption is the belief that if the role of the group as either

an informal, non-formal or formal learning mechanism is to be understood, it is necessary to know how it functions within the learning environment of the school.

### **The Influence of the Group.**

Groups have different functions, depending on the context, which are equally important for the maintenance and delivery of a learning process; in this case dealing with disengaged youth in schools. The group is the vehicle in which learning may be developed. Brown (1994. p101) says that a group is initially a collection of individuals, each of whom will be preoccupied with issues to do with joining or inclusion and there is often dependence by the group on the worker and an apparent willingness to conform to whatever is suggested. This suggests that **the youth worker in a school may be, at least initially, seen as the instigator of a 'functional learning' group which differs from a class of young people.** The youth worker is intentional in using the group and group processes to achieve certain aims.

Although Brown (1994) is talking about performing as a group, the principles of group development, in this instance, may apply to **the notion of learning through a group.** If group development is different in the non-formal and formal organisations we may begin to see how they differ from each other. Firstly, groups within the informal or non-formal world **function around an agreed task or issue** i.e. the need to work together for a variety of reasons linked explicitly, for youth workers, to the needs of the individual and group cohesion.

In the formal system this developmental aspect of learning is prescribed through the curriculum and usually not negotiable by participants. One of the aspects of these formal learning groups are their time-limited life. For example, the fact is that most people end their school going life at the age of eighteen. Brown (1994:108) puts this very simply by stating,

“..... many groups come to an end.”

Brown is alluding to the taken-for-granted fact that groups end their existence but other groups, such as friendship and interest groups, do not. The assumption, in using the group as a vehicle in which learning is shaped, is that the needs of the group may outweigh the need to learn. It also, indirectly, alludes to the fact that while the school going group or class ends so too does the interventions of youth workers in schools; the same youth workers who form groups as vehicles for learning in order to meet the needs of young people. Alternatively the needs of a group may mask the individual needs of individuals within the context of a school.

Pupils in a class are, in effect, a group. Therefore, group dynamics are an important variable for our understanding of the differences and similarities that contextualise the learning process. Subject-based learning may be just one of the ingredients in the process along with getting information; building relationships; friendship; developing religious belief; competing and fun. This means that different experiences are dependent upon and shaped by the context of the activity as operationalised for and within a group process. Pupils within a school may be influenced

and affected by different aspects of the group process to those outside in youth centres. The group may therefore control the nature of the learning environment and shape the needs of the group by restricting the capacity of members to discussion of topics that challenge the needs of the group. Alternatively the group may reward those values and beliefs that promote their needs and the needs of the school; for example rewarding pupils with qualifications in the formal disciplines. The nature of the group process again reflects the nature of the learning environment in a given context.

### **Limitations of the Group Process.**

Groups function within a set of well defined and understood contexts and it is these contexts that influence the learning process, e.g. the school. **Bishop and Hoggett (1986. p33) suggest that the group can facilitate or hinder the development of learning.** They researched groups of local enthusiasts and stated that groups were important for the following reasons:

1. Social exchange can take place.
2. Groups create a notion of collective rather than individual products.
3. Groups help people make new friends and meet people.

Bishop and Hoggett are suggesting that the function of a group is often perceived as an individual activity but in fact those participating come together for more collective aims with the individual activity a secondary consideration. This is worth exploration, in that it may indicate a difference in the informal, non-formal and formal approaches to learning in terms of how 'the group' influences the learning process used by youth workers in schools.

Groups are influenced by external factors (for example cultural capital) and internal factors (leadership, shared aims and relationships ) that exert both a negative and positive influence on how the group perceives itself in terms of status. For example, recruitment of disengaged young people onto a course designed to re-engage them in the school may highlight how inclusive or exclusive the group may be in its formation as it draws from only one section of the school. The implications are that the development of the group, for the purpose of doing youth work in schools, influences not only what is being learnt within these groups but also challenges a different perspective about the use of a certain type of group work (informal setting) in a school (formal setting). One aspect worth investigating may be the implicit 'limiting' effect of the group process to the goal of learning.

The literature suggests that an investigation into the use of group work will indicate how this context influences the learning process. The group appears to be a vehicle in which the promotion of learning takes place. There remains the question, however, about **the extent to which the level and nature of intra-group dynamics can influence the learning process in schools for those deemed disengaged.**

### **The 'Group' in the Formal Setting.**

Hasenfeld (in Sundel et al., 1985. p294) explaining the importance of groups to learning in organisations said,

“From an organisational perspective group work can be seen as one of the means through which the agency produces its outputs...”

Hasenfeld (Ibid. p294) elaborates on what this means by stating,

“...who contracts the agency is determined in part by the definition of the agency’s domain, namely the population over which the agency claims jurisdiction, the range of needs to which it is responsive, and the type of services it has developed.”

He is suggesting that organisations respond to and influence, through conscious or unconscious selectivity, group norms and values, and states (Ibid. p295),

“...the agency will define which client attributes are relevant to the organisation...”

In terms of what this means, Hasenfeld suggests that by declining resources to other potential ‘technologies,’ the agency in effect exclude them from the repertoire available to the workers. He says (Ibid. p295),

“... many professional decisions are subordinate to and shaped by organisational policies. These policies in themselves reflect the political and economic realities to which the agency must adapt if it is to survive and thrive.”

It can therefore be suggested that the learning process in a school, as a formal organisation, could be shaped by the ideology and philosophy of youth work. The group in this instance is used as a means of control over the clients. Those means, says Hasenfeld may range from persuasion to promises and threats. He also introduces an interesting ingredient into the equation of group learning or learning that is influenced by the group; that of size. He says (Ibid. p304),

“Studies on group size indicate that as size increases, participation by members declines, the group has a lower level of attraction, the leadership is more centralised and there is less group consensus.”

Thus the greater the pressure from the school to include more pupils in the group, the less control those who operationalise the aims of youth work have to influence group characteristics. Hasenfeld says that groups function in what he calls an ‘ecological base,’ that is, the group’s organisational location, the space and time allocated to it and the resources available for carrying out its various functions. He says that the group’s ecological base as structured by the agency will determine whether the group can develop in a nurturing environment or whether it must expend most of its energies to protect its survival. One of the differences between schools and youth work may be the energies

expended by schools in other directions to that of learning or, indeed, a more explicit use of the group as a means of achieving these different aims through youth work practices.

### **Effectiveness of the Group as a Learning Vehicle.**

If the group is an integral aspect of learning in both the formal, informal and non-formal worlds, how can one assess the impact this has on the learning process? Rose and Tolman (in Sundel et al., 1985. p368) ask an interesting question,

“Did the group benefit the individual members?”

The group, says Rose and Tolman (Ibid. p368), offers multiple models for evaluation. They say,

“Each person, as he or she provides information in the group, models for other members a way to communicate such information and a vocabulary for communication.”

They are suggesting that **the group itself is a learning tool offering members peer-learning opportunities which are situationally-specific but effective.** The group offers a vehicle in which learning can take place more effectively and in which people gain status, friendship, knowledge, and individual potential. The group may offer some people a chance to achieve in a microenvironment untouched or influenced minimally by outside forces. Hering et al., (1993) argues that the experience of collective learning can have a series of beneficial effects upon the overall personal and social development of young people. The group is therefore an important vehicle in which learning is transmitted and in turn can maintain the nature and type of group norm that reflects the ethos of the school. This would mean that **a youth worker would use the group to achieve its aims and the school could use the group to achieve its more formal aims.** The group is both a vehicle in which values and beliefs are transmitted and nurtured at the expense of a challenge to any of the group norms.

Giddens writing on young people in school, agrees (1992. p197),

“The lads felt alienated from the dominant culture of the school and sought every opportunity to challenge or contest it.”

He elaborates by stating (Ibid. p199),

**“The importance of the group is very clear to members of the counter-school culture.”**

Giddens (Ibid. pp200/203) says we cannot underestimate the strength of peer pressure within groups of young people in schools. The findings of this research may later help explain if this group process as experienced through being in a ‘class’ within the school exerts any influence on the learning of the disengaged or if youth work is really a world

of 'groups'.

Vernelle (1994. p32) believes that while there is differentiation within groups, individuals can make rational choices between competing groups they belong to:

“...members can differentiate between this group and other groups and feel that the task is as important as the relationships which have pre-occupied them in former groups.”

Groups are therefore vehicles in which learning takes place and in which the learning is affected by group dynamics. This learning can be limited by the nature of the group or enhanced by the group process. The literature does suggest one common thread within groups; that of the strength of the group to survive and maintain itself by peer-group pressure. This peer pressure is facilitated or guided by the context in which the group functions and is further shaped by the group leader or leaders. This may apply equally to the school or youth worker in the school, that is, how does the group within either the school or youth work setting use peer-pressure to achieve the goals of learning and personal development, and how influential is the group on the learning process?

### **Leaders of Groups.**

If people function and develop in group situations then youth workers as facilitators or leaders of the group may shape the group process or at least influence what happens in the group. Youth workers may be explicitly in schools to deliver prescribed programmes or to use a variety of group work approaches to achieve some common aims, e.g. conflict management, raise self-esteem or for personal development and are therefore using their position in the group to develop or facilitate learning around a predefined agenda. Young people in schools may have, or experience, a different type of leadership around the needs of a curriculum and organisation as espoused by teachers. The teacher could therefore have a central role in these formal groups and influence what is learnt in them. However, **the role of the teachers, in terms of understanding youth work approaches in schools, may be worth investigating as another ingredient in the learning process as either a positive or negative variable in the process.** This, of course, assumes that the youth worker is a central part of the learning process within schools. In the formal system the leader will normally be the teacher but in the youth work world he or she may be an enthusiastic individual with skills limited by his or her circumstances and understanding of their role while in the context of a school.

On group leaders Boud et al., (1985. p77) say,

“...group leaders in the role would challenge participants as to whether their personal theories are internally consistent, represent valid claims, reflect the actual world or are only partial conceptualisations of the 'real' world.”

Boud is referring to learning as a critical process within a group facilitated by reflection. Youth workers following the Model of Effective practice guidelines would see their role clearly to challenge beliefs and values and to create opportunities within which young people can grow both personally and socially. The leadership role of youth workers in

schools should reflect these central aims. **The role of the group leader is to develop reflection as an implicit or explicit part of the learning process.**

Youth workers explicitly use the group as a vehicle in which they develop young people. While Brendtro et al (1983) offers a macro model into which youth workers can frame their interventions, the group process offers a mechanism for operationalising their work. Within the youth centre a youth worker will create opportunities to engage young people in groups, for example, giving them tasks; interest groups; senior members committees; organising residential; setting up sports programmes and encouraging teams to develop; running specific groups for young women or young men's groups; and encouraging the interplay within groups of peers. However, the nature of the group work may change within the context of the school as alluded to above. What is the understanding of group work in schools for youth workers and teachers? Can youth workers develop a functional group in a school to meet their professional needs and the needs of the young people? Are there aspects of group work that are compromised in the school setting? Do teachers see group work as part of the learning process?

### **Youth work in schools: an emerging local model.**

Loughlin et al (2005) outline in detail the theory behind the use of youth workers in schools giving clear guidance about why they carry out work with young people in this context. They outline the reasons as:

- To enhance the profile of youth work alongside the formal education sector;
- Acknowledgement from schools that a combination of different strategies are successful with 'disaffected' young people;
- Youth workers are skilled in working with those who do not or cannot comply with expected norms;
- Schools are recognising that the formal structure and the resulting formality of relations between pupils and teachers, which are dictated by the result driven culture in schools, is resulting in an increasing number of pupils becoming disaffected from education. Consequently they are displaying behaviours and attitudes that lessen both their own and others' chances of reaching their full potential;
- Recognition that the youth work strategies, skills and specialisms are a proven way of 'engaging' with these young people;
- Work within a school environment facilitates contact with some young people who they (youth workers) would not otherwise engage with;
- Local knowledge and professional insight enhance the level of focus of relationship with young people and further add to the potential for the school to have a holistic view of the young people;
- Youth workers have a duty of access to young people wherever they are, including school, as young people are legally obliged to attend school;
- The experience in school has an impact on young people's social and personal development which is a key component aspect of the youth service curriculum;

- Outcomes from school have an implicit effect on young people's future.

Loughlin et al (2005) say that as part of a movement, within education, towards a multi-disciplinary approach, the youth service wishes to enhance the widest educational experience of young people by not only sharing their skills, strategies and specialisms, but also enhancing the approach by sharing knowledge and experience of the young people's background. They suggest that the above functions sit comfortably within the school setting and underpin the key principles of youth work, e.g. personal and social development, participation, partnership, reconciliation, targeting social need, equity, diversity and interdependence.

These youth workers base their work on the 'voluntary' principle, which denotes that the young people are not coerced into participation. They also espouse the inclusion of parents in the process and use 'young person centred' approaches in their work. The workers have an elaborate pre-planned process before engaging with the young people at risk which includes, where possible, key teachers and communication with all of the staff. They evaluate the work regularly,

“Regular evaluation and critical assessment of practice is an essential element of any programme. This evaluation should involve all parties to the programme; young people, youth worker, teacher(s), and parents/guardians. As and when appropriate consultation should occur with other professionals (Education Welfare Officers and Educational Psychologists)” Loughlin et al (2005).

Loughlin et al (2005) outline a plan of action for 'new' schools who wish to use the youth work approach. This includes workshops with teachers outlining the process of the work and the expected outcomes. They offer the following template about what the youth service can do within schools. At the **centre of the model** are the young people who:

- Are underachievers;
- Have emotional difficulties;
- Have behavioural problems;
- Have personal issues.

Moving out from this central focus is a set of **indicators** that suggest there are 'issues'. For example:

- Difficult peer relationships;
- Truancy or non-attendance;
- Aggressive behaviour;
- Withdrawn behaviour;
- Lack of personal organisation;
- Personal issues such as bereavement;
- Emotional or behavioural difficulties;
- Conflict with authority;
- Unfulfilled academic potential.

These indicators suggest, according to the concentric zone model, that young people have the following needs:



Low self-esteem;  
*Difficulty with* controlling anger;  
*Issues with* self-expression;  
*Difficulty with* self-understanding;  
*Issues with* time management;  
Support;  
*Issues with* relationship/interpersonal skills;  
*Taking* self-responsibility;  
Information;  
*Lack of relevant* coping skills;  
*Understanding* self-awareness;  
Low self-confidence.

The paper suggests that these needs are met through the following intervention strategies:

Issue –based workshops;  
Group work;  
Social group work;  
Individual work.

There is no doubt that youth workers using this above model, developed by youth work professionals, are well planned, focussed primarily on personal and social development and purposefully integrated into the schools. This offers youth workers an arena (the school) in which they can impact on ‘disengaged’ young people in a professional manner. The inclusion and training of the teachers ensures that they are not only involved in the work but that they understand the process that the youth workers are using. In an era that signifies more creative ways of both working and engaging with young people, this approach offers a captive audience for youth workers to impact on some young people. It is however open to a few questions. For example, what is the strategic thinking behind this model? How do the youth workers know that the young person is a volunteer and not coerced? Do these types of programmes change the long-term outcomes for young people in terms of qualifications gained or is this not an intended outcome? Are youth workers agents of ‘social or school control’ making young disengaged youth more compliant? Is this a bad thing? What is changing in the schools due to the inclusion of another profession in school business? Do youth workers have a say in the running of the school? What is compromised in terms of youth work as a profession while in the schools? How did the youth workers decide on what model of practice to use in the school? Is there scope for development and discussion?

While the research findings will address some of these issues it is important to note that the above model, which has evolved over eight years, may offer a starting point for other potential providers of youth work in schools.

## SUMMARY

Irrespective of how youth work is viewed **the fact that some youth workers are now employed in schools is a reality.** They are obviously seen as **offering something that cannot be offered by teachers.** There is an expectation that the ‘difficult’ or ‘disengaged’ young person can benefit in some way from interacting with a youth worker. Indeed the school may want to benefit in terms of offering a service to young people not normally on offer by traditional teaching and teachers. Governments will want to know what this **‘value added’ aspect of schooling** is offering. However, this raises many issues, including:

- a. Why do schools need youth workers or informal educators?
- b. Are schools aware of the function of youth work?
- c. Is the concept of informal learning processes understood by teachers and youth workers?
- d. Should youth workers measure all or some outcomes of their work?
- e. Do youth workers understand the role of teachers?
- f. Is youth work clear about its role in schools?
- g. Are youth workers clear about their model of practice?
- h. Is the school the best arena for informal youth work?
- i. Is any aspect of youth work compromised, in terms of professional principles, when carried out in schools?
- j. Apart from facilitating programmes in schools, do youth workers have a say in other parts of the school life?
- k. What do young people get out of informal youth work practice in school?
- l. Do young people benefit more or less when youth work is carried out in schools?
- m. Does youth work in schools create a demand on young people to be more active in other aspects of school life?
- n. What are the long-term benefits of youth work in schools?
- o. Are there any parallel programmes that are more beneficial to young people that are not run in schools?
- p. Is there a systematic and pre-designed strategy for youth work in schools?
- q. If the youth worker is using, what Brendtro et al call ‘humanistic teaching’ can the students differentiate between ‘teachers’ and ‘youth workers’ when in different contexts and classes?
- r. Do those using a learning process that builds the individual take cognisance of the school setting when the young person is not with this type of facilitator?
- s. Are most of the young people who are engaged in youth work in schools the more disruptive, marginal and most likely to gain few if any qualifications?
- t. Are youth workers aware of the long-term implication of their learning process in terms of introducing young people to a more ‘lifelong learning’ process?

- u. Would a 'process-driven' learning approach in schools benefit other young people in schools such as those who are not disruptive but nevertheless disengaged from the education process?
- v. How aware of their impact on the schools are youth workers if they raise the young people's self-awareness in a setting that cannot deal with this concept?
- w. Are youth workers more realistic about the capabilities of their client group because they see young people as individuals?
- x. Are teachers more 'realistic' than 'idealistic' youth workers because of their commitment to a teaching curriculum that assumes all children are the same?
- y. Is the school the best 'site' for the development of young people using Brendtro et al's model?
- z. Is the school curriculum too prescriptive?

The research will address many of these questions.

## SECTION 3

**Authors: Margaret Guy and Dr. Tony Morgan.**

### **Perspectives from the Literature**

The idea of a youth-work methodology in schools is not a new concept. A number of recent research projects, including the Strategy for the Delivery of Youth Work in Northern Ireland 2005-2008, have recommended that all agencies working with young people work imaginatively so that the service can,

“... embrace in reality the joined- up approach that we hear so much about.”  
[Director of YouthNet]

In ‘The Excluded Adolescent’ (Morgan et al, 2000), the writers argue for a strategic, long-term vision for the future education of young people which would incorporate the,

“...cross-fertilisation of formal with non-formal teaching practice...[and that]...all agencies dealing with youth programmes should have an integrated approach that includes young people at the centre of the structure.”

There is no doubt that youth work and schools are expected to work together in a more integrated way. **To date there has always been a close relationship between schools and youth work without any strategic plan.**

Key points and recommendations from an investigation into alternative education programmes highlight some of the issues facing this type of approach (Out of the Box. Alternative Education Programme (AEP) 2006).

Findings from this research show the impact of a variety of programmes on young people in schools. The investigation was carried out on three types of Alternative Education Programmes (AEP):

1. Alternative education provision based in the community;
2. Training Organisations/School Partnerships;
3. Key stage 4 Flexibility Initiative (KS4FI)

Some of the key points were:

- AEP is successful in re-engaging a considerable number of disaffected young people;
- Though a range of qualifications were achieved they were generally perceived to be of little value at labour market entry;
- AEP staff were seen as peripheral to that of those involved in mainstream provision;
- An extremely valuable knowledge base of methods and techniques for engaging learners has been developed by AEP;
- Those leaving AEP were still at risk;
- Use of interagency work but little evidence of this after the young people left the school;

- This lack of support could result in any gains that had been made during the young people's time in AEP being lost and urgent attention should be paid to addressing this issue.

While not wanting to go into the recommendation in detail, some aspects of this report are pertinent to this study. For example they say that,

“Many of these young people have disengaged from learning for a substantial part of their adolescence...”

The young people face a raft of complex and difficult experiences. Early support and identification of problems in terms of preventative work in primary schools would help young people respond positively to a certain teaching style, method and learning environment. They state (recommendation 3.3),

**“A challenge for the education system is the transfer of such understanding, skill and expertise from alternative education into mainstream schooling.”**

The above statements illustrate the need to understand what works in the school setting; more importantly, why certain practices work and if they can be replicated.

Central to such a vision would be the nature of the pedagogical approach that formal education has used. Argument has been made for a number of years now that unless a different approach is used with young people who suffer educational disadvantage, large numbers of them will continue to leave school without qualifications or the social skills needed to fit into society and work. One might go further to suggest that some young people will be ‘turned-off’ the process of learning due to their school experience; notwithstanding other influential factors in life as outlined below.

Which ‘different approach’ can succeed? Two terms frequently appear in the literature and, although they are quite distinct in meaning, they tend to be used interchangeably...*non-formal education* and *informal education*. ‘Non-formal’ implies that the objectives of the education differ little from those of the formal sector but that the methods used would be more creative, student-centred and less rigidly traditional. ‘Informal’ tends to eschew the discipline of the traditional curriculum methods and tries to focus on such issues as personal and social development. Informal approaches are invariably found in youth work and efforts are made in this section to examine this particular form of education, together with some consideration of ‘non-formal’, or what are more often referred to as ‘alternative’, forms of education for young men. The youth work strategy document (2005:13) outlines the following definition of non-formal learning,

“Non-formal education refers to learning and development that takes place outside the formal educational field, but which is structured and based on learning objectives. This is differentiated from informal learning, which is not structured, and takes place in daily life activities within peer/family groups etc. **Youth work interventions typically result in both non-formal and informal learning.**”

## **Social Disadvantage.**

The majority of young people grow up, attend school and socialise within their own communities. In rural areas these effects are compounded due to lack of transport and geographical isolation. This has resulted in many young people, who lack the necessary skills and education to cope, feeling excluded from actively participating in community life. Many first-hand reports demonstrate that such young people do not venture outside the area where they live, causing even further social polarisation and, ultimately, further forms of exclusion.

In the NIERC (2001) report, social exclusion has been described as,

“...a shorthand list for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown.”

Exclusion is invariably associated with deprivation, long-term unemployment and low levels of economic activity. Location and high levels of deprivation are key variables in future inactivity and long-term unemployment among those who might otherwise be new recruits for the labour market. Furthermore, this persists through generations. Evidence suggests that young people growing up in areas of high unemployment and low economic activity are more likely than those living in affluent areas to become unemployed, under-qualified, inactive and low paid.

It is the intention in this chapter to consider how aspects of informal education can help resolve some of these problems but it must be noted in passing that there are other kinds of solution. For example, a recent Economic Appraisal commissioned by YouthAction Northern Ireland (2000) argues that,

“...the creation of capacity building programmes in areas of high economic dependency and low employment is crucial in helping to break the cycles of under employment, unemployment and socio-economic aspirations.”

Farming and associated sectors often supplied employment for the less-educated young person but recently this option is becoming increasingly less available. The Rural Development Council (2002) reveals that,

“...throughout the area, there is a high dependence on the agriculture sector for employment. Traditional rural employment in agriculture has been gradually declining since the early 1980s or has become squeezed by falling farm incomes.”

Potential employability, therefore, continues to depend on traditional paths. There is little likelihood that this will change. What must change, therefore, is the manner in which young people are prepared for the labour market. As schools continue to use more creative approaches to learning for some young people, the youth work sector is finding itself having to use its expertise and resources in another arena. It is obvious that the solution must lie in multi-agency co-operation. Before considering

informal education directly, however, it is necessary to examine the problems that would seem to require informal approaches to learning as part of their solution.

### **Disaffection.**

The Youth Service faces a challenge that is becoming increasingly complex. More and more of the values-system of a generation ago is being eroded and changed by media sensationalism with exposure to the lives of celebrities through the television system and a youth culture that, in some circles, seeks to embrace violence, sectarianism, drugs, crime, and an alarming contempt for authority. This is evidenced in attacks on ambulances, fire appliances, the PSNI and other professions. Many young men struggle to find their place in this world of rapid social and economic change; a world which has had a major impact upon young men's education, social behaviours, mental health and employability.

Harland (2000) states that society's expectations of young men has placed particular pressure on them and that they struggle to deal with these pressures,

“Young men feel that they have to meet the stereotypical images of masculinity and that they are under pressure to be ‘men’ in the traditional form.”

It is the failure to succeed in this struggle that can often lead to what the literature terms ‘disaffection’. Kilpatrick et al (2005) state that there is a growing concern over young people who are at risk, or have been excluded from school and are often referred to as ‘disaffected’. These young people tend to come from a background of multiple disadvantage, a profile that has been identified as being associated with experiences of joblessness on reaching school leaving-age.

The term ‘disaffection’ is multi-faceted. It refers to a whole range of behaviours, attitudes and experiences of young people. DETR (2000) in its report ‘Disaffected Young People’ identifies a range of elements related to disaffection:

- *Young people, who lack a sense of identity, have a sense of failure;*
- *those that are ‘disturbed’, ‘depressed’, difficult young people;*
- *those that are ‘failed by the system’;*
- *young people in Status Zero or NEET (not in education, employment or training);*
- *those experiencing discrimination;*
- *those with behavioural problems.*

The variety of ways in which disaffection can present itself, suggests that disaffection is the outcome of a ‘multiplicity’ of causes, often interrelated but differing from young person to young person. As a word ‘disaffected’ conjures up thoughts and images of young people who are ‘wasters’ having attitude problems rather than acknowledging the experiences that often lead young people to become disaffected. Piper and Piper (2000) argue that the term is,

“problematic and unhelpful and more likely to damage those it was intended to help. It pushes the blame for under-achievement on to the young person.”

Research shows that such an attitude is mistaken and unhelpful. There is a clear consensus that the causes of disaffection and non-participation are multiple and interconnected; that the disaffected young person is almost invariably a victim of his environment. Some of the underlying causes of disaffection include poverty, unstable home and family circumstances, inter-generational unemployment, peer pressure and learning difficulties. As Bentley and Gurumurthy (1999) argue,

“disadvantage in different spheres of life can combine to create vicious circles that result in disaffection.”

Each disaffected young person has his or her story but most will relate their disillusionment to unhappy school experiences that culminated in truancy and exclusion. Blythe and Milner (1996) state that “...*exclusion from school is related to further exclusion from other opportunities later on in life.*” Others, however, attempt more complex explanations of disaffection. Pearce and Hillman (1998), for example, cited in Lloyd (1999), see a clear duality of cause in disaffection and non-participation. The condition can result either from ‘structure’ (society) or ‘agency’ (individual). Are young people disaffected as result of their individual attitudes and behaviours or are they victims of socio-economic forces, with disaffection a ‘product’ of these structural factors? Perhaps it is both? Merton and Parrott (1999) suggest that,

“...for most disengaged young people it is likely that their disaffection arises and continues as a result of some complex interaction between agency and structure.”

For some, the existence of disaffected young people is seen as a problem to be solved, a social blight. To some extent, the response of the UK Government’s Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) can be seen to stem from this kind of thinking. In relation to educational disaffection and underachievement, reducing the levels of pupil disaffection has been its central principle. In July 1999, the Unit published a report called *Bridging the Gap*. In this report it estimated that almost 161,000 young people aged 16-17 were not engaged in education, training or employment. This led to the recommendation of a comprehensive support service for young people. But there are many more who seek a solution that positively enhances society through the development of the young person. Morris et al, (1999) state,

“If they fail to become contributing adults, these young people represent a very substantial loss of potential to the country, to the economy, to communities and to individual lives.”

Disaffection need not always lead, however, to truancy, to disruptive behaviours or even to criminality. Sometimes it can be expressed in more subtle or perhaps more apathetic ways. Parsons (1999) points out that there are students who are not truant and who do not exhibit unusual behaviours:



*“They attend school,”*

he says,

“...but school has little relevance for them; they are not actively engaged in the learning process.”

These young people (especially young men) go through the motions of working, putting in the minimum effort required. Parsons states that,

**“...they could be described as passively disaffected, those who glide through the system absorbing little teacher time and little learning.”** [Young Men and Education (NSEF 2000, p52)]

Education’s historical impact on the plight of disaffected young people has not emerged with any credit. Research over the years has continued to make clear that the use of **formal methodologies for those prone to disaffection, underachievement, non-participation, are invariably doomed to fail.** Yet no obvious changes have been made to the system. Davison (2004) states that, ‘...*how young men learn is through active participation.*’ In the traditional formal education setting, teaching is top down. Davison criticises ‘the old model’ that pursues the same consistent mantra:

“I have something to tell you; you memorise the facts and prove it on a written test and you have an education.”

Davison believes that such an approach simply cannot work. He advocates a new learning practice that,

“... means creating circles of inclusion with a facilitator who is trusted enough to host a learning space for students to learn, not just what to think, but how to think for themselves.”

The general consensus of the literature on informal education and disaffected young people is that **formal education focuses too much on gaining academic qualifications** rather than equipping young people with practical, life and social skills and knowledge for ‘real life’. The young people themselves are clear about this, even if they cannot articulate it. One of their key criticisms of the education system is its lack of flexibility in the curriculum and in the selection of options that prevents them from making the best of their educational opportunities.

In ‘*Young Men Talking: Voices from Belfast*’, Harland (1997) carried out an in-depth needs analysis in relation to the lives of young men aged 14-16 years from the Catholic and Protestant traditions living in Belfast. This publication examined the multi-faceted issues affecting young men and in particular their views on, and experiences of, education. One young man aged fifteen commented,

“Some teachers are a bit ignorant and all that there. Some teachers have different methods of teaching, and some teachers just can’t teach you.”

Simple but heartfelt remarks like these support Kendall’s (2006) assertion that school factors play a role in the disengagement of young people. She refers to,

“...the perceived irrelevance of curriculum; teachers lacking the skills to work with particular young people, as well as being without access to suitable training opportunities; and divisions between vocational and academic education resulting in students being ‘locked’ into courses that are inappropriate to their learning need.”

At this level, she adds, while they may have no clear awareness of their needs, students, nonetheless, should be given opportunity to determine the pace of their learning. For this to happen, she argues, there is a need,

“... for effective forms of guidance from both inside and outside the formal education system.”

Disaffection does not mean blindness to what might have been. The disenchantment young people experience in schools can stem from the manner in which opportunities were presented, a manner that was inappropriate to their nature or abilities and which gave them no real opportunity to take advantage of what was purportedly on offer. Many of the young men fully appreciated that school was important and was central to improving their opportunities to securing work. One young man, despite the fact the he gained little from his schooling, was still capable of regret that he did not apply himself more.

“School has taught me hardly anything, ’cause I never really did much at school. I never went much ’cause I didn’t like it, but I wish I had stuck at it better and tried my best, but I couldn’t be bothered – I really wish I had learned to spell, I tried to catch up, but I couldn’t do it.”

Clearly here is a student with, at the very least, a nascent motivation that was never tapped. Many others of those interviewed expressed similar sentiments, claiming that school did not adequately prepare them for future employment. Harland (1997) agrees that most of these young men were evidently underachieving in school but states that,

“School could be more effective in providing opportunities for them to experience quality work placements which would give greater insight into the demands and requirements of employment agencies and the type of skills needed to do the work.”

From the needs assessment it was found that the young men lacked confidence to articulate their sense of frustration with the school system and the teachers within it but

they could nevertheless make the point to the researcher. One young man, aged sixteen, stated,

“They don’t like us, they see us as troublemakers. If we were in Class A, they would treat us different – ’cause they’re in a higher class, they give them more time. They don’t understand us – they think we’re wasters.”

These responses highlight the need for schools to take a different approach when working with young men who are clearly underachieving within the classroom. There is no shortage of advice in the literature about how this might, and must, be achieved. Harland (1997) states that,

“...there needs to be opportunity within schools for young men/people to influence their own learning and to voice their thoughts and opinions in terms of the materials used in classes and the environments in which they learn.”

In similar vein, Morgan et al (2000) state that,

“...education must be holistic; it must encourage the skills and capacities of young people to work together in teams, to build their confidence and to use their own initiative, rather than focusing narrowly, as it does presently, on academic results.”

Trefor Lloyd (2002) in his report for practitioners, *‘Underachieving Young Men Preparing for Work’*, argues that,

“...schools need to become even more flexible in their approach and attitudes towards life-related, non-academic programmes such as *Into Work*.”

### **Broadening the curriculum.**

Within Northern Ireland there continues, of course, to be a focus on young people’s academic ability but a recent review carried out by CCEA (2003) indicates that the Examinations Authority has begun to consider strategically young people’s vocational opportunities. This will take the form of a new enriched, more coherent, enjoyable, motivating curriculum within schools, a curriculum that recognises young people’s vocational opportunities, focuses on learning for life and work and is giving an important place to key aspects of personal, social and health education. New attitudes like this will challenge the prizing of academic qualifications within our society and help gain equal recognition for the skills-development of young people.

The *Department of Education’s Three Year Education Plan 2005-2008* (2004) also aims to provide flexible learning opportunities that meet the varying needs and abilities of all young people. Key recommendations include:

- improving the Life Skills of all young people;
- fostering creativity and providing young people with knowledge and skills for life;

- employment and further learning;
- the development of partnerships.

What needs to be emphasised here is that such provision must reach the true cohort of disadvantaged youth it is aimed at and that it is not allowed to become simply another curricular choice.

Few would nowadays disagree that education should be seen in its broadest sense; that all learning is educational and needs to be recognised and valued as such. Education should be regarded as a lifelong process and not limited to traditional and non-traditional accreditation. The academic and vocational learning paths should be complementary, viewed as parallel processes and of equal value – leading to increase in opportunities and improved quality of life.

“There needs to be fundamental recognition that ‘mainstream’ does not suit every young person and if the young person cannot learn, provision for learning needs must be provided for in an alternative setting.” (Mc Cafferty: 2005).

Something of this kind of awareness now appears in government thinking. In the *Review of Public Administration in NI* (2005) document, it is emphasised that within,

“...the Department of Education’s vision for education, youth services play a key role in connecting formal and informal learning and contributing to the development of coherent pathways to learning for all young people” (p89).

The hope must now be that what is still simply theory will be translated into action as more and more agencies come to realise the necessity for a common and co-operative provision.

### **Underachievement.**

Because of its association with behavioural problems, underachievement is a significant issue for teachers. Young people who are disruptive influences in the classroom setting can impede the learning of others and so contribute to the underachievement of their peers as well as their own. Educational underachievement is **the outcome of a combination of factors including a failure on the part of providers to detect poor literacy and numeracy skills** at the point where young people move to secondary school. This can lead to an inability to cope that in turn may lead to truancy and recurrent absenteeism. If children in primary school have been allowed to slip through without remedial attention to their learning problems, then inevitably their deficiencies will create problems for secondary schools, particularly since secondary school teachers tend to be subject-oriented as opposed to child-oriented. Pearce and Hillman (1998) state that,

“...the disjunction experienced between the environment and culture of the primary and secondary school systems may be an important trigger of disaffection.”

