



Getting
It Right
Quality
Assurance
in Youth Work



Written by
Andrew
Cummings

“Getting It Right: Quality Assurance in Youth Work”

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Introduction

In most industries and sectors of work, the concept of “quality” is an important one. We all like to think that we are involved in something that is good, and to have our work considered highly by others. In the business world, having your product or service regarded as being of high quality is important for success. For this reason, various approaches have been developed to measure and assess just what this idea of “quality” means.

Initially, such approaches were seen as the sole domain of the business world. But in recent years, a growing number of human services and community organisations have also become interested in measuring the quality of the work that they do. In some cases, this has involved using the quality assurance approaches that were developed for the business world, and applying them directly. Alternatively, other organisations and sectors have developed their own approaches, in order to better capture ways of measuring the idea of “quality” as it relates to people, rather than products.

Within the European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC), a number of the member organisations have done just this. Some member organisations have developed their own methods of measuring and assuring quality, whilst

others have adopted one of the existing approaches and applied it to the youth work setting and organisations. Over the last few years, there have been many conversations within ECYC, aimed at sharing and comparing experiences, and the ideas emerged for developing some common baselines or standards of quality. This could then be used by any youth work organisation wishing to explore ways of ensuring that the services they provide for young people are of a high quality.

The aim of this publication is to capture some of the experiences of ECYCs members in this emerging area of Quality Assurance for human service organisations, and to begin the task of analysing these different approaches, in order to compare the similarities and differences of the various methods. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the services that are provided for and with young people are as good as they can be, and that these services continue to meet the needs of young people in developing the skills and qualities they require, so that they can grow up to live happily and fulfilling lives.

“Kwaliteitsproject Oost-Vlaamse Jeugdhuisen” Eastern Flanders Quality Management Project Belgium

The Eastern Flanders Quality Management Project set out to provide quality input in youth clubs in an active way. Involvement in the project was voluntary to clubs which are members of Formaat - the Flemish federation of youth clubs - and 52 out of 79 clubs applied to be involved. Eastern Flanders is one of 10 provinces in Belgium, comprising of 65 municipalities with 79 youth clubs.

Officially, the project started on August 1st 1999. However, at this stage, Formaat had been working on the project for over a year. This work involved staff members of Formaat, local authorities and ten co-ordinators of local youth clubs. The project began with a questionnaire, with three active young people from each youth club completing the form. Each of these young people was aged between 16 and 22, and was active as volunteers in their local youth club. The questionnaire was developed using the European Model for Total Quality Management - a quality instrument founded by the European Foundation for Quality Management. Completing the form took at least two to three hours per youth club. In total, 156 questionnaires were completed. As well as being involved in the surveys, young people were invited to take part in a “coaching group” which helped to steer the project.

After completing the questionnaire each youth club, and the three participating people from each club, received a “plan of action”. A complete description of the youth club was developed, based on the information obtained from the questions. This was connected to a thorough evaluation of each youth club, from top to bottom. At the same time, Formaat carried out a survey of local authorities concerning youth club policy. Finally, Formaat made some suggestions to optimise the work of each youth club. The project was developed over three years, and at the end of this time each of the youth clubs were surveyed once again, as a form evaluation.

All of the material gathered throughout the project was compiled into a report, which described in detail the work of Eastern Flanders youth clubs in 2002. The report included suggestions and recommendations for optimising youth clubs and youth club policy at the local, regional and national levels.

“Kwaliteitsproject Oost-Vlaamse Jeugdhuizen” Eastern Flanders Quality Management Project Belgium (continued)

The project officially ended on December 19th 2002. However, the Quality Project is still continuing within the Formaat network. As well as continuing to work with the youth clubs that participated in the project, there has been considerable interest from other youth clubs, who have asked for the results, ordered copies of the final report, as well as interim articles that were published during the four year period of the work.

The project was funded by the province of Eastern Flanders. The money was used to pay the salary of one full-time staff member, and equipment such as a laptop computer and recording material. Formaat also invested its own resources into the project.