Other groups that are also vulnerable include young people who have been in care, up to three-quarters of whom leave school with no qualifications. A major report by Barnardo's (*Failed by the System*, September 2006) states that children in care are being failed by an education system that does not allow them to explore their potential. Some 80,000 children are in care in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and a survey of 16 – 21 year olds in care reveals that only 10% of them achieve five or more GCSEs at A to C grades compared to the average results. These children, the report claims, live in a culture of disadvantage through multiple care-home and foster-care placements, exclusion, and insufficient support. Linda Wilson, Northern Ireland Director of Children's Services, says,

“The cycle of disadvantage that haunts these children as they grow up shows no sign of being broken as they enter adulthood. Dreadful GCSE results compound the disadvantage they face and commit them to unemployment and long-term disadvantage.”

This opinion is supported by Pearce and Hillman (1998) whose research shows that poor performance at GCSE is the best predictor of future non-participation in education, employment or training. What is needed, the researchers claim, is a fairer system, especially for the children in care.

In recent years, educationalists, government, parents and the media have become increasingly concerned about the behaviour and performance of young men in school. There is a common perception that there is an achievement gap between boys and girls in compulsory education. Although there are subject-based variations, the overall picture suggests that over the past thirty years girls are increasingly outperforming boys in both National Curriculum and GCSE. However, the fact is that at the lowest levels of attainment, gender performance differences are not significant. Nonetheless, Stafford et al (1999) suggests that,

“...public policy and media attention have focused on young men because *there are fears that this underachievement may hinder their transition into adulthood, undermine citizenship, lead to increased crime and other anti social behaviour.*”

The Education and Training Inspectorate for N. Ireland (2000) reports that young people at greatest risk of underachievement and social disadvantage include 1,104 children aged 12-16+ in care (47.5% of the total number of children in care), 1,463 children on the child protection register, and 5,302 children at Key Stage 4 who have been referred to the Education and Library Boards because they were experiencing problems attending mainstream education (10% of the Key Stage 4 cohort). Social background also negatively influences educational and economic prospects. Apart from a generational trend of failure and lack of support, there is more likely, in areas of deprivation and high unemployment, to be the perception and attitude that education and training is a waste of time. Merton et al (1999) states that,

“...in such areas, engagement in the informal economy or criminal activities is often perceived to outweigh the uncertain benefits of continued participation in education and training.”

The Social Exclusion Unit (1999), too, makes this point but with more emphasis on the fact than on the cause,

“It is well known that young people who come from poorer backgrounds are less likely to stay in education beyond the age of 16. Ninety-one percent of 16 year olds from professional families are more likely to stay on in full-time education or training in England and Wales, compared to 61% of those from unskilled families.”

### **Informal Education.**

Hager (1998) is persuaded that traditional educational structures have largely discounted informal learning. However, a growing interest in vocational education and training by both policy makers and the research community in many countries during the 1990's suggest that the time may have come for informal learning to receive serious attention. Part of the problem is that the difference between 'informal' and 'casual' has not been fully articulated and, for the average educationalist, its benefits are not immediately evident. But there are many of its proponents who now argue strongly for a consistent approach to informal teaching and learning. Smith (1997) for example, argues that informal education,

“...is a process – a way of helping young people learn. It is driven by conversation, involves exploring and enlarging experiences. It has a purpose and can take place in a variety of settings.”

Experienced youth workers are increasingly realising that teachers in formal education are unaware of the benefits of an informal methodology in appropriate circumstances and how it could help their teaching. Burley (1990), for example, acknowledges that **informal education in schools tends to be underplayed and is found in pockets of activity rather than being explicit** but he argues that,

“...informal education offers schools the opportunity to inject more relevance than is possible within the existing formal curriculum...” [and can offer young people] ‘... a chance to try out new things, to take risks and extend their experiences beyond the immediate environment of the school.’”

It is his general contention that informal education would complement the work of teachers by offering opportunities for getting to know students better. He believes that,

“...young people/students are attracted to informal education because it offers them the opportunity to feel recognised for their own worth in settings in which they can influence and control the pace and content of their learning.”

The Department of Education (2005) in *The Nature of Youth Work in Northern Ireland* reveals, however, that (at least as far as engaging with ‘troublesome’ young people is concerned) the school system is becoming interested in youth work processes. Of course, the Department’s objectives would differ somewhat from those of the informal educator since its ultimate aim is for young people to fit into the school system but the report makes it clear that there is increasing awareness that school settings and the formal nature of the traditional curriculum cause difficulties for the many disaffected young people who find them almost impossible to cope with.

**There is now among the various providing agencies a growing awareness that informal education is necessary as a part of disaffected young people’s lives and, even more importantly, that such approaches should be available in schools.** In relation to the Curriculum, Burley (1990) states that there has been a,

“...substantial rethinking of the examination system.”

The effect of this has been to create within the formal system an increased interest in skills and the new vocationalism. This he believes has a particular impact upon informal education where ‘process’ and not ‘outcome’ is important. Smith(1997) explains why. He says that;

- working with disadvantaged young people demands a deeper understanding of their educational and social needs;
- time must be devoted to exchanging or learning with others in the ways they wish or need;
- the majority of the work that informal educators engage in is with other professionals.

The *North/South Education Forum Report* (2004: 28) claims that for youth work in schools to be successful it must encompass important elements such as:

- the process of building relationships with young people;
- ensuring that the participation of the young people is voluntary;
- enabling the youth worker to be ‘neutral’;
- permitting the youth worker to act as advocate for young people with other professionals.

The report also goes on to state that there should be,

“...increased awareness of the value of youth work in a school context... that value is to be placed on voluntary participation as a model of including at-risk youth in the school sector...and finally, **the sharing of practice with other professionals dealing with young people.**”

This issue of agency partnerships is now seen to be of vital importance. Social workers, teachers, youth workers and other trained service personnel must be involved in developing a strategic long-term vision for the future education and training of young people most at risk. **The disaffected must be offered a holistic education**, provided through methodologies that are compatible with their needs and **which involves not only cognitive development, but affective and skills development as well.** It is clear from research carried out by different groups and individuals over the past few years that **no one agency can hope to make such a provision on its own.** Partnerships and other forms of co-operation are essential. Extern (2004) lists some of the advantages of partnerships, claiming that they,

‘... can enrich the curriculum and general experience of young people. People from different types of organisation working together to develop something different to meet a specific need often spark off ‘creative initiatives’. Partnership can create a feeling of belonging for the young people and encourage a greater sense of civic responsibility and self-awareness.’

### **Alternative Education.**

Avrich (1980) states that alternative methods of providing education and the theoretical basis utilised by alternative educators within public education has existed for more than 200 years and has grown from contributions of many people from different countries. The ultimate goal of alternative schools and programmes is to assist individuals to become as productive as possible upon entering the community as independent contributors to society. Frizzell (1990) has defined alternative education as a,

“...perspective not a procedure or a programme.”

It is based upon the belief that there are many ways to become educated as well as many types of environments and structures within which learning may occur.

Already alternative methods of delivery, different teaching styles, have been developed to support the alternative curriculum but for alternative education programmes to be effective they need, according to Kendall (2006), to,

“...meet the needs of young people, rather than slotting them into programmes.”

She does not believe, however, that the programmes should confine themselves simply to personal development or social training. The quality of alternative educational provision, she argues, depends on its ability.



“...to ensure that students have opportunities to gain some kind of formal accreditation when attending such interventions.”

Smith (2003) does not altogether support this view. He has concerns about the nature of the qualifications that might be achieved and the effect of pursuing them upon the processes integral to the philosophy of informal learning. He argues that accreditation,

“...alters the focus of activity in a way that undermines the informal and convivial nature of youth work. Alongside this has also come **an emphasis on competencies rather than competence**...workers will have an obvious outcome rather than having faith in the benefits of building relationships. We are also likely to see a further increase in ‘two bit’ certification, i.e., the giving of awards and certificates of little worth and meaning.”

**There is merit in this point but it could be argued that non-formal approaches to enabling the achievement of qualifications, if carefully designed and applied, might offer the young person the best of both worlds.** Extern’s report, *Alternative Education Provision – Starting to look at good practice (2004)*, would appear to be making this point. They assert that alternative forms of teaching need to provide a different and better experience to young people than that offered at school.

“Young people need to feel more positive about themselves before they are able to effectively enter education programmes. Thus activities to build self confidence and enhance self esteem are pre-requisites to further education”.

In the USA, the inspiration for developing alternative programmes and schools primarily resulted from the needs and concerns of individuals and communities who wanted to see an emphasis on the very talented and on the high-school dropout. The primary goal of initiating alternatives within communities has been to provide every parent and child with choices to obtain, for every young person, the best education available. It was eventually discovered that alternative methods and approaches that emphasise flexibility, support and one-to-one work, benefit a greater number of young people.

In Northern Ireland, the Education Inspectorate examined a new, alternative initiative, *EOTAS (Education Other Than at School)*. This was a project targeted at 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students who, for a variety of social and health reasons, were either excluded from, or refused to attend, school. Its aim was to help disaffected adolescents by means of greater flexibility in the curriculum, a flexibility that would allow EOTAS providers to design specific curricula that would meet the needs of these young people. Findings from the Inspectorate’s study found, in the main, that young people attending these alternative education schemes benefited, for the most part, personally, socially and educationally. Interim evaluations show that the approaches taken in alternative

centres enable young people to gain qualifications, have a knock-on beneficial effect on parents, and help to prevent social isolation in later life. The study also discloses that many of these young people have strong views on their experiences of the formal education system, highlighting in particular its inability to accept them, or to understand and provide for their needs.

### **Concluding Comment.**

Given the complex, student-centred nature of informal approaches to teaching, their Aristotelian focus on working and proceeding from where the learner is, and the deep affectivity that underpins the processes, it is not difficult to see why formal educators may avoid using this approach. Yet the evidence is clear that whatever that training is, a substantial proportion of the school population do not benefit as much from their school experience; the legacy from which could be long term alienation from any type of learning that emulates the school system especially for marginalised adults

There are, also, the difficulties of using informal techniques to achieve the more cognitive developmental outcomes that 'schooling' inevitably demands. However, with willingness among all providers, training where required, and a focus on the needs of the young people, these problems can be solved. What will *not* be solved, is the enduring disadvantage of the socially and economically deprived young people, if education persists with a curriculum that does not work, has never worked and, if it retains its present form, never will work with those most in need.

## SECTION 4.

**Authors: Joe Hawkins and Dr. Tony Morgan (edited by Dr. Brian O'Hare)**

### **Measuring Outcomes.**

Nowadays, especially in youth work, the notion of educational objectives seems to have been replaced by the concept of 'outcomes'. Whereas 'objectives' tends to imply planning, tasks still to be achieved, learning still to occur, 'outcomes' mean something rather different. This concept assumes that the objectives have already been set, that the learning has taken place, and that some measurable effect has resulted from the experience. There seems to be, however, a significant level of discussion centring on the extent to which outcomes can be measured or observed.

In view of these concerns, **it is necessary to examine definitions of outcomes**, in particular outcomes as a result of social interventions, and, in doing so, consider the purpose and pressures for their development. Consideration must also be given to the possibility of locating a point in time when the concept of outcomes (as a pre-determined result of an intervention) entered the 'language' of youth work and youth service and to identifying **who or what was primarily responsible for the introduction of the concept**. Some attempt will also be made to explore the social and economic policy context against which the concept evolved and finally, review its purpose and scope in youth work and the youth service in Northern Ireland today. It must also be noted that in the youth work sector, 'outcomes' are closely interconnected with the debate on the use of curriculum in the youth service. It is the intention to refer to this debate but only for the purpose of illustrating the impact of, and the context for, the development of the concept of outcomes as a predetermined result of youth work interventions.

For Field (2003:209) educational establishments have started to use the language of markets and competition. He says that this has created negative unintended consequences,

“Thus output-related funding, rather than improving performances of service-delivery agencies such as colleges (*youth service...*the author's italics), has often distorted their behaviour.”

Could youth work in schools be following a funding agenda representative of language of the markets and competition, such as outputs, outcomes, value for money, competition etc? Field believes so, and offers a word of warning,

“Rather than pursuing the aims originally envisaged by those who drew up the approved list of eligible outputs, organisational managers often seek to improve their share of resources by focussing on reported achievement against the key indicators, or reclassifying existing activities in order to meet new funding criteria and downplaying other (unmeasured or less generously rewarded) core activities.”

Field (2003:210) suggests that the 'fuzzy' nature of soft outcomes creates problems if they are used by Government to achieve certain political objectives. This is important to youth work in that many of the outcomes, such as, raising self-esteem, increasing young

people's confidence, building relationships, challenging values and beliefs etc., are all soft outcomes. Field continues by saying that it is unlikely to be one that ministers or civil servants feel confident in their capacity to develop clear criteria for judging success (or failure). He cites an example of reducing non-participation among adults in lifelong learning, saying,

“...while utterly admirable in itself; the difficulties in reaching an agreed definition of ‘non-participation’ is likely to prove formidable...”

He says that there are similar complex characteristics around the question of informal education, yet,

“...increasingly economic policy as well as education policy focuses on the role of networks and trust in facilitating the informal transmission of skills and knowledge.”

(Cited in Field 2003:210)

Field's work, while focussing on lifelong learning, has some resonance with youth work, particularly in schools. Youth work is based on outcomes that are often termed ‘soft’ and difficult to measure. Governments will fund programmes that can offer transparency, measurable outcomes and quantifiable outputs. Field says that governments will only offer small amounts of finance partly because of the difficulties faced by government in establishing whether the results offer value for money. One might ask if youth work in schools is a more tangible way for youth workers to measure their outcomes and outputs, i.e. in terms of those young people gaining qualifications and/or awards? For Field (203:211) intangible factors invariably present policy makers with measurement problems. He says that pursuing soft objectives through partnerships with non-governmental actors also lays government open to the charge of throwing money away (2003:211).

Field outlines a few reasons why these types of projects that have difficulty with measuring outcomes, are still prevalent in government policy:

- a. They normally have considerable legitimacy and are therefore ‘safe’ in political terms. Who is going to say that additional resources for youth work in schools would not be welcome?
- b. They represent a relatively easy field for non-regulatory types of intervention. **Much responsibility for implementation and delivery will rest with relatively low status and local actors.** Partners can be won over through incentive funding and the prospect exists of hard short-term targets.
- c. Governments like to be seen as having faith in the human capital approach to human resource planning. The point is that ‘schemes’ that address aspects of human capital (qualifications led) are looked favourably upon by government ministers at policy level.

What therefore are the implications for youth work in schools in terms of short-term funding, 'safe' programmes, non-regulatory approaches and difficulty with measuring specific outcomes?

### **In search of a definition.**

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (tenth edition, 2001) defines 'outcome' as, "*a consequence*", which in turn is defined as "*a result or effect*". The word outcome denotes, in at least a casual sense, something having been impacted upon, or a situation changed or altered as a result of something that has gone or taken place before. An internet search of the term 'outcome' reveals that it is used in a vast array of circumstances, situations and fields of work to connect, in a more definite sense, **the relationship between what has taken place before and what has changed as a direct or indirect consequence of an action or set of actions carried out as part of a programme.**

Other agencies have also attempted to define 'outcomes'. The Charities Evaluation Service (CES), for example, defines outcomes as, "*...changes that indicate whether an organisation has made progress to its aims and to what extent its interventions are making a difference.*" (CES, 2000). In another context (research undertaken by the CES for the then National Lottery Community Fund) the authors define outcomes as "*... all the changes and effects that happen as a result of your work.*" (Cupitt and Ellis, 2003:5). The use of the word "*all*" is very significant here. **It encompasses both the intended and unintended outcomes of an organisation's work.** This is an important point to be aware of when considering the effects of informal education interventions because often the unintended outcomes can be significant benefits that never could have been predicted. Kendall and Knapp (1999:25) in their work on behalf of the Voluntary Activity Unit of the Department of Social Development, Northern Ireland, refer to "*...the final outcomes, which, at the most simple level, are the changes over time in the welfare, quality of life and status (such as educational attainment or health) of end users induced by the voluntary activity in question.*"

These definitions create a sense of services being provided in a particular setting, in exchange for learning, change or development. They also illustrate that the exchange usually takes place within a relationship and across social boundaries, for example, between a service provider and a client, user or customer. Of themselves, the definitions give no real sense of their role or purpose in these settings and relationships. What is also masked is the inter-dependence of the concept of 'outcomes' with a sub-set of other terms such as *inputs, baselines, activities, outputs, outcome indicators, outcome targets, impacts and results*. There is a risk of theoretical paralysis here if too much specificity is sought in relation to each of these subsets but to some degree, all of these must be established, recorded, monitored and evaluated before any connection between what has gone before and what has been consequent to it, even in a casual way, can be claimed.

## Splitting the Outcome.

It becomes apparent in the literature that the term ‘outcome’ is used interchangeably, and sometimes confused with, other linked terminology such as ‘outcome indicator’. A potential cause for confusion was the suggestion that outcomes could be split into two types, ‘hard’ and ‘soft’. Table 1 below illustrates examples of both. It is an extract from a guide on measuring soft outcomes, developed specifically for projects funded through the European Social Fund (ESF); a fund primarily focussed on training, especially that which leads to the enhanced employability of participants. However the authors, Lloyd and O’Sullivan (2003:5), also believe their findings can be applied in a range of settings.

| <b>Table 1 Examples of Hard and Soft Outcomes</b>   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Hard Outcomes</b>  | <b>Soft Outcomes</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Starting a training course</li> <li>▪ Getting a qualification</li> <li>▪ Getting a job</li> <li>▪ Moving into permanent accommodation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved self confidence or self-esteem</li> <li>▪ Improved individual appearance and presentation</li> <li>▪ Improved ability to manage and plan finances</li> <li>▪ Improved language, numeracy or literacy skills</li> <li>▪ Better time-keeping / time management</li> <li>▪ Improved ability to get on with people / teamwork</li> <li>▪ Ability to write a job application letter or prepare CV</li> </ul> |

For Lloyd and O’Sullivan (2003) hard outcomes then are the clearly definable and quantifiable results that show the progress an individual has made. In contrast, soft outcomes are those that represent intermediary stages on the way to achieving a hard outcome. This is not dissimilar to the concept of ‘*outcome indicator*’, a term which is normally attributed to non-measurable behaviours that can, however, be observed and which can ‘indicate’ that change is taking place. Critical to both types of ‘outcome’, however, is the need to monitor and track key aspects of the work being undertaken in order to lay claim to the actual and attributable outcomes of it. To make such a claim, the same information must be collected at least twice over a period of time and the results compared (Carrington, 2002:26).

Carrington also raises questions as to the value of soft outcomes as indicators. He claims that they are often personal to the client group and their measurement can be intangible and subjective. Obviously, therefore, they cannot be externally assessed and while they do not tend to be a principle concern for statutory bodies that fund other agencies to help achieve public policy or common goals, they do demand a level of trust from the funding body. However, Carrington concurs with the notion that soft outcomes, despite the subjectivity in their identification, can provide ‘a good illustration’ of a

positive outcome of an intervention and that the learner is making progress along the way to achieving a main goal or 'hard outcome'.

There is a suggestion in this that 'outcome indicators' and 'soft outcomes' are almost the by-product of organisations' work and not outcomes in their own right. However, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) in a paper entitled '*Soft Outcomes and European-funded Projects*' (2002:1), argues that, despite the difficulties in measurement when compared to hard outcomes, soft outcomes are none the less "*real results*" with a positive bearing on the development of individuals, and they can be measured, recorded and shown as such. For example, video evidence of individual before any interventions and fixed time frame video evidence of same individual dressing and presenting in an improved manner or a diary kept by individuals illustrating and recording improved skills.

### **The Purpose of Outcomes.**

The use of the concept of 'outcomes' in business or organisational settings perhaps sheds some light on their purpose for social and educational purposes. It might be instinctive for a youth worker simply to claim that outcomes are the benefits a learner gains from his learning experience. Clearly there must be some accountability, some realistic attempt to demonstrate that such outcomes actually are the result of the intervention.

Carrington (2002:35), in a publication produced for the Community Fund, quotes the CES on the purpose of outcomes:

"Organisations need to know their outcomes (the difference they have made) for two reasons: for accountability and organisational learning."

In a subsequent Community Fund publication, Cupitt and Ellis (2003:12) of the CES expand on this, describing outcomes as being concerned with making work more effective and meeting clients' needs. They emphasise that **identifying desired outcomes right from the start of a piece of work is about enabling better planning and satisfying the expectations of funders.**

Aspects of good management, better planning and meeting needs, are given equal status to '*better accountability*' and '*satisfying the expectations of funders*'. However, 'satisfying the expectation of funders' highlights an underlying concern experienced by many who are affected by the drive towards identifying and measuring outcomes. **Instead of focusing on the needs and development of the young people, the interventions might have to be adjusted to comply with funders' wishes.** Carrington (2002:55) urges funders to avoid adding to this negative and one-sided view by encouraging those to whom grants have been awarded to see the approach "*as their own*". Carrington (2002:35) also argues that funders should be aware of and trust the integrity and conscientiousness with which the voluntary sector carries out its obligations. He quotes the CES on the "*greater acceptance*" in the voluntary sector of the good management practice associated with the process of monitoring and examining the outcomes of an organisation's work.

Outcomes, therefore, seem to have a twofold purpose. They are seen as evidence that the learning process is effective and that the young person is benefiting. And they are also evidence to funders or policy makers that time and resources are being effectively used. There is always the caveat, however, that when assessors or funders or superiors external to the intervention seek evidence of the ‘added value’, there are times when a substantial improvement in a young persons development may appear negligible to outside eyes.

### **The Demand of Outcomes.**

Not everyone, however, is prepared to trust the identification of outcomes to the tutor or youth worker. One agency that demands accountability through the identification of outcomes is the Community Fund, now re-branded as The Big Lottery Fund. Following a merger with another lottery fund distributor, The New Opportunities Fund, the Community Fund is a major funder of the community, voluntary and statutory sectors with an anticipated £34m available for distribution between 2005 and 2008 in Northern Ireland alone. Ten point eight million pounds of this funding will be specifically set aside for a Young People’s Fund (Big Lottery Fund, 2005:8). In 2002 the then Community Fund Chief Executive, Richard Buxton, outlined the Fund’s intention to place “ *a greater emphasis on outcomes*”. Following Buxton’s statement, it became an obligation for organisations in receipt of funding to demonstrate how they were “...*making a measurable short-term difference and contributing to making a long-term difference to the lives of people they seek to help.*” (Buxton, 2002:2). However, it should be stated that the demand to prove a long-term impact is virtually impossible to evidence in time-bound interventions.

Such a clear statement from a body with significant influence clearly increases the demand for an outcomes-orientated approach to work with people of all ages and backgrounds. From the point of view of the worker-on-the-ground, such an emphasis on demonstrable outcomes has negative implications. It inhibits their freedom to pursue one-to-one interventions with specific young people and **limits creative approaches that may work in practice but are difficult to assess.** Harland et al (2005:23) concluded that over-emphasis on outcomes could diminish the ability of tutors,

‘...to attend to the process of youth work and build relationships.’

Youth workers themselves, in response to similar demands from the European Union Peace & Reconciliation Programmes, expressed similar concern. The ‘Peace I’ & ‘Peace II’ programmes, as they became known, originated in the mid 1990s and brought substantial funding<sup>1</sup> from the EU for work across all sectors to support the developing political and peace processes in Northern Ireland. But Harland et al (2005:54) reports that the workers were experiencing an, “*increasing pressure... to evidence specific outcomes from their work.*”

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<sup>1</sup> €500million through the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Peace I), during 1994-1999 and €425million through the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Peace II) for spending between 2000-2006



Lloyd and O'Sullivan confirm that the nature of the demands from the EU may generate a deal of 'administrative' stress for youth workers. A considerable element of the EU funding was received from the European Social Fund (ESF) – one of four Structural Funds designed to strengthen economic and social cohesion across the European Union. ESF is primarily concerned with training - especially that leading to enhanced employability, helping unemployed and inactive people enter work and developing the skills of employed people. This funding source brought with it European Union requirements for the identification and measurement of 'soft outcomes' as a key criterion for receipt of funding, especially where hard outcomes were not appropriate to the target group (Lloyd and O'Sullivan, 2003:3). It had already been made clear that accountability for soft outcomes is extremely difficult particularly since success often differs, sometimes quite substantially, from learner to learner.

Kendall and Knapp (1999:4-7) suggest that there are four key elements to the demand to identify and measure the outcomes of their activities, particularly in reference to community and voluntary sector organisations:

i. The first is *accountability for public funds*, i.e. taxpayers' money. Public accountability has always demanded that public resources are used legally, with probity, and to achieve value for money. However, increased attention is now being placed on identifying what value is actually achieved with this public money.

ii. The second element originates from other funders. Again, *it is concerned with accountability for the funding provided and for reporting, in some measurable way, on a project's performance and its outcomes*. Cupitt & Ellis (2003:4), agree that many voluntary sector organisations are already familiar with describing what they do and identifying who they work with. However, they suggest that the sector also needs to place greater emphasis on indicating precisely the changes that come about in people's lives as a result of the work it does.

iii. Kendall and Knapp (1999:6) see the third element as coming from managers within the publicly or privately funded organisations. They present an argument that *organisations themselves need performance-related information for their day-to-day operation and to gauge how well they are performing in pursuit of their objectives and organisational aims*.

iv. The fourth element is from members of the public at large and community expectations, not just because they are taxpayers but as stakeholders or participants in the community and voluntary sector, whether as users, volunteers, employees or donors. Kendall & Knapp (1996:7) explain that these *stakeholders seek entitlement to make demands through internal organisational mechanisms* (e.g. attendance at annual general meetings) and external channels (e.g. the media). They specifically highlight the role of 'advocacy groups' within this element of the demand for outcome and performance data.

It is apparent from all of the above that an outcome-orientated approach to the work of organisations has become pervasive across all sectors. It is not confined purely to outcomes for the immediate beneficiaries or individual end-users of services, i.e. young people. There are demands on services for increased evidence of progress in a variety of circumstances, e.g., housing conditions, roads, traffic flows, recreational facilities etc. etc. Hard outcomes are expected in all Government sectors.

Given the vigour of the present focus on outcomes across such a diverse range of interested parties, it is unlikely that informal learning will escape an increasingly intense

spotlight on the outcomes of its interventions. For this reason, new effective forms of measuring such outcomes and more convincing methods for assessment of soft outcomes will have to be devised.

### **Youth work, Outcomes and Curriculum.**

The movement toward producing ‘measurable outcomes’ for youth workers and the youth service has been gaining momentum for almost two decades. In 1990 Jeffs and Smith (1990:26) set out their picture for the future shape of youth work. They envisaged a future in which organisations, agencies, departments and even local authorities would

“...have to demonstrate how they will meet pre-determined criteria concerning, for example, target group expected outcomes and how they will be measured (performance indicators); compliance with the mission statements / aims of youth work as defined by the government; and expenditure targets and budgetary controls.”

Their vision was based on developments through the late 1980s in Northern Ireland where a centralised curriculum for youth work had been in operation since 1987. In his curriculum statement, the then Under Secretary of State for Education in Northern Ireland, Dr. Brian Mawhinney (DENI, 1987), stated that it was about laying the foundation for a new sense of common purpose and a **more effective means of judging performance. Value for money featured heavily** in Dr. Mawhinney’s presentation and he saw it as an important part of the curriculum’s purpose to assist all levels of youth service to determine its own priorities **within the resources available**. The Minister was also at pains to point out that the curriculum was not being “...forced on...” the youth service. However, it is clear throughout his presentation that failure to enter into a contract based on the core requirements of the curriculum would almost certainly ensure that an application would be rejected.

Jeffs and Smith (1990:23) say that recent changes within (formal) education, e.g. the ‘*imposition*’ of a core curriculum with a centrally defined teaching syllabus, a set of outcomes, and a testing and assessment framework to measure those outcomes may indicate certain predictions about other sectors as well. They explain that in the health sector, several kinds of outcome are now expected, for example, Trusts are expected to indicate the construction of the internal market and demonstrate how it is designed to encourage hospitals to compete for resources. The Social Services are expected to demonstrate, for example, a greater focus on targeting services and the level of success in the introduction of the care in the community initiative.

Jeffs and Smith (1990) focus specifically on youth work, however, and at the time of their writing, they were taking account of the words of the then Under Secretary of State at the Department of Education in London, Alan Howarth, speaking at the first ministerial conference on a core curriculum for youth work in 1989. At this conference he stated that the government was looking for a,

“...directed fusillade [rather] than a scatter-gun approach...”

as a methodology for the future youth service in England. The Minister went on to say that what he meant by core curriculum was not so much the aims and activities of the service but the,

“...priority outcomes which the service should seek to provide” (Ord, 2004:44).

His ideas, however, were not to be easily or immediately implemented. The rate of Jeffs and Smith’s overall predictions, and expected outcomes in particular, slowed somewhat in the early 1990s with Ministerial changes (Ord 2004:45) and what was generally perceived to be the Department’s, ‘...*hamfisted management*’ of a further two Ministerial Conferences held in 1990 and 1992 (Merton & Wylie, 2004: 63). By and large **attempts to secure a core curriculum failed, mainly because the wider youth service was unwilling to sign up to a set of ideas which seemed to be centrally prescribed.** However, the question of a role for the youth service was pursued throughout this period and agreement was reached on a set of common principles forming the foundation of effective youth work in England, i.e. that it should be,

“...enabling, educative, participative and promote equality of opportunity.”

Significantly, the agreement reached did not specify the kinds of learning outcome to be achieved nor the criteria by which the above principles might be assessed and measured (Dept. of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [DEFRA], June 2000).

While the concept of a ‘*core curriculum as outcomes*’ for the youth service had been largely evaded across England in the early and mid 1990s, throughout the same period the Northern Ireland curriculum for youth work was firmly embedded. All units and projects funded through an Education Library Board (ELB) were required to set out at least an annual work plan incorporating the nine core requirements of the curriculum document that were to be reflected in all programmes, which would then form the basis of a contract for funding (DENI, 1987).

The format of the work plans and contracts differed across the five Education and Library Board areas but, in each ELB, clubs and units were asked to specify in advance the output, i.e. numbers of young people, numbers of sessions, projects, etc., and the extent to which young people participating in programmes had progressed in the core requirements. **It is clear that such demands were, in effect if not explicitly, a request for stated ‘outcomes’.**

The demand did eventually become explicit in an occasional paper from the Inter Board Youth Panel of the five Northern Ireland ELBs (1994:8). Clearly discussions had been on-going in the background and policy-makers were becoming increasingly determined to ensure that **evidence of ‘value for funding’** would be provided. The authors of the occasional paper emphasised that future curriculum development must have a sharpened focus to ensure the quality of the service provided to young people and be carried out in as effective a manner as possible within available resources. In conclusion it stated: “*Any curriculum framework requires that outcomes are clearly defined prior to embarking on any piece of work.*”

It would thus appear that ‘*curriculum as outcomes*’, which had been strongly opposed and largely avoided in England, was still the pursuit of the statutory youth service in Northern Ireland. Subsequently, via the funding role of ELBs to local voluntary clubs and units in their areas, the requirement of setting pre-determined outcomes was extended to the wider voluntary youth sector.

The *Report of the Curriculum Review Working Group* (DENI, 1996) reflected broad agreement on the strengths and weaknesses of Dr. Mawhinney’s 1987 curriculum statement (i.e., the imposition of a centralised core curriculum on Youth Work). The Working Group also reported, however, that some in the youth service had felt that the curriculum was being applied in an inflexible and prescriptive fashion and in their proposals for the future of the curriculum, the Working Group suggested that the grant-giving powers of the relevant statutory bodies (including ELBs) could encourage attention to particular curricular themes as the needs of the learners change. Even with this ‘concession’, there remains a clear implication here that ‘the centre’ is beginning to dictate the curriculum, its methods and the manners of its assessment. **Such centralised control over a sector that relies on an ‘informal methodology’ that must be flexible, adjustable and student-centred must create fears for the effectiveness of its approach.** This echoes Carrington’s (2002) general concern with ‘funders and compliance’ as well as Jeffs and Smith’s (1990) specific concern about ‘compliance to achieve funding’ leading to a government defined youth work agenda. The risk for the youth service in these circumstances is that focussing funding on curricular themes or ‘outcome focussed funding’ **will result in the development of assessment-driven interventions with young people, rather than planned interventions based on the identified needs of the young people concerned.**

“Agencies can become shaped by the supply of funding, rather than the demands of the client group. There is a real temptation for the idea to follow the money, rather than the other way round. This more ‘entrepreneurial’ approach can create management problems - in addition to the ethical dilemmas.” (Rogers, 1993)

In a section of the Curriculum Review Report headed, ‘*Evaluating the Work*’, the Working Group suggests that the model of contract outlined in the 1987 curriculum statement, which they refer to as an “Agreement”, can set benchmarks of quality. They go on to illustrate through an example what the outcomes of a series of agreed interventions with young people might be.

“The [agreement] might specify how far, in an individual youth group, young people can influence programmes and decisions, take responsibility, for themselves and others in the community, show evidence of having new skills and interests and demonstrate gains in knowledge, understanding and awareness. If they have done so, the expected outcomes could include enhancement of self-esteem and greater maturity in relationship.” (DENI, 1996:17)

The working Group goes on to state that such an emphasis on outcomes may be necessary if developments in overall youth policy require the youth service to increase its responsibility for meeting the needs of, for example, more disadvantaged groups. Beyond

that there is nothing in the report or its recommendations for the future (which were circulated for consultation), about what the outcomes for the youth service - hard or soft, with or without indicators or targets - could or should be.

The subsequent full-scale review of youth service policy in Northern Ireland, ‘*A Youth Service for a New Millennium*’ (DENI, 1999), which followed a substantial consultation exercise, also made little comment in respect of specifying outcomes for youth work or the Northern Ireland Youth Service. This is perhaps understandable; however, since its primary concern was in developing the broad policy framework for the Youth Service and to identify an action agenda for implementation of the Policy (DENI, 1999:6).

Nonetheless, the policy review report did draw attention, on a number of occasions, to the need for appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes *with an emphasis on qualitative outcomes* to be applied to new and experimental work within the Youth Service. This was probably **an acknowledgement of the general wish to embed evaluation and monitoring as a continuous principle running through, but not dominating, every aspect of service, planning and delivery, management and administration systems.** But since they did not consider this aspect of the issue to be part of their brief, they suggested that it might be undertaken by a proposed new body, the Youth Service Agency NI, that was detailed in the Review Group’s preferred option for the future. However, since the then Minister for Education in Northern Ireland, George Howarth was, “...*not convinced*...” that it was necessary to proceed with a major restructuring of the Service at that time (DENI, 2000), the task of establishing ‘qualitative outcomes’ was left in abeyance.

### **Curriculum Outcomes and Measuring Frameworks.**

In spite of a constant emphasis on outcomes across a variety of sectors, the issue sometimes ebbed as well as flowed in DENI documents. In 2003 DENI updated and re-launched *Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice*. The document was originally issued in 1997 at the same time as a major consultation on youth service policy in Northern Ireland was being undertaken and consequently its impact was reduced. ‘The Model’ sets out a central theme of personal and social development and three core principles for youth work in Northern Ireland:

- i. commitment to preparing young people for participation;
- ii. testing values and beliefs; and
- iii. the promotion of acceptance and understanding of others.