This project was innovative because it was the first time that a Quality Management approach had been used within youth work in Belgium on this scale. Because of the depth of the material gathered, Formaat now have a very good idea of the way youth clubs in Flanders work, what methods they use, what rules and regulations are in place, and so on. But as well as surveying these things, they also offered the clubs that took part a tool to optimise their organisation and their approach to youth work.

The way the project was conducted and executed had a significant impact on the non-formal learning of the

young people involved. Through this process of questioning, many youth clubs started to discuss the various topics inherent in the project, such as the goals they hoped to achieve. They began contacting Formaat to obtain more information. Many more young people began to come to training courses to find out more. Through this process of questioning, they became aware of things that hadn't been discussed in some youth clubs for years.

Tom Dierckx, former International Officer at Formaat, said “the project made the non-formal learning process, which is inherent to the youth club methodology, manifest. Young people started to realise that they were learning a lot through their engagement in the youth club. They began to realise how much they learn about taking responsibility, how democratic decision-making works, how to work in a group. And because they realised it, they were motivated to improve things. It led to a kind of “trigger effect”. They got a global view of what they have been doing and they could look at this in an objective way, without the daily pre-occupations that a volunteer is confronted with in the youth club. They got the global picture and saw the flaws, as well as the strengths.”

“Kwaliteitsproject Oost-Vlaamse Jeugdhuizen” Eastern Flanders Quality Management Project Belgium (continued)

By carrying out the Quality Management project, Formaat now have a very clear view of how their youth clubs work. Some important conclusions have also been made, including:

- Youth clubs don't have a long term policy. Problems are mostly solved when they occur.
- They have difficulties in coping with all of the regulations, such as laws for non-profit organisations, taxes, permits etc.
- Motivating, training and recruiting young people - as a means and objective of the youth club methodology - is a weak link. In relation to this they concluded that a significant number of clubs had weak policies (or no policy at all) on issues such as open gatherings, participation and so on.
- In those youth clubs which have a professional youth club worker (26 of the 52 participating clubs) there are often poor human resources policies. This has a significant effect on the time that youth workers stay in their jobs. There is also often no clarity about the role for the worker in the youth club.
- A lack of clear policy guidelines has led to a worsening of some of the functions provided by the youth clubs

- Youth clubs are good at fulfilling their “recreational” function, such as organising concerts, parties, group activities and so on
- Youth clubs appeal to young people. The method of open youth work is still a huge success with young people in Flanders

The outcomes of the project have been useful for Formaat. They used the findings to inform their work plan for the next three years, and are even considering the impact of this work for the next ten years. It has also helped inform policies on issues such as training and information, and has given Formaat and the youth clubs in East Flanders a higher degree of visibility amongst the local and regional authorities.

A follow-up to the Quality Management project is now underway in Eastern Flanders. Using the method of peer education, the project brings youth clubs together in regional networks, in order to provide each other with support, encouragement and new ideas. The goal of this project is to make youth clubs stronger and more responsive to the needs of young people.

Kompleksne Kvaliteedi Tagamise Mudel Avatud Noorsootöö Asutuses – Total Quality Assurance in Youth Work Organisations - Estonia

The Total Quality Assurance approach has been adopted and developed by the Tallinn Youth Work Centre, which is part of EANK – the national youth clubs organisation of Estonia. This approach to quality assurance means that those who use it look at as many aspects of the organisation as possible, in order to assess the work of the youth clubs, and then use this information to make decisions. Also, it gives Tallinn Youth Work Centre the possibility to compare various aspects of their work with other organisations, and also to compare developments within the organisation over time.

The quality assurance approach is used by all of the youth clubs that are part of the Youth Work Centre in the city of Tallinn. There are 14 youth clubs currently using the approach. Young people have been directly involved in designing the approach and evaluating its success. Aspects of the Total Quality Assurance approach have been used by different youth clubs over the last three or four years. However, a specific project aimed at combining all aspects of the approach began in January 2006.

The process for developing the approach took a lot of time and involved in-depth discussions with youth workers, administrators etc, as well as young people themselves. The process has been totally financed by the Tallinn Youth Work Centre budget, with no additional funding.

“We first used all the aspects of quality assurance separately. But when we put them all together we saw some grey areas and found new areas we needed to look at, and things we still needed to do. We can now develop, control, monitor and look up all aspects of quality within our organisation, both from inside and outside the organisation”.

The youth clubs involved in the piloting of the approach found it to be a totally new way of thinking about their work. Silver Pramann of Tallinn Youth Work Centre said:

“For the first time we can see the complexities of quality assurance at different levels, and consider all the different aspects involved. At first it was not clear to the youth workers what kind of results we hoped to achieve, and it was a bit difficult to motivate the workers. However this has changed over time. One of the best things about the project is that we have learned to see the same issue from several points of view at the same time – inside and outside, and from the top and the bottom.”

Sample Quality Assessment Tasks - Estonia

Youth worker analyses another worker's activity in the youth centre or outdoors	Suggestion box for youngsters	Feedback about the activities by young people
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<i>Time / Frequency</i>	<i>Twice a year</i>	<i>Continuously</i>	<i>Continuously</i>
Description	One youth worker will observe another's work and after that will make an analysis using their own form. The director makes a schedule of who will be observed and when. Each youth worker will decide what kind of activity he/she will observe.	In each youth centre is a suggestion box where youngsters can write their suggestions, ideas etc. Youngsters' comments are in free form. They can evaluate the youth work and activities, workers' competence etc.	A youth worker gathers these using different methods of feedback for activities and attaches these to his / her own notebook or special report form.
Verifier / leader	Youth worker	Leader	Youth worker, group work leader, some other leader
Information recording and implementation field	Analyses are written down using a special form. Questions can be asked. Youth worker will present the analysis to the colleague and also to the director. This information is confidential.	Once a month each leader gathers together posted suggestions and makes a summary. Summary will be presented to colleagues and the director. It helps to plan activities, to understand youngsters needs and gives feedback to the service.	Methods: own notes, special forms, project reports.
Result	Analysis is written down. This information will be used by the director, who will hold a work contribution and work development conversation with each youth worker. Youth worker will get reflection on his/her work from a colleague. - analysis	Once a month an assessment of the youth work services held by youth centre visited by the youngsters. - assessment	Direct feedback on all activities, which helps youth workers to make corrections in his/her work planning. Holding activities, making summaries, evaluation. - assessment
Supportive / contributory	X	X	
Process			
Indicator			X
Evaluation - inside organisation	X	X	X
Evaluation - outside organisation			
subject field - youth work	X	XX	X
Subject field - working order			
Subject field - worker			
Regulations/ documents/forms/ legislation	Analyse the form and youth worker's job description	Youth workers, service, quality standards, job description	Special feedback, summary form, job description

Interim report of the club work (two times in July, December)	Roundtable meeting of the youth center's leaders	Indicator questionnaire	Report of activities (statistics)
Twice a year		Two times a year (during the statistic week)	
Bi-annual reflection on all the club activities. Club leader fixes participants data to special registration form and makes report.			
Report data – description of activities, methods, duration, time, place, results, negative and positive circumstances, budget, and co-operation partners. Collecting feedback - different interactive methods are used.	Sports and Youth Department specialist invites once a month together all leaders of Tallinn's youth centres. The aim of the round table meeting is to standardise the youth centres' work. In the meeting problems, co-operation possibilities are discussed, new work methods, facilities are introduced.	Concrete and constant questions will be asked from youngsters.	Interim report of outdoor and indoor activities, local district activities and large scale (whole town / area) activities. Leader must use special report form and describe more concrete large scale activities.
Leader	Specialist of Sports and Youth Department	Leader	Verifier of the activity, youth worker, leader
Youth club registration form. Report is written down in relaxed form, but all counted aspects must be described. Data is used for analysing work.	Round table meeting agreements are fixed into protocol. The leaders introduce agreements, discuss topics with colleagues on work meeting or by e-mail	Answers are fixed into special form and analysis is presented on the intranet.	Data is fixed into statistics form. Data is used analyzing youth center's action plan and putting together annual report.
Youth worker, organization gets feedback to plan work and this helps to plan new innovate activities. Data used for work with other youth centres. – analyse	Tallinn's youth centers work and activities are standardised, making new co-operation agreements, such as using the same youth card and implementing new innovative ideas in the youth work field. - analyse	Main aims, topics are mapped and action plans can be changed using these data.	Material to compare planned and accomplished activities. – analyse
Job description, registration form, report	Protocol, personal notes, director's messages sent by e-mail	Job description, questionnaire form	Job description, statistics form