Like its 1987 predecessor, the new version mentions effectiveness, efficiency and best value but this time more in passing than as a starting point. But a key, somewhat contradictory, feature of the Model is a curriculum and programme development cycle which notably makes no direct reference to outcomes, focussing instead on consulting, agreeing and evaluating as the means of identifying and reporting progress or the lack of it. Further, it rates as ‘*a strength*’ the fact that there are no prescribed outcomes other than those agreed in consultation with participants (DENI, 2003:20).

For others at that time, however, the issue of ‘outcomes’ had not disappeared. One effort to promote a ‘framework’ to develop monitoring and evaluation processes based on

performance indicators and outcomes stands out in the Northern Ireland context during this period - not because of its influence or impact but rather because of the number of times it appears in youth sector focussed documents. 'A Framework for Interventions' (2000) was produced jointly by the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI), the Inter Board Panel and YouthNet, in anticipation of the Peace II Programme. The Framework provides a list of suggested target groups and three levels of incremental interventions:

Level 1: Inclusion of Marginalised Young People;

Level 2: Capacity Building; and

Level 3: Developing Citizenship .

Each level prescribes a set of activities around which, 'characteristically', interventions could be made. Each level also contains a set of expected outcomes that would observably or measurably result from these interventions. The authors stressed, however, that the Framework was not to be seen as inflexibly prescriptive nor were the three levels of intervention to be seen or acted upon in isolation from each other. The Framework was offered as a developmental continuum around which applicants to the Peace II Programme could build a logical proposal that would, in turn, contribute to a strategic approach to the work with young people that would be funded through it.

The 'Youth Work Strategy 2005-2008' developed under the auspices of the Youth Service Liaison Forum (YSLF)<sup>1</sup>, puts forward a new vision and mission for the youth work sector in Northern Ireland. Under its theme of delivering effective inclusive youth work, a priority is to "develop and measure performance / outcome indicators" (DENI, 2005:8), which is currently being taken forward by the Curriculum Development Unit on behalf of the YSLF.

Given the degree of contradiction emanating from DENI publications in their attitudes to outcomes (DENI 1996:17, 2003:20 & 2005:8), it is perhaps no surprise that little progress appears to have been made on 'defining' outcomes along the lines envisaged by the Inter Board Youth Panel (1994:8). However, since **enhanced partnership and cross-sectoral collaboration is crucial to the effectiveness and potential impact of the 'Youth Work Strategy'**, and since this will be overseen and underpinned by the YSLF who see the definition and measuring of outcomes as a priority, inconsistencies in attitudes, especially those found in DENI documents, should disappear.

### **Youth work and Outcomes.**

France and Wiles (1997:1) echo Jeffs and Smith's (1990) earlier prediction of more focussed targeting of resources and the consequent emphasis on achieving pre-determined outputs and outcomes in tackling the problems of young people or young people's problems. Ominously, they also note that formal monitoring and evaluation in the Youth Service was not well established. This weakness is illustrated by the failure of 73% of 28 initiatives (awarded funding through a Department for Education in London sponsored crime reduction programme) to put in place a monitoring and evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> The YSLF is a body chaired by the Department of Education and inclusive of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland, the five Education and Library Boards, YouthNet (the voluntary Youth Network for Northern Ireland), the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum

system to produce data, "...which could demonstrate their outcomes to the satisfaction of an outsider." (France and Wiles, 1997:8)

A similar weakness to that noted by France and Wiles is also found in work undertaken by Mattessich of the Wilder Research Centre, on behalf of the YCNI. Mattessich (2001:15) observed that organisations funded by the Youth Council, as a group, addressed;

"...outcomes that are disparate from one another and which, to the lay person, might seem one or two levels removed from the most important needs that youth have."

He went on to point out that while,

"...some organisations..."

funded by the Youth Council could demonstrate their results, outcomes and achievements,

"...most cannot."

Mattessich was keen to point out, however, that these observations referred specifically to the demonstration of 'outcomes' and that this deficiency did not imply that youth sector organisations do not address significant social needs. He was simply trying to point out that neither the average youth worker nor the Youth Council can provide measurable and observable results in a manner that easily captures,

"...the approval of politicians, funders, and the general public."

There was growing recognition by youth workers, however, of their responsibility to come to a better understanding of 'outcomes' and to develop skills in demonstrating them. During the substantial consultation process undertaken by those involved in the development of '*Step It Up - Charting Young People's Progress*'<sup>1</sup>, it was workers in the 'field' who highlighted the need for youth work in Scotland,

"...to be properly understood and valued by other professionals, politicians and even some managers!" (Milburn et al, 2003:31).

They were also able to accept that to achieve such recognition, they would have to find ways of indicating what was valuable and successful about their work.

Like the *Strategy for Youth Work in Northern Ireland*, 'Step It Up' was also based upon a new definition of the purpose of effective youth work. However, it goes further than the Northern Ireland 'Strategy' by providing a document (inclusive of

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<sup>1</sup> This was a comprehensive report produced in 2003 by the Community Education Department of the University of Strathclyde and the Prince's Trust Scotland to support developmental work with young people in youth work settings across Scotland.

practice materials and with links to associated websites<sup>1</sup>), which contains a comprehensive range of indicators and outcomes of youth work activity around a widely agreed framework of social and emotional competencies<sup>2</sup>. Significantly, it contains a **specifically designed self-assessment programme providing a structure for young people to chart their own development and progress as a result of their participation in youth work activities**. On paper at least, such a system could go some way to addressing the issue which Harland et al (2005:57) highlight in their study of the nature of youth work in Northern Ireland, i.e. that beyond a broad description of phases in a process, relationship building and general range of skills acquired by young people, the majority of youth workers in their study,

“...were unable to articulate concrete outcomes.”

Once youth workers and the Youth Service become competent in the articulation and demonstration of ‘outcomes’, however, they will possess the mechanism for ‘*communicating*’ the value of youth work and its ‘*accomplishments*’ to relevant funders, policy makers, decision-makers and society at large.

Some three years before Harland et al made these comments, however, the Department for Education & Skills published ‘*Transforming Youth Work - Resourcing Excellent Youth Services*’ (2002), a paper that recognised the importance of, and the need for, accreditation through a statement of outcomes. The document specified standards of youth work provision for Local Authorities across England, which included defining the target age range as 13-19 (with scope for working at the margins with 11-13s and 19-25yr olds), an aim to reach 25% of the age range in any given year of operation and a determination to reflect the cultural diversity of the community. Under the heading ‘*Measuring Performance*’ it set out ‘Annual Youth Service Unique Targets’, which restated the 25% reach into the target population and set a further target of 60% of these (N.B. this target was subsequently revised down),

“...to undergo personal and social development which results in an accredited outcome.”

It also specified particular groups or categories of young people to be targeted<sup>3</sup>.

It is clear from all of the above that connecting learning, change and development to the social interventions that take place in a youth or community setting is not simple or straightforward,

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<sup>1</sup> Step It Up youth workers materials can be found online at [www.youthlink.co.uk](http://www.youthlink.co.uk) The Step It Up self-assessment website is at [www.youngscot.org/stepitup](http://www.youngscot.org/stepitup)

<sup>2</sup> The social & emotional competencies identified in the Scottish model as central to effective youth work and young people’s development are: *awareness of myself; solving my problems and making my decisions; my working relationships with others; my communication with others; managing my personal and social relationships; and the world around me.* (Milburn et al, 2003:7).

<sup>3</sup> To include a locally agreed target for those assessed as not in education, employment or training (NEET) or who are at risk of, or who already fall into the following categories: teenage pregnancy, drugs, alcohol or substance abuse or offending (DFES, 2002:16).



“...as the causal link between activities undertaken and their impact is not entirely clear.” (Knox and Hughes 1994:248)

Community, voluntary and youth work sectors continue to make a distinctive contribution to the social world of their beneficiaries by addressing social need as they are uniquely placed to identify it. However, if they are to do this in *conjunction and partnership* with Government rather than *at its direction or 'bidding'*, then the ability to demonstrate outcomes becomes crucial. Nonetheless, ‘conjunction and partnership’ must not be sought ‘in compliance’ or at the expense of the real perceived needs of the target group. Carrington (2002:33) considers this to be a critical point that has the potential to be lost in the seemingly inexorable movement towards establishing outcomes as a basis for funding or reporting on activities and impact. He warns youth workers of,

“...the importance of ensuring that target outcomes have a meaning for and relevance to the needs and circumstances of service users and are not designed to provide a tidy short term ‘result’ to enhance the reports of either the funder or the provider.”

### **End Comment.**

The review of literature masks the inherent difficulty with assessing the impact of youth work in schools without taking cognisance of the structural inequality associated with the education system. While this research was not about investigating the strengths or limitations of the education system in Northern Ireland it is important to say something about the context in which youth work or informal learning processes are practised. Mac Beath et al (2007) investigating ‘Schools Facing Extremely Challenging Circumstances’ (SFECC) comprehensively critique the underlying issues associated with ‘trying’ to create change through the school system. For example Mac Beath et al (2007:125) state at the end of their study into 8 underperforming schools that,

“While schooling for all was achieved in Britain in the nineteenth century, a few years into the twenty-first we are still not able to claim that schools as we know them are able to offer a fulfilling education for *all* our children.”

They state that even when the resources for the new ‘academies’ was raised from £14,000 to £21,000 per pupil evidence shows that some schools still underperformed. The question is what is meant by underperformance? For the SFECC the measurement of progress was based on the narrow measurement of GCSE results, moving from 2 or less to 5 or more. They do, however, acknowledge other less tangible factors. One aspect of the SFECC research that resonates with this study is the contention that there is a ‘quiet revolution’ in some schools. This quiet revolution is localised and shaped by individuals and outside agencies being brought into the school from both the voluntary and statutory youth sectors.

Mac Beath et al (2007:127) is interesting for other reasons as they infer that schools can only offer a partial service and that learning is not simply a product of

teaching but is acutely dependent on mental and physical health, diet, emotional stability and the quality of relationships in school, home and community. Mac Beath et al (2007:128) do not see the school as the only 'educators' of young people. They state,

“Education was not to be seen as something that took place solely in the classroom.”

However the SFECC study highlights concerns about not wanting to challenge the existing education system. They suggest that some of the changes needed cannot be achieved in the existing system.

Mac Beath et al (2007) suggest that the more insulated the experience from 'real life', the less likelihood there is of penetrating the inner world of disenfranchised young people. Until such times as schools can measure outcomes in terms of young people's learning in the context of their immediate community (however defined) and their family and personal needs, then subject-led curriculum outcomes will remain the central measurement of success.

Evidence is clear that a substantial section of young people in our society are being failed by the education system. The time has come for a radical reappraisal of the provision that society makes for a percentage of young people who enter adulthood without qualifications, without formal training, without the skills that will lead to employment and with nothing in their future except disenchantment, poverty and the same existence that afflicted earlier generations.

The answers to this problem exist. They exist in several recent research reports that have appeared over the past few years, reports that recognise the need for an entirely new curriculum for this cohort of young people and entirely new approaches to delivering this curriculum. Youth work has done its best in circumstances of uncertain funding, limited resources and questionable support. It is fair to say that more than this is needed. Schools have failed to deliver a meaningful learning outcome for this cohort but there seems still a necessity for schooling, however different a form it might have to take.

Always, when such suggestions are made, there arises the question of qualifications. What kind of qualifications can they earn that will have any value? That is, of course, both an ethical and a vocational question. There is the value of personal and social development that is hard to measure in material terms; there is the value to society of a citizenship that is less anti-social and less criminally inclined; and there is, too, the value of preparedness for work. There is also the additional question of the extent to which any of these 'low-achievers' in educational terms, are, in fact, 'under-achievers'? How many adolescents have left school under-qualified and disaffected who, given alternative approaches to their education and enlightened tutor attitudes, might well have left school with radically different prospects rather than an aversion to learning for some? There are issues here that are not within the brief of this review but it can be said in general terms that realistic prospects can be identified, realistic targets can be set, and realistic demands, however informal the approach, can be made on the learners.

It is this kind of thinking that demands serious consideration for ‘informal learning’ methods. Success should be measured in terms of what the student has learnt and is learning.

Herein lies another issue fraught with difficulty. Much of what is valuable in informal learning can neither be measured nor obviously observed. It is doubtful if even the learner could articulate many of the beneficial but unintended outcomes that are so much a feature of the informal approach. This section shows how complex this issue is but it also makes clear that demonstration of observable outcomes, as a result of interventions, is a necessity. It is necessary for those who teach so that they will know what interventions to continue making or what remedial adjustments they will need to make to their stated programmes. It is necessary for those who fund such programmes as evidence of success. Furthermore, it is necessary for employers who will, understandably, want some evidence of the reliability and employability of those to whom they are prepared to offer work.

## SECTION 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.

### Introduction.

#### INITIAL RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.

- To seek clarification of the outcomes of youth work in schools, Youthreach and informal education settings.<sup>1</sup>
- To ascertain if the ‘profiling web’ could be developed and integrated with school based work in Northern Ireland.<sup>2</sup>
- To assess the delivery mechanism of youth work in schools.
- To investigate the ‘ecology of the learning environments’ in terms of youth work approaches to learning in schools.
- To understand the curriculum around youth work for marginalised/disaffected/disengaged young people in formal settings.

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#### MAIN OBJECTIVE:

To seek clarification on the outcomes of youth work in schools;

#### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

- Ascertain what programmes are currently running in a sample of these formal settings.
- Name the programmes/courses.
- Outline the expected outcomes.
- Ascertain the levels of outcomes, in terms of awards/qualifications.

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• <sup>1</sup> This objective initially contained the Further Education sector but it was decided at an early stage that it would not be appropriate because the concept of ‘youth work’ is not that well developed in the FE sector. Although it should be noted that some schools use the FE colleges to service aspects of the curriculum not available in the school, e.g. hairdressing, bricklaying, apprenticeships and other related areas. Subsequently the researchers suggest that there needs to be further research into the use of informal learning processes in FE colleges, including the links between FE and school-based work with disengaged youth.

• <sup>2</sup> This aspect of the research was aspirational at the beginning of the research but it became clear that the profiling web had a specific function which related to the Youthreach programme in the Republic of Ireland. The researchers suggest that **when youth work in schools is more strategically formed there should be a further analysis of how the profiling web could be of use to youth workers and teachers.** There is no doubt that the profiling web offers a useful mechanism for prioritising work with young people in a variety of educational settings.

- Ascertain whether the agencies seek out young people or do young people attend voluntarily.
- Is the programme part of wider provision.
- Can the young people leave the programmes at anytime or do they incur a penalty, e.g. loss of benefit.
- Do individual programmes have a target number of young people.
- Do the programmes suit all young people.
- Are there any problems with the outcomes.

**MAIN OBJECTIVE:**

To ascertain if the profiling web (Mary Gordon) can be developed for schools in Northern Ireland;

**SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:**

- Write a brief outline of the aims and objectives of the Profiling web.
- What are the suggested outcomes of this programme.
- What is the function of the profiling web.
- Evaluate the impact, using the trained workers and feedback from the young people.

**MAIN OBJECTIVE:**

To assess the delivery mechanisms of youth work in schools;

**SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:**

- Who teaches/delivers the programmes.
- What programmes are used and why.
- Are the programmes accredited.
- How long do the programmes last.
- Are all programme outcomes measured.
- What other courses are available to the young people in these environments.
- What support mechanisms are on offer within the school.
- What other services do the youth workers use.
- Is the programme an integral part of the young person's learning experience or separate from the rest of his/her studies.
- What are the benefits of working in a 'formal' setting using informal approaches to learning.
- What difficulties do you face in your 'formal' setting using informal approaches to learning.

**MAIN OBJECTIVE:**

To investigate the 'ecology of the learning environment' in terms of informal approaches to learning in schools;

**SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:**

- What is the context of the learning environment. In terms of:
  - Physical space;
  - Age group;
  - Group size;
  - Group gender mix;
  - Where do the informal educators meet the students?
- How do the formal sectors recruit the young people.
- Who is the client base? For example: The nature of young people, e.g. left school early, qualifications, other providers etc...
- How does the youth work 'set-up' differ from the school environment.
- How does Youthreach differ from the 'formal' school setting.
- What works in these settings.
- What is problematic in these settings.
- How do these 'formal' agencies acknowledge the informal teaching process.
- Are the programmes an integral part of the agencies' educational function, for example, is there any evidence of how this is manifest? i.e. award ceremonies, publicity etc...

**MAIN OBJECTIVE:**

To develop a curriculum around informal education for marginalised/disaffected young people in formal settings.

**SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:**

- What is the role of youth workers in formal settings.
- What exactly is the function of youth work to learning in formal settings.
- Analyse aspects of the profiling web and other programmes that might be worth considering for inclusion.
- Highlight good practice.
- Outline the difficulties faced by youth workers in formal settings.
- Indicate the strengths of using informal approaches in formal settings.
- What are the training needs of youth workers in schools.

## **RESEARCH STRATEGY.**

### **Qualitative analysis.**

The research was conducted within the framework of qualitative analysis. The strategy was chosen to maximise the potential for understanding the individual actors' (young people, youth workers, teachers, principals and Youthreach practitioners) interpretation and understanding of the interface between the informal and formal learning contexts. Qualitative analysis increased the understanding about the process of development within both worlds, i.e. youth work/informal education and schools/formal education when they come together to achieve certain goals. It further increased understanding as the research took place in 'natural settings' supporting a more holistic understanding about the interface between formal and informal learning. Lastly, qualitative analysis was used to gain multiple perspectives about the relationship between youth work and schools from a variety of key respondents involved in this type of work. The use of focus groups with young people was particularly insightful as it allowed the researchers to delve into their views and opinions about practice. The young people were given a worksheet/questionnaire for additional information.

Researchers also observed the youth workers and teachers as they carried out the research. Meetings and notes were kept to discuss these observations as a method of analysis. Finally documents relating to practice and planning were read to contextualise the findings.

### **Methods of data collection.**

The researchers used a variety of data collecting methods that are complementary to qualitative research:

In-depth interviews with key informants from youth work, schools and Youthreach;  
A worksheet/questionnaire for young people with experience of informal practices in formal settings;  
Focus groups for young people to ascertain their views;  
Observation analysis carried out during the research;  
Documentary evidence underpinning programme development.

### **Sampling frame.**

- Schools involved in collaboration with statutory and voluntary youth work provision.
- Teachers from schools involved in youth work provision.

- Youth work practitioners working in schools.
- Youthreach programme as a parallel educational experience for marginalised young people in the Republic of Ireland.

**IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH THE FOLLOWING KEY INFORMANTS:**

**A. 9 teachers familiar with informal or youth work practices in schools:**

This sample included key informants who are familiar with an informal educational programme and who can give views, opinions or facts on the interface between the formal and informal learning processes

- 5 Principals of secondary schools: Belfast (2), Craigavon (1) Newry (1) and Ballynahinch (1).
- 1 Special needs co-ordinator: Belfast secondary school.
- 1 Year Head from a secondary school in Belfast.
- 1 Vice-principal from a secondary school in Belfast.

**B. 8 Youth workers working in schools:**

- 1 Youth worker from the Belfast Education and Library Board working in schools.
- 1 Youth worker in the voluntary sector working with schools.
- 1 Youth worker involved in policy decision for youth work in schools.
- 1 Youth worker involved in the South Eastern Education and Library Board schools based work.
- 1 Youth worker involved in the North Eastern Education and Library Board schools based work.
- 2 Youth workers from the Voluntary sector involved in funding-led programmes in secondary schools.
- 1 Youth worker from the Southern Education and Library Board work in schools.

**C. 11 informal educators working in Youthreach:**

This sample included a variety of Youthreach staff; co-ordinators (7), county co-ordinator (1), the Director of a Senior Traveller Centre (1), the CEO of Youthreach (1), the quality assurance co-ordinator for all Youthreach programmes (1).



**D. 5 Focus Groups of young people:**

2 groups from an 11-16 all ability Secondary School in Belfast.

1 group from an 11-16 integrated school in County Armagh.

1 group from a Catholic Secondary school in County Down.

1 group from a co-educational school in County Donegal.

**E. Questionnaire.**

A questionnaire involving 117 young people

## **SECTION 6: ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS.**

### **Introduction.**

#### **Stage 1.**

In-depth interviews were carried out on key informants directly involved in youth work in schools in Northern Ireland. The sample included youth work practitioners, teachers and principals from schools that use youth workers to deliver programmes. Additionally interviews were carried out on Youthreach staff and managers (a programme based exclusively in the Republic of Ireland) to investigate if they felt that the programme, as a parallel educational process, offered other interpretations for the analysis of youth work in schools. The findings from the Youthreach interviews are in a separate section.

Appendix 1: Interview questions for youth workers in schools.

Appendix 2: A set of questions for teachers and principals.

Appendix 3: Research questions for Youthreach staff.

### **THE SAMPLE.**

The sample represents individuals who have first hand knowledge of youth work or informal education in schools as youth work practitioners (statutory and voluntary) including teachers and principals involved in facilitating these activities. The list includes those working on Youthreach programmes:

1. Practitioner from Opportunity Youth, Northern Ireland;
2. YouthNet representative;
3. BELB practitioner from Belfast;
4. NEELB practitioner from Coleraine;
5. SELB practitioner from Armagh;
6. Representative A from Youth Action;
7. Representative B from Youth Action;
8. School principal from a secondary school in the SEELB, Ballynahinch;
9. Youthworker from SEELB (Youth Service) schools based programme;
10. Principal of an Integrated secondary school;
11. Vice-principal of a girls' secondary school in Belfast;
12. Year Head of a girls' secondary school in Belfast;
13. Special needs co-ordinator for a secondary school in Belfast;
14. Principal of a boys' secondary school in Armagh;
15. Principal of a girls' secondary school in Belfast;
16. Principal of a boys' secondary school in Down;
17. Member of a SMT (Senior Management Team) of a girls' secondary school in Belfast;
18. County co-ordinator with Youthreach;

19. Co-ordinator with Youthreach in Gortahork;
20. Senior Traveller County co-ordinator in Republic;
21. Co-ordinator with Youthreach in Lifford;
22. Co-ordinator with Youthreach in Buncrana;
23. Co-ordinator with Youthreach in Glengadd;
24. Co-ordinator with Youthreach in Ballyshannon;
25. CEO Youthreach;
26. Quality Assurance Manager in Youthreach;
27. Co-ordinator with Youthreach in Drogheda.

The findings and analysis are presented under the following headings:

**-THE CONTEXT OF THE WORK.**

**-THE GROUP.**

**-THE PROGRAMME/COURSE OR INTERVENTION.**

**-DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR INFORMAL LEARNING.**

**-SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS.**

## THE CONTEXT OF THE WORK.

All interviewees were asked about the context of the work.

### A. Youth work in schools.

*[Research question: Can you give an example, from your working situation, that illustrates how you have become involved in informal approaches to learning?]*

This question quickly highlighted the ambiguity of the concept of youth work perceived as 'informal education'. While the youth workers launched into a straightforward response by outlining their work the schools perceived 'informal' education in quite a different light while those from Youthreach understood it in the context of a programme that was, in the first instance, divorced from school. One youth worker said that she had been asked by her Board to run an XL course (this was a programme developed by the Princes Trust offering a prescribed curriculum/structure and equivalence with GCSEs) which was eventually dropped to be replaced by the COPE (Certificate of Personal Effectiveness course). This programme was offered by the Board and accepted by the schools.

Interestingly when asked about informal education and the schools, most teachers and principals mentioned any outside agency that came into the school. The concept of informal education seemed to denote social workers giving talks, drugs awareness sessions, teenage pregnancy discussions, suicide awareness and health promotion agencies **all coming into the schools**. This concept of informal education as perceived as coming into the schools was termed by the researchers as '**in-formal**', i.e. **anything that came into the formal setting**.

Other providers, mainly from the voluntary sector, offered a service/course/programme to schools, e.g. dads and lads, personal development, drugs awareness etc. **These organisations were proactive** in the relationship between schools and programmes.

One interviewee from the NEELB was more precise about the role of youth work in schools. He states,

“Our model is...we don't go into schools to teach...we go in and through a referral system...we are given groups of young people who have issues based work around behavioural support....emotional and behavioural difficulties.”

He stated that they, “...help them cope with their situation in school.” This was slightly different to other youth workers who used informal approaches to complement the school curriculum rather than as a process for, what could be termed, 'behaviour modification'.

Other schools allowed students to attend the local Further Education programme or local community based groups, **outside the school setting**, as long as they offered something for their students.

## **B. The function of youth work or informal education in a school setting.**

*[Research Question: What is the function of youth work or informal education in your setting?]*

For one principal the function for this type of work was for,

“...the preparation of pupils for life and the introduction of citizenship, home economics, personal development and education for employability. Those are areas that will require a large degree of external support coming into schools and equally for pupils moving out so that education doesn't necessarily take place within the parameters of the school's buildings but that it is something that will equip pupils for life. They have got to experience that in all forms.”

This comment captures the essence of youth work type activities in the school setting. Other practitioners see the function as,

“...examples as to how the informal and formal sectors meet in relation to education...the flavour of the programme is all about the youth work approach...whereby the young people determine their learning. It's all about providing them with choices and about engaging their creativity, their talents, their ideas...bringing them on board a process where they plan, they do, and they review their learning so there would be critical reflection.....all new concepts for the young people.”

While these comments relate to the youth workers going into the school some youth workers were working with young people excluded from schools. For these youth workers using a curriculum driven approach was equally useful; one stating,

“...young people can relate to this kind of approach, especially the young people we work with, as most of them have been expelled from school, so they don't favour the formal side.”

While the majority of the interviewees saw youth work practice as another dimension to that of the school one respondent from the NEELB was under no doubt about what they were trying to achieve by going into schools.

“...my function is to help young people get the best experience out of school, to cope with school through whatever their personal and social needs are...”

This person felt that such an approach was consistent with youth work principles as it adhered to the notion of a 'voluntary principle' and the young people were at the centre of the process. He continued,

“...I think that schools are failing young people and young people are failing schools...They are crying out for help and the vast majority are eventually receptive to what we do...We are looking to go into another five or six schools within the next year.”

### **C. Why use this approach?**

*[Research Question: Why do you use this approach?]*

The choice of using a youth work approach in schools seems obvious to youth workers interviewed.

“Young people see teachers as being older and so a youth worker is someone that they knew from doing youth work in the town, so there is a link....They bring an extra dimension and extra experience....They are not seen as a teacher and it adds to that whole atmosphere of a more relaxed different focus to what they were about.”

This interviewee is alluding to the fact that youth workers can bring a dimension to the school that is difficult for teachers to bring. Additionally the youth workers used the approach for a variety of reasons:

- a. Some to deliver an accredited course in the school, i.e. COPE or XL
- b. The delivery of information on issues relating to youth, health, sexual issues, drugs, addiction, suicide etc...
- c. To deliver projects funded by the EU under certain measures relating to community relations, personal development and citizenship.

For the schools the main reasons were the need to ‘engage’ some young people who were having difficulty fitting into schools. The schools needed to offer something that both fulfilled the mission of the schools, in terms of developing the whole child and a programme that was in keeping with the ethos of the school. Some principals went so far as to suggest that the ‘newness’ of the youth worker’s face in the school was a dimension that allowed him/her to build a different relationship with young people. In contrast the teacher was perceived as always on their backs to deliver the curriculum.

#### **D. The strengths of using informal approaches in formal settings.**

*[Research Question: What are the strengths of using informal approaches in formal settings?]*

One interviewee stated the following,

**“...when I speak to young people I tell them I work ‘in’ the school, I don’t work ‘for’ the school.”**

This comment, from a youth worker, highlights the perspective of using youth work principles in the school setting. He said that the **relationship with the young people was paramount** and they could walk in and out at any time from the programme. However, not many teachers or principals would be as liberal with attendance and many of the young people were expected to attend and were picked for this reason. Some youth workers suggested that the strength was the absence of teachers during their programmes while others said the schools with a link teacher made their admission into the school a positive experience.

While the youth workers saw the voluntary relationship as paramount it was suggested by one policy maker that,

**“...our main concern would be that while we try to maintain the voluntary link...it is not always a voluntary relationship that you get in the classroom.”**

He said that most programmes were in the schools due to certain behaviours that needed to be challenged or changed because of the disruption they were making to the school and other pupils. The voluntary relationship was a debatable strength.

One principal said,

**“...certainly our experience has been very positive and XL has benefited the young people enormously...but I would still say that it has to be teacher-led embracing alternative approaches rather than alternative approaches coming into the school. For example, we were very anxious to make it clear that children in XL classes were very much part of the school community.”**

This comment illustrates the dichotomy between two different professions in the school setting. Another comment illustrates this point. One of the principals said,

**“Schools can waste an awful lot of time doing their best to counsel and give advice to pupils...often not having the full picture and sometimes that advice, albeit given with the best intentions may be totally misplaced whenever the full picture is ultimately revealed.”**

This comment may suggest that **youth workers attend to the ‘full picture’ of young people’s lives as a prerequisite for their intervention**. As suggested by Brendtro et al

(1983) the relationship is primary if one is working with youth at risk. It could be argued that relationships are primary when working with any young people. However it depends on the nature of the intervention that youth workers are making. The research indicates that programmes being delivered around personal development do in fact need to get most of the young person's 'full picture' so that they can use this as a starting point from which to move forward. The previous quote suggests that this is not always the case for teachers in schools.

Most, if not all those interviewed, suggested that the use of informal youth work in schools made a valuable contribution.

### **E. Difficulties faced by informal educators in formal settings.**

*[Research Question: Outline the difficulties faced by informal educators in formal settings?]*

Most youth workers felt that they could build a relationship with those labelled 'difficult' young people even in the context of a school. There was some debate about the nature of youth work being compromised in this setting, for example, was it really a voluntary relationship they had with the youth or was the curriculum too prescriptive and less flexible? One workers said,

“...we need to tread softly...we need to be accepted...we need to get credibility so that you know what you are doing...it's nearly always a process where feelings get worse for a while....with some resistance from teachers.”

There is no doubt that youth workers throughout this study felt that some teachers had to be won over. Others felt that the link teacher was very important in identifying those young people that could benefit from their intervention and eased the path through involvement of the principal, senior management and parents.

One principal makes the following comment,

“We did find on a number of occasions that sometimes the youth workers coming in didn't really understand that the school context was very different to what they had been used to while working within the youth work context.....and in some cases we found that they had found it quite difficult to manage the group of pupils and sometimes would request a teacher to sit in with them to conduct such meetings. It seemed to me at the outset that in some cases they had underestimated the difficulty that the school would be aware of in dealing with a cluster of pupils who have their own particular problems ...sometimes the groupings we found were effective in many respects for those pupils who perhaps lacked self-esteem but were generally co-operative in their mannerisms and may have just lacked confidence in themselves.”



This is a very insightful perspective that suggests that **youth workers may not be able to deal as effectively with some disengaged young people**. Interestingly none of the youth workers interviewed mentioned their limitation in this regard. There appears to be a need for the two professions to understand each other in terms of practice if they are to work together. As one observant principal says,

“...there needs to be a lot **more planning** and linking with the school in terms of how the programme could best work....this could be **done in advance of the programme taking place**.”

### **THE CONTEXT OF THE WORK: SUMMARY.**

There is no doubt that bringing youth workers into the school has, mainly, been viewed as positive. The school views this work as complementary to their work with young people as it prepares them for life. Youth workers, on the other hand, appear to be having to grapple with some ambiguous issues that they think are undermining some of the central tenets of their own profession. For example, some mentioned the challenge to the voluntary nature of youth work and the perceived difference between themselves as ‘informal educators’ and the more ‘formal’ teaching profession. While many youth workers see their client base as those disengaged or disaffected with school they did not mention any inherent problems with working with this cohort. Some youth workers welcomed the teacher involvement while others were happy to work alone.

## THE GROUP:

### F. Age profile of school-based group.

*[Research Question: What in the usual age of the group/class you work with?]*

The answers were similar for most of the sample. Normally the groups age from 14 to 16 with most of the students coming from the group that would be termed potential low achievers (in academic and qualification terms). A voluntary youth sector provider ran a programme for 'lads and dads'. Another school said that they,

“...targeted Year 9... although there were risks on both sides because on the day we were handing all of Year 9 over to the care of youth workers...it took place on a normal school working day...so we had the Year 9 pupils in...no uniform...being looked after by the youth workers...I have to say that I did have some apprehensions about that but it turned out a very successful day.”

This illustrates that some **schools will use youth workers with younger students as a means of engaging them early-on in their school life**. Another school used more informal youth work practices as part of the Year 8 induction period when they first attended secondary school. Many schools are interested in programmes that facilitate those in the final year of schooling as they appear to be the most restless. Some school programmes allow school leavers one day or more to attend the local Further Education college for vocational training although they are still tied to the school. **Irrespective of the reason for using youth workers a pattern is emerging that suggests youth workers are given a 'group' of young people to work with. For youth workers there is no need to establish a group, which is common practice in youth centres, as there are 'ready made' groups in schools.**

### G. Numbers in school-based youth group.

*[Research Question: How many young people are normally in the group?]*

Overall it would be right to say that the size of the group depends on the nature of the contact. If the person coming in is giving out information on drugs or other issue based work then they might face a large group. If, on the other hand, they are delivering a personal development course to disengaged young people the numbers are lower. Schools however appear to favour a programme/course or intervention that can facilitate a full class.

One respondent from the SELB states,

“...my function was to go in initially to build relationships with the young men...there were 27 of them.”

Another school said that there are sometimes 400 in the hall but the minimum number would be a class or group within a class, of 10 to 15.

The findings indicate that the size of the group depends on whether the outside person, youth worker or whoever, is going to give a talk on something or take a class through a prescribed programme of study, i.e. COPE or XL. **Youth workers often make demands on schools for small groups between 12 and 15 while class sizes are much larger. One youth worker said that she had to run a group session with a group of more than 25 which was nearly impossible given the nature of her input.**

#### **H. Gender mix of group.**

*[Research Question: Do you have a gender mix?]*

This was an interesting question as the schools normally have no control over it due to them being either single sex or mixed. Those youth workers who can dictate the gender balance will do so, one saying,

“...in terms of recruitment we would be involved in the recruitment of the groups, e.g. in one group there are 9 boys and 2 girls and another with 4 boys and 6 girls.”

This person worked in a mixed school so it was possible to get a gender balance. It should be said that the gender issue also applies to the worker. One female youth worker stated,

“I was a female coming in to work with a group of young men...it was quite daunting for some of them. It was a new way of working and they were very suspicious of me. “Are you here on behalf of the school?” They would ask. It took a long time for them to realise that I was a youth worker and I used different ways of actually facilitating groups.”

**It appears that the issue of gender relates to both peers and professionals. Elements of personal development can be developed in groups that have a good gender mix so that young people can discuss certain problems and topics of mutual interest. This may not always be possible in single-gender schools.**

#### **I. Setting for youth work in schools.**

*[Research Question: Where do you meet the students?]*

Most of the sample met the young people in the school setting. However, some youth workers stated that they take the young people outside the school in order to achieve their aims as the school was not conducive for the type of work they were trying to do. **Within the school the venue often depended on what was available.** Some schools offered the assembly hall or gym, while others, with better informal rooms, could only offer a different setting to the classroom. Most youth workers would demand a room that is not like a teaching room with desks, as most of their work will involve young people sitting in circles discussing topics etc. Some providers from **the voluntary sector will take young people out of the school** into their own agency for programmes. It was felt that this allowed them **more freedom from the constraints of the school with bells and interference.** Some youth workers used the youth wing as it was more conducive to an informal setting where they could establish group norms away from the distractions of school life.

One principal, **discussing the difference between the way youth workers and teachers practice their professions,** says,

“I think that because of the way that schools are organised that teachers are expected to maintain good discipline in classes in order for proper learning to take place. People from a youth club setting...yes they do have to exercise a certain level of discipline and control but at the same time they are encouraging the relaxation, the self-esteem, the socialisation of pupils which will be their major concern. Teachers at the end of the day are expected to produce results academically....and because of those very pressures that are on teachers to produce the academic results sometimes that will bring them into conflict with the young people...because young people may not recognise that the teacher is there to help. They see the teachers giving them more work, chastising them if work is not done to a certain standard and perhaps being on their backs as they would see it. Whereas in a youth club setting they see the youth worker can have a casual encounter with the young people, has time to listen to them and will not be coming up with the same type of pressures as a teacher in a school. It's having an understanding basically of what **the objectives of the education sector...of the school and the youth service perspective. If we could marry those two and see how they could accommodate and support each other then it would be good.**”

Herein lies some of the tensions surrounding the use of the **school as a setting**, especially for personal, social, behavioural and emotional development. One response has been to amass many of the principles of youth work into a course, i.e. COPE, XL etc. etc. Through this approach the youth worker can deliver a timetabled course to a group or class in a school within the timetable, otherwise the work is unaccredited and is assumed to be complementary to the subject based curriculum that drives the school outcomes, as stated by the principal in the last quote.

Another principal of a medium sized integrated school agrees,

**“I think if this is going to work in schools it must have the commitment of the senior management team** and certainly the principal, or at least an influential member of the senior management team. Hopefully though, it would have the full support because it does introduce a different type of education into the school which not all members of staff might be particularly comfortable with and there is an educational aspect in relation to the staff there, to convince them that this is actually of value. There are practical issues. How do you create the space. How do you create the time? Where does it fit into the timetable? I suppose the question is always asked... if the children are doing peer mediation, what are they not doing? So you have to justify it in relation to other curriculum pressures that might be on. So the role of the management is to support the project and to ensure that it is resourced in terms of personnel, time, physical resources and that as much as possible, and to give it recognition in the public domain, also in relation to perhaps marketing publications and so on, that it becomes mainstreamed as something the school does to enhance its provision for the pupils.”

#### **J. Recruitment of young people to programmes.**

*[Research Question: How do you recruit these young people?]*

Those workers who were going into schools with a prescribed programme would meet with the school principal or year head. The latter would normally identify a class or group that they felt would benefit from the experience on offer. Other providers would go to the school with something on offer and the school would decide if they had a cohort that would benefit. Others sought out youth workers to deliver programmes on drugs awareness, personal development or citizenship and would be more proactive in deciding who should get the experience. If the course could be offered to a large group (in the assembly hall) then it might involve the whole year group.

**Some youth workers said that they did not want the programme to be seen as dealing with young people who were problematic, a sentiment that most principals agreed with. One of the strengths alluded to previously is that youth workers do not have to recruit young people to their groups. While the debate about the ‘voluntary principle’ of attendance is ongoing, most youth workers welcomed the opportunity to work with those young people they would otherwise not see in youth centres.**

## **K. Client base for youth work in schools.**

*[Research Question: Who is your client base? For example, the nature of young people, i.e. left school early, no qualifications, part of a youth club, certain school pupils etc. etc...?]*

Most respondents agreed that those young people that are recruited for some courses such as COPE or XL are,

“...young people who are lacking in motivation, very poor self-esteem, fairly academic but lacking confidence. Other young people with specific learning difficulties that need specific support within the learning environment and other young people who have come from very difficult home backgrounds that have impacted upon their education.”

For those youth workers going into the school there is no doubt that they are there to deliver a programme/course or intervention to groups that are problematic. That assumes they are there for a specific piece of work that complements that of the school and that the teachers can see as useful for their students. If, on the other hand, the school sees youth work or informal education as outsiders coming in to deliver information, then the client base may be less differentiated in terms of engagement.

Suffice to say that most youth work in schools is geared towards those young people who are disengaged or marginalised in the first instance, from the ‘normal’ school system. **Most of those interviewed were positive about the impact of youth work on young people irrespective of the reason for attending the programme. The voluntary nature of attendance, rather than being seen as a primary concern before young people attend a group, may, in fact, be more relevant in regards to retention. Irrespective of the reason for young people being part of a youth group in the school they will not continue to attend if they are getting nothing from the experience. Some respondents were emphatic about offering the young people the opportunity to leave the group at anytime during their interventions.**

## **L. Programme length.**

*[Research Question: How long do the programmes/courses/interventions last?]*

An XL programme can last for 2 years over 5 terms of 3 hour sessions. Similarly the COPE programme, depending on the levels that the young person undertakes, can last for more than a year. The length of contact time fluctuated but was normally between 2 and 3 hours sessions over the period of the programme. Most programmes either lasted for 6 to 8 weeks or with accredited courses, an academic year, e.g. COPE or XL. However, some one-off interventions only lasted for 1 day with inputs to large groups or individual classes. The length of programme relates to the nature of the input.

## **THE 'GROUP' SUMMARY.**

Youth workers are tasked with working with marginalised youth. Therefore, it would make sense for them to be in the schools working with this target audience. The research so far indicates that this is the case. Normally youth workers will seek entrance to a school because they have something to offer, e.g. a programme of study like COPE or XL or a personal development course specifically designed by them. Or, they have been asked to come in to the school to deliver a session/workshop or series of session on drugs, alcohol misuse, suicide prevention, teenage pregnancy prevention or whatever. Schools, it would appear, see any outside agency coming into the school as informal education, whereas youth work would view its work mainly as a process of learning through structured or unstructured programmes.

Students on these youth work programmes will therefore be marginalised youth while students attending programmes of study, offered by other outside agencies, may not be termed marginalised. Their role is to facilitate learning through another pathway, deal with behavioural problems, make them compliant, build trust, teach them something that is or is not measurable and build a relationship. Some youth agencies decide to do this outside the parameters of the school while others will work in the school setting. The groups, if they are youth work orientated, will be small. The school denotes the gender balance as either all male/female or mixed.

## **THE PROGRAMME/COURSE/INTERVENTION:**

### **M. Acknowledgement of programmes by the school.**

*[Research Question: How does your 'formal' agency acknowledge the informal process?]*

Some courses are accredited which means that students are part of the normal ceremonies in the school. For others there is or was tension. One youth worker states,

“...there was some resistance at the start and now that I have worked in schools for a couple of years my face is known in all the schools. I feel that they are a lot more accepting and I believe that that **has taken time** and we've had to prove ourselves somewhat, and so too have the young people, in terms of achievements that they have made.”

Others mentioned that they were involved in presentation ceremonies within the schools. One youth worker used the same principles with the schools as she would with the youth by building up relationships with link teachers and having good communication between herself and others. She says,

“...I make sure my face is known in the school, I introduce myself...I say who I am, what I do, and in group sessions I try to encourage the young people to have their programmes known throughout the school to involve other teachers, other classes, parents...”

Interviews with principals suggests that they are very keen on presenting a united front in terms of the achievement of young people involved in courses outside the general remit of GCSEs or A Levels. However, as most youth work programmes are not accredited, the integration is dependent on the enthusiasm of the teacher/year head or principal. The general consensus of the youth workers interviewed was that integration needed to come from the top down otherwise it was less meaningful. Additionally there was a feeling that youth work practice in schools is still seen as low level work and that grades in GCSEs etc. are the gold standard.

### **N. Integration into the school.**

*[Research Question: How do you think the agency integrates the informal process into the ethos of the school?]*



One youth worker said that in one particular school the programme,

“...fits in quite well...as they’re not as formal as some other secondary schools...there is quite a lot of outdoor activity work so it fits in quite well but on the whole it doesn’t fit in as well as it could.”

Another youth worker said that the **achievements were on the school website**. For her,

“...this type of PR has been very positive for us because people are now seeing the youth work approach in a very different positive light.”

Another states,

“Acknowledgement from most teachers that we have something to offer and the way schools are moving they see the whole thing about informal approaches...that we can get through to young people that they can’t because they are tied within formal structures with formal relationships.”

Another youth worker is more critical. She says,

**“...they (the school) did acknowledge it but they didn’t value it...what they were more after was a certificate at the end of it...they had a presentation. It’s more a fact of the whole output rather than the process they go through.”**

This is a very important observation that begins to denote the difference between how youth workers perceive informal education and what some schools see as informal education. For the youth worker the ‘process’ that young people go through is more important than the output, i.e. the certificate. While the youth workers understood the importance of the award they believed it was equally important to understand the process of learning through a reflective process. Most respondents mentioned the need to redesign some programmes to suit the learning needs of participants. Others were aware of the **difficulties for some young people on courses that demanded higher levels of literacy and numeracy**.

A youth worker states,

“...the agency didn’t integrate very much. I went in to do my piece of work and go and that was it...I didn’t have an input to anything else...they tried to have an input into what I was trying to do but that was not appreciated.”

Throughout the research, **it would be true to say that the youth workers had no say in anything to do with the school other than what they were offering**. One worker said that they planned to train staff about issues facing young men as they

(teachers) appeared to be totally unaware of these issues. For her there needed to be more preplanning.

One of the interviewees involved in policy formulation says,

“The schools do acknowledge the programme in that they’ll happily kind of report that they are working with and are involved with youth workers as a way of trying to engage...almost so that they can say we are taking every opportunity to enhance the education of young people...but it’s primarily the way they describe it in that the young people are better behaved or they illustrate by way of this young person was at risk of falling out of the school system...going nowhere and here they ended up with such and such a qualification they are staying on or moving onto further education through the local college.”

He is a bit more challenging to teachers with his next point,

“They (referring to schools) can illustrate by example some of the benefits and developments but often the very simple level of feedback is other teachers reported changes of behaviour, more manageable classes...but what has taken place...can you identify beyond that...what has taken place to bring about that change...can they pinpoint what have been the crucial interventions?...there doesn’t seem to be a lot of interest...they get an outcome and that seems to be what they are happy with.”

One principal says that the teachers appointed to deal with youth workers are themselves open to change,

“I am quite sure **that like all good teachers they do learn from any experience** that they come across and I would like to think that any teacher at the end of June is a better teacher than they were at the beginning of September.”

**The challenge appears to be about tangible changes to teaching that might take place due to the relationship and experience gained while working with youth workers.**

One of the main findings from the research appears to relate to the concept of ‘school ethos’. This was something that was not mentioned by any youth worker but emphasised by all teachers and especially principals. One might say that the ‘ethos’ could or was shaping the nature of youth work in schools and the courses/programme/curriculum or interventions on offer. One principal states,

“It is important for example in issues like ‘drugs education’ that visiting speakers coming into the school would share the same values as the school are trying to address within their drugs and education policy.”

This aspiration was a common theme throughout the research with most schools seeing the ‘pastoral care’ team or teacher as central to the ‘ethos’ of the school.

## **O. Levels of outcomes.**

*[Research Question: What are the levels of outcomes, in terms of accreditation/awards/qualifications?]*

Programmes that offered certification such as COPE or XL were, de facto, offering an equivalence to GCSEs. Different levels of achievement meant that young people could leave with bronze, silver or gold. One youth worker said that those with literacy or numeracy issues normally did not take the written tests and this was a weakness, if the course was compulsory. Another worker raised the central dilemma faced by youth workers when asked to outline outcomes,

“...it depends. The aims of the short courses are very defined; which is to make young people transfer choices in their behaviours and social skills (referring to the use of a programme called, Western Spirit)...whereas the adventure learning stuff is all about problem solving skills and looking at confidence, esteem and issues that affect them and their community in which they live and acknowledging that...I’m a believer in the roles and responsibilities debate. Young people have the right to know their rights but they’ve also to know their responsibilities...this is a big debate that is always missing.”

One can see that youth workers see the interaction with young people in terms of personal development. For example, changes in self-esteem, young people taking responsibility for their actions, confidence building and, issues that affect them and their human rights. These personal development concepts are almost impossible to measure, at least in the short-term. Hence one of the reasons why there is an attraction for youth workers offering a well developed course of study such as COPE or XL, that has not only tangible outcomes but equivalency with GCSEs.

Youth work is therefore not only about measurable outcomes but less tangible outcomes. For one youth worker it was,

“...all about re-engaging young people into education...there is an expectation that they will have an accredited qualification or award depending on whether it is COPE or XL...we also deliver the wider key skills qualifications...we deliver three...problem solving, improving own learning and working with others. The young person might be functioning at either level 1 or 2 in the wider key skills. So they can do the gold award, for example, and that is half a GCSE equivalent and 3 wider key skills which equates to two and half GCSEs so they have the equivalent of 3 GCSEs through doing XL and wider key skills. COPE then is a full GCSE

and likewise the programme I am doing is integrating the 3 wider key skills as well.”

This quote illustrates the ‘flexibility’ mentioned by many youth workers who have to modify many programmes to suit the needs of some young people.

One school said that their part-time student support worker may be expected, in the future (if they became full-time), to offer more residentials and awards, such as the President’s and the Duke of Edinburgh. This would be written into their contract. Another school when asked what the outcomes should be stated,

“...it depends on what you mean by measured...certainly things are hard to quantify...while you can use surveys to quantify the relationship between drugs and alcohol and all those things....I think the qualitative is probably the one that we would want to develop. Listening to our young people, hearing what they tell us about the benefits of this and how it’s impacting on their lives outside school and their lives inside school.”

This suggests that **teachers understand that not all forms of informal education have easily measurable outcomes but that feedback from students highlight how they impact on their lives.**

## **P. Problems with outcomes.**

*[Research Question: Are there any problems with the outcomes?]*

A recurring problem was that of engagement by some of the target group in activities that resembled school-based work, i.e. written assignments and reading. For one practitioner,

“...some of the young people find it very difficult in terms of the written work...and as an informal practitioner I would say that we would have the scope to be more creative...I have used tape recorders and video recording in terms of how they complete what’s called an action plan and in terms of the language of the school...”

Another says,

“The major problem is that some of the boys have literacy problems which means they don’t enjoy having to write stuff down so that might be a hinderance having them achieve their qualification.”

While problems relate to tangible outcome some argue that the concept of ‘change’ is itself difficult to measure. An interviewee stated that the measurement of change and

the recognition of change reflects their impact. While they do this through targets set with the young people, teachers and parents, the main part of the process was,

“...the young people setting targets for themselves.”

This quote illustrates one of the frustrations experienced by youth workers in schools,

“...sometimes the relationship isn’t deemed as an outcome...whereas in the informal setting that is what informal education is all about.”

This person goes on to explain,

“It is largely to do with perception...we have started using the ‘Richter scale’ (a measuring tool for development) which we are piloting at the minute...traditionally all you have to do is a session record...an evaluation after every session with the young people...you have to do a session outline with your evaluation and your perceptions of any issues and highlight specific comments that could be tackled at a later date...and then write your reports and targets...you still can’t define a measurement.”

This quote again indicates the difficulty with programmes/courses/interventions that are well thought out but still lack clarity around ‘tangible’ outcomes, at least in the short-term. One insightful principal states,

“I don’t have expectations that are measurable in the traditional way because that is not the nature of the course. But because you don’t measure them in the traditional way, that does not mean that they are not measurable by different criteria...what you are looking for here is the quality of the experiences that the children have and their perception of whether it has been beneficial to them or not.. We would do... from time to time... evaluations by the pupils on the programmes. We would find increasingly that the people coming in would build this into their courses anyway. In-house in terms of our peer mediation... we would do that and the feedback from the children is almost invariably positive... they have enjoyed what they have done... they have learnt a great deal about relationships...they have learnt about conflict resolution techniques... they have improved their vocabulary... they have higher self- esteem... they are confident to stand up in front of parents and even teachers on in- service courses and talk about the programme and, had they not done the course, I don’t think they would have been able to do that... and that stays with them...a lifetime learning sort of thing. **We have to develop different measuring techniques to take into account that non-traditional academic learning. How do you measure that type of intelligence?... but I do know it’s not by the traditional methods.**”

The above quote captures the formal sector’s perception of informal education processes and acknowledges the difficulties with measuring outcomes. Another principal stated that a problem for him was that,

“The informal educators are not working to the same calendar (as the school) and they don’t know whether they are actually going to be in existence in September or not...so we are making plans assuming that perhaps somebody is coming in to take an afternoon for maybe 10 weeks...we have to timetable that...we have to know who our clients are and sometimes it is July or August before they know if they’re going to be in existence...that is too late for the schools.”

### **Q. Programme ‘measurement’.**

*[Research Question: Are all aspects of your programmes measured?]*

As mentioned above **the concept of measurement is ambiguous**. Most programmes are ‘evaluated’ which some youth workers would term a measuring process. The young people begin at ‘a’ and move through a process to ‘c’. The **‘bite-size’ changes are noted** through developing relationships, personal awareness, confidence, self-esteem etc... etc... and written down or verbally given.

Other programmes or courses have written outcomes that demand a reasonable use of English. These programmes are similar to GCSEs and offer schools a programme of study that can easily be sold to pupils, parents and teachers as well as timetabled into the school year due to their formal outcomes in terms of examination results. Schools appear to favour these courses and, as stated by some youth workers, so do they. The reason that youth workers like these prescribed courses is that they are clear about the content (COPE and XL) and they themselves have no difficulty with ‘teaching’ these personal development courses. The school can timetable the youth worker like a teacher, the youth worker feels like a teacher with a managed timetable, and has a purpose and known outcomes. A few of the interviewees saw this approach as a positive aspect of youth work in schools as it addressed issues, within the context of a school, that were problematic in the youth sector. For example, what are the outcomes of youth work and what do they do after building a relationship with young people (Harland et al 2003)? The contextualisation of youth work in schools appears to give, at least for some aspects of youth work, a professional role and function that is tangible.

The answer to the question, “Are all aspects of your programme measured?” is no. However, it raises the issue of measurement in terms of informal education (as defined by schools) and youth work (as defined by the youth work sector) and the difference between informal, non-formal and formal learning outcomes.

One teacher said that they used to measure the young person’s literacy and numeracy abilities before and after programmes to bring up their levels. But he says,

“...how do we measure the pastoral issues and emotional intelligence and stuff like that...I don’t know. I think you just know something is the right thing to do and the feedback is that someone stays on at school...was that as measurable in

some ways?...I don't know. I think it would be impossible for the programmes to suit all pupils. That's why you need a range...it's not one size fits all and you do have to monitor it and try the...well that didn't work so try something else. You are looking for something that strikes a chord and you don't always get it right."

## **R. Indicators for measuring outcomes.**

*[Research Question; What indicators do you use to measure outcomes?]*

Allied to the last question on measuring outcomes it became clear that both schools and youth workers were aware of indicators that were reflective of 'outcomes' based on the concept of 'change'. One programme uses,

"...performance indicators called the '4 voice framework' which would be used within the rural context...which is about the impact of young people on how they influence policy and strategic development. Each of us would have different ways of measuring the work. We set out objectives around attitude change...there would also be harder outputs as well...but much more around the learning for the young people involved."

The interviewee interested in the policy implication of outcomes agrees by saying,

"The softer bits of the programmes are not measured because the type of information that we have to report means that what we are asking people is... did young people take part in formal training or was it advice and guidance? So people have to qualify their work in those particular ways... they can do a bit of both... but it's sometimes about asking people for a sense of the harder outcomes by way of qualifications or unit achievement. We try to keep it very individual because as funders it would be very easy to say we want every project to work with 50 young people... we want half of them to be in a certain age group... half of them to have achieved this level of qualification... but we try not to do that. Funding is driven in that way, its very targeted, but we've tried to hold back the project from that type of approach so that they can say... this is the target group... this is the particular need that we are trying to address within that target group and therefore coming out of the interventions that we make, this is what we realistically can deliver... it can be quite small... a small number of young people over 2 years."

This statement is an obvious **attempt to move away from 'hard' academic or formal outcomes in terms of awards**. However, while this method needs to be further developed most agencies working in schools have their own quite well detailed evaluation process that would address personal growth.

## **S. Suitability of programmes for young people.**

*[Research Question: Do the programmes suit all young people who attend?]*

The answer to this question depends on the nature of the intervention from outside the school and the perceived needs of the school itself. If youth workers are offering a programme in the school, based on a course they have already used, then they can negotiate with the school around who will benefit. If the school has a view about what they think informal education is, for example, sexual health, then they will target an agency that fulfils their remit and ethos. One example that was mentioned a few times was the ‘Love for Life’ programme offered by an outside agency. One could then assume that this programme suits the ethos of catholic schools and that pupils and parents will be in agreement with using this programme in the school.

As mentioned above the need for youth workers to offer or have ‘flexible’ educational courses/programmes/interventions that suits the needs of marginalised young people (normally low achievers with low literacy and numeracy skills) is vital. When programmes that would not have been assessed previously have been shaped **into courses such as COPE and XL not all marginalised young people can benefit**. It appears, through comments from youth workers that XL was much more flexible than COPE in terms of allowing them to make appropriate changes to the curriculum. Youth workers said that they would sometimes offer these programmes to those students who were not their target group to those ‘above’ the marginal young people because they could benefit and fulfil the written criteria needed to finish these courses. Courses designed by youth workers would probably suit all marginalised young people in schools, **courses that have a written school-like tendency suit more ‘academic’ marginal youth** and programmes that are deemed ‘informal education’ by school (bringing in agencies to give out information) may suit all young people who attend as there is no measurement or indicator of impact expected.

## **T. Quality assurance.**

*[Research Question: What quality assurance mechanism do you use to evaluate your programme?]*

Interestingly most of the schools **were very complimentary about the quality assurance carried out by all youth work courses**. Youth workers state,

“...we would peer supervise ourselves...we meet with the care team in the school and get feedback as to what is going on...”

“...we use moderation in the courses...the moderation would be our quality assurance and this is provided by ASDAN...we prefer peer moderation...so that



gives us the opportunity of seeing what other people are doing and we are trained in moderation...”

Another says,

“All aspects of the programme are measured... That is something that we have worked really hard on in terms of measuring progress... We were recently inspected and they were very complimentary in terms of the quality assurance procedures that we have in place and all of the processes... We have a whole spectrum of quality assurance measures in place... Firstly we identify the indicators that we’re going to use to measure the young people’s progress... they have been agreed with myself and my line manager. In the past it was up to the youth worker to choose but we have now agreed, as a team, the indicators that we feel are key to the programme. After every session we complete a session plan whereby I outline the learning outcomes for the young people within the session. I have a plan of the energisers that I’m going to use, the debriefing exercises that I’m going to integrate fully within the session including methods of recording... we try and record everything. I would have a digital camera going the full time and we would ask young people in the group to take responsibility for photo opportunities to photograph or to video record... we would have portfolios of examples whereby the young people collate all the recordings of the work that they do throughout the session in a range of creative ways... it might be a diary.... through ICT photographs, etc., we evaluate at the end of every session. I would put 15-20 minutes aside after every session that I deliver to critically reflect and sit down and say, what went well and what didn’t go well?... What would you do differently? That would permeate the session itself;... it’s a process that I feel that the young people at the start find difficult but they will embrace... through practical experience they will begin to really grasp that and want to do it then. I have seen that when we do an energiser activity they will want to come back into group setting and discuss their learning.”

The nature of the quality assurance is captured in the above quote that suggests youth workers are conscious of informal education being an ongoing ‘learning process’ rather than subject based learning. **Reflection, feedback and ‘changing tack’ as and when it is appropriate for students’ learning is part of the learning process for youth workers.** Youth work programmes may find it easier to engage young people with their more learner/learning-based curriculum which is based on personal, emotional or behavioural development.

#### **SUMMARY OF PROGRAMME/COURSE/INTERVENTION.**

The main programmes used by youth workers, in terms of accreditation, appear to be COPE and XL. They are talked about in a positive manner and fit the school timetable for classroom teaching. Some youth workers felt that the XL course offered more flexibility in terms of shaping and changing the curriculum to meet the needs of some of their young people. The COPE course, it was suggested, suited a more ‘able’ young person rather

than those struggling with literacy issues. Some youth workers viewed the programme itself as evidence of interaction with young people and not necessarily measurable in 'academic terms'.

Integration into the schools seemed to be made easier if the youth workers used programmes that were accredited although those, such as 'dads and lads', made a great impression on the school, the pupils and the parents who attended. Quality assurance was carried out by the project after each session but the follow-up appeared to be less rigorous. This may have implications for programmes that cannot be easily measured as schools appear to require tangible outcomes. However, those principals interviewed were very positive about the programmes on offer in their respective schools irrespective of them being measured as they felt that the young people were benefiting from exposure to them. It was interesting to note that **most principals took a very realistic view about the need to engage in immeasurable outcomes for some of their pupils** through the use of non-traditional curricular approaches.

## **DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR INFORMAL LEARNING:**

### **U. Delivery of programmes/courses or interventions.**

*[Research Question: Who teaches, delivers or facilitates the programmes, courses and interventions?]*

Again this question resulted in a variety of answers. There was definitely no single universal method of delivery although it would be fair to say that youth workers subscribed to those tried and tested methods of delivery such as groupwork, discussion groups, experientially based groups, building relationships, getting to know young people, and other youth work approaches. However the context of delivering youth work in schools was sometimes problematic as indicated by some respondents who said that they did not like teachers in the room during sessions. One stated,

“The youth workers deliver the programmes in every instance. Sometimes the teacher can come in and undermine the role of the youth worker. In a youth group setting there’s a lot of noise...whereas a teacher with a particular opinion would say it is too noisy.”

Others welcomed the teacher into the sessions.

Some used the link support teacher as the first port of call and found that person very helpful.

Some schools offered information sessions for large numbers of students in assembly halls. For example, one youth worker said that due to time bound school restrictions the school link person would organise and bring in drugs awareness and sexual health organisations rather than get them to do this type of work. These programmes were sometimes delivered to a full assembly hall of pupils.

Other schools, reluctantly, allowed the youth workers to take the young people for the complete course, including a residential. In one instance this was problematic as it meant that the teachers, who normally attended the residential, were excluded and hence missed out on building a relationship with these pupils.

There was evidence of other programmes taught jointly between teachers and youth workers.

Some youth work programmes were viewed as a means of counselling difficult young people with the intention of eventually getting them (the young people) to ‘fit-into’ the school system.

A teacher says,

“One tension we have here...which we haven’t quite resolved yet is that we like going away on a residential because we get to know our pupils in a different setting and they get to know their teachers in a different atmosphere. The thing about youth workers...when they get the children, they don’t want the teachers around them...so that’s one wee thing.”

This person said that it is important to have the teachers involved and as this was normally done during the residential they had, in fact, lost an important opportunity to build a relationship.

## **V. Support mechanisms.**

*[Research Question: What support mechanisms are on offer within the ‘formal’ agency?]*

Those schools that employed a link support person (sometimes not a teacher) appeared to offer the best support for youth workers before, during and after intervention. The support person knew the disengaged pupils, the school system/structure and could ease the path for outsiders coming in. All the principals interviewed explained at length the importance of making the youth workers feel part of the school. Some understood the importance of a ‘different’ setting in which youth work could function more effectively. Although it should be said **not all schools had appropriate settings or venues in their school for group work or informal education.**

Some statutory youth providers used a link person in the youth service to liaise with the principal, senior management or appropriate teacher to ‘pre-plan’ activities so that the school could timetable the workers in advance. These statutory workers were not necessarily the practitioners but played an important role in the relationship between the school and the statutory youth service. The voluntary youth sector, influenced by funded programmes, did not appear to have a person who was permanently liaising with schools. This would only happen if they (the voluntary sector organisation) knew they had longer-term funding for certain programmes.

## **W. Use of other services.**

*[Research Question: Do you use any other services for your group(s)?]*

In the Newry area there is a local Newry and Mourne **Area based strategy that is geared towards integration of programmes including some work ‘with’ and ‘in’ schools.** The youth workers are keen to develop this service while working in schools but found that there was a basic problem with the introduction of another ‘player’ in

the school. For example when talking about the role of a worker from the area based strategy one interviewee says,

“It was quite hard for her as she felt quite intimidated in the initial stages. But she too built up a relationship with them (the young people in the school). We brought in the Young Men’s Unit to do pieces of work...the group didn’t take to them at all, they didn’t like outsiders coming into the group. We had family planning in to do the sexual health end of it as I felt it wasn’t our place.”

Another worker stated that while she did not use other services she knew that some of the boys have completed basic food hygiene and the Duke of Edinburgh awards within the school.

## **X. Integration of programmes.**

*[Research Question: Is the programme an integral part of the young person’s learning experience or separate from the rest of their studies?]*

One workers says,

“I feel it is an integral part because it’s their first time getting a chance to speak up and that gives them a bit of confidence in other classes. I don’t think it is implicit to the core curriculum and key skills...but the work that we are doing is complementary.”

Another states,

“The programme was separated...there was English and Maths and Computers and the vocational side of it. I feel it was separate as we were just left to work with the group and write an evaluation at the end. You didn’t get a sense of being integrated.”

Other respondents mention that the school would invite them into meetings between senior management and year heads. The **integration of programmes** into the school **seemed to depend on the length of time the youth work in schools had been going on**. For example, in the NEELB (which has been running for 8 years or so) the workers have a more integrated role in some schools. In others, due to the short-term nature of the work it appears that there is less integration into other aspects of the school life by youth workers.

## **Y. Good practice.**

*[Research Question: Can you give an example of good practice?]*

For one youth worker an example of good practice was,

“Good practice goes back to the young men and their learning needs... communication skills were developed using games... then we just discussed how they communicated. We had to make it as much fun as possible by looking at practical situations...it does work.”

Another states,

“Good practice in my group... I think what worked really well is...say they were doing a collage or thinking about men in the media...for them to get up and present that to their class is a big thing and then get a clap and sit down and discuss it... that was a big thing and they all wanted to do it which took us by surprise. They were proud of what they'd done. With school A in Belfast....young people with learning disabilities... we would do a lot of work there through our arts based work and it's a good model of practice because the young people are expressing themselves very creatively... it's very simple based work in terms of methodology but it works very well for the school... the school can see the growth in the young people and their confidence.”

The implication from these quotes suggests that small bite-size movements of change are recognized by youth workers. In terms of progressive development an interviewee gives the commentary,

“Good practice... I carried out a project called, ‘Dealing with Difference’... a community relations project between two schools that I'm involved with.... High School B and High School C. The two schools were identified because there are difficulties in relationships between the two schools...a number of the children who go to school B are city children and would have difficulty in their relationships with others. We did a Community Relations project..... we brought in an artist from Creative Youth Partnerships and we created a very innovative jigsaw mural and it explored what makes us the same and what makes us different.... as a result of that, the piece of work is outstanding.... we have swapped pieces over so school B have some of the school C pieces and C have some of school B's . In October we are going on a Community Relations residential.... We're going to bring that work a stage further...and I would say that that is a really good piece of practice.”

This quote indicates a certain degree of flexibility available to youth workers as they use more creative approaches for the development of learning. **The question is whether teachers have the time or space to move ‘slowly’ through the curriculum, sometimes at the pace of young people?**

The above quotes clearly illustrate **the flexibility explicitly present in youth work practice** and a key learning approach used **by the youth work profession**. The degree of flexibility is more obvious in youth work **outside schools** where **youth workers are not tied to outcomes in terms of academic achievement or measurement**.

An interviewee involved in policy says about good practice,

“My impression is that it is not so much an approach but more to do with the set of individuals and the relationships.”

One experienced youth worker has strong views on the change from the XL programme to the COPE course as an example of good practice being ended,

“I wouldn’t use the COPE as an example (of good practice)... when we were delivering XL in the years prior to taking on COPE in school D , we were able to build XL from something that COPE started out as...just another programme... it (XL) then became a choice on the Year 11 options and we were able to build different things... we were able to provide a drop-in and get people involved with the Princes Trust Volunteer Awards. XL was very flexible... it’s more a youth worker approach than COPE...COPE is very structured and I think you only have to look at who can deliver COPE... it can be delivered by teachers and youth workers...whereas XL was for youth workers. I don’t know why they changed it as **XL had been built up to do something that employers were recognizing**...and the young people were enjoying taking part. They just decided to try something different.”

One worker sums up his view on how they know what they are doing relates to good practice,

“We’ve got more schools wanting us in for longer.”

## **SUMMARY OF DELIVERY MECHANISMS.**

The above comments and descriptive analysis suggests that the delivery mechanisms reflect those used in mainstream youth work. The youth workers sometimes find teachers unnecessary when working with some young people. Understanding what this might mean for the teachers appeared less important than being in a position themselves to build a relationship with the young people. The question is whether youth workers view their work as integrative to the school and the development of teacher/pupil relationship or if this is relatively unimportant for their short-term intervention. **The sense of integrating youth work into the ‘whole’ school is something that appears to be absent from the interview comments only insofar as there is recognition of the need to use other services to deliver some aspects of the ‘informal’ curriculum as perceived by school management.** Youth workers appear to have much more flexibility when delivering programmes. The rationale for choosing some programmes over others is based, one assumes, on the needs of the group that the youth workers are working with. The teachers do not, it can be assumed, have the luxury of being as flexible as the youth workers who are at liberty to use whatever method they like around whatever subject they feel is reflective of the needs of young peoples.

The delivery mechanism through the use of COPE appeared to be problematic in terms of a lack of flexibility and the need, as suggested by one interviewee, of literacy skills not always present in the 'less able or disengaged youth'. The key finding is that the concept of 'flexibility' is central to youth workers but curtailed for teachers due to the need to teach the 'core curriculum'.

## **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS.**

### **1. Do you think that youth work/informal education in schools works? Why?**

One youth worker said,

“I think youth work in schools works if it is ‘youth work in school’...if it keeps the principles and the ethics of youth work and the methodologies of youth work...as in personal social development...the relationship... it can work...**there is a danger that youth work is moving to the delivery of courses.**”

The principal of a large secondary school was very supportive of the potential for informal education in her school,

“Well I think it is an area that needs to be developed. If we are going to make school experience relevant and this is what the ‘**revised curriculum**’ is about...trying to make the experience as relevant and coherent as possible then I think we need to involve the informal network. We need to tap into their expertise because we are no longer an island...no school ever was...but we are no longer an island where we can assume that we have all the expertise. So many issues in society today that impact on what happens in school, things that perhaps we don’t have any control over...so we really do have to access all types of support to help us develop our young people to become informed decision makers and good citizens. Also, I didn’t mention the whole citizenship programme which is now part of learning for life and work...which I think is a rich source of potential here to take this whole agenda forward...because that’s very much the real world and learning that’s relevant for their lives.”

This may highlight **the need to see ‘education’ and ‘learning’ in terms of a more holistic process rather than based on a set of subjects?**

One senior voluntary sector youth practitioner says,

“It works a little bit... I think for me youth work is about the voluntary relationship with the young person and particularly supporting citizenship



community development style principles... and reaching out to those most marginalized...I'm not sure that the school environment can facilitate that."