The Balanced Scorecard – Iceland

The Sports and Youth Council of Reykjavik (ITR) is the municipal department responsible for over 20 youth clubs in the city of Reykjavik, Iceland. ITR uses the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach to measure and ensure quality in all of its services, including the services it delivers to young people. The BSC is an established quality assurance and business management approach developed in the United States in the 1990s, and is now used widely around the world. ITR began using the BSC approach in 2000.

The Balanced Scorecard is built on four “dimensions”:

- Quality of services
- Finances
- Processes
- Staff.

Each dimension should have between one and five targets. These targets must be based on the SMART criteria – in other words, they must be:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time-framed

Each target is measured, and a score is given. It is important to think about the impact that each dimension has on the others, and to consider the effects. For example, a cut in funding will affect the “finances” dimension, but it will also directly impact on service delivery, staffing and so on.

ITR chose the BSC approach, as it fitted well with things they had already implemented to improve service delivery across the organisation. Initially they began using BSC in a simplified way, but after a while the city officials decided to fully implement the approach. To do this, they provided training seminars for all senior staff. At the same time, expert consultants were brought in to assist with the implementation. The approach starts with a series of measurements. Within ITR, the youth clubs received the highest scores for the services they deliver, amongst all of the services run by ITR. However, after a while many people in the organisation became confused because the organisation’s policy plan – linked to the BSC approach – was not clear enough, and this needed to be addressed.

The BSC approach used by ITR is based on the organisation’s policies. Policies should define and formulate things such as who will be involved and / or responsible for each area of work, the focus of the work, target areas and so on. Policies should reflect all of the stakeholders involved in the organisation – the young people who use the services, staff at the youth clubs, managers, other decision makers, funders etc.

The Balanced Scorecard – Iceland (continued)

Communication is central to the BSC approach. It is all about disseminating knowledge and ideas. Each level of the service must encourage a two-way flow of information. This helps to identify knowledge, dialogue and needs. The BSC approach describes how an organisation should implement policies, as well as how to measure success, goals, “guiding lights”, targets and so on.

This approach is designed particularly for larger organisations, and is likely to be too complex for smaller ones. Because of the scale and complexity of the BSC approach, the role of implementing the system within ITR has generally been given to middle and upper managers. But in order for it to work effectively, it should involve input from everyone in the organisation.

As part of the BSC approach, every staff member in ITR has a Training and Learning Plan, which is reviewed twice each year with their line manager. At the same time, the manager and youth worker should look at issues like job satisfaction.

ITR has developed sophisticated software to help capture and measure the information needed, but still they are aware that this does not always give the whole picture. Data is collected from each of the 20+ youth clubs run by ITR, and this data is gathered by the head office. All the plans made by each youth club must fit within the municipal plan, and be consistent with the BSC approach.