One worker stated the importance of the two professions learning from each other,

"I would say youth work does work but it has been a process... if I looked back 4 years ago there is no comparison in terms of where we are now ...there's been huge learning in relation to both ourselves as youth workers and teachers... teachers have said to me... I have learnt so much from you and likewise me from them. We are two different professions but I feel that we have an awful lot to offer in that we are both educators and I feel that the young people benefit from that tremendously."

There is an interesting insight into how youth workers are perceived in schools through this quote from a special needs coordinator in a secondary school,

"It's been a sort of awakening for me, when I was given the task and told you are going to be bringing non-teachers...and what we would consider non-professionals...I now know that **those people can do things an awful lot better and an awful lot more professionally that I can as a teacher because they are experts in that field** whereas we are teachers and we are drawn in a lot of different directions, we have a curriculum to deliver and a lot of other things, so we don't always have the time, or the expertise."

This is an acknowledgement of **a change in attitude** that came about **through exposure to outside workers**. Some teachers, it would seem, have difficulty with youth workers but after seeing some positive benefits they appear to respect their contribution. This person went on to state,

"If it is a teacher delivering it... it's part of the curriculum, it's school, it's boring, someone else coming in, it's exciting and it's a break from all the other stuff. That's good...that feeling among young people has to be exploited to a certain point."

One principal was very positive about the role and function of informal education in his school,

"Not all children are academic and find formal education quite challenging. You might get children that have low literacy ability, children with very low self-esteem. You are trying to engage those children in worthwhile activities which are also educational within the school. If they're doing something that they enjoy doing, that they like doing and that they see a value in then they are much more likely to be co-operative and at the end of the day they are going to learn better. The way we work the project is that all the children in Year 8, irrespective of their ability, experiences a taught programme because although we are talking about this as informal education, it's not entirely informal, it is a structured course but it is taught through active

learning methodologies and in that sense it's maybe different from what they experience in most classrooms most of the time."

This quote suggests that the process of informal education, offered to all first years, is 'taught' in a more participatory way. As it relates to the process of establishing peer mediation processes in the school the topic may lend itself to this type of approach otherwise one might ask, is active learning applicable for other subjects in the school?

The principal attempts to answer this question,

"The emphasis is on relationships within the peer mediation programme and that wouldn't be the case maybe in formal education where the emphasis is on acquiring knowledge, acquiring academic skills and so on. Where often the interpersonal aspects of development are certainly not stressed, are not seen to be as important, whereas in the peer mediation, it's really flipping the coin over completely and it's the interpersonal skills that are emphasized and again I'll come back to what I said earlier, very often children who are not academic have very good and well developed interpersonal skills because they may be coming from a domestic background where they have for instance caring responsibilities... but in the normal course of the school year... we have very little opportunity to acknowledge that or even to reward it or celebrate it in any way. It helps us to get to know the children better. There is a sort of percolating effect where maybe you will find out that the child, who may not be very attentive in class or may be challenging in terms of behaviour... that there may be reasons for that in the home or in terms of what they have experienced in their life and that is something that can come out through peer mediation and through counselling that is associated with the peer mediation. Our experience is that the children who become peer mediators quite often are not the academically brightest children but they are the ones who have street credibility with their peers and who bring that experiential learning that has already taken place into the school. The peer mediation gives them an opportunity to put those skills on display as it were and often they are very good at it."

This principal acknowledges the essence of education as being different 'academically' for some young people but that personal development transcends perceived intellectual ability. This means that it is fine to be emotionally or self-aware of ability but that this does not register in terms of academic achievements, assuming we use awards and qualifications as a measurement. Again one might ask is this 'academic' ability measured by the grades they get in GCSEs (or other accredited programmes) or through AS/A level results? Youth workers may, inadvertently be shoring up the academic system by allowing their outcomes to be accredited within a school system that sees awards as a measure of success.

## **2. Are informal education processes in schools about the delivery of courses?**

One respondent says,

“Youth work is definitely moving towards the delivery of courses... there are too many outcomes...there has to be accreditation...sometimes not all young people want to do a course... it’s taking away from the whole ethos of it (youth work)...it’s meant to be voluntary and they want to be there but not to do courses.”

Another states,

“Youth work is moving to the delivery of courses... it is very funding laid, e.g we have been through a new call for applications (referring to Peace money from the EU)...we have made some decisions. We’re asking people to complete a work plan... one organisation has come back to say these will be bespoke pieces of work.”

One interviewee was positive about the delivery of courses, stating,

“We are responding to need...there is a market place out there and what we’re being asked for is accredited courses where young people are accredited for personal social development... I know that there are youth workers who are very against accreditation...who believe you don’t need a piece of paper for everything that you do. It’s an outcome for me... there is a process and the process is what’s really valuable... the learning for the young person... but my attitude is that when they’re going through that process they might as well get the accreditation. It’s not additional to... its embedded in it because they’re doing all of the work...they’re doing all of the learning... all of the practical work... why shouldn’t they get accredited for it when other people are and maybe doing a lot less.”

One principal was critical of the changes taking place,

“I would be concerned that schools are somewhat like an elastic band, that they are being stretched and stretched to accommodate all of the changes which are taking place in society...that is happening at the present time without any real regard for the degree of resourcing which is going to be required in order to accommodate those changes.”

### **3. Is teaching/learning changing in your organisation? How?**

One youth worker working in schools says,

“There is less developmental work happening...it’s down to the funding criteria in that you have to do this and that to meet these particular outcomes... but it has all changed...I’m doing very little developmental work. I’m mostly doing training of some

sort. You don't get the time to build up the relationship...**you're losing the relationship things.**"

While only a comment from one worker it would appear that if Brendtro et al (1983) is correct in saying that the primary central tenet for working with youth at risk is 'relationship building' then youth workers may need to take cognizance of what will happen if they lose this central tenet, as suggested by one interviewee.

Another youth work practitioner agrees,

"Youth work is much more course, time-scaled, and structured... there are workers who are under pressure....structured planned intervention is overriding the involved conversation based evolutionary type thing."

One statutory youth worker states,

"In terms of the delivery of things that aren't accredited courses...we have been told that we wouldn't be allowed to be in schools delivering anything that wasn't accredited, i.e. we would just be in doing COPE or a trainee leader programme. The problem with working in an area project is that you cover a lot of different schools, so you are probably only going to be in doing COPE... this is the way that we are being pushed... there is more of a political aspect because of the Review of Public Administration... that youth workers want to be developing stronger links with the school sector, but they run the risk of losing the informal side of what the work is about because if we are delivering accredited programmes young people aren't given a say...they don't choose to come...they are told to come...That's not what youth work is about."

These strong opinions were echoed by some **youth work practitioners** as they **grappled with the changing philosophy/ideology of youth work as it moves closer to the formal education sector**. It should be noted that this person said that COPE was the right programme for some young people if they could be identified within the school. She says that COPE is for the higher age range in schools with the younger pupils becoming more involved in drugs awareness, sexual health and the issue based programme work. She is suggesting using age as one perspective for youth work intervention.

Another interviewee says,

"I hope it doesn't go the way England is and get fixated on accreditation because I don't see the benefit of it and I think it's diluted some of the accreditation courses that are already out there...that were and would have been seen as viable whereas too many courses are being accredited for the sake of it. I've come from statutory to voluntary ... I think over here we are a bit behind England in a sense of the statutory side... the developments within youth work are changing and need to change because it's not meeting the needs of certain young people. I see the benefit

of more focus-based youth work... that's why I work within this agency... I agree with the ethos behind it and I agree that young people should steer the way it is. There's still a place for open youth clubs but it depends on the dynamics...sometimes it's not appropriate to do individual one-to-one work but sometimes there is a need to be flexible. There is a need for the small-group work to coincide with the larger open youth club setting and I think youth work is changing but they're bringing in accredited courses for everything and I disagree with that as I don't want to see the young people being deluded."

Another respondent expresses this view,

"From a voluntary sector point of view there's pressure on all of us for outputs in terms of accreditation, recognition that is definitely a push from somewhere... within this organisation we have training but we need to maintain good developmental based youth work which is just about the young people attending... young people being themselves not having an agenda. I think in youth work it worries me that there should be a healthy balance of output with just wanting to be involved in a programme. A lot of the new groups we're recruiting we're offering it optional if they want to receive accreditation but if they just want to turn up every week and just take part that's still ok."

While another says,

"There are huge changes in relation to youth work, youth work is in a huge transition... we're working with very difficult young people now and that seems to be our market. **Our skills are being really stretched** and I feel that in relation to the training of youth workers that that would really need to be addressed...we really do have to be so creative in terms of our approaches to engage with these young people."

#### **4. If you could change anything about using informal education in schools what would it be and why?**

The following four comments represent some respondents' views on this question:

1. "Youth workers need to be more proactive in defining exactly what they are there to do and the roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined before you actually go in to a school. And I think it needs to be part of a long-term process... it needs to start small and work up."
2. "I would change the role of the school...more information and communication...two-way between the informal educator and the school... the school playing an active role within the programme...learning from the

youth worker and the youth worker learning from the teacher. Be willing to learn sharing relationship.”

3. “It’s almost impossible to get residential.... what we do now is one day residential.... you go on a Saturday morning... do your teambuilding... stay that night and back the next day... because the young people are so busy with jobs, studying and other commitments. Youth work needs to be changing the attitude that if it’s not in my patch ...I don’t need to worry about it... the issue for me is that we need to be more inclusive as youth workers in terms of how we present ourselves in our language. We need to be faster around diversity and minority groups.”
4. “I feel that there is still rigidity there in terms of... yes its fantastic having the 3 hour session but it is difficult sometimes to work with young people outside of that 3 hours. In contrast School A (reference to a school) have been very good... we have been able to work for full days with the young people particularly on the Community Relations because the principal has seen the value... but School B is one of the schools that has been involved for quite a long time ...other schools are quite new to the XL and the COPE programme ...therefore it’ll take them longer to be more proactive in terms of supporting us and giving us more scope.”

5. **What do you think are the training needs of informal educators?**

One trainer in youth work said,

“ I am not a qualified youth worker and I would work with qualified youth workers... they sometimes have anxieties about working within a school setting and would lack confidence at the outset...a lot of the work that I’ve been doing has been in and around that area of building their confidence and drawing out the skills that they have and what they can actually offer within a formal learning environment... it concerns me that youth workers would have concerns about going and working with a group of young people in any environment...because my attitude would be that they have the skills.”

## **SECTION 7: YOUTHREACH AS A PARALLEL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE.**

### **Introducing Youthreach.**

Youthreach is an integral part of the national programme of second-chance education and training in Ireland and is a central part of Government's to the achievement of lifelong learning society.

The programme is directed at unemployed young early school leavers aged 15-20. It offers participants the opportunity to identify and pursue viable options within adult life, and provides them with opportunities to acquire certification. It operates on a full-time, year round basis.

### **Youthreach Philosophy.**

Youthreach adopts a credit approach, as opposed to a therapeutic approach. The young people are not approached on the basis of perceived deficits. Rather, they are regarded as equals (as adults). The essential question is - 'What do you think are your strengths and how can we help you to maximise them, and what do you think are your weaknesses and how can we help you to address them?' As well as being learner-centred, the approach is also experiential.

Youthreach is inter-disciplinary in approach. Practitioners combine education, training and youth-work methodologies. Staff come from a variety of backgrounds including teaching, vocational education and training, youth-work and welfare. Evaluations of the programme have found that this mix has been critical to the success of the programme, resulting in a cross fertilisation of expertise from the different disciplines.

Interactions are less formal and relationships with staff are 'warmer' than in schools and many observers argue that this is an important component in the programme's success. The young people perceive themselves to be listened to and respected, i.e. treated as adults. Groups are relatively small - the tutor-learner ratio is about 10.5:1.

Youthreach is an integrated experience - personal, communications and vocational skills are integrated in a curricular and experiential matrix. There is a growing focus on developing individual learning plans and encouraging the learner to take responsibility for learning and to evaluate their own learning.

## **Management of the programme.**

Youthreach is funded by the Exchequer under the National Development Plan. It is a joint programme between two Government Departments – Education & Science and Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Management is through an Inter-Departmental Committee. Its implementation is animated, supported and co-ordinated by the Youthreach National Co-ordinators.

The Department of Education and Science delivers Youthreach through Centres for Education managed by Vocational Education Committees (VEC.[www.ivea.ie](http://www.ivea.ie)). The programme is also delivered in a network of 45 Community Training Centres funded by FAS and ten ‘justice workshops’ funded by Fas ([www.fas.ie](http://www.fas.ie)) and the Department of Justice Equality Law and Reform. A parallel programme in a culturally appropriate setting is delivered in the 33 Senior Traveller Training Centres ([www.sttc.ie](http://www.sttc.ie)).

These centres are out-of-school settings and they are distributed throughout the country, generally in disadvantaged areas. While Youthreach is a national programme, centres are locally managed, and programmes reflect the particular social, economic and cultural environment in which they operate. This local management is a pillar of the programme’s design and operation. Although all Centres are alike, no two are the same.

## **Numbers of participants on Youthreach Programmes (census date December 31<sup>st</sup> 2003)**

There are 3258 places in Youthreach Centres nationally. FAS funds 2700 places in Community Training Centres (CTC). An additional 1076 places are offered in Senior Traveller Training Centres. The majority of students in the VEC Youthreach stand correspond closely in age to second level students with 78% of them being under 19. In the Department of Justice / FAS centres the vast majority of participants are described as being under 20 years of age, while the percentage under 19 in the CTCs is lower, at approximately 51%.

## **New Youthreach places.**

The ‘Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015: Towards 2016’ includes plans to provide 1,000 extra places on the Youthreach Programme run by VEC by the end of 2009.

The 1,000 extra places are to be provided on the following basis; subject to the availability of financial resources: 400 in 2007, 200 in 2008 and 400 in 2009. The 2007 Estimates for the Department of Education and Science provide funding for the provision of 400 extra places in Youthreach as planned this year.



## **The need for Youthreach?**

It is estimated that as many as 750 children fail to transfer every year from primary to post-primary School. The number of students who leave education with no qualifications is 3.2% while another 15.3% leave with only a Junior Cert qualification.

Early school leavers are at particular risk in the labour market. Of those who enter the labour market after school, the unemployment rate is 47.5% for those with no qualifications, compared with 9.6% for those with a Leaving Certificate. Research also shows that both the levels of education and the grades achieved have a marked influence on gaining employment and, in general, that higher qualifications and grades can:

- Increase the chances of gaining employment;
- Reduce the length of time spent seeking work;
- Reduce the risk of unemployment; and
- Promote higher earnings levels.

## **Key features of successful interventions with early school leavers.**

In the experience of Youthreach, the key features of successful interventions with early school leavers are as follows.

- A focus on the holistic development of the individual;
- A learning environment which is safe, structured and challenging; programmes must focus on independence and integration;
- A process which is both participant-centred and participant-led; there should be open and honest feedback between trainer and participants;
- A team approach – programmes are most effective if organised on the basis of a curricular matrix in which each teacher or trainer is implementing a range of cross-disciplinary curricular objectives (such as communications skills developments, health and safety awareness, etc);
- Staff who facilitate and animate and are themselves open to learning. Ideally, teams should be multi-disciplinary. The maintenance and in-career development of staff involved is a priority;
- A methodology/pedagogy which begins with the young person;

- A general emphasis on achievement rather than failure;
- Appropriate assessment and certification;
- Flexibility at all levels – management, relationships and curriculum
- Programme duration based on need rather than time.

### **Youthreach objectives.**

The programme is intended to facilitate young people in returning to learning and preparing for employment and adult life. Its general objectives are as follows;

- Personal and social development and increased self-esteem;
- Second-chance education;
- The promotion of independence, personal autonomy, active citizenship and a pattern of lifelong learning;
- Integration into further education and training opportunities and the labour market;
- The promotion of social inclusion.

### **What is developed in Youthreach?**

Youthreach offers a flexible and dynamic programme of integrated general education, vocation training and work experience. Learners set personal and educational goals that increase self-esteem, work-based skill, a knowledge base and employability. Essential course elements include personal and social development, vocational skills and communication skills.

### **The Youthreach process involves**

- personal development and exploration;
- identification of needs, interests and capacities;
- setting learning goals
- sampling general vocational skills;

- development of specific aptitudes;
- work experience;
- literacy and numeracy development

The foundation phase programme is constructed as a curricular matrix incorporating these elements. This approach is also found in the certification offered at FETAC ([www.fetac.ie](http://www.fetac.ie)).

Both personal skills and vocational skills are developed. These are generally at 'foundation' level. The intention is that progression opportunities are provided, as well as employment links. In many cases, however, trainees develop beyond Foundation level.

The programme rests on twelve building blocks:

1. Methodology
2. Structure
3. Flexibility
4. Quality
5. Innovation
6. Supports
7. Achievement
8. Appropriate certification
9. Progression
10. Information and Communication Technology
11. Inter-agency cohesion and continuity
12. Partnership and networks

### **The Youthreach process of learning.**

The first principle of the programme is to start with the learner. The programme focuses on the holistic development of the individual. Participants are facilitated in setting personal and educational goals that increase their self-esteem, skill and knowledge base and employability.

It follows that the process followed should be both participant-centred and participant-led, with the programme following trainees' identified interests and needs and participants and staff acting as equal partners in the learning process. The learning environment is safe, structured and challenging, there is an emphasis on recognising and rewarding achievement rather than reinforcing failure and flexibility at all levels.

## **National Education Psychological Service.**

The national Education Psychological Service (NEPS) is a service funded by the Department of Education and Science. NEPS psychologists work with primary schools and they are concerned with learning, behavior, social and emotional development. Each psychologist is assigned to a group of schools.

NEPS psychologists specialize in working with the school community. They will work in partnership with teachers, parents and children in identifying educational needs. They offer a range of services aimed at meeting these needs, for example, supporting individual students (through consultation and assessment), special projects and research.

“NEPS mission is to support the personal social and educational development of all children through the application of psychological theory and practice in education having particular regard for children with special educational needs.”

## **Special Education Needs Initiative in Youthreach**

**Background** – This is a recognition, by NEPS, of special needs of students in Youthreach. It links to Department Policy in relation to disability and social exclusion (EPSEN Act 2004). The initiative will be undertaken in 20 centres (25 Groups) in 2007, initially as a pilot project. It will be evaluated to determine best practice leading hopefully to the future extension of the initiative.

**Purpose** – To increase the capacity of a centre as a team to respond to the varied needs of its learners by; expanding the skills base of the centre; allowing for greater flexibility and responsiveness to individual needs in the operation of the centre; and developing educational practice and supporting staff.

**Resources** – per group of 25 per annum, €2,000 is allocated for staffing, €2,000 for staff training and €4,000 for staff support and supervision

**Specific Functions** – Initial Profiling and Assessment, followed by regular review, with each student. The development of individual plans for each student, the establishment of a mentoring support system, and engagement in inter-agency work as required for particular students.

**Preparation Plan Review** – Initial review of student needs by existing staff, the review of staff skills through use of brain storming, identification of gaps, location of skills needed, using available initiative resources to address identified needs gaps.

**Preparation Plan Mentoring** – this will include the parameters of mentoring. Assigning individuals, consideration of skills needed, communication skills required and planning procedures for guidance interventions.

**Preparation Plan Assessment** – this will use the profiling web (Appendix 5), other assessment tools and data collection. It will focus on goals and progression planning. The mentor will act as co-ordinator of assessment for his or her students.

**Preparation Plan for Individual Student Plans** – An individual plan will be based on assessment and any other relevant information available to the mentor, including interventions and supports.

**Preparation Plan for Liaison with Local Services** – Local agencies and service providers will be identified, finding out how they work and what their referral arrangements are, contact will be made and details exchanged. Collaborative actions will be negotiated in relation to particular students.

**Preparation Plan for Staff Training** – following SEN training in 2006 (evaluation forms) training needs initially identified and subsequently training programmes were developed and resourced. This is an ongoing process.

**Preparation Plan for Case Supervision and Staff Support** – Case supervision will require staff support and is dependant on the qualifications of support practitioner and co-ordinator.

**Evaluation** – the purpose of the evaluation is to measure outputs achieved by centres; outcomes for students; calculate the impact of the initiative and indicate changes necessary before extending the programme to the other Youthreach centres.

**Other Support** – there will be an internet site dedicated to this initiative, located on the Youthreach Web-site [www.youthreach.ie](http://www.youthreach.ie). There will be a nested password accessible site for centres who have done the SEN training, i.e. the 20 SEN initiative centres. It will allow for group e-mails, feedback and discussion. There will be psychological support for the implementation plans design and development of training inputs, sourcing training courses, internet site content, facilitation of networking, consultation and advice.

## **Achievement**

In promoting participants' sense of self-worth and identity, practitioners place a strong emphasis on achievement. So, a broad range of certification is made available. Ninety per cent of Centres enter participants for FETAC qualifications. Seventy-eight different modules are offered throughout the programme at Foundation and Level 1 and ten per cent of Centres provide more than 16 modules.

Participants also take the Junior Certificate, the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied as a progression programme. Other options are also offered, such as the European Computer Driving Licence and the FIT programme.

## **Quality Assurance.**

Youthreach providers and participants alike are committed to a quality service. Thus, for example, 13 members of staff successfully completed the NUIG (National University of Ireland, Galway) Specialist Certificate in Health Promotion and graduated in 2003. They were developing centre health plans towards achieving the Health Q-Mark. In the event, 11 centres were awarded health Q-Marks, including four gold awards and two silvers.

The key mechanism for quality assurance in the Centres is the Quality Framework Initiative for Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres. This provides a comprehensive planning, evaluation and validation framework for the programme similar to the School Development Planning Initiative.

The Quality Framework Initiative was established in November 2000 following a recommendation, made in the Youthreach 2000 consultative report, for the development of a quality assurance system for the Programme.

The development of the **Quality Framework** required in-depth consultation with all stakeholder groups including learners, staff and management. This has resulted in the development of **Quality Standards** and a range of quality assurance processes that reflect the needs and vision of those most closely associated with the delivery of the programme.

### **The Quality Framework consists of four key building blocks:**

- Quality Standards;
- Internal Centre Evaluation;
- Centre Development Planning;
- External Centre Evaluation.

The Quality Standards are at the core of the model. Stakeholders work towards meeting quality standards by engaging in the quality assurance processes of planning and evaluation.

Quality assurance in this model focuses on continuous improvement. It encourages a collaborative approach to problem solving and assists stakeholders to identify practical solutions.

**Draft Guidelines for Internal Centre Evaluation and Centre Development Planning** have been developed and 44 centres piloted these quality assurance processes during the period October '03 - July '04. The guidelines are now being re-developed in anticipation of the rolling-out of the Quality Framework to all Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training centres over the coming years.

For further information on the Quality Framework contact the co-ordinator Shivaun O'Brien at shivaunobrien@eircom.net

### **The structure of Youthreach projects.**

A structured approach is important in working with young people who live in unstable situations. While providing a safe and listening experience it also challenges and encourages. The programme itself is being restructured into three phases:

- **An engagement/gateway phase** in which the young person's needs are identified and an individual learning plan is negotiated, within the framework of the centre or workshop capacity;
- **A foundation phase**, in which they are supported in overcoming learning difficulties, developing self-confidence and gaining a range of competencies essential for further learning and
- **A progression phase** providing for more specific development through a range of educational, training and work experience options.

### **Flexibility**

Given the complexity of many of the subjects' backgrounds and presenting situations, flexibility is imperative at all levels - management, staffing and delivery. Young people learn at their own pace and enter for certification when they are ready. This approach is facilitated by the modular structure of FETAC certification. More flexible delivery options were introduced under the 'Back to Education' Initiative in 2002/3, including part-time options to take account of the buoyancy of the youth labour market. It is considered vital that those who are tempted out of Youthreach to enter work should be allowed to continue their education and training on a part-time basis so that in the event of economic downturn or the conclusion of a particular employment, as happens frequently in certain areas such as construction, they will not end up unemployed and still unqualified.

### **Progression**

It is intended in Youthreach that participants will firstly identify their personal, educational and vocational goals and secondly progress towards achieving them. Progression policy within Youthreach is focussed on:

- Educational pathways through opportunities to pursue programmes such as the Leaving Cert Applied, with extension of the duration of the Progression Phase. Trainees can progress from Level 1 or Leaving Cert Applied programmes to PLC courses, which are certified at Level 2 by the NCVA/FETAC and from there to third level courses in the Institutes of Technology. Trainees can also progress to education options under the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) scheme operated by the Department of Social and Family Affairs.
- Training pathways through the promotion of access to a range of options within FÁS and the Education sector through Linked Work Experience, Level 1 training, Specific Skills Training, Community Employment, Bridging Measures. Entry to Apprenticeship is also possible, with support where needed from Bridging Measures. Progression to other training paths, for example in tourism, hospitality, agriculture and hairdressing is also promoted and supported.
- Employment pathways through the maintenance (by centres) of links with employers in order to facilitate young people in finding employment. Where advocates are in service, they support this transition. Many centres also support former participants in the early stages of employment.

### **Partnerships and networks.**

Considerable emphasis is placed on local planning and inter-agency networking. Centres operate within a strong community base and maintain good contact with local agencies. In line with national policies and the National Children's Strategy, Youthreach supports an integrated area-based approach to services for children and young people. There is a pressing need for cohesion and integration of supporting services in the areas of childcare, guidance, counselling and psychological services. Acknowledgement of the cultural context of trainees and their communities is also important. In addition, networking out-of-school centres with the mainstream system is a feature of the programme's approach, with centres acting as brokers and mentors to facilitate successful progression.

### **Inter-agency cohesion and continuity.**

Youthreach practitioners greatly value the support of colleagues in other services and render their support in return. Three developments offer opportunities to greatly enhance the quality and coverage of such co-operation, the School Completion Programme, the Education Welfare Service and the introduction of Family Welfare Conferencing under the Children Act 2001. VECs and CTW Boards of Management are teasing out the practical implications for centres of these developments. Staff in Youthreach look forward to increasing their co-operation with other service providers and to the establishment of greater inter-service cohesion and continuity at local level in the best interests of participants and their families. In a number of areas local integrated strategies are being developed. For example in the Midlands there is a local partnership focusing on health promotion in the centres. This has been initiated by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and involves a wide range of service providers.



## **Innovation.**

Innovation has been a characteristic of Youthreach since its inception. Its links with the Community Initiative Employment/Youthstart generated the European guidance model known as MAGIC (from Mentoring, Advocacy, Guidance, Information and Counselling).

## **Supports.**

A number of supports are set in place to support the delivery of the programme. Providers receive an annual allocation of resources towards the provision of psychological, guidance and counselling supports. It is acknowledged that this is not comprehensive. It is intended that this area will dovetail with the development of a National Educational Psychological Service. Other supports in this area include the advocate service. This is funded by FÁS and is available in a number of areas.

Support is also made available for in-service activities and guidance, counselling and psychological services. FÁS has put in place a network of full-time advocates, whose role is to support participants' decision-making, referral, progression and placement. Work is ongoing to ensure a co-ordinated approach in this area. The Copping On ([www.coppingon.ie](http://www.coppingon.ie)) crime awareness programme has been developed in co-operation with the Prison Service and the Garda Juvenile Liaison Service and is provided on an ongoing basis. This programme encourages Youthreach trainees, prisoners and ex-offenders to share their experiences, as well as developing close links between Youthreach centres, youth workers and Juvenile Liaison Officers. All Youthreach centres integrate a substance abuse programme as an important part of the personal development element of Youthreach.

## **Information and Communications Technology.**

Each centre is expected to develop the ICT skills of the young people. This is not just a personal educational right, but also a social and economic necessity. This web site has been established for Youthreach and is hosted by National Centre for Technology in Education. Each centre has its own Web-page(s).

## **Success of Youthreach.**

Evaluations report that participants highly value their experience on Youthreach and would recommend it to others. Reviews of learner outcomes consistently show over 75% of participants progressing to the labour market or to further education and training. This rises to 85% for those who complete Progression training.

Fifteen years after its first centres opened, Youthreach is now a well-established national programme situated in a continuum of measures responding to disadvantage in the

education and training systems. Mainstream practitioners increasingly acknowledge it as the education and training system's flexible friend.

### **And the young people?**

One young Galway man who left school at 14 said,

“Since leaving Youthreach I have never been out of work and I am currently serving my apprenticeship as a motorbike mechanic. I have always loved motorbikes and it's great to be able to work at something I really like. I still keep in touch with the staff at Youthreach and really appreciate all the opportunities their help and support have given me.”

## **SECTION 8.**

### **QUESTIONNAIRES AND FOCUS GROUPS IN FOUR SCHOOLS.**

#### **Introduction.**

Young people were asked to fill-in a brief questionnaire (Appendix 4) before the focus groups began. The researchers were interested in how the young people perceived interventions by youth workers and if who they interacted with in the school setting in terms of support.

# SCHOOL A



**School A** is an urban school situated in the west of the city of Belfast in Northern Ireland.

For these pupils places of importance, in order, are:









- 1) Home
- 2) Sports Club / Leisure Complex
- 3) School
- 4) Youth Club
- 5) Church
- 6) Informal Meeting Place \*
- 7) Other \*\*
- 8) Relatives' / Friends' House


\* Informal place was Golf Course – Forest Park, pub, Mc Donald's .


\*\* Other included break/dancing class, fishing pool, Cocos, my room, field for motorbikes, track, the street.


**School A** positively promotes opportunities for the young people to address grievances, make suggestions and seek advice. The following table shows the persons to whom the young person would turn.

As with all the schools in our survey, teachers were named, a very positive aspect in identifying services of assistants.

|                                | <u>Complaint</u>   | <u>Suggestions</u>  | <u>Advice</u>   |
|--------------------------------|--|---|---|
| <i>Principal</i>               |   |     |    |
| <i>Vice principal</i>          |  |   |   |
| <i>Year head/ Form teacher</i> |  |    |   |
| <i>Student council member</i>  |  |  |   |
| <i>Named teacher</i>           |  |   |  |
| <i>Nurse</i>                   |  |   |   |
| <i>Student counsellor</i>      |  |   |   |
| <i>Social Worker</i>           |  |   |   |
| <i>Chaplain</i>                |  |   |   |

10 Students = 

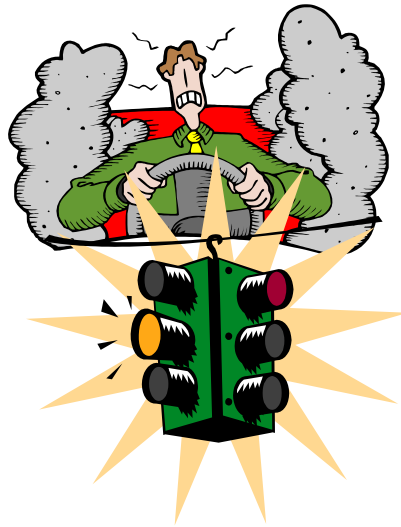
5 Students = 

2 Students = 

1 Student = 

In pursuit of providing an enhanced programme of engaging experts in various fields and of exposing young people to the wide world, School A facilitated these activities:

- IMPACT, A Programme related to car crime
- Hip Hop
- Childline
- Gaelic Football Training
- Rugby Coaching
- Drug Awareness
- Smoking awareness
- Anti – Bullying
- Environmental Cleaning



We, as researchers, were interested in the perception the young people had of these people and the activities, which were provided for them.

Let's hear what School A young people said:

*'I liked the way they got on.'*

*'It got you out of class.'*

*'Not like normal teachers.'*

*'They were sound.'*

*'Teachers are always grumpy and those people were cheerful.'*

*'They don't shout as teachers have no patience.'*

*'Because we got out of work – YES.'*

*They didn't spell as well and they weren't very smart because we corrected them every week.'*

*'They walked like penguins.'*

*'They didn't have their suits on.'*

*'Because I was getting bullied and they helped me to handle it.'*

In light of having engaged in the novel and creative activities, are there any future areas of discovery, which would appeal to the young respondents. School A pupils mentioned:

Watching movies

Drama

What happens in other places

About drugs

Advice

Trips

Television / Media Studies



# SCHOOL B



**School B** is a school situated in the heart of Mid Ulster.

For these pupils places of importance, in order, are:
















- 1) Home
- 2) School
- 3) Church
- 4) Sports Club / Association
- 5) Youth Club
- 6) Informal Meeting Place\*
- 7) Relatives' / Friends' homes
- 8) Other\*\*


\* Informal place was Cinema, Town shopping centres


\* Other included Magic Shop, Dance school, after school Football Club


**School B** positively promotes opportunities for the young people to address grievances, make suggestions and seek advice. The following table shows the persons to whom the young person would turn.

As with all the schools in our survey, teachers were named, a very positive aspect in identifying services of assistants.

|                                | <u>Complaint</u>  | <u>Suggestions</u>  | <u>Advice</u>   |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <i>Principal</i>               |    |    |   |
| <i>Vice principal</i>          |    |    |   |
| <i>Year head/ Form teacher</i> |   |   |   |
| <i>Student council member</i>  |   |  |   |
| <i>Named teacher</i>           |   |   |  |
| <i>Nurse</i>                   |  |   |  |
| <i>Student counsellor</i>      |  |   |  |
| <i>Social Worker</i>           |   |   |  |
| <i>Chaplain</i>                |   |   |   |

10 Students = 

5 Students = 

2 Students = 

1 Student = 

In pursuit of providing an enhanced programme of engaging experts in various fields and of exposing young people to the wide world, School B facilitated these activities:

- Integration Activities
- The Gideon Bible group
- Peer Mediation
- Anti-Bullying
- Racism
- Love 4 Life
- Tennis
- Gaelic Football
- Basketball
- Dentist
- P.S.N.I.
- Visiting Canadians
- International Day



We, as researchers, were interested in the perception the young people had of these people and the activities, which were provided for them.

Let's hear what the School B young people said:

*'They let us talk.'*

*'I remembered they said they were students at a College.'*

*'Same, nothing different.'*

*'You weren't just told to sit down and do work.'*

*'They talked more politely.'*

*'Nothing.'*

*'They sounded more Southern bred.'*

*'I did not enjoy it. It was boring, but then I think all school is boring.'*

*'They played games with us.'*

In light of having engaged in the novel and creative activities, are there any future areas of discovery, which would appeal to the young respondents in School B mentioned:

Different people and cultures

Drama

Healthcare

Out of school Activities

Physical Education

Rugby Training

Computer skills

'Teach us useful stuff for life.'

Musicians and bands

# SCHOOL C



**School C** is a school situated in the new city of Newry in Northern Ireland.

For these pupils places of importance, in order, are:

- 1) Home
- 2) School
- 3) Informal Meeting Place \*
- 4) Church
- 5) Sports Club
- 6) Other \*\*
- 7) Youth Club
- 8) Relatives' house













\* Informal place was town shopping centres, cinema, and library.


\* Other included pub, my room, hospital, singing class, work



**School C** positively promotes opportunities for the young people to address grievances, make suggestions and seek advice. The following table shows the persons to whom the young person would turn.

As with all the schools in our survey, teachers were named, a very positive aspect in identifying services of assistants.

|                                | <u>Complaint</u>  | <u>Suggestions</u>   | <u>Advice</u>   |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <i>Principal</i>               |   |   |   |
| <i>Vice principal</i>          |    |   |   |
| <i>Year head/ Form teacher</i> |    |   |   |
| <i>Student council member</i>  |   |  |   |
| <i>Named teacher</i>           |  |  |  |
| <i>Nurse</i>                   |   |  |  |
| <i>Student counsellor</i>      |  |  |  |
| <i>Social Worker</i>           |   |  |   |
| <i>Chaplain</i>                |   |  |   |

10 Students = 

5 Students = 

2 Students = 

1 Student = 

In pursuit of providing an enhanced programme of engaging experts in various fields and of exposing young people to the wide world, School C facilitated these activities:

- Peer Mediation in Bullying, Peer Pressure
- Drugs Awareness
- C.T.
- Action Cancer
- Young Adult Programme
- Love for Life Programme
- Horizon
- Met M.L.A.'S at Stormont
- Talks on Africa and AIDS
- Alcohol Awareness
- Pregnancy Education
- Visit from ex-drug addict



We, as researchers, were interested in the perception the young people had of these people and the activities, which were provided for them.

Let's hear what the School C young people said:

*'They done it in a fun way with Powerpoint.'*

*'They were fun and different from school.'*

*'More relaxed, less strict.'*

*'They spoke to us as normal human beings.'*

*'They were getting on with students in not a teacher like way as if they were friends.'*

*'They let us call them by their first name.'*

*'They made learning fun and they did games.'*

*'They sometimes swore in role play which was good.'*

*'The way they dressed and acted.'*

*'They are all proper workers and they used statements like 'don't worry, we're not teachers so you can talk freely.'*

*'I got out of class.'*

In light of having engaged in the novel and creative activities, are there any future areas of discovery, which would appeal to the young respondents. School C pupils mentioned:

Dancing

Talks on under age sex

Drug Awareness

Employment opportunities after school

Different people from different backgrounds and religions

Anti-social behaviour issues

Weekend Residentials

Programme that help you communicate with other people

Sport, Health and Fitness e.g. football

Government, who to vote for?

# SCHOOL D



**School D** is a rural school situated in the north west of Donegal in Ulster.

For these pupils places of importance, in order, are:

- 1) Home
- 2) School
- 3) Church
- 4) Sports Club / Association
- 5) Informal Meeting Place \*
- 6) Youth Club
- 7) Relatives' / Friends' Houses
- 8) Other \*

\* Informal place was pizzeria, bars, cafeterias.

\* Other included beach, town crossroads, old quarry used for stock cars.

**School D** positively promotes opportunities for the young people to address grievances, make suggestions and seek advice. The following table shows the persons to whom the young person would turn.

As with all the schools in our survey, teachers were named, a very positive aspect in identifying services of assistants.

|                                | <u>Complaint</u> | <u>Suggestions</u> | <u>Advice</u> |
|--------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| <i>Principal</i>               |                  |                    |               |
| <i>Vice principal</i>          |                  |                    |               |
| <i>Year head/ Form teacher</i> |                  |                    |               |
| <i>Student council member</i>  |                  |                    |               |
| <i>Named teacher</i>           |                  |                    |               |
| <i>Nurse</i>                   |                  |                    |               |
| <i>Student counsellor</i>      |                  |                    |               |
| <i>Social Worker</i>           |                  |                    |               |
| <i>Chaplain</i>                |                  |                    |               |

10 Students =

5 Students =

2 Students =

1 Student =

In pursuit of providing an enhanced programme of engaging experts in various fields and of exposing young people to the wide world, School D facilitated these activities:

- Social and Lifeskills
- Sexual Awareness
- Drama
- Religious Retreats
- Health Matters
- Career Guidance
- Driving Skills, 'Drive for Life.'
- E.C.D.L.
- First Aid
- Gardai presentation
- Third Level Colleges presentations
- Guest career persons, barristers, chemists, radiography
- Horse Riding
- Gaisce, The President's Award (in G.B., Duke of Edinburgh Awards.)
- Law and Justice System
- Work Placements
- Outdoor Activity Centres e.g. Gartan, County Donegal
- Anti Bullying Course
- Study Programmes





We, as researchers, were interested in the perception the young people had of these people and the activities, which were provided for them.

Let's hear what School D young people said:

*'I am on the School's Students' Council, so I get to meet the Parents' Committee and Board of Management often. I would pass the suggestions on to them because they have important decision-making roles in the school.'*

*I would talk to my Art teacher. She doesn't have special powers within the school, but is a good listener and is supportive.'*

*'They talked to us on a more mature level as if talking to other adults.'*

*They were interesting and different from the usual class agenda.'*

*'They would sit in groups with us and discussed things from our point of view first before giving their own opinions and thoughts.'*

*'The activities they carried out were fun and it wasn't serious like it would be in the classroom. It was really enjoyable although I still learned new things.'*

*'They talked to me as a person.'*

*'They explained their background and put themselves forward as friends rather than a figure of authority.'*

*'It was a break away from the regular school day.'*

In light of having engaged in the novel and creative activities, are there any future areas of discovery, which would appeal to the young respondents. School D pupils mentioned:

Further Outdoor Activities

More guest speakers

Fundraising events for charities

Music and Drama

Foreign Exchanges

Safer Driving

Language Skills

Transition Year\* for All

\* Transition Year is a year gap between pupils undertaking the Junior Certificate in schools in the Republic of Ireland and sitting their Leaving Certificate. Many of the previously mentioned activities pertain to activities for this grouping.

## Focus Groups.

The purpose of the filmed discussions was to flesh out opinions expressed by the pupils in a structured questionnaire. The latter led into the facilitations by a member of the research team with experience in such informal group work. Four second level schools were chosen as a consequence of teaching representatives having been interviewed and expressing views on what the school was attempting, vis-à-vis : relationship building between formal and informal sectors.

The research team felt it **prudent to equate the teacher opinions with what the pupils would say in regard to their experiences** to date of informal learning in contrast to the formal learning usually associated with school.

The two - page worksheet employed in each school as a quantitative and qualitative tool in itself and is included as **appendix 4**. It was an attempt to recognise the range of ability between and within groups of pupils to be filmed. Also, it was considered valuable as a means of easing the pupils into the themes of the overall discussion. The actual sessions were professionally filmed in an effort to “unpack” cogent points the pupils were making and to understand in their terms the value or otherwise of the informal education they had experienced to date and whether or not they would appreciate any more. In this way **the nuances of what they had to say could be better explored** and revisited by the research team. All Child Protection Procedures were adhered to and no images will be for public consumption. Associated paperwork between the school and parent was facilitated by the Senior Management Team of each institution.

The latter can be described as follows:

An 11- 16, all ability, Catholic boys school in Belfast - School A (2 focus groups);

An 11-16, integrated school in County Armagh - School B (1 focus group);

An 11-16, all ability, Catholic boys school in County Down - School C (1 focus group);

An 11-19, all ability, co-educational school in County Donegal - School D (1 focus group).

Years 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 had at least some representation between all encountered and one group had pupils aged 16+.

A range of communities are included, with an international dimension also, to take stock of this increasing reality in schools.

Three are in the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland and one is in the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland. Consequently, best practice in regard to the relationship between formal and informal education can be shared when noted in either jurisdiction.

**The actual presence of the camera enhanced the process rather than hindered it.** The young people involved were energized by the camera and it was only necessary with one particular group to clarify that the researchers were not from television and that we were in fact involved in a “programme” of research.

Observations on the experience of facilitating the filmed discussions

The first point to make is that it was an honour and hugely rewarding. The second thing is a frank admission that each of the five facilitations was exhausting. The **energy and enthusiasm of the pupil participants** made the preparations worthwhile and proved the value of the process of filming the views expressed.

The warm welcomes we received in each institution from Senior Management Team SMT, teachers, ancillary and other adult staff and from all the pupils we encountered; was part testimony of the growing recognition of a need by formal education to embrace what informal education has to offer, create space and time for it and guarantee its future mainstreaming in partnership visioning.

### **Using the Worksheet**

The first section of the worksheet provides an insight to the range of communities the pupil sample comes from.

The second task asked them to rank order important places in their lives. Note that room has been made for the inclusion of places we as adults may not fully appreciate in terms of young people’s priorities?

**It was essentially an exercise in measuring in some way, how young people perceive the school as a place in their own lives and the life of their base community.**

The final five sections of the worksheet, explore the pupil perceptions of those adults who have come into the formal school setting to facilitate elements of learning around issues important in the lives of young people. The pupils are asked to **compare and contrast their perceptions of such adults to their more usual experiences of learning with teachers.**

In School A the researcher worked with 18 Year 8 pupils who included a young man from Africa, recently settled in the West Belfast community. Later they encountered 18 Year 9 boys with a reputation for being challenging. It took around fifteen minutes or so

to fully interest the Year 9 group in what the researchers wished to achieve with them. It must be said that the presence of the camera increased their participation rate. This group of young adults included a young man recently arrived from Scotland and a number of young travelers. These facilitations took place on the morning of Wednesday November 8, 2006.

The afternoon of Wednesday 8 2006 was spent with 49, mainly Year 10 pupils of School B in two groups. Whilst School A in Belfast was exclusively boys and Catholic in identity, School B had a good balance of the sexes and all communities. An international dimension was provided by the participation of Portuguese pupils with varying fluencies in the English language.

The morning of Thursday November 9 2006 brought us to County Down among the young men of School C. One of the 16, represented Year 11 and had participated in a conflict management programme which involved leaving the school to meet informal facilitators and peers from another institution representing the other main community. The rest were Year 12 pupils, aged fifteen to sixteen.

The following week, on the morning of Wednesday 15 2006, we traveled to County Donegal to meet 16 students of School D. These pupils reflected the experiences of those involved in the “Transition Year”, which follows the Junior Certificate Examinations in the Republic of Ireland. The age range was 15 to 19+ and again both sexes were represented.

The total pupil sample of **117**; represents, all-ability, male and female, cross community and cross border.

Each focus group’s input was enhanced by the Facilitator using strategies learned in training for Youth and Community Work. These included:

- Feedback at intervals from the Facilitator about how the session was progressing;
- Letting the participants know how much more time would be spent on individual component activities of the session;
- Acknowledging the value of all individual contributions;
- Speaking clearly, not shouting or as boys in School A put it, “throwing a psycho”;
- Accepting the level of energy and noise associated with the activities of the session;
- Using “I” statements;
- Employing the first names of young adults as a form of respect;

- Scanning the facial expressions and body language of each group for signs of unease and/or levels of enjoyment;

Whenever the focus group was divided into smaller units to discuss and write down observations, moving around these to skim and scan some written responses and encouraging further detail if at all possible.

### **Summary of key issues raised during on camera discussions with pupils in the five focus groups**

In each of the schools visited, it was quite clear that **young people** in them **valued education**. In School A, comments underlining this included:

“I like school...it gets you educated...”

“...you learn more and get a good job when you’re older...”

“...other people in the world don’t get the chance...like the third world people...”

“You have to have a good education.”

All these comments are from 12 and 13 year old boys .

In School B supporting comments included:

“You get to go and meet your friends and you get to learn.” - Year 10 Female

“...not to have an education would be a total disaster!” - Year 10 Male

In School C we have observations around welcoming all sorts of boys and giving them another chance,

“... a wide range of children, like Polish children...we have a wide range of foreign communities around here.” - Year 12 Male

In School D pupils made statements such as:

“...education is important...” - 17 year old female

“There’s more important things to me than school...not that school is not important because it is...” - 17 year old Male.

“...all the young people get their education, go to college, come back and make the town a better place.”

Young adults responded positively to the learning facilitated by **adults they clearly differentiated from teachers** and who were sited on school premises or visited the latter to engage with them. One particular role that teachers carry out in second level schools was touched upon by a number of individuals and is highlighted at this point because of its distinct nature. The designated “Form Teacher” who spends the beginning of the school day, possibly the end of it and times in between, with his/her cohort of pupils; earns special comments from young people in the focus groups. In School A the Form Teacher’s ‘mediation’ role was described variously as,

“...more chance of telling the class off...getting information across to other pupils and teachers...we are with him most of the day...”

These young men’s comments were echoed by a female pupil in School B who confessed to “sharing” with the Form Teacher in a confident, comfortable manner.

The kind of issues covered by visiting adults included:

“...bullying...not taking drugs...all bad stuff...smoking and all...” -Year 8 pupil from School A .This young man also commented positively on the activities employed by such visiting adults:

- Making posters
- Playing games
- Making flow charts in small groups and then presenting them to a plenary group.

Another pupil from Year 9 in School A could tell that visiting adults who facilitated an anti - Joy/Death Riding scheme were not teachers:

“They didn’t look like teachers. They didn’t dress like teachers. They didn’t shout at you or anything like that...”

Another Year 9 pupil added a further dimension:

“...they didn’t normally act like teachers or give you work or anything...”

A third individual from this focus group commented that he,

“...liked the way that any answers we had, they wrote them on the board, so that was good for us.”

Members of this focus group added further observations in relation to the style of Informal Educators and engagement with young adults. One in particular contended that he would pick this sort of adult rather than a teacher to discuss life issues. He felt that teachers could learn a lot from them; especially,

“...not to shout.”

However, there was one caveat to the visiting adults respecting the pupils by noting all their answers. One pupil made the very telling observation that he felt that they,

“...weren’t very smart...they couldn’t spell...”

This emphasis on literacy is counterbalanced somewhat by a contribution made shortly afterwards by a young man in this focus group who appeared to have taken in a great deal of the core message of the anti-Joy/Death Riding programme. The latter’s personnel had employed techniques and strategies which had provided him with something of an epiphany in relation to his base community,

“...how much the government had to pay to look after every community and the highest community was Divis.”

Discussions in the Informal Education programme had provided him with insights to the negativity of antisocial behaviour.

In School B differentiation between formal and informal education was described in the following terms:

“It was mainly sitting down and drawing ...whereas ..lessons is mainly sitting down and writing.” - Year 10 Male.

A female Year 10 pupil highlighted her contrasting feelings about an in-house, informal programme, vis-à-vis standard lessons,

“...more active education...where instead of sitting down always, you could stand up and do things.”

A second Year 10 female pupil drew attention to the fact that the in-house programme was facilitated by an adult who,

“...allows you to call her by her first name...she will come to you at any time...she’s a lot easier to talk to.”

A Year 9 pupil from School B felt that **teachers could learn** from the adult who facilitated the in-house programme because the latter,

**“Let us talk for a change.”**

The essential difference for a male Year 10 pupil in School B was that the in-house programme of informal education did not involve being trapped behind a desk.

For a Portuguese female pupil in School B the experience of uniformed police officers visiting her school in her native Portugal was not unusual:

“The police came in every year to talk about drugs...trying to advise us not to do drugs.”



Interestingly, a uniformed PSNI officer had carried out a pilot programme of civic education in School B the year before these pupils joined.

**The issue of trust was paramount for students** in School C. While they felt that their Student Support Officer, "...talks to you like a normal person...like a friend..." teachers could not be viewed in the same way because, "...teachers talk to one another a lot in the staff room." In contrast the SSO is perceived differently because,

"...you can say stuff and he'll not go back and say it to any other teachers."

However, the Head Boy was present in this group and he did add one proviso in relation to the role of the SSO attending the Student Council as a conduit to the school's Senior Management Team. The Head Boy felt that the latter should attend the Student Council meetings themselves for direct communications,

"...because they can see our point of view the way we see it and not just the way (the SSO) says it."

School C also had visiting adults to facilitate a personal development and **sexual awareness** programme. One particular Year 12 pupil spoke for all whenever he commented to the effect that he **would not have felt as comfortable asking teachers questions about the kind of material** the visiting adults presented on personal development and sexual awareness. One of his peers accepted that teachers could cover topics instead of Informal Educators visiting to do so:

"I suppose they could but people coming in is different from normal school."

This young man reinforced his argument by claiming that **pupils could be more open with Informal Educators** about things like alcohol because,

"They don't really know you and are not going to tell your Mum and Dad what you do."

On the topic of drug awareness he contended that he supported Informal Educators flagging up the discussion in schools:

"They are showing you...what it can do to you."

Many of those present nodded in agreement with his claim that the **messages relating to challenges in society would not have the same measure of success if delivered by the teachers** because,

"Pupils don't really listen to what teachers say sometimes."

In School D pupils felt that visiting adults “...wouldn’t be as strict...” as teachers. One particular informal educator was described as,

“...a down to earth kind of fella...”

A second visiting adult was viewed as “slightly different” from teachers because,

“You get on with him person to person.”

There again one seventeen year old female pupil could identify certain adult visitors to her school as teachers,

“...by the way they acted...other people were more laid back and you were more comfortable with them.”

School D focused mainly on a discussion of the Transition Year experience for pupils in the Republic of Ireland. For one female pupil it was “very different” from what she had been used to in school. She had been given **opportunities to “sit about and talk” about important life issues**. A male counterpart outlined Transition Year in more detail:

“You still come to school. You still have a timetable. The classes aren’t the same as they would be in normal cycle...**In other classes you’re learning material to go towards your exams...but Transition Year is more material that will be valuable to you later on.**”

There is a universal issue around the “value” placed on informal education by some teachers, some parents and society at large. School D pupils were candid in their remarks that they had some teachers who felt that the Transition Year experience was a waste of a whole school year. Such teachers “counselled” certain pupils against participation. This observation linked in with one made by a pupil in School A, who felt that his class had been selected for the anti-Joy/Death Riding programme because they were, “the lowest class.” This raises a final question: Are future Informal Education programmes to be aimed at all pupils?

If such programmes remain targeted at “low ability” or “under-achieving” pupils then the tensions between outcome driven and process driven work in schools will remain.

## SECTION 9. FINDINGS: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.

### Introduction.

During the research it became apparent that the term ‘youth work’ in schools and ‘informal education’ in schools meant different things to different people. This related to how some of the respondents understood or even acknowledged the concept of ‘informal’ education including an understanding of what was being delivered by outsiders other than ‘teachers’. For example, many young people mentioned youth worker practitioners by their first name. So ‘Martin’ was interesting and we enjoyed the session rather than the youth worker. In some instances this **‘visiting adult’** was not a youth worker but a social worker or a community based practitioner from a local project. Therefore when discussing youth work in schools or using the term informal education in schools, the schools alluded to anyone who came into the school to deliver a programme other than a school based subject. Statutory youth providers were the only group that were directly assumed to be ‘youth workers’ due to the way in which they planned and carried out their task and also because some of them were workers in local youth clubs. In most cases this meant that youth workers were delivering a programme which was agreed by the principal, senior staff team, student liaison officer and organised in advance. So when questioned about what informal programmes the schools used or were involved with they mentioned a plethora of diverse programmes. Hence **there is some ambiguity with assuming that by using the term ‘informal’ education in a school setting teachers or principals are referring to youth work.**

Schools probably only understand that youth workers are running some of these programmes if they are informed that the presenter is a youth worker. Otherwise they are, in the eyes of the school staff, ‘all informal educators’. The researchers would argue that the implication for youth work is that they are not obviously seen by schools as the only group who can deliver informal education. Also the programmes provided by youth work agencies can, and are, provided by groups that are not youth work trained. While it is believed that youth work uses an implicitly informal approach to learning, schools do not see informal education as exclusively youth work. The question to be asked is whether the concept of informal education means the same to the youth workers as it does to the teachers in schools? It seems from the research that the concept of informal education for youth workers is about the process of learning through the use of relationships, experiential and student centred learning needs. Whereas in schools the concept appears to refer to any session or programme that is not part of their understanding of delivered subject based curriculum.

The findings will be analysed and discussed under the following headings:

- **YOUTH WORKERS IN SCHOOLS;**
- **SCHOOL BASED ISSUES;**
- **JOINT ISSUES;**
- **EVOLVING MODELS OF PRACTICE;**

## **YOUTH WORKERS IN SCHOOLS.**

### **The nature of youth work as a profession.**

The findings suggest that youth workers who work in schools are doing so because of the influence of external forces such as funding and the advantage that accessibility into ready made audiences in schools offers. Underpinning the work is the 'model of effective practice' offering a framework in which the profession can shape its practice. The core principles of a commitment to preparing young people for participation, testing values and beliefs and the promotion of acceptance and understanding are central to youth work in schools. The process of delivering these 'skills' or 'value changes' are included in some of the prescribed courses of study. Others include them de facto in their rationale, e.g. lads and dads programmes. Youth workers use them to develop a curriculum that reflects their profession involving young people in developing curriculum content, programmes, actions, activities, reflection and evaluation (Model of Effective Practice. 2003).

Most youth workers in the research based their approach on the 'Model of Effective Practice' in terms of reworking and reshaping the curriculum to suit the school based work. However it should be noted that some aspects of the model were not as prominent within the school system as they would be outside school, for example, work with the community. It may be worth noting that while youth workers in schools are engaged in the process of understanding and attempting to measure outcomes the model does not address in any detail the concept of outcomes.

For some interviewees in the research the question they were asking was, "Is what we are doing in schools, youth work?"

One area of concern has been the 'watering down' of the voluntary principle attached to youth work. Some youth workers (see discussion in Young People Now 23/07/03) have asked, "**Is there too much emphasis on 'voluntariness' in youth work?**" Some believe that they compromise this principle when working in schools. Peter Crossley in the above article asks, ultimately does anyone have a choice that isn't limited by the environment in which they find themselves? Others feel more strongly with one commentator saying that she would make it compulsory for some young people to come into contact with youth workers for their own development. She states (YPN. 2003),

"I'd go even further, and say that I believe strongly we should become a statutory organisation, with more regulation and training for new youth workers."

She is alluding to the need to 'force' some young people into youth work!!

However, another way of reflecting on this issue is to view the process of youth work in schools differently from the youth work value base per se. This may mean that the concept of the voluntary principle is differentiated within the context of the school

and youth sector. The need to differentiate between settings suggests that there are concerns about the power relationship between young people, teachers and youth workers. Voluntariness and effective partnerships, with most disadvantaged young people, are not mutually exclusive and the 'compulsion' to attend some programmes did not prevent them (young people) from deriving considerable satisfaction from the learning experiences and activities on offer. If young people are not given the opportunity to avail of youth work in schools, irrespective of the imposition of this activity or not, they cannot exercise choice. Youth workers may need to be trusted with the interpretation of the principle of voluntariness while working in contexts not totally conducive to youth work practice.

The respondent from the NEELB was under no illusion that they offered an important service to schools. Although based on informal and non-measurable outcomes they nevertheless used methods that complemented the needs of the schools (compliance) with the needs of the young people (addressing needs through solution focussed approaches).

**The findings suggest that for youth workers and young people the need to build relationships are primary**, as suggested by Brendtro et al (1983). This means that without building a meaningful relationship a full learning potential cannot be achieved or that the potential is somehow minimised. The findings clearly show that youth workers see the development of this relationship as paramount and that young people place a strong value on the need to build a working relationship, normally with the 'visiting adult' rather than the teacher. The research shows that some schools organised a residential to build the relationship between students and staff. After building a working relationship many youth workers use prescribed accredited course such as COPE or XL to deliver youth work practice. Others use discussion groups to introduce areas of interest or concern, e.g. suicide awareness, alcohol and drug misuse, sex education, sexual health, joy riding, health promotion, disability, bullying etc. etc... under the title of 'personal and social development'. This means that **youth workers need a certain context in which to be effective and a philosophy which underpins basic principles** such as building relationships.

### **Informal educators have 'street-cred' in the schools.**

Some young people knew the youth workers before they came into the school due to their affiliation with the local youth club. This meant that a relationship was already established with some young people. A few youth workers felt that this gave them some form of 'street-cred' over and above teachers. Other workers felt that as they knew the young people beforehand it created a sort of continuity between what was going on in the youth club and what was happening in the school. Some youth workers could act as advocates on behalf of young people because of their more personalised knowledge; one worker stating that they had a more holistic understanding of the strengths of young people not always obvious in a school setting.

### **Non-formal, informal, group work, and issue based work as approaches to learning.**

There is no doubt that youth work in schools is based on a more informal approach to learning and that, in most instances, that process is educational. Whether we see education in terms of measurable outcomes such as examinations or in terms of personal and social development is debatable. **The point is that youth workers see their role, through the manufacture of situations that challenge behaviour and offer contexts for growth as educational.** The mechanisms used to achieve these goals are often group work or issue based group work. Some of the schools in the research project used issue based work to complement the curriculum while others used individual work to supplement the needs of the school, for example, when behaviour was an issue. However all the youth workers or informal educators used learning processes that were not subject based approaches to learning and therefore were, de facto, non-formal. The movement towards courses such as COPE or XL may change this perspective. Group work is the main vehicle in which informal education is delivered by most youth workers. The added benefit is the existence of ready made groups for youth workers to engage with irrespective of the reason for attendance. They form the group, use ice-breakers to create group cohesion, build a contract with the young people and decide on the aims of the group. Some stay in the school while other use the youth wing. Group work is a central plank for the operationalisation of youth work practice in school. The group allows the workers to build a relationship with the young people in a framework similar to that of Brendtro et al (1983).

### **Engaging with a captive audience.**

The research findings from Northern Ireland indicate that school principals and youth workers see a value in using youth workers or informal educators in the school setting. The youth workers like the idea of a captive audience and easy access to young people who may never attend a youth club or other statutory provision. They also like the prescribed use of a curriculum (as long as it is not too inflexible) and they like the timing of the youth work intervention, i.e. during the day. The schools use the youth workers, informal educators or visiting adults to supplement or complement what it is they do especially in areas where they feel they lack expertise, for example, drugs awareness, bullying or suicide prevention. There appears to be little, if any, strategic thinking about the nature of this work and how it is prioritised other than what is local, for example, the use of a local joy/death riding group. However, in the **Youthreach project** the focus on disadvantaged young people was much more coherent in terms of services available at the centre and a much more strategic plan was evident. This included the **evolution** of the project over 18 years and the introduction of **services that complemented the needs of the young people**, for example, literacy training, job skills, counselling, homeopathy, reflexology, basic skills, a crèche, and financial support. Youthreach offers a parallel path to schooling and has evolved into a project that appears to be able to deal with young

people disengaged from school in an alternative manner. Although they have a captive audience it is divorced from the young person's concept of traditional 'school'.

### **Creating groups.**

The NEELB use outdoor pursuits through youth work to engage young people. This form of group development while aimed at the physical development can evolve into group sessions about self-awareness and peer support. It is an example of youth work in school being more than a counselling service for young people and is in keeping with the philosophy of creating opportunities for youth development often found in youth centres. However, the research indicates that normally the youth worker in the school is classroom based dealing with personal and social issues and does not have many opportunities to create outside activities. Some schools have included the youth worker on residential so that this method of engagement can be developed. This is an area that is worth more exploration if the two professions are to work closer together.

### **Building credibility.**

One very strong point emerging from the research is the need, mainly from a youth worker's perspective, of building credibility; not only with young people but with the teachers and senior staff in some schools. One project (NEELB) were proactive when work in schools began. They met the senior management team and discussed at length the needs of the young people, the youth workers and the school. As timetabling is important to the school this pre-planned stage is vital for the smooth running of the projects. Additionally it was obvious that 'early' timetabling was necessary for most schools as they work on a yearly cycle and need advance warning if time slots are needed. When a working relationship has been achieved entrance in to the school and an understanding was automatically built into the management process. However, **new schools** coming on board may **need to discuss the implications for timetabling with the youth workers.**

In terms of the power relationship between youth work and teaching the research findings appear to suggest, although more research may be needed, that youth workers 'go-into-the formal' system. This means that the dominant paradigm is the formal school system with the principal having the final say in what happens in the school. The credibility of the youth worker appears to revolve around them being able to 'sell' their product to the school in terms that both fit the school system and is understandable to the ethos of the school. The evolving NEELB model appears to be more equitable than other programmes that are 'add-ons' to the school curriculum. **Time is a factor in building credibility between the two professions** and one area that is worth considering if youth work is to become a more equitable partner.

## **Accreditation.**

The findings suggest that when accreditation is associated with youth work programmes the schools find them more advantageous. For example, with the COPE and XL courses there are GCSE equivalences. This makes these courses easier to sell to young people, parents and employers because they are based on personal and social development and because they offer accredited assessment. However the research points to problems that those young people with literacy difficulties experience. Young people who have literacy problems would struggle to perform in some of these personal and social development programmes. Other schools are not particularly interested in accredited programmes and in fact some programmes, such as, Lads and Dads would be difficult to accredit.

The review of literature highlights the difficulty that faces youth work in an audit culture where outcomes need to be stated and measured. Youth work needs to decide on what it can and cannot measure and if these courses/programmes/interventions are best suited to the school setting.

Being able to offer courses that have accreditation says Field (2003) allows governments and departments to spend money knowing that they can account through understandable outcomes, such as qualifications that are equivalent to GCSEs. The findings indicate that prescribed courses such as COPE are clearly useful in the school setting as they offer comparable outcome to that of the school system. Other interventions like personal development, counselling or helping projects, 'Lads and Dads', drugs awareness, anti-bullying, sex education, anti-joy/death riding etc etc... while necessary and interesting are nevertheless more non-formal in nature. Youth workers may need to engage in a debate around aspects of youth work that will not be accredited.

## **Learner-led curriculum.**

Youth workers see the work in schools as primarily based around personal development linked to the young person's community and family. The curriculum is learning-led and encourages young people to start from where they are at to understand their place in society; often, suggests the research findings, around issues that are sometimes created by the school, friends, family and community and, of course, the self. The learning is personal and challenging and engages young people. Feedback during the focus groups highlights the importance of young people being listened to and positively rewarded for their contributions. There appears to be a lack of coherent thinking regarding the link between the 'learning' curriculum, in terms of how it is delivered by youth workers, and the 'subject-based' curriculum taught by teachers. **The overwhelming evidence in this research is that young people valued education but some aspects did not endear them to learning.**



## **Flexibility.**

Youth workers were much more flexible in their approach to learning as they have no subject-based curriculum to deliver and they can take more time with relationship building and guidance. The research shows that this flexibility is central to youth work but a difficult concept for schools to embrace. The fact that some youth workers can design and deliver their own curriculum suggests a degree of flexibility that teachers do not experience. **Not only do youth workers have time to develop innovative approaches to learning but they can take more time in the class room if a young person needs to off-load some information before moving-on in terms of personal growth.** This flexibility is not on offer to many teachers and is only available to those schools who employ a student support worker. This worker is able to meet young people outside the class for discussion and guidance. Some schools employed individuals to sit alongside difficult youth so that they can deal with problems as they arrive.

The research does suggest that as youth work is more embedded into the life of the school, it takes on the form of timetabling a curriculum. This means that while the youth workers may have flexibility in their delivery method; the basis of the curriculum, the time for delivery and the number of young people will be dictated by the school. Flexibility is a central core of youth work practice outside the school as youth workers take their time when building relationships, seek support from other agencies, discuss and evaluate young people's issues and generally work without the constraints of measurable outcomes. How long this will continue as they embed themselves in the school system is difficult to assess. This research indicates that the flexibility experienced by youth workers may be eroded as they form closer alliances with schools.

## **Behaviour modification: measuring behavioural change.**

The research findings show that one of the aims of bringing outsiders into schools is to modify the behaviour of young people. The introduction of parents into the school is a settling factor as is the use of 'visiting adults' who deliver programmes that young people identify with and learn from. Personal development programmes allow young people to explore their understanding of 'self' and reinterpret their life in the school. Outcomes mentioned by the young people include being able to ask for clarification from teachers, being more confident in the school; feeling they are represented and have a voice; planning action (Solution Focussed approach) and having realistic goals. Other programmes from outsiders, while not accredited, help complement the schools activities. Teachers and principals are under no illusion that some young people are having difficulty fitting into the system and end up leaving with few if any qualifications. The need to engage this group on programmes that broaden their learning is often driven, though not exclusively by the need for teachers and schools to have a 'quiet life'.

Findings from the focus groups show quite clearly that all young people want to learn and that disruptive **behaviour is a symptom of something else.** Youth workers will attempt to understand what this 'something else' is and **deal with it often, but not exclusively, before the learning process can begin.**

## **Youth work in schools is shaped by policy, i.e. funding-led.**

Evidence from the research points emphatically to the fact that **there is no strategic plan behind youth work in schools**. The findings show clearly an ad hoc process that relies on the professionalisation of youth workers and teachers. It also relies on funding and the goodwill of principals and senior managers to embrace what is on offer from the youth service. Some principals are shaping the agenda for reasons of expanding the learning potential of the pupils, due to falling numbers, difficulty with achieving unrealistic goals (league tables based on qualifications) and on the belief that other aspects of learning are important. Policies around 'Every Child Matters' add justification to the principals understanding of a holistic school. One might ask the question that if a school had a full quota of students and good academic results what would be the role of youth work? A subsidiary question may be, Is youth work in school primarily for secondary schools and in particular 'difficult' young people? Irrespective of the reason most of the projects in the research were instigated due to funding or the youth service offering their skills and staff for free. Again this is an indicator of the lack of strategic thinking about an activity that appears to work but only if funding and/or enthusiasm exist.

Youthreach is a funded programme that offers the young people diverse opportunities, skills and experience irrespective of intermittent funding strategies. **Consistency** is essential as is the long-term nature of the funding. One lesson to be learnt from investigating Youthreach is its **longevity** leading to **strategic planning and thinking** around the role of youth work/informal education for disaffected youth.

**Programmes in N.I. are short-term and ad hoc.** These short-term funding-led programmes **may challenge** some of the core principles of youth work, for example **equality and professional practice** when the youth work ends and the worker disappears.

## **Engagement.**

Whatever the means of entering the school the findings suggest that the engagement between the informal educator or youth worker and young people is positive. Their role and function is received with enthusiasm and the teachers see them as adding to the overall development of young people. This can be through behavioural change, information on issues or personal development leading to coping skills and confidence to speak out in class. It was obvious that some young people in schools are not as engaged within the school system as one would like. Added to this are the compounding problems of family, peers and community and there is disengagement. One of the strengths, as mentioned by Brendtro et al (1983) is the primacy of relationship building. All workers in the research see and use relationship building as the corner stone for all their work. Engagement is not taken as given, even in the school setting and is something that youth workers invest time in developing and explaining.

Youthreach offers as a **parallel educational experience** that young people can avail of and engagement is perceived by those young people as 'different' to school.

### **Expected-outcomes for youth workers.**

The findings show clearly that youth work in schools is primarily about personal development that encompasses the understanding of the self, the group or peers and the family within a community context. The term we choose is '**expected-outcomes**'. The researchers feel that this realistically assumes that there are outcomes, such as gaining more confidence; higher self-esteem; awards; coping with difficult situations; behavioural changes; anger management; working with dads; developing communication skills but that these are expected and not necessarily measurable. If we use this term for school-based outcomes we can see that one could 'expect' young people to be able to read and write after 12 years of school but for some that is not the case. Youth work in schools clearly offers young people, teachers and school principals something that is missing from subject-based teaching. Personal development has to be assumed to be taking place even if its impact is only assessed using evaluation forms at the end of sessions. Self awareness through youth work practice appears easier to achieve than a GCSE in mathematics for some young people. Exposure to **informal approaches** to learning through youth work definitely **offered those young people in the research something special and something that they valued**. They also expressed their understanding of the importance of an 'education' and while not averse to learning appear to engage more readily with a youth work approach.

Although there are expected outcomes it may be useful in the future to look at the concept of '**recordable outcomes**' in conjunction with the rise in **quality assurance practices** in youth work and other fields.