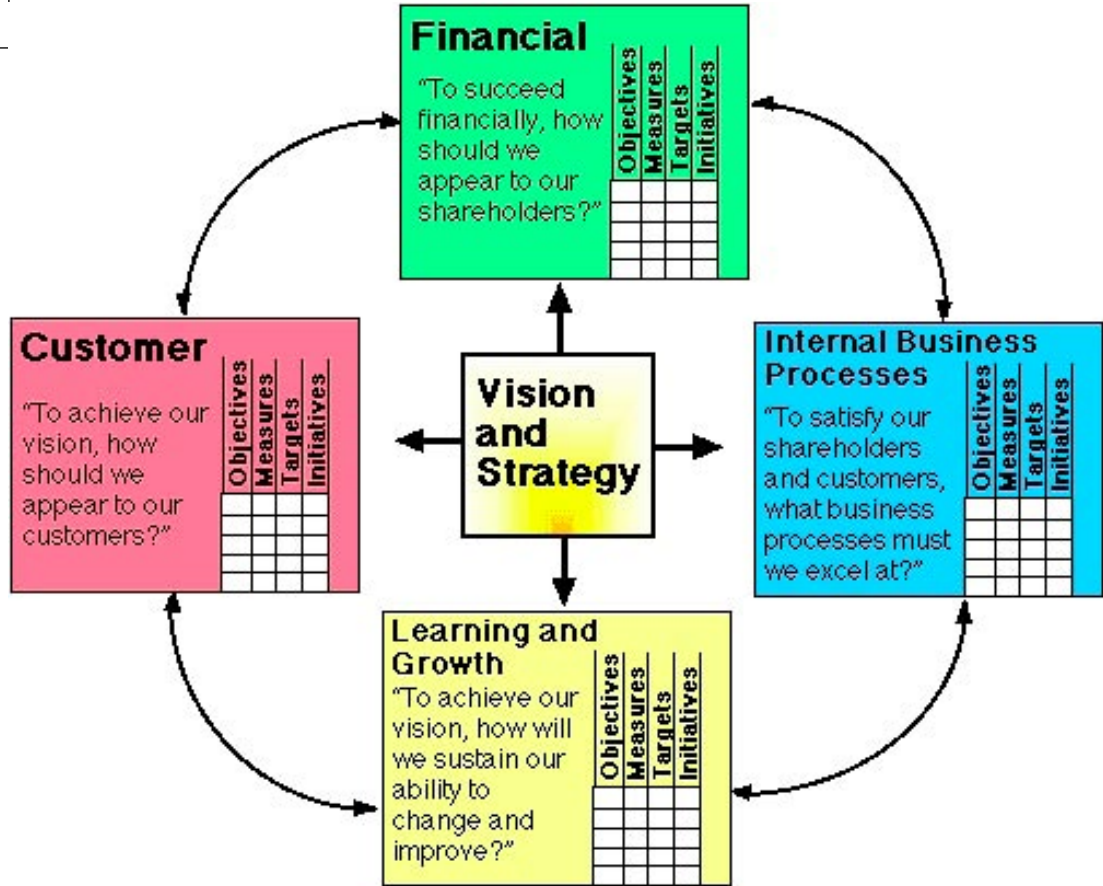
Each youth club must identify its targets and name the person who is responsible for each target.

Within ITR, consideration has been given to whether the four dimensions adequately cover all types of organisations, cultures etc. There are still some concerns about whether it adequately measures the social environment in which youth work organisations operate.

Young people were not directly involved in the development of the BSC approach, but they are informed about it. Young people are asked to complete satisfaction surveys, in order to measure how happy they are with the youth clubs and other services they use. Young people were also consulted in the development of the approach by ITR. Each youth club leader knows that their club will be measured in terms of satisfaction, both by the young people who use the club and the staff who work there. At the same time, it is important to remember issues other than “customer satisfaction” – such as promoting learning, ensuring human rights and challenging discrimination.

Using the BSC approach has highlighted the importance of dialogue, and the need for proper channels of communication and decision making in ITR. It has also highlighted the importance of people – staff, service users and others. It has raised people’s awareness of the complexities involved in the various “dimensions” of service delivery.

The Balanced Scorecard Approach



Quality Standards Framework - Ireland

Youth Work Ireland is a national organisation supporting youth work development across the Republic of Ireland. Its membership is based on a regional divide. Of the 26 counties in Ireland, Youth Work Ireland has regional youth services who are members in 21 counties.

Youth Work Ireland developed the Quality Standards Framework (QSF) as a method for ensuring and improving the quality of youth work, and the support available to youth clubs and projects across Ireland. The approach is based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model and is assessed using both self assessment and peer assessment methods.

The QSF approach was designed for the member youth services of Youth Work Ireland. It is targeted at the services offered by their regional offices, and is not meant to quality assure each individual youth club or project. Instead, the approach assess the overall service delivery at the regional level. All stakeholders have been involved in the development and implementation of the assessment process.

QSF was originally designed using both a working group and a consultation process, developed over approximately a two-year period. The approach was then piloted and reviewed, and following this, the implementation of the QSF approach to the rest of the Youth Work Ireland network began.