### **Evaluation.**

One of the interesting aspects of the work that emerged was the diligence with which youth workers evaluated the impact of their projects in schools. While one would not equate these practices with examination outputs they were nevertheless adequate to capture the essence of what young people experienced. **For some principals this indicated both transparency and measurement**. For the youth workers it was about feedback so that they could say with certainty that they achieved their goals. These goals were often set by the young people and revisited regularly. **One telling comment from the young people was the importance they attached to a worker listening to them**. The discussion around using COPE or XL arose due to the youth workers feeling that some young people were struggling with COPE whereas the XL course allowed them to modify the curriculum when young people were being left behind. Evaluation in most instances for youth workers was more non-formal than formal and ongoing. The issues of tangible outcomes, in terms of awards, was often achieved by giving the young people a certificate of attendance on a programme.

## **Evolving issues for youth work practice.**

One of the most insightful aspects of the research was the finding that youth workers need to be creative in the schools system. They not only need to deliver personal and social development programmes but create the environment within the ethos of the school that both allows them to deliver their programme and create an 'environment' that allows the intervention to work to its maximum. Nearly all the youth workers wanted a certain type of space in which to carry out group work. Negotiation was essential with the principal and senior management team to achieve the 'right' ambiance. One can see the clear overlap between Brendtro et al's tenets for working with youth at risk, especially that teaching is humanistic and relationships are primary. Most of the principals in the study understood the importance of space for this type of work and tried if possible to offer appropriate facilities. For young people this 'different' experience appears to have worked. They liked the youth worker or informal educator taking their points seriously and putting them on the flip-chart, acknowledging their input, taking them serious and giving positive feedback. Creating a different environment begs the question about what happens when the youth worker leaves the school? The input from youth workers or others is short and to the point, normally dealing with issues that stimulate both debate and involvement in a setting that is conducive to participation. Youth workers encourage all to participate and will endeavour to 'deliver' the course/programme/intervention in a certain way; a way that relates to professional practice and suggests an underpinning value base around treating all young people the same. Interestingly not having a strongly prescribed curriculum allows the youth worker to be creative and flexible if the group is unsettled. The findings from the young people suggest, very strongly, that they like this approach and identify with many of the outputs and processes used.

The creativity of the 'visiting adults' appears to be similar although those visiting to address large numbers is more about giving information than creating a learning environment. Normally large groups are split into smaller working groups so that young people feel included and their voices can be heard.

Youth workers appear to 'create' the environment in which they can achieve maximum impact in a school. When this is 'watered down' due to lack of facilities, large groups, prescribed programmes (COPE), and other unfavourable variables then the impact of the work may be diminished. **It appears that youth workers have basic demands for interventions in schools** and something that may form the basis of universal principles for youth work in schools.

The model developed by the NEELB emphasises the importance of both **preplanning the inputs and the training of teachers for the intervention**. The youth workers from the NEELB strategically plan their intervention process long before they enter the school thus pre-empting problems.

## **Understanding the school.**

The inclusion of interviews with support teachers, year heads and principals was informative for the researchers. It became obvious that youth workers were perceived as '**visiting adults**' by both the staff and pupils. The concept of youth worker was not as

prominent as one would have thought even though many of the inputs were by youth workers. **Youth workers interviewed all agreed that they needed time (sometimes a long time) to understand what happens in a school.** Some said that they were not equipped either philosophically or with the knowledge to **understand how a school functioned.** This made their impact much more difficult. One important fact, although less important to youth workers than teachers, it seemed, was **the need to timetable events.** Often the timetable was designed over the summer months for a September start. Schools appeared to like to know well in advance about who was coming in for what and for how long.

Noise levels for youth workers indicate engagement with the material and participation but for some schools it meant lack of discipline. Most youth workers in the research said that they had to negotiate their role in the school. First name terms were important for youth workers but they had to explain that when they left the young people had to revert to school rules. Early intervention with the principal was important for youth workers in order to outline their needs as a profession within the context of the school. In research carried out by Harland et al (2005) they talk about the dominant paradigm being formal education. There is no doubt that while youth workers bring to the school what the researchers term the **'in-formal'**, the dominant ethos is subject-based teaching. Youth workers are only a small part of a school life and understanding this was not something that was easily achieved.

### **Understanding the role of teachers in a school.**

Following on from understanding the ethos of the school is an understanding, by youth workers, of the role of teachers. The teachers employed or involved in informal educational activities all understand the importance of these extra-curricular activities. The support teachers are the strongest advocates of informal approaches to learning in schools and act as an important first port of call for youth workers coming into the schools. Some of the support teachers instigate this involvement while others facilitate the programmes because of their role and understanding of the young people; particularly those at risk. Linking with appropriate teachers appears to be a critical aspect of youth work in schools. The research findings indicate that all schools who use youth workers have teachers who understand what it is they are doing in the school and what they can do in this context. The demands of youth work practitioners is eased by the understanding of their work by teachers who can equally, given limited resources in schools, facilitate most of the requirements that youth workers need to pursue their goals with young people.

### **Limitations of youth work.**

There is realism, for youth workers, outlined by Rogers (2003), that not every one will achieve highly in school. While it may not be politically correct to state the obvious it is important to say that this research highlighted the fact that youth workers normally work with young people who are perceived, rightly or wrongly, to be at risk of something or other. Many of the young people that the youth workers were working with would be

low-education achievers. Using programmes such as COPE highlighted the difficulty with this approach for those on the margins of the margins. What can youth workers achieve in the context of school? Many of the interventions were based on personal and emotional development of young people using their lives as the starting point. Frustration in school for some may have been the starting point and difficulty with a teacher or even the school. The youth worker creates an environment in which the young people can begin to understand who they are and what makes them tick as young developing adults. The academic outcomes are, it appears, initially irrelevant as the youth worker attempts to re-engage the young people in the process of learning. It would seem that to assume that all potential low-achievers will somehow become high achievers after youth work intervention is a tall order. Therefore one might argue that the limitations of youth work in schools are due to the context in which it occurs and the expected outcomes of the school. The youth workers see coping; anger management; standing up for oneself; challenging and growing as central tenets of young people. Jeffs and Smith (1990) stated that when we bring the debate about what youth work is into the educational system youth work will lose out. The findings from this report tend to support this contention in that youth work in schools, while having an impact, appears to be measured (if that is the correct term) in ways that schools understand; for example, behaviour modification; programmes that have awards; engagement; participation etc. etc. There is growing recognition that other aspects of schooling (based on Every Child Matters policy implications) will be taken into account in the future when schools are being judged.

### **Re-visiting Brendtro et al's model.**

The inclusion of Brendtro et al's model has provided the researchers with an analytical tool against which they can deconstruct the concept of youth work in schools. Firstly relationships are primary. This contention applies to all youth work practice but is slightly changed in the school setting. For example, the 'temporary' nature of the relationships during short-term inputs. Youth workers who are part of the school, running youth wings, can develop long-term more permanent relationships. Some respondents were both working in the school and running local youth provision leading to more permanent relationships with young people. The nature of the relationship depended on the duration of the input from youth workers; the more short-term leading to temporary relationships with long-term contact in school, and after school, leading to long-term relationships. Youth workers in youth centres can develop long-term relationships through creating opportunities for young people. Youth workers in schools may not be able, in some instances to build this long-term relationship. Those schools with a student support worker had a person who could build a more permanent relationship with the young people mainly inside school. However, irrespective of the relationship being long or short-term there is no doubt that youth workers still see 'relationships as primary'.

Assessment as ecological suggests that if you are going to assess young people you need to take cognisance of the environment they find themselves. Brendtro et al are indicating that assessment is more than subject learning and testing. Other factors need to be considered if assessment is to reflect the real learning that has taken place. School

based assessment tends to be about examinations and subjects deemed important for young people. **Youth workers often talked about the small bite-size changes noted in some marginalised young people as measurement of change.** Assessment in the school environment is normally qualifications-led. Youth workers using courses such as COPE and XL are altering their concept of assessment to suit that of a school. Assessment in youth work is more subtle and less measurable leading, as suggested by Field (2003) to difficulty for Government funding. Youth workers appear to embrace the idea of school-based assessment when working with some young people.

Teaching is humanistic indicates that we cannot separate the person from the teaching or learning process. To assume that young people, in some way, change when they enter the school is naïve. The research is clear about this concept in that youth workers' view of marginalised or disengaged young people is different from that of teachers. The context of the perception, i.e. the school, shapes teachers' perceptions and, this research suggests, is influential upon the traditional perspective held by youth workers. This means that youth workers are themselves contextualised in their thinking on youth work in schools by the nature of the formal school system. Humanistic teaching in a subject-led school is something that is difficult to achieve. Youth workers attempt this in short, sharp inputs or through more prolonged interventions with young people; depending on whatever model they are using. However, if this is not supported by the school the nature of the teaching process is confusing for young people as they move between humanistic teaching (youth worker input) and subject-led teaching (teacher input).

**Youth workers pride themselves on working with crisis as an opportunity in experiential terms.** The nature of youth work inputs, for example, anger management, bullying or increasing self-esteem all lend themselves to using experiential learning and the presenting problems as a starting point. Schools or teachers view crisis as, school based crisis, and deal with them accordingly. Youth workers on the other hand take a broader perspective on crisis; sometimes involving other pupils or family life. Many schools also address crisis in broader terms but inevitably return to the base line of compliance to school norms. Youth workers can be much more flexible than teachers about using the crisis as a developmental process for young people.

Brendtro et al say that practice should be pragmatic. This means that when working with young people at risk the response by adults should be useful and meaningful when addressing 'real' issues. The NEELB model uses solution focused school based work to achieve this aim. Problems are identified and solutions evolve from the relationship between pupil and youth worker. The contextualisation of the solution within a school may be different from that of a centre based youth worker. However, as pointed out on numerous occasions by a senior worker, young people 'are' in schools and they can get much more out of the system if they can be supported during difficult times. This worker felt that youth work, in schools, was vital for some young people and that the pragmatic practice was, unashamedly, school orientated, because of his belief in the importance of getting an education. Brendtro et al's model highlights some of the dilemmas faced by youth workers who are engaging with youth at risk. Some of the lessons spill-over to 'normal' school going young people as youth workers broaden their input to a wider audience. The nature of youth work in a school setting is different to that outside the school for the simple reason that the **school ethos dominates the ideological**

**philosophy about the concept of ‘getting an education’.** Youth workers have an effective model outside schools which has been tried out in the school setting. The results are positive but, as will be discussed, need more discussion and analysis.

## **SCHOOL BASED ISSUES**

### **Role of ‘appropriate’ teacher.**

As alluded to above, the role of suitable teachers is important if a youth work intervention is to be maximised. **Choosing the correct personnel** is important for the schools as is the understanding of the concept of **differentiation in students** by youth workers. It was pointed out by some principals that some youth workers could not differentiate between pupils when teaching them in one room. This was to do with ability and the need to understand that some needed more support than others. Another talked about understanding the pitch, language and pace of study.

### **Ethos of school.**

This was a central finding, i.e. every school was different and had a preferred ‘narrative message’ which was governed by the Board of Governors and the school principal. Schools liked ‘outsiders’ to fit into this perceived image which was evident in the school prospectus and mission statement. Youth workers ‘coming in’ to the school may be filling gaps in what the school cannot deliver but there was a need for them to understand what was acceptable and what was not. Some youth workers felt, in the early stages that there was a sense of ‘them and us’ and they had to ‘force themselves’ onto the teaching staff through using the staff rooms or through the support teachers and through meetings with senior management. Certain inputs in the schools were prone to being vetoed by the pastoral care team if they were deemed to run contrary to the ethos of the school.

### **Dropouts or ‘quietly disengaged’.**

While the research findings do not deal directly with the issue of young people dropping out of school there is nevertheless a view that by introducing youth work ‘type’ programmes into schools they (the pupils) are more engaged in school life. An aspect of this engagement that was evident in the focus groups was that while young people may not drop out of school and are, what could be termed ‘troubleless’ there may be a group of young people disengaged from the learning process in some schools. An example of this is the literacy levels some young people have after 12 years of schooling. To combat



at least the issue of literacy the Youthreach programme has a compulsory literacy curriculum for all young people. The question is whether young people are more engaged in the learning process and indirectly the school through exposure to a different (informal or non-formal) teaching experience. The young people in the research were positive in their praise for 'visiting adults' when they spoke about them being taken seriously and being listened to in sessions. However, all the young people in this research project said that they valued their 'schooling' and knew that it was important to get qualifications while at school. The fracture seems to be between some young people's learning style and personality and the universal generic school environment that treats all young people as homogenous. **Dropouts from the school system, suggests this research, are not necessarily only those young people who leave but those who stay on and 'mentally dropout' with few if any qualifications. More insidiously they may be switched off learning in the future.** Equally if some young people value the educational system and enjoy the informal or non-formal learning process; **can different teaching methods be used to engage them?**

### **Subject-led teaching curriculum.**

Youth workers or other informal educators coming into a school normally do not see themselves as delivering a subject. Although they might be giving information of alcohol or substance misuse they probably refer to themselves as youth workers, community activists, social workers, student support workers etc. etc. Teachers, on the other hand, are referred to as a mathematics teacher, religious education teacher, teacher of English etc etc. This differentiation appears to suggest that the curriculum is subject-led although there are year heads and other roles that teachers perform. The point is that it is easier to see what exactly a teacher could or should deliver if he or she is a teacher of English. It is not as clear for youth workers who could, if necessary, call themselves personal and social education teachers.

### **Qualifications and accreditation.**

Allied to the concept of a teaching subject-led curriculum is the notion of gaining qualifications or getting accreditation for learning. The research findings suggest that most principals understand the need for inputs that are useful and not necessarily accredited. Some youth workers clearly see inputs that are accompanied by accreditation (COPE and XL ) as an easier sell in schools. Others see the downside for recruiting those young people on the margins. Some principals said that the parents like the idea of their young people getting awards for their efforts and most of the schools have a ceremony to recognise the achievement of the young people. Some of the outputs were in the form of visible murals or tangible projects between schools of different denominations. Most, if not all principals, were realistic about the fact that inputs around personal and social issues were more important to deliver, irrespective of them being accredited. If the literature is to be believed then government will be looking more closely for value for money, which is about tangible measurable outcomes, often in the form of qualifications or equivalence.

### **Demands of the new curriculum.**

There appears to be a new type of curriculum being formed for many secondary schools called the 'extended curriculum'. This curriculum, alluded to in the literature, may take account of programmes and policies that 'broaden' the expected outcomes in schools and allow for more generic skills assessment. For example, the use of Every Child Matters criteria for schools would allow them to use the inputs from visiting adults and youth workers as an indication that they are involved in extra-curricular activities. More importantly it allows the school to use these programmes and expected outcomes as part of how 'they' wish themselves to be assessed and sold to the public. In Northern Ireland this is demonstrated by the 'Localised Schools Partnerships' as proposed by Costello in his review of second level education, as envisaged post 2008 and the end of the Selection Procedure. A

A second example is the innovation of NIO ministers in the current school year (2006-2007) of 10 schools with 'specialised status', receiving extra finances to facilitate a focus on the Arts, Performing Arts, Sciences, Technology. It is proposed to roll this strategy out to other schools.

IME (Irish Medium Education) is expanding steadily into second level and the number of 'green field' and 'transformed' second level integrated schools are increasing.

The Review of Public Administration has proposed a different role for the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the latter has held conferences to highlight new vocabulary for the future of schools as, 'Faith Schools'. The challenge of change faces all sectors in Northern Ireland and the Teachers' Council for N. Ireland has an agreed statement of 'competencies' expected of teachers as they 'continue professional development'. An analysis of the list of competencies reveals a number expected of youth workers.

### **Student support person/role.**

The findings highlight the important role played by the student support person in schools (assuming a school has this type of person). Not only did they liaise with the researchers but were in a position to identify which pupils had been exposed to youth work or informal interventions. They ease the path of 'outsiders' coming into the school and they have a 'handle' on the young people who are 'marginal' in the school. Their role is to maintain a link between the young people (especially those who are having difficulty fitting into the system and those who are relatively compliant but too quiet) and the school authority. Young people speak positively about these people and when asked who they would confide in if they had issues, they invariably identified the support officer. The role of this non-teaching individual is a useful model for using different approaches within a school in order to deal with issues. Some schools have to find their own money to fund such a post.

### **Understanding the role of the youth worker in the school setting.**

The research clearly indicates that at least in the early stages of engagement youth workers have to explain their role in the school. Some programmes offer initial training of teachers to address this issue while others often report that they do not feel part of the school environment. Irrespective of the reason it raises the issue about how youth work is perceived in the school setting. It also sheds light on the earlier perspective around the ambiguous perception of ‘visiting adults’ coming into the school. ‘If’ teachers do not differentiate between those who visit the school then their view on youth work may remain confused as they see all outsiders offering similar programmes. The nature of youth work with its informal approach to work with young people is something that needs to be understood as it is the defining difference between them as professionals and other outside presenters who may be delivering information sessions.

### **Role of the principal.**

Reading the comments of the principals involved in the research it is evident that they are both aware of the input made by youth workers and some of the shortcomings. They all viewed youth work in a positive light and understood the difference in their approach to that of teachers. Some were aware of the need to use certain ‘types’ of teachers to liaise with youth workers while others employed student support staff. These support staff were extremely useful as the first port of call for many interventions in the school and further suggest that their principals know the value of a ‘youth work type’ person in their school. Not all student support staff were youth work trained but all appeared to use youth work principles to underpin their work, such as, building relationships with young people, engaging their parents and understanding the community from where the young people came. Other respondents **mention the importance of winning over the principal and senior management team if the work was to be fully integrated into the school in any meaningful way.**

### **Ability of the youth workers to teach.**

One question that arose from the research was if youth workers should behave as teachers or if teachers could be youth workers. The closer youth workers get to delivering a prescribed curriculum, e.g. a COPE course, the more ‘teaching competencies’ they need to portray. Youth workers are often not trained as teachers and therefore may not understand fully what is required from this profession. If the curriculum being taught is based on personal development youth workers feel capable of understanding what should be learnt. Within this area of expertise youth workers can use their group work and individual skills approach to learning. While youth workers are not teachers they deliver programmes that the schools see as educational although further research is needed on the nature of the youth work curriculum.

## **Pupil involvement.**

One of the most interesting findings from the research was the value and importance young people put on having their views acknowledged by youth workers. Positive feedback and a sense of being listened to were mentioned by all those who took part in the research. Having their opinions viewed as an important part of the learning process seemed a simple but vital part of informal learning. Young people could differentiate between 'outsiders' and teachers. While one of the researchers was a teacher the act of teaching only appeared to apply to those in the school that young people knew as teachers. All 'visiting adults' seemed to be viewed as non-teachers although in the case of this research they were half-wrong in their assumption. What does it mean for young people to view adults as non-teachers? Some young people mentioned the fact that **youth workers did not shout at them**. An interesting comment that is probably more about teachers using different methods to achieve discipline. Others mentioned the issue of **noise being an integral part of youth work practice suggesting involvement and enthusiasm** while some teachers saw this as a lack of discipline. The topics normally that engaged young people all had aspects of their lives as part of the 'curriculum'. For example, personal development, anger management, self-esteem, emotional development, communication, interpersonal skills, team building, assertiveness, sexual health, bullying, interview procedures, dads and lads which suggests, very strongly, that **if the subject engages young people they will become more involved in the process of learning**. It also suggests that involvement is possible within the boundaries of these 'types' of programmes and that young people, even those who are not as academic as others, can and will get involved in the learning process. However, **is this possible for teachers who are with the pupils more often than the youth worker who parachutes in to teach an engaging topic?**

## **JOINT ISSUES.**

The last sections outlined issues associated with youth workers and teachers that occur due to the two professions coming together in the school setting?

The Strategy for the Delivery of Youth Work in Northern Ireland 2005-2008. Department of Education (N.I.) indicates that in the future there will be partnerships between schools and youth work. The fundamental principle appears to be around the concept of underachievement and how youth workers or informal educators can complement the school curriculum.

The issue of measurement of outcomes, i.e. hard or soft, however stated, from each profession is an important future issue. The preferred nomenclature that the researchers wish to use for explaining the outcomes of youth work in schools is, as mentioned above, **'expected outcomes'**. This is an important finding from the research as it allows both youth worker as informal educators and teachers similar ground on which to measure or judge their impact. Youth workers appear to expect outcomes that may never be measurable in the classroom. Although they evaluate what they deliver they can

never be sure that a young person's self-esteem has increased. More importantly, without support, they may not know if the self-esteem is progressive or regresses. Outcomes in youth work terms, with the exception of those related to qualifications, may always remain as 'expected outcomes'.

The common denominator in both professions is the young people. As young people are different the expected outcomes are different. Youth workers appear to use a process that acknowledges this differentiation while teachers appear to know there is differentiation but cannot, due to the prescribed curriculum, allow for too much flexibility.

The findings highlight that measurement of outcomes for some young people may detract from the more important part of learning; the delivery and process that young people go through. It could be suggested that if this is correct we should 'expect' outcomes rather than say that if we do not get outcome 'x' then the teaching input was incorrect or worse; that the young person is not capable of learning. **This research indicates that all young people have the potential for learning but not necessarily learning that is subject-led and school orientated.**

There is no doubt that funding shapes both the nature of youth work in schools and the outcomes that are expected. Schools do not like short-term funded programmes because they are hard to fit into the timetable from one year to the next while it is a part of the life of many voluntary youth work agencies. Many of the latter are chasing money under EU Peace 11 funding and other funding streams. There needs to be an integrated strategy which is 'joined up' so that young people see the benefits of this type of work. One school was involved in a local district partnership between the community, local Further Education College and training centre. This is a good model and requires more information and strategic thinking if it is to succeed rather than being led by funding or enthusiastic individuals. More research is needed in the field of meaningful partnerships for disengaged youth similarly to those in Youthreach.

Both youth workers and teachers appear to be working with the same client base which is a group of young people with multi-faceted issues. There is a need to understand this group of young people and purposefully target them at an earlier stage in their education. Some schools along with the youth workers do this by involving the family and the community. A holistic approach is possible but may need to be discussed to unpack what it means for young people.

Some principals mentioned the lack of understanding by youth workers about the concept of 'differentiation of abilities' between pupils. Schools see the young people differently to youth workers and categorise or stream them according to ability in terms of teaching the curriculum. Youth workers appear not to need to differentiate young people. This might be because they are given a group of similar ability or the activity or intervention can facilitate young people with differing capabilities, for example, anger management. Some respondents mentioned that they were sometimes asked to deliver a programme to a large group of young people and found it quite difficult to build a

meaningful relationship. Other respondents found themselves in classes with young people of different ages and abilities. Given the nature of the youth work approach and the process of engagement there did not seem to be any difficulty for the youth workers working in any situation.

Literacy is an issue central to Youthreach programmes but invisible to youth workers in schools. Teachers are tasked with teaching literacy and youth workers only encounter this as an issue if they are delivering something that demands a level of literacy to complete the task, e.g. the COPE course. This is definitely an area that needs some strategic thinking if two disparate professions are to work together with young people who are experiencing literacy issues. One might ask what does the youth service do for young people outside schools in terms of literacy training? This is only an issue for youth work insofar as it impedes progress with some courses but important if young people are to achieve their full potential inside or outside school; a point recognised in the Youthreach projects.

The findings show clearly that most schools and youth providers are always looking for new innovative models of practice, for example, EOTAS (Education Other Than at School) and local partnerships. This is a strength, in that new ideas can be tried out with funding. On the other hand it creates an ad hoc approach for youth workers in schools. Programme providers need to take stock of what worked and how they can build on their experiences rather than continuing to be innovative at the expense of consolidation. The Director of Youthreach said that in his opinion **the short-term nature of projects in the UK was at odds with how the Youthreach project had evolved over 18 years.** Time is needed to develop youth work in schools by learning important lessons that can be built upon. This implies a **look at professional youth work training and teacher training to see if there are areas of overlap.** If youth workers are having an impact on the lives of young people can this become an integral part of schooling? Can teachers learn from youth workers and vice versa? Should there be more professional post-qualifying training for those involved in youth work in schools? Has the informal world of learning an important role in the formal school system?

## **SECTION 10: EVOLVING MODELS OF PRACTICE.**

**models of practice are in operation at present.**

### **YOUTH WORKERS COMING ‘INTO’ THE SCHOOL MODEL.**

There are youth workers going ‘into’ schools to deliver programmes and interventions. They are long-term, short-term, informational or about personal development. Some are funded by outside agencies and others are funded by the school. The programmes offer young people experience and information that would otherwise not be on offer through the curriculum. The nature of the interventions appear to be ad hoc. They often depend on funding or on the youth agency offering the service for various reasons. The nomination of schools for this type of work is unsystematic although at times the youth workers address local issues such as joy/death riding or drugs awareness. This model often results in the youth worker feeling a slight sense of ‘detachment’ from the life of the school even when they are obviously having an affect on young people.

### **SCHOOL INSTIGATED MODEL.**

Some programmes are instigated by the schools who seek outside agencies or individuals to come in and deliver programmes. These can be day long, residential, mediation, issue based, spiritual and often supplement the school curriculum. Most topics involve ‘experts’ more skilled and informed than teachers.

The use of a student support person in some schools appears to be a useful way for schools to develop a relationship between pupils, teachers and family. Young people in the research were complimentary about the role of these support workers. Additionally outside agencies perceived them as central to their work in the school. Some could identify those young people who would benefit most from interventions and ‘eased’ the introduction of visiting adults coming into the schools. One principal said that he had to find the money from the budget to employ his support worker; an indication that he valued this approach to working with some young people. These models create a way of working that embraces the ‘ethos’ of the school as a central tenet of their work with young people.

### **INFORMAL INTERVENTION MODEL.**

There are models of practice that use informal approaches but are not delivered by youth workers. These refer to anything delivered by outside agencies other than youth workers that use a more informal or experiential group work process for delivery.

### **YOUTH CENTRE ‘IN’ THE SCHOOL MODEL.**

Some schools have a youth wing. This involves the youth worker (often a teacher with a timetable) running a youth centre during and after schools. Youth work activities

such as cross-community work, drugs and alcohol awareness etc... are normally run in the centre during school time. Young people are brought to this area for informal inputs. The youth worker/teachers can build a more permanent relationship with young people in two worlds, e.g. school and youth centre. The centres are opened in the evening for further youth work. While the research did not carry out an in-depth analysis of youth centres in schools one respondent indicated that they were part of the school but not really integrated into the school structure. This meant that the relationship between teachers, the curriculum and the practical use of the youth centre was little to non-existent. More research needs to be done on the function of a youth centre in a school in terms of impact on teaching and learning for disengaged youth.

### **YOUTHREACH MODEL.**

This programme outlined in the research is an attempt to show that there are other 'parallel' educational experiences that can engage young people. The Director of this project said that he did not want it viewed as an 'alternative' model to school as this contention somehow diminished its importance for some young people. The profiling web is a tool that has been designed to suit the Youthreach approach to understanding the needs of young people. Transferring this tool to youth work in schools in Northern Ireland may require a rethink about the role of the youth worker in schools. This could involve some youth workers training as counsellors to deliver more appropriate services to young people at risk.

### **SUPPLEMENTARY MODEL.**

Some models of practice supplement the school curriculum. As outlined above Schools Based Work is about the school adding additional aspects of provision to the curriculum and supplementing what it is they teach. These interventions are meant to give the pupils more than just the core curriculum and are seen as important inputs for those young people thought to be in a 'risk' category. For other schools this meant programmes on anti-bullying or 'lads and dads', car crime, suicide awareness etc etc. Not all programmes were accredited.

### **COMPLEMENTARY MODEL.**

Some models of practice complement the work of the schools. For example, if there are behavioural issues impeding the rest of the class, youth workers are used to deliver courses such as anger management or personal development. This means that the youth work intervention complements the aims of the school as well as adding to the experience of the pupil. It differs from the supplementary model in that it is 'intentionally' linked to the smooth running of the school whereas the supplementary model is about adding to the curriculum and the needs of the pupil rather than the needs of the school.



## **ALTERNATIVE MODEL.**

While there are a variety of alternative approaches, such as, the district partnership model between various providers the Youthreach model in the Republic of Ireland is divorced from schooling. The EOTAS model comes close to this approach but differs in substance and resources as well as philosophy and delivery. Youthreach was investigated in this research project to highlight the point that for some young people the school does not suit them in their educational journey at certain times in their lives. It is used as a means of comparison with programmes developed in Northern Ireland and as a sounding board for future ideas and interventions.

## **LOCALISED CONTEXTUAL MODEL.**

The research did not directly research local models of practice but unearthed one partnership between the school, youth workers, local Further Education Colleges and community training schemes for young people in their last year of school. Some were offering young people an opportunity to leave school to sample other providers and vocational training. Most schools maintained ownership of the pupils due to funding arrangements **but some principals felt that if the young people benefited they may forgo their funding stream.** This model is more ad hoc than strategic and depends on many interested players in the field but it is one that could be developed especially between schools and F/HE Colleges and an area for further research.

## **FUNDING LED MODEL.**

There are many models of practice that are funding led and as such are short-term and difficult for schools to include in their long-term strategy. There is no doubt they are received in a positive manner because of their impact on youth but are sometimes dropped due to funding coming to an end even if they are shown to be effective. It may be better to have a short-term input than none at all given the nature of funding in N. I. Unlike the Youthreach project such 'short-termism' has led to a lack of coherent development in Northern Ireland.

## **CLIENT LED MODEL.**

Similar to the school instigated model some schools and youth providers shape their programmes to suit or meet the needs of the clients (pupils), as and when they are needed. For example, the need to introduce drugs awareness in most schools as a real issue or in parts of West Belfast the need to discuss joy/death riding among young men. These programmes are shaped mainly by the needs of the pupils.

## **SECTION 11: CONCLUSIONS.**

Throughout the report the authors have highlighted in **bold** some of the most salient points. These are presented below under the main objectives of the research;

### **1. To seek clarification on the outcomes of youth work in schools.**

The research findings suggest that youth workers in schools are following a personal and social development agenda. Those Education and Library Boards that are moving in this direction appear to see their role as complementing the education process. However, the researchers feel that youth workers may need to critically analyse this role in terms of the unintended consequences it may be having on some of the fundamental principles that underpin their profession. This research report may help guide the debate.

Below are some points worth consideration in relation to the clarification of the outcomes from this work:

- An outcome is the relationship between what has taken place before and what has changed as a direct or indirect consequence of an action or set of actions carried out as part of a programme. It encompasses both the intended and unintended outcomes of an organisation's work.
- A need to understand the prioritisation of interventions in schools.
- Irrespective of a theoretical discussion it is important for youth work to have an underpinning model from which to measure or gauge the impact it is having in schools.
- Is youth work in schools an emerging model of practice which is different from the traditional role of youth work?
- What is the 'valued-added' aspect of youth work in schools?
- Educational underachievement is the outcome of a combination of factors including a failure on the part of providers to detect poor literacy and numeracy skills at the point where young people move to secondary school.
- It is necessary to examine definitions of outcomes.
- Who or what is responsible for the introduction of the concept of outcomes for youth work?
- Identifying desired outcomes right from the start of a piece of work is about enabling better planning and satisfying the expectations of funders.
- Value for money featured heavily.
- The need for a more effective means of judging performance.
- Should 'all' youth work interventions have accredited outcomes or should some remain unmeasured?

## 2. To assess the delivery mechanisms of youth work in schools.

The findings clearly indicate that there is no 'one size fits all' delivery mechanism. Many youth workers use the group process as a vehicle from which to develop their programmes. These 'process-driven' groups are normally based on personal and social development using the young persons experience for engagement. They draw heavily on traditional youth work principles, such as building relationships, voluntary attendance, person centred approaches, respect, trust and non-judgemental attitudes. Young people can differentiate between delivery mechanisms used by youth workers and those employed by teachers. Below are some interesting points that are worth some consideration by both youth workers and teachers in relation to increasing the learning potential of disengaged youth.

- i. Issues raised in this report might focus the strategic nature and delivery mechanisms of youth work in schools.
- ii. Youth work in the context of a school setting may need to take cognisance of the 'school ideology' when making decisions.
- iii. The value added aspect of youth work cannot be underestimated, even if the input is short-term.
- iv. There are some informal educational inputs that do not need to be carried out by youth workers.
- v. Youth work is a vital non-formal educational process of personal and social development which complements the work of the formal sector.
- vi. Until such time as there is clarity, youth work, irrespective of the context, may not be as focussed as it could be.
- vii. A youth worker in a school may be, at least initially, seen as the instigator of a 'functional learning' group which differs from a group of young people in a class with a teacher.
- viii. The role of the teachers, in terms of understanding youth work approaches in schools, may be worth investigating as another ingredient in the learning process as either a positive or negative variable in the process
- ix. The role of the group leader or youth worker is to develop reflection as an implicit or explicit part of the learning process.
- x. Youth workers are offering something that cannot be offered by teachers.
- xi. Youth work interventions typically result in both non-formal and informal approaches to learning.
- xii. Formal methodologies for those prone to disaffection, underachievement and non-participation are invariably doomed to fail.
- xiii. Is there a 'watering-down' of the voluntary principle in youth work?
- xiv. Group work is the main vehicle in which informal education is delivered by most youth workers.
- xv. There is a need to develop the concept of learning through the use of group work.
- xvi. The group can facilitate or hinder the development of learning.
- xvii. More understanding is needed of the extent to which the level and nature of intra-group dynamics can influence the learning process in schools for those deemed disengaged.

- xviii. The group itself is a learning tool offering peer-learning opportunities .
- xix. The importance of the group is very clear to members of the counter-school culture.

### **3. To investigate the ‘ecology of the learning environment’ in terms of informal approaches to learning in schools.**

The school based learning environment is, at times, problematic for some young people. Youth workers engage with these ‘disengaged’ youth in a variety of ways primarily influenced by the ethos of the school. The need to have a specific learning environment for the delivery of youth work in schools is something that needs to underpin the work with those disengaged. Having to work in a school context needs to be further explored in the light of alternative projects like Youthreach. This programme offers an alternative approach and a learning environment that may be more conducive to non-formal and informal approaches to learning. The following points are worth considering.

- i. The school may be an environment that allows youth workers to work with young people other than in their leisure time.
- ii. The fact that some youth workers are now employed in schools is a reality.
- iii. Youth workers seem to be effective in schools because they have more generic skills for dealing with young people in a holistic way.
- iv. Teachers need to understand the nature of the learning process as espoused by youth workers.
- v. If youth workers in schools can make the school a more outward looking organisation through ‘nurturing the self-worth’ of marginalised young people, then they will have achieved something. If, on the other hand, they are only supporting an inward looking organisation with few if any outward looking functions then one must ask is it worth getting involved in this type of work?
- vi. There is a need to understand the difference between youth worker and teacher relationships with pupils; particularly those deemed to be disengaged.
- vii. Youth work in schools has something to offer young people in terms of maximising their learning potential.
- viii. Building a relationship with young people is central to effective interventions.
- ix. Youth workers invest long periods of time building relationships with young people.
  - x. The practice of youth work may be compromised in a school setting.
  - xi. Some aspects of youth work are less effective in the school context.
  - xii. Disengaged youth experience more than one risk factor, i.e. from within the school, family, community and self.
  - xiii. Young people’s behaviour can elicit corresponding problem behaviour in others including the adult.
  - xiv. There is a power relationship between the young person and the teacher.

- xv. Some young people are passively disaffected, those who glide through the system absorbing little teacher time and little learning.
- xvi. Informal education in schools tends to be underplayed and is found in pockets of activity rather than being explicit.
- xvii. There appears to be an acknowledgement of the general wish to embed evaluation and monitoring as a continuous principle running through, but not dominating, every aspect of service, planning and delivery, management and administration systems.
- xviii. There is some ambiguity with assuming that by using the term ‘informal’ education in a school setting teachers or principals are referring to youth work.
- xix. Youth workers need a certain context in which to be effective.
- xx. Time is an important ingredient in the learning environment, between youth workers, teachers and young people.
- xxi. The NEELB has developed an approach over time as a viable model of practice.

**4. To develop a curriculum around informal education for marginalised / disaffected young people in formal settings.**

The need for a curriculum should take place after a debate about the specific role of youth work in schools. Identification of this role will allow the youth work and teaching professions to come to an agreement about what model, function or role they prefer. For example, should the curriculum complement, supplement or offer an alternative to what currently exists. More importantly, how will young people benefit from a revised curriculum and will all aspects be accredited or measured? Below are those points from the research that might help shape the debate.

- i. Youth work is mainly associated with non-accredited personal and social development.
- ii. The need to maintain a school based curriculum that, in parts, is alien to many young people at certain times in their lives needs to be addressed.
- iii. Schools cannot be held accountable for disengaged youth nor indeed can youth workers. Other issues, such as, family; community and ‘self’ need to be factored into the equation.
- iv. Youth workers should develop a focussed approach for their role in schools which integrates their work with that of the school, community, parents and young people.
- v. If schools need to expand their remit from a subject-led curriculum to a more student/learner-led curriculum youth workers are well placed as effective partners.
- vi. A youth work curriculum offers a more holistic approach to education.
- vii. What criteria is used to decide who is in need of personal and social development and how is this linked or integrated into the rest of the young person’s school-based experience.
- viii. Do teachers identify with a curriculum that can make use of interpersonal development?

- ix. A challenge for the education system is the transfer of understanding, skills and expertise from alternative education into mainstream schooling.
- x. Formal education focuses too much on gaining academic qualifications.
- xi. There is a need to share practice with other professionals dealing with young people.
- xii. The disaffected must be offered a holistic education which involves not only cognitive development, but affective and skills development as well. No one agency can hope to make such a provision on its own.
- xiii. There is an emphasis on competencies rather than competency.
- xiv. It could be argued that non-formal approaches to enabling the achievement of qualifications, if carefully designed and applied, might offer the young person the best of both worlds.
- xv. Attempts to secure a core curriculum failed, mainly because the wider youth service was unwilling to sign up to a set of ideas which seemed to be centrally prescribed. It is clear that such demands were, in effect if not explicitly, a request for stated outcomes.
- xvi. Such centralised control over a sector that relies on an informal methodology that must be flexible, adjustable and student-centred must create fears for the effectiveness of its approach.
- xvii. A specifically designed self-assessment programme providing a structure for young people to chart their own development and progress as a result of their participation in youth work activities.
- xviii. Schools may need to discuss the implications for timetabling with youth workers.

##### **5. To ascertain if the profiling web can be developed for schools in Northern Ireland.**

**The profiling web** was designed to complement the work undertaken by Youthreach personnel based on inputs from young people. The researchers would suggest a similar approach for assessing the needs of young people insofar as there is a context in which it would serve a useful purpose. **Without a programme like Youthreach the use of the profiling web, in the first instance, may struggle to make an impact.** It is therefore suggested that those involved in youth work in schools revisit the use of the profiling web when there has been more in-depth discussions around the concept of youth work in schools.

## **SECTION 12: RECOMMENDATIONS.**

### **Factors which underpin the RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. The prevailing facts are that more than 10,000 pupils are on waiting lists for educational support and more than 27,000 young people have left school with no qualifications at all. The latter, suggests the Princes Trust Research (2007), costs £500,000 per week to the Northern Ireland economy. Therefore the authors suggest that a Youthreach like programme would be a best practice parallel educational process to implement over a period of several years and resourced long-term.
2. Informal education programmes must be implemented for the benefit of ‘all’ pupils not exclusively disaffected young people. Young people understand and can differentiate the relationships they have with teachers, youth workers and other visiting adults to the school. From the research, youth work style interventions, sessions or programmes are positively received and were successful. Senior managers and pupils agreed that it maximised learning potential.
3. Informal education will be maximised when it is planned, prepared for, progressive and with formative and summative evaluation. Presently there is no evidence of such a strategic approach to address the micro politics involved. Issues of timetabling, dedicated physical space, choosing participants, linking to the total school experience and continuity of personnel will then be addressed.
4. Responsive relational education is presently in competition with the imposed curriculum. Implementing 3 above is a step towards creating holistic education in this era of opportunity of change.
5. Informal educators and teachers should not have to ‘wait’ to encounter each other in the school setting. It is vital that they share initial training, early professional development and continuing professional development.
6. There is an opportunity at present to create a balance between outcomes focussed education and process focussed education.
7. Youth work interventions may well flourish more effectively in an out of school setting. This does not preclude links to the school.
8. The recognition that emotional intelligence is more important than I.Q. is an outcome of the research.
9. The wisdom of the young participants was echoed in the comments of Senior Management who participated. Both agreed that certain issues were best delivered and facilitated by the ‘visiting adults’ including youth workers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### *Youth Work related:*

**Youth workers should identify ‘specific’ aspects of their work that will be optimised in a school setting. For example, personal development through the use of group work processes should be an entitlement for all KS3 and KS4.**

**Youth work programmes should continue to listen to the voices of young people. The voices should extend beyond the disengaged youth to those ‘quietly-disengaged’ in school life including, if possible, all school going young people.**

**The differing needs of schools and young people will be served by a variety of models of practice.**

**Youth workers in schools should have additional training in counselling and advanced group work skills.**

**Youth workers should see themselves as a conduit for the development of learning experiences in the ‘whole’ school.**

### *Schools related:*

**Where youth wings exist they should become ‘multi-purpose’ centres explicitly integrated into school and community.**

**There should be some analysis of the role of the school-based student support worker.**

### *Joint Youth Work and Schools related:*

**Youth workers in schools should encourage more inclusion of the community in the school and in their programmes. Schools’ Senior Management Teams need to explore initiatives with youth workers to facilitate this recommendation.**

**The voluntary and statutory youth sectors should design specific inputs for schools. These inputs should take cognisance of the needs of the formal sector in terms of timetabling, interventions and appropriate school settings.**

**Localised partnerships should be developed for the future of second level education.**

**There should be more staff development for youth workers and teachers before, during and after programmes in schools.**



*Training related:*

**Teacher training pathways, such as, early professional development; continuing professional development; professional qualifications for Headships should include more aspects of informal or non-formal learning processes which experienced youth work practitioners could facilitate.**

**Initial youth work training should include aspects of formal education facilitated by experienced Senior Managers in education.**

*Research related:*

**More research is needed into the micro-politics of the schools. With localised partnerships envisaged for the future, this concept needs to be ‘named’ and addressed urgently.**

**There should be an evaluation of short-term funding led projects which work in schools.**

**Further research is needed into the nature of informal learning processes relating to the role of Further Education Colleges.**

**Research is needed into the role of ICT as a vehicle for engaging disaffected youth in schools.**

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## **APPENDIX 1:**

### **Interview questions for youth workers in schools**

#### **WHAT IS INFORMAL EDUCATION?**

- What is the context of your learning environment? i.e. school, youth club, Youthreach etc?
- What does informal education mean to you?
- What is the role of an informal educator in your setting?
- What exactly is the function of informal approaches to learning in your setting?
- Why do you use this approach?
- What are the strengths of using informal approaches in formal settings?
- Outline the difficulties faced by informal educators in formal settings?

#### **THE PROGRAMME/COURSE:**

- What programme(s) or course(s) are currently running in your setting?
- Name the programmes/courses?
- Outline the expected outcomes?
- What are the levels of outcomes, in terms of accreditation /awards/qualifications?
- Are all your programmes measured? If not, explain?
- Is entry automatic, i.e. without prior qualifications?
- Does your agency seek out young people or do young people attend voluntarily?
- Is the programme part of wider provision in your organisation?
- Can the young people leave the programmes at anytime or do they incur a penalty?
- Do the programmes suit all young people who attend?
- Are there any problems with the outcomes?
- What quality assurance mechanism do you use to evaluate your programme?

## DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR INFORMAL LEARNING:

- Who teaches/delivers the programmes?
- How long do the programmes last?
- What support mechanisms are on offer within the agency?
- What other services do the informal educators use?
- Is the programme an integral part of the young persons learning experience or separate from the rest of their studies?
- Can you give an example of good practice?

## THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

- What is the usual age of your group/class?
- What are the numbers in the group?
- Do you have a gender mix?
- Where do you meet the students?
- How do you recruit these young people?
- Who is your client base? For example: The nature of young people, e.g. left school early, qualifications, other providers etc
  
- What specifically works in these settings?
- Why does this informal approach work in these settings?
- What is problematic in these settings?
- How do these 'formal' agencies acknowledge the informal teaching process?
- Are the programmes an integral part of the agencies educational function, for example, is there any evidence of how this is manifest, i.e. award ceremonies, publicity etc

## FUTURE ISSUES:

- What are the training needs of informal educators?
- Do you think that youth work in schools works? Why?
- Are informal education processes in schools about the delivery of courses?
- Is teaching/learning changing in your organisation? How?
- If you could change anything about using youth work in schools what would it be and why?
- What do you think are the training needs of youth workers involved in informal educational approaches to learning?

## **APPENDIX 2:**

### **Set of questions for teachers and principals in schools offering youth work or informal educational programmes.**

#### THE CONTEXT OF THE WORK?

- Q1 Can you give an example, from your working situation, that illustrates how you have become involved in informal approaches to learning?
- Q2 What is your function in this setting?
- Q3 Why do you use this approach?
- Q4 What are the strengths of using informal approaches in formal settings?
- Q5 Outline the difficulties faced by informal educators in formal settings?

#### THE GROUP:

- Q6 What is the usual age of the group/class you work with?
- Q7 How many young people are normally in the group?
- Q8 Do you have a gender mix?
- Q9 Where do you meet the students?
- Q10 How do you recruit these young people?
- Q11 Who is your client base? For example: The nature of young people, e.g. left school early, no qualifications, part of a youth club, certain school pupils etc ?
- Q12 How long do the programmes/courses/interaction last?

#### THE PROGRAMME/COURSE/INTERVENTION:

- Q13 How does your school acknowledge the informal process?
- Q14 How do you integrate the informal process into the ethos school?
- Q15 Outline the expected outcomes?
- Q16 What are the levels of outcomes, in terms of accreditation/awards/qualifications?
- Q17 Are there any problems with the outcomes?
- Q18 Are all aspects of your programmes measured?
- Q19 What indicators do you use to measure outcomes?
- Q20 Do the programmes suit all young people who attend?
- Q21 What quality assurance mechanism do you use to evaluate your programme?

#### DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR INFORMAL LEARNING:

- Q22 Who teaches/delivers/facilitates the programme/course/intervention?
- Q23 What support mechanisms are on offer within the school?
- Q24 Do you use any other services for your group(s)?
- Q25 Is the programme an integral part of the young persons learning experience or separate from the rest of their studies?
- Q26 Can you give an example of good practice?

#### ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:

- Do you think that youth work in schools works? Why?
- Are informal education processes in schools about the delivery of courses?
- Is teaching/learning changing in your organisation? How?
- If you could change anything about using youth work in schools what would it be and why?
- What do you think are the training needs of teachers involved in informal educational approaches to learning?

## **APPENDIX 3:**

### **Research questions for Youthreach staff.**

Questions for CEO of Youthreach (Republic of Ireland).

- Q1 Is attendance compulsory?
- Q2 What is the age of attendance and how long do students remain on the programme?
- Q3 Do you mainly deal with marginalise youth?
- Q4 Is Youthreach an alternative to the school system?
- Q5 What are the expected outcomes for Youthreach students?
- Q6 How do you see Youthreach preparing young people for life?
- Q7 Do young people who attend Youthreach gain awards/qualifications...is this important?
- Q8 Do you use the profiling web?
- Q9 How useful a tool is the profiling web?
- Q10 Are there any difficulties with running Youthreach alongside the school system?
- Q11 If this programme was to be introduced into Northern Ireland, what would you change?
- Q12 Have you had the programme evaluated?...what were the results?
- Q13 Any additional comments?

### **Questions for Youthreach workers. (Republic of Ireland).**

- Q1 Do you mainly deal with marginalise youth?
- Q2 Is Youthreach an alternative to the school system?
- Q3 What are the expected outcomes for Youthreach students?
- Q4 How do you see Youthreach preparing young people for life?
- Q5 Do young people who attend Youthreach gain awards/qualifications...is this important?
- Q6 Do you use the profiling web?
- Q7 How useful a tool is the profiling web?
- Q8 Are there any difficulties with running Youthreach alongside the school system?
- Q9 If this programme was to be introduced into Northern Ireland, what would you change?
- Q10 Any additional comments?

**APPENDIX 4:**

**Worksheet used as a questionnaire for young people.**



**Dear Student**

**I would like you to fill in this little activity sheet. It will help me to find out what you do in school and to learn about all the activities that are available to you.**

**By the way, thank you very much for doing this work for me. You can see that no names are used, so your answers will be anonymous.**

**Where do you live? I live in \_\_\_\_\_**

**Whether in a town or a city, you belong to a community. Would you put the following seven places in the most important order in your life. If I have left an important place out of your list, please put it in yourself.**

**PLACES:        SPORTS CLUB        CHURCH        HOME        SCHOOL        SHOPPING  
CENTRE  
  
                  YOUTH CLUB        OTHER PLACE (Name it in the list below please)**

**MY LIST OF IMPORTANT PLACES:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

**In school do you talk to any teachers about important things happening in your life?**

**YES / NO / SOMETIMES \_\_\_\_\_**

**If you had a complaint to make, who would you speak to in school about it? Does that person have a special job to do in the school?**

**If you had a suggestion for the school, who would you pass it on to? Again, does this person do a special job?**

**If you were seeking advice, is there a teacher you would contact? Again, does this person do a special job?**

**Do you think you are listened to in school?**

**YES / NO / SOMETIMES** \_\_\_\_\_

**Most days in school, you have classes in Maths, History, Geography, P.E. and many more. During the year do other people come into the school to talk to you or do activities different from your normal school programme?**

**TAKE A WHILE TO THINK BACK AND SEARCH YOUR MEMORY.**

**What kind of things did you do and talk about with these other people?**

**Did you think the people you met were teachers?**

**YES / NO / SOMETIMES** \_\_\_\_\_

**What did they do or say that made them different from teachers?**

**Were the activities they did enjoyable?**

**YES / NO / SOMETIMES** \_\_\_\_\_

**Can you give one reason why you enjoyed them?**

**Would you like more programmes like these YES / NO /** \_\_\_\_\_

**If your answer was YES, can you give me one or two examples of what you would like to do:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

**Finally, look after yourself and thanks a lot for helping me with my work.**

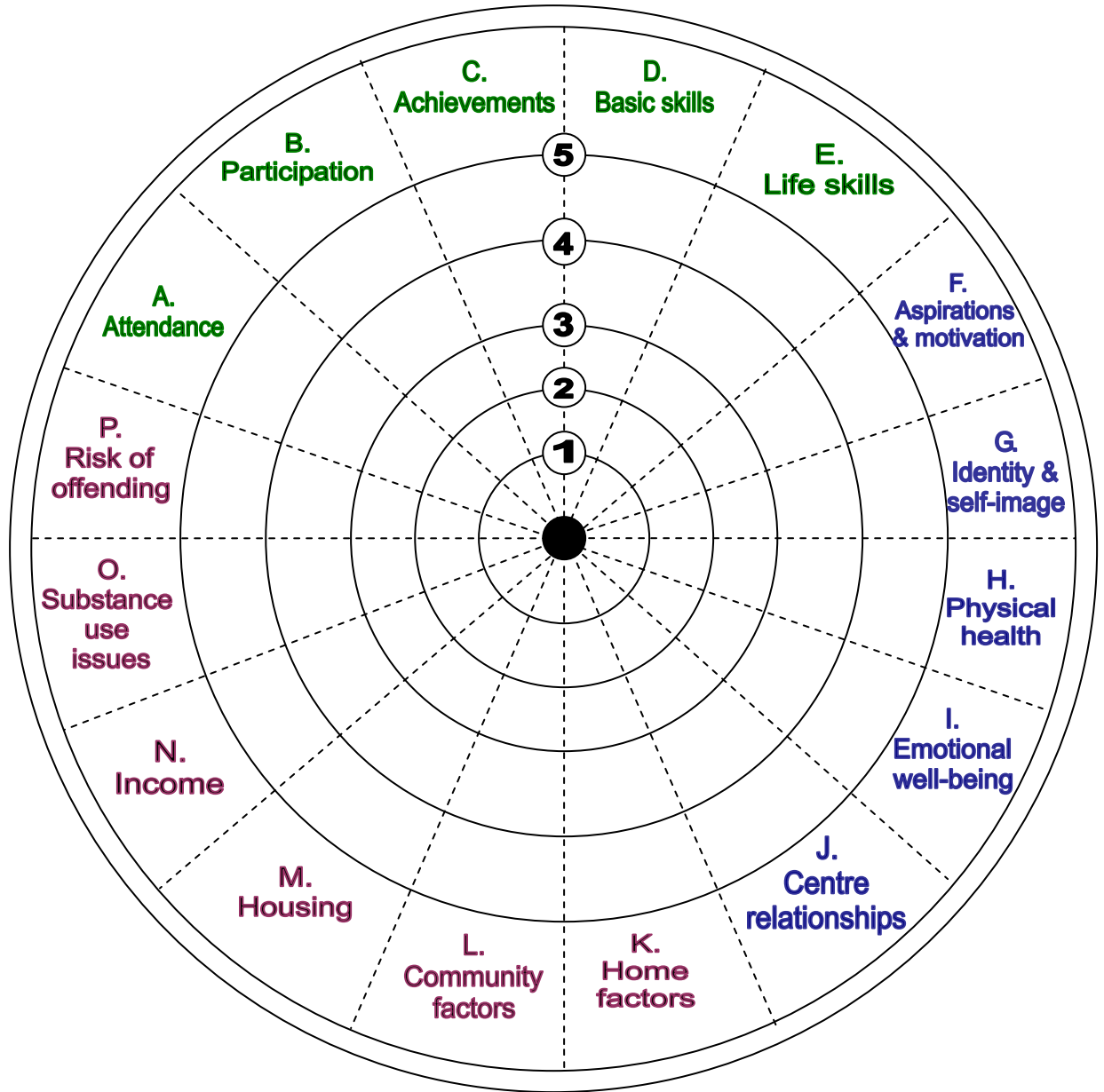
## **Appendix 5: Outline of Profiling Web.**

## **Notes on using the Profiling Web, developing IEPs, setting up key worker / mentoring systems and engaging in inter-agency work with local services**

### **1. Key elements in the theoretical approach**

- The involvement of the student in their assessment, IEP and review
- The holistic nature of the information being gathered
- The use of a key worker or mentor system
- Inter-agency work with other services if problems are acting as a barrier to learning
- The assessment itself is an intervention
- The assessment takes the form of an interview between the key worker and the student
- The student is being invited to reflect on themselves
- It is the student's perception of their areas of difficulty and strength that determine the ratings that are recorded
- The student identifies their own goals
- The IEP is based on the data obtained from doing the Web
- The IEP identifies courses, activities and methods
- The IEP identifies the specific supports that will be provided in the centre.
- The IEP identifies services / agencies outside the centre that will be contacted.

## 2. Introduction to Profiling Web



## Web areas of focus

### **Education**

Youthreach, Community Training and Senior Traveller Training Centres have a clear vocational, educational training brief. As well as modules in vocational subjects, they provide for educational areas such as literacy and numeracy and the academic requirements of State examinations and FETAC modules. Basic learning in ‘soft skill’ areas, addressing those life skills that are a prerequisite for a person to be able to progress to employment or further training, also forms a core part of the curriculum of centres.

- A. Attendance
- B. Participation
- C. Achievements
- D. Basic skills
- E. Life skills

### **Personal Development**

At least as important as the vocational aspects of the training provided in the centre are the social and personal development aspects. Some modules and short courses focus directly on social, emotional and health education. The culture and climate of the centre, however, have an even greater impact on this area of learning as they create the context within which the relationships between staff and students and between students and students are formed. The quality of these relationships is crucial to the success of the programme for all students. Support services by counsellors, guidance counsellors, advocates, mentors and psychologists also relate to the area of personal development.

- F. Aspirations and motivation
- G. Identity and self-image
- H. Physical health
- I. Emotional well-being
- J. Relationships with/in centre

## **Practical Factors**

The practical factors are contextual ones for the student and, although not directly related to the work of the centre, may have the effect of preventing the student from benefiting from their time there. As such, they may constitute *barriers* to the student's ability to make progress and may prevent learning from taking place.

- K. Home factors
- L. Community factors
- M. Housing
- N. Income
- O. Substance use issues
- P. Risk of offending

### **3. Filling in the Web**

The learner is facilitated by the staff member acting as a key worker to assess their own needs.

This takes place over the course of a number of interviews. The number of sessions required will depend on

- the degree of trust there is in the relationship between the key worker and learner
- the difficulty of the issues that the learner is dealing with and whether they have talked about them before
- the learner's willingness to reflect on themselves
- the amount of information that the learner wishes to volunteer and considers relevant to the work of the centre

### **Using the Web**

- The learner rates themselves under the various factor headings
- The learners gives their perception of their areas of strength and difficulty
- The learner identifies their long term goals
- The learner plans an outline career path or progression sequence that they feel they would like to follow
- The learner identifies the short term goals that will be addressed in their Individual Education Plan (IEP)

### **The Key Worker's role when using the Web**

- Facilitates the learner to decide which areas they will address during the session
- Facilitates the learner to break down her goals into manageable steps
- Discusses with the learner the interventions that will be involved in the IEP
- Facilitates the learner to identify what is achievable within the centre framework
- Brings the IEP back to the staff team to agree and manage implementation

- Clears possible difficulties or dilemmas with manager and staff at the outset
- Organises writing up of plan as agreed with the learner – the learner may type it; literacy students may need help with a picture version
- Agrees formal review dates with the learner, plus a system of frequent supports and checks at the early stages.
- Facilitates the learner to record progress and make adjustments, etc. at subsequent meetings
- Coordinates the IEP, but it is delivered by the staff team and responsibility for its implementation lies with all the staff working with the learner

#### 4. Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) or Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)

- The IEP is informed by the data obtained from the Web:
  - the student's expressed personal, educational and vocational goals
  - the subject areas the student is interested in acquiring skills in
  - the problem areas the student has identified that they need help with
  - the strengths the student feels they can draw on and/or want to develop further
- The IEP identifies the specific interventions that will take place
  - subjects, eg FETAC modules to be studied, literacy objectives
  - activities, eg work experience opportunities, sporting, social and other activities, counselling
  - methods, eg how the learning objectives will be pursued, whether in one-to-one, small group or large group settings, whether using hands-on / practical or more traditional academic methodologies
- The IEP identifies the specific supports that will be provided in the centre, eg key-worker / mentor, review procedures, literacy, counselling, advocate
- The IEP identifies the services / agencies that will be contacted and worked with, eg probation and welfare officer, psychiatric / clinical services, social worker, health centres / GP, addiction services



### **Guidelines for the implementation of IEPs**

- If parts of the plan turn out to be unrealistic, etc., (as staff may already know), the real learning takes place when the learner comes to this realisation themselves, and makes appropriate alterations. So it is important to meet regularly, especially in the early stages, a first question being “How is your plan going?”)
- Learners have to rate themselves in the light of their culture. What is the real world for them? For example, their aim may not be employment as we know it, therefore employment as we know it would not be an objective in their plan. What we consider to be progress may differ from the learner’s view of progress.
- Ask yourself and the learners:
  - *What do they need to learn?*
  - *How do they learn best?*
  - Or maybe:
    - *What do they need to do/get/achieve in order to be able to learn?*

This last question may be the biggest part of the first plan, before any ‘learning’ is possible.
- Always make sure the learners have *responsibilities* in their learning plan (and use the word *responsibility* when agreeing the plan).
- Remember, the learners may come from a failure culture. Therefore, initially, the person identified as the main support needs to meet the learner (informally and briefly), perhaps every second day. Achieving even a small objective *may* require a lot of support. This level of supports and checks can spring the first successes.
- The actual learning plan template needs to be clear and it needs to be learner-friendly both in words and in appearance. The learner needs to be able to own it as theirs and not see it as more paper-work being done ‘on them’.
- Key workers need to have integrity, flexibility and respect for the learner. They would also need to have, at the very least, sound judgement and at best, intuitive knowledge, for the Individual Education Plan system to have real success.

## **6. Identifying the main elements in an IEP**

Break down the IEP into key components, e.g. goals, objectives and actions; supports; inter-agency work. Discuss each.

Explanation and discussion of goals, objectives and action plans

## **7. Sample outline IEP template**

Student’s Date of Birth:

Last school attended:

Date of leaving:

Reason for leaving:

Family details:

Other relevant details:

### 1. Goals

The student's

- a) long term personal goal/s:  
short term personal goal/s:
  
- b) long term educational goal/s:  
short term educational goal/s:
  
- c) long term vocational goal/s:  
short term vocational goal/s:

### 2. Interventions

The specific interventions that will take place:

- subjects/programmes that will be studied:  
methods to be used:
- other areas of academic study:  
methods to be used:
- activities that will be engaged in:  
any special arrangements that will be made:

### 3. Within centre supports

The supports that will be provided in the centre for this student:

By whom:

### 4. Outside service supports

The local services / agencies that will be contacted and worked with:

By whom:

Review date:

## 8. Roles and responsibilities of mentors / key workers

(The terms Key Workers and Mentors are being used interchangeably here)

- The Key Worker acts as the first point of contact for the trainee (or student) and is the person who will take a particular and key interest in the welfare and support of the trainee.
- For the trainee, s/he knows one staff person who they can turn to at any stage, given the dedicated role they have been assigned. The Key Worker will act as the link between the trainee and all other service interventions. S/he will develop a close, trusting, caring and supportive relationship with the trainee, keeping an eye on how things are developing.
- In particular the Key Worker will play a central role in the development of the ILP<sup>1</sup> and the subsequent review and monitoring during the implementation phase. The Key Worker system acts as a national progression for the effective implementation of the ILP.
- The Key Worker roles should be distributed amongst all members of tutoring staff in a centre. Allocation of a Key Worker will therefore be dependent on existing commitments of staff. It is recommended that the Key Worker should be someone who is not already involved in tutoring the trainee<sup>2</sup>. This avoids conflicts of interests and also allows for a broader spread of perspective in assessing the trainee.
- The actual time element, or formal contact between the learner and key worker(s) involves once a month reviews with availability on a response basis to issues, usually of a minor nature, that usually take no more than some minutes to deal with. Much of the work associated with the role of the key worker centres round internal staff meetings and case-conferences (involving personnel from outside the centre).

(taken from the FÁS CTC Productivity Agreement)

A description of mentoring:

*“I meet with all the new trainees for induction and profiling; I meet them regularly to monitor their progress; I resolve difficulties if they arise in the centre or at home; I mediate between trainees and instructors; I hold one-to-one sessions*

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<sup>1</sup> Individual Learning Plan or Individual Educational Plan (IEP)

<sup>2</sup> This will not always be possible. Where the Key Worker is tutoring the trainee it is important that they be someone who has a positive view of the trainee and someone who gets on well with them. (MG)

*with them; I make referrals and organise contact with services e.g. doctor, probation, health board; I provide information”.*

(from Gordon, M. (2004) Survey of Guidance, Counselling and Psychological Service Provision in Youthreach, Community and Senior Traveller Centres for Education Report. Available on Youthreach and STTC websites – [www.youthreach.ie](http://www.youthreach.ie); [www.sttc.ie](http://www.sttc.ie))

A key worker system is a form of pastoral care in a centre. A key worker is sometimes attached to a group and the individual within that group, sometimes to an individual, depending on many things, including the size of the centre. In larger centres the Key Worker provides the necessary ‘closeness’ that a coordinator/director can’t. A Key Worker reports on progress, mediates and liaises. A Key Worker is sometimes seen as ‘the good cop’. The priority focus of a Key Worker or Mentor is always on the individual young person (in contexts).

‘Mentoring is a one-to-one relationship which essentially ‘faces inwards’: the mentor’s purpose is to offer motivation, non-judgemental support and a positive role model’.

A mentor needs to be able to:

- *Enter the young person’s frame of reference*
- *Help young people to understand their potential to change*
- *Provide interactive feedback on change*
- *Open doors and cross thresholds with young people in ways that support rather than disempower them...*
- *Often described as analogous to the ‘good parent’*
- *Mentoring relationship is dynamic, leads to action and inspires young person to take action on his/her own behalf – may include mentor acting as role model (ie ‘good parent’).*
- *Includes negotiation on behalf of young person and mediation between young person and others*

*Qualities of the effective key worker/mentor*

- *Good parent; trusted adult – support, caring, interest, concern, explanations, helping to develop confidence and self-esteem*
- *Learning facilitator – setting tangible and achievable goals, checking on understanding and action, helping young people to develop learning management skills (self-knowledge, information, taking action, coping with transitions)*
- *Education organiser - liaison with internal structures and individuals on young person’s behalf*
- *Social worker – liaison with external services, bodies, etc*

(from Dermot Stokes’ paper on Mentoring)

**Key issues for centres to decide on when putting a key worker or mentoring system in place:**

- Which members of staff will act as mentors or key workers
- Which term (mentor or key worker) will be used in the centre
- What time will be allocated for mentors to spend with their trainees
- How the key workers are allocated to their students<sup>1</sup>
- The responsibilities of the mentor<sup>2</sup>
- A review system if the key worker / trainee relationship is not working

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<sup>1</sup> As the success of this role is totally determined by the quality of the relationship the mentor/key worker has with the student care needs to be taken to find a method to ensure that the most effective possible pairings of staff and students

<sup>2</sup> It should involve both “first port of call” and coordinating elements, but the whole staff has responsibility for the student and not just the mentor

## 9. Identification of local services and agencies that operate in the locality of the centre

### Assessment areas and networking

#### *Assessment areas:*

#### *Relevant agencies and services (for information and support purposes):*

#### **Educational development**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| 1. Attendance    | Schools, EWB   |
| 2. Participation | Schools  |
| 3. Achievements  | Schools, Sports clubs                                |
| 4. Basic skills  | Schools, Sp. and lang. <sup>1</sup> therapy services |
| 5. Life skills   | Disability services, Nat. Council for Sp. Ed.        |

#### **Personal development**

|                             |                                      |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 6. Aspirations              | Guidance, Work experience            |
| 7. Identity and self-image  | Counselling                          |
| 8. Attitudes and motivation |                                      |
| 9. Physical health          | GP, Health centre                    |
| 10. Emotional well-being    | Mental health / psychiatric services |

#### **Social interaction**

|                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 11. Relationships within the centre | SPHE <sup>2</sup> , Counselling     |
| 12. Home factors                    | Social services                     |
| 13. Social and community factors    | Community development organisations |

#### **Practical and risk factors**

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 14. Housing              | Social services, CWO, Corpo / Co Council |
| 15. Income               | MABS                                     |
| 16. Substance use issues | Drug programmes, GP, Guards, Courts      |
| 17. Risk of offending    | JLO, Community Guards, Courts            |

#### **List of support measures and services for children:**

#### **The key *in-school* measures are**

- Giving Children an Even Break;
- the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and
- the School Completion Programme.

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<sup>1</sup> Speech and language

<sup>2</sup> Social, personal and health education programmes

- Others include the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, Breaking the Cycle, Learning Support/Resource Teachers and Traveller supports

**The key *post-school* measures are**

- Youthreach (delivered in 90 Centres for Education run by VECs, 45 CTCs funded by FÁS, and 10 ‘Justice’ workshops jointly funded by FAS and D/JELR);
- Senior Traveller Training Centres (33, run by VECs)
- Other training provision, eg funded by FÁS (pre-apprenticeship courses, FAS Training Centre courses, external or community-based training programmes) or other training agencies (Fáilte Ireland, Teagasc, BIM, etc).
- Gateway programmes (funded by FAS)

**The key *youth work* measures are**

- Youth Development Projects
- Youth Encounter projects
- Probation and Welfare Service Initiatives
- Garda Juvenile Diversion Projects
- Drugs Task Force Projects
- Youth Information Centres

These measures involve a wide variety of organisations and structures. There are local Youth Services such as Finglas Youth Service, Limerick Youth Service, etc. In some cases, their work is co-ordinated by a regional body, such as the CDYSB. In others, the local services are federated in one of the national organisations, such as the National Youth Federation. Foroige and Catholic Youth Care also provide youth services. While the Department of Education and Science has policy responsibility and is the largest funder of youth work, three of the above measures and most of those listed below do not come under the D/ES’ authority.

**The key initiatives in the *health sector* are**

- Neighbourhood Youth projects
- Springboard projects

In addition, health services operate a wide range of services for children under a variety of headings.

*Other services* also target young people, including

- Garda Juvenile Liaison
- Probation and Welfare Service
- Local Employment Services
- Steps Advice and Counselling Services
- ICTU Unemployment Services
- INOU centres and affiliates
- Health Board Teenage Health Initiatives; Health promotion projects

- Crosscare

Other project and funding strands *also exist. They include the following:*

- Young Peoples' Services and Facilities Fund
- Projects supported by Area – based Partnerships
- Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation projects (Border area)
- Barnardo's Family Support projects
- International Fund for Ireland projects
- Leonardo da Vinci, YOUTH, etc
- EQUAL pilot projects and similar measures

This list is not exhaustive – there are others in many local areas. Other funding enters the chain through Foundations and charities, such as the Irish Youth Foundation, the Joseph Rowntree Trust, and so on. Private philanthropists also contribute (eg PJ McManus in Limerick).

A number of *system measures* have also been introduced such as the establishment of the National Education Welfare Board, the National Children's Office, the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, the Education Disadvantage Committee and a range of research, notable the longitudinal study soon to be commissioned by the National Children's office.

Given this diversity of funding and delivery channels, it is not surprising that a wide range of individuals work with young people at local level. In no particular order, these include

- Youth workers (salaried and voluntary)
- Teachers (including school guidance counsellors)
- Instructors, tutors
- Advocates (FÁS)
- Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs)
- Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers
- Probation and Welfare Officers
- Social workers (principally in Health Boards)
- Mediators (LES)
- Education Welfare Officers
- Family welfare conference Co-ordinators – (Children Act)
- Family welfare conference facilitators – (Children Act)
- Family welfare conference mentors – (Children Act)
- Psychologists – from the National Educational Psychologist Service and health boards (inter-service referrals are very problematic); psychiatrists

There are others at work in schools and Centres, eg guidance personnel, teaching assistants, counsellors, and so on. There are also others who work on an out-of-centre basis, such as those involved in outreach activities on drugs for Health Boards, and so on. (Dermot Stokes)





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