QSF was originally piloted with eight of the 21 regional youth services that are members of Youth Work Ireland. Following the successful pilot phase, it was agreed that this approach should be adopted, and should become a criteria for membership of the federation. It is now envisaged that over a three year period, all of the 21 regional youth services will have adopted this approach as a condition of their membership.

Because Youth Work Ireland operates as a federation of youth services, each organisation operates independently. The downfall of this approach is that there was no base-line of minimum standards for youth work practice. In view of this, the organisation decided to develop a set of minimum standards that would apply to the practice of all its member organisations. The model they have developed is based on the principle of continuous improvement, so that once all organisations have achieved the minimum standard, they will be required to continue working with the QSF approach in order to meet the standards of excellence.

Quality Standards Framework - Ireland (continued)

The QSF approach was developed through researching and reviewing existing models of quality assurance. These were then presented to the working group, who brainstormed the standards that should be contained therein, choosing standards which were most relevant to the member organisations. Youth Work Ireland is hoping to have the QSF approach externally validated, so that it will have additional currency and credibility, and so that it fits with other existing models of quality assurance.

QSF is supported and led by a number of people within Youth Work Ireland. These include the Quality Standards Training Co-ordinator; staff from the regional youth services; various volunteers; board members; and other Youth Work Ireland Staff.

The QSF approach is new and innovative, as there are no other frameworks like it for the voluntary youth sector in Ireland. It is based on a qualitative approach to assessment, as opposed to quantitative measurements. It also allows organisations to present information in a portfolio basis for assessment, which gives greater regard for the practice of youth work, rather than measuring things like the number of young people participating in programmes and activities. Additionally, the peer assessment approach also encourages the sharing of good practice between organisations.

Young people have been involved in the development of QSF in a number of ways. They were involved in the consultation stage, and participating organisations are continually encouraged to involve young people as much as possible as they go through the quality assurance process. Young people are interviewed in focus groups about their understanding of the organisation as a "Quality Organisation".

"In the early stages, the participating organisations seemed very excited about the project. The development stage took a long time, but now we are into the implementation stage. The benefits have been two-fold: Firstly for Youth Work Ireland, we are identifying the needs and gaps in service provision of our members; and secondly for our members, it provides a framework for them to identify gaps themselves. People always say 'I must get around to that', but this approach gives them a context and a process for doing so, and most importantly they get support from the national office."

“It has allowed us to identify areas of good practice, as well as finding out where there needs to be greater investment in terms of training and resources. It has allowed organisations to support each other in sharing good practice, and has also set an agenda for the national office in ensuring that we meet the needs of our membership, in order that they can achieve the quality standards.”

Consultation has been central to making sure that Youth Work Ireland has the right and appropriate quality standards included in the QSF approach. It is also important to remember that QSF begins by looking at the minimum standards of practice, as a basis for streamlining services. *“Obviously there will be some organisations that will be exceptional in terms of their service delivery. But this approach ensures that the organisations that are operating below that standard will also be encouraged and supported to develop to a minimum level of acceptable practice.”*

The Youth Federation Voluntary Youth Sector Support Project – United Kingdom

The Youth Federation is an umbrella organisation which supports voluntary sector youth clubs and projects in the Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and Wirral areas of North West England. The Youth Federation is a member of UK Youth. The approach they have developed for quality assurance is being used by 140 youth clubs and projects within the Youth Federation network.

Youth Federation has developed a youth work validation programme that works at two levels. Level 1 is focused at the organisational level, and looks at five key areas of policy and practice. These are

- Health and safety
- Child protection
- Equal opportunities
- Governance
- Financial probity.

Level 2 is a practice-based validation, and focuses on the Joint Area Review Process. At this level, the approach explores a further five key areas of work. These are:

- Outcomes addressing the UK Government's White Paper entitled "Every Child Matters"
- The quality of youth work provided
- Curriculum and Resources
- Operations
- Strategic Management.

This approach to quality assurance in youth work has been developed over several years. Level 1 has now been running for over four years, whilst Level 2 has been developed more recently, and is now in its second year.

The approach was developed initially through discussions with UK Youth and with local youth groups, through a local quality standards group. A number of partner organisations are now involved in its delivery - Youth Federation, UK Youth, Cheshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services, Cheshire Youth Service, and Cheshire and Warrington Connexions,

The project is funded from a variety of sources, including Cheshire and Warrington Learning and Skills Council, Cheshire Youth Service, Cheshire and Warrington Connexions and Warrington Youth Service.

The Voluntary Youth Sector Support Project originally came to be developed because of requests by voluntary groups to have one simple approach to quality standards. At around the same time, discussions were held with the Cheshire Funders Forum, who similarly wanted one system for recognising approved service providers.

The Youth Federation Voluntary Youth Sector Support Project – United Kingdom (continued)

The project was originally developed only for the areas of Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and Wirral. However, due to its success, the Youth Federation are now discussing how the approach can be utilised throughout the North West region of England. This would then be managed by two key regional agencies - the North West Regional Youth Work Unit and North West Youth.

This project is innovative in a number of ways. Firstly, it has involved collaboration between statutory and voluntary groups in designing it. Secondly, it has a number of different strands of support, in that while the training and support to achieve the standards is provided by Youth Federation, the inspection against the standards is undertaken independently.

The Level 1 aspects are inspected by workers from Cheshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services, whilst Level 2 is inspected by a team of workers from the Youth Service, Connexions and the Voluntary Sector. At Level 2, young people are trained and supported to act as Young Peoples Evaluators. To do this, they have been trained in using the assessment model by an inspector from the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), which has the statutory responsibility for ensuring standards in education and the Youth Service in England and Wales.

This programme has helped to develop the work of over 80 groups so far. Within Cheshire alone, groups who have achieved the quality standards have been able to access over £560,000 of

funding as a direct result of achieving the agreed standards outlined by the project. Through undertaking their own Quality Assurance research, the Youth Federation found that 80% of the groups involved felt the project had a measurable impact on the quality of service they were providing for young people.

The collective view from funders is that this framework has provided a common benchmark of quality for voluntary groups, which helps the funders to be clear about the quality of the youth groups they are funding. This also helps the youth clubs when they are applying for funding, as these groups do not have to jump through a variety of different standards, for each possible source of funding.

Youth Federation have learnt a great deal from carrying out this quality assurance project. Firstly, they have found that there is no such thing as "one size fits all" when it comes to quality assurance. Some groups achieve validation within 3 months, while others may take a year. Personal contact with the groups is vital to keeping them going through the process. Training needs to be delivered closest to the points of need. Similarly, training sometimes needs to be simplified for small groups. Ultimately, achieving the quality standards enables the youth groups involved to gain a great deal of self confidence in their work with young people, and also ensures a high quality of services available to young people themselves.

Increasing Recognition of Youth Work: The European Portfolio for Youth Workers and Youth Leaders

When we look at the specific recognition of competences of youth workers and youth leaders, the decision of the Council of Europe's European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) of 2003, to develop a portfolio on non-formal education of youth workers and youth leaders was a real milestone.

Based on this decision, the Council of Europe invited an expert group to produce an instrument to describe experiences and competences in the youth field, as well as to enable users to assess and monitor the progress of their learning. The European Portfolio for Youth Workers and Youth Leaders is based on a functional analysis of what youth workers and leaders should be and be able to do. From this is drawn a framework of competences which individuals are invited to use as a self-assessment tool, and then to gain feedback from their peers and colleagues. A test phase involving a control group of 250 youth workers and leaders from across Europe (plus those who were interested and downloaded the portfolio from the internet) was used, and led to a finalised version which was published and distributed in 2007.

Based on consultation across Europe, the expert group saw the need for youth workers and youth leaders in non-formal education and learning settings to have an instrument which could help them to:

- **identify, assess and record** their competences
- **describe** their competences to others
- set their own learning and development goals.
- And that is precisely what the portfolio is designed to do. This portfolio is intended for the use of:
 - **Youth leaders** - which we understand to refer essentially to young adults holding a responsibility in a youth organisation, network or any other youth structure, mainly on a voluntary basis, and
 - **Youth workers** - holding the same kind of responsibility, mainly on a professional basis.

Increasing Recognition of Youth Work: The European Portfolio for Youth Workers and Youth Leaders (continued)

Most of the users will probably be people who have gained experience and skills in youth work through being active as youth leaders or youth workers, without having any formally recognised qualifications in the field. Feedback already received suggests that the portfolio may also be useful for qualified professionals who would like to review their current situation and plan their continuing professional development.

- The portfolio contains the following sections:
- How to use the portfolio
- The youth work context
- Knowledge, skills, attitudes and values
- Youth leader / youth worker - a functional analysis
- Competence framework
- Getting feedback from others
- Personal development and learning plan

During the development phase, the expert group consulted a wide range of people about their opinions and criticisms - both positive and negative. They felt that the portfolio is an exciting tool for youth workers and youth leaders to try out! A test phase was introduced and to run during 2006. During this time the expert group hoped that many people would have a go at using the portfolio and take the time to provide feedback.

A copy of the portfolio can be obtained from www.coe.int/youthportfolio.

Mark Taylor
Freelance trainer and writer

What is ECYC?



The European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC) is an international non-governmental youth organisation that was formed in 1976. The goals of the organisation are to:

- Advocate and promote the benefits of Open Youth Work
- Promote co-operation between Open Youth Work organisations across Europe
- Increase international awareness amongst young people
- Provide seminars, training courses and programmes of youth exchange
- Encourage the active involvement of young people in their communities

Today, the ECYC network consists of more than 3.5 million young people, who are involved in more than 18 000 youth clubs, groups and projects in more than 30 countries of Europe - from Cyprus in the south to Greenland in the north.

ECYC offers its members a wide range of projects and activities, including young people's seminars, training for youth workers, international projects and initiatives, networking meetings on topics of common interest, promotion of best practice, and development of policy guidelines relevant to Open Youth Work and so on.

ECYC works closely with other youth organisations and agencies, and is a member of the European Youth Forum, as well as having consultative status with the Council of Europe.

For more information about ECYC, go to **www.ecyc.org** or **email info@ecyc.org**

What is Open Youth Work?

Since being formed in 1976, the European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC) has worked to promote good practice in Open Youth Work in Europe. In order to develop good practice, it was important to start by deciding on a common definition of this concept we call "Open Youth Work". This is a summary of the definition that the first members of ECYC developed together:

The Role of Open Youth Work:

The purpose of Open Youth Work is to offer young people, on the basis of their voluntary involvement, developmental and educational experiences which will equip them to play an active part in democratic society, as well as meet their own needs. Open Youth Work takes place in youth clubs, youth projects, youth houses, on the street -wherever young people are to be found.

Open Youth Work offers young people opportunities which are:

Educative - enabling young people to gain skills, knowledge and attitudes needed as individuals and members of groups and communities;

Designed to promote equality of opportunity - through the challenging of oppressions which result from differences in culture, race, language, sexual identity, gender, disability, age, religion and class, and through the celebration of diversity which arise from these differences;

Participative - through a voluntary relationship with young people which encourages their involvement in the decision making structures which affect their lives;

Empowering - by supporting young people to understand and act on the personal, social and political issues that affect their lives, the lives of others and the communities of which they are part.

The Core Values of Open Youth Work are:

- Young people have the right to identify options and choices and choose the most appropriate one for them in any given situation
- Each young person should be given the support they need to reach their full potential
- Young people should be supported to develop their own values and attitudes and develop the capacity to critically analyse the world around them and to take action in response.

The Characteristics of Open Youth Work are:

- A planned, systematic educational experience outside the formal education curriculum
- An active model of learning which promotes experiential learning and reflection in real life situations
- Recognises that inequalities of opportunity exist in society and seeks to raise young people's awareness about society and how to act upon it
- It is based on the issues and areas of interest of young people themselves
- It is mutually beneficial, enjoyable and fun for both youth workers / youth leaders and young people
- It is a partnership between youth workers / youth leaders and young people, based on the active participation of young people
- It provides opportunities for young people to participate in decision making, planning, organising and evaluating
- It enable communities to work towards meeting the needs of their own people
- Is accessible to young people regardless of their race, culture, creed, gender, sexual orientation and disability