

Youthreach Ireland

What were the conditions and steps taken that have contributed most to the success of the measure?

According to evaluations and Youthreach reports, the following measures and steps have all contributed to the success of the programme:

- Developing individual learner plans focused on holistic development;
- Ensuring a safe, structured and challenging learning environment
- Student-centered learning;
- Mutual feedback between trainer and participants;
- Team approach to cross-disciplinary curricular objectives (such as communication skills development, health and safety awareness, etc.)
- In-career staff development;
- Appropriate assessment leading to certification (A broad range of certification is available to Youthreach participants. The majority of participants have their achievements certified by the State Examinations Commission)
- flexibility at all levels – management, relationships, curriculum
- Programme duration based on need rather than time.

Which stakeholders were involved in identifying needs and in the planning and design of the measure?

The emphasis of Youthreach is on local planning and inter-agency networking; centres function in community settings and maintain good contact with local agencies. Youthreach supports an integrated area-based approach to services for children and young people and highlights the importance of cultural context of trainees and their communities. Networking between out-of-school centres and the mainstream system is one element of the programme, with centres acting as brokers and mentors to facilitate successful progression.

Cooperation mechanisms and sharing of information between centres and post primary schools are essential. Liaison and collaboration between centres and local bodies and agencies is also vital. Other services, agencies and organisations are also involved with centres' activities including libraries, sports organisations and facilities, and local enterprises and employer organisations such as chambers of commerce.

Who was involved in implementing the measure?

In each locality, the Chief Executive of the Education Training Board (ETB) oversees the Youthreach programme and ensures a co-ordinated approach to its implementation. The ETBs providing the Youthreach programme have full responsibility for all aspects of the programme implementation.

Youthreach National Coordinators facilitate and support programme implementation.

Who has key responsibility for implementation?

These programmes are managed at national level by the Department of Education & Science and at local level by (ETBs). At national level, the Department of Education and Skills and SOLAS (The Further Education and Training Authority) are responsible for the Youthreach programme operated by ETBs.

How are the different people involved in implementation being supported (e.g. do they receive specific training?)

Youthreach providers and participants have access to various forms of training. Members of staff have been trained the NUIG Specialist Certificate in Health Promotion, in order to develop Centre health plans towards achieving the Health Q-Mark.

The staff members have backgrounds from different disciplines. A high degree of motivation and commitment as well as experience is essential. Staff members need to have a combination of qualities and skills including broad educational and vocational experiences, a proven track record of performance in their career to date and confidence in their abilities to relate to disadvantaged young people. They should also be able to work with groups of learners with various educational attainment levels and degrees of motivation.

What have been the obstacles to introducing the measure? How have they been addressed?

- Learners were placing great emphasis on their previous experiences in the school system and their disengagement from this process. The staff had to learn to support learners in placing emphasis on achievement rather than on what they perceived to be failure;
- Learners felt threatened by the Youthreach centres which reminded them of school. Staff and management helped centres evolve and developed as non-traditional “out-of-school” spaces
- Learners didn't have enough training and work options. New opportunities were developed over time to provide learners with the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to enhance employability and progress to further education, training, employment, etc. based on their needs and competences.

Is there a monitoring/evaluation system in place?

All centres engage in annual internal centre evaluation (ICE) or centre development planning (CDP) processes.

External evaluation is conducted by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills. In 2006, the Department Inspectorate began carrying out whole centre evaluations of Youthreach ETB centres.

The Quality Framework Initiative was established in November 2000 following a recommendation for the development of a quality assurance system for the programme. The recommendation was presented in the Youthreach 2000 consultative report.

What is monitored?

Quality assurance in Youthreach is set out in the Quality Framework (QF) which provides a comprehensive quality framework of standards, planning and evaluation for Youthreach. The Quality Framework consists of four key building blocks: Quality Standards; Internal Centre Evaluation; Centre Development Planning; External Centre Evaluation

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.

Who monitors and how?

As mentioned above, centres engage in internal centre evaluation (ICE) annually. Draft guidelines for Internal Centre Evaluation and Centre Development Planning have been developed and over 44 centres piloted quality assurance processes. The guidelines are now being re-developed for the Quality Framework to all Youthreach Training Centres. External evaluation is conducted by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills.

Are further evaluations planned and when will the results be available?

A new research project has been commissioned by SOLAS and will provide the first-ever evaluation of the National Youthreach Programme (including Youthreach Centres and Community Training Centres). The study will be carried out in the context of the dissolution of the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and FÁS and the transfer of the Youthreach programme to the ETB sector in Ireland. The findings will generate policy-relevant knowledge concerning the outputs and outcomes of the Youthreach programme and the effectiveness of this type of provision.

What has been the impact of the measure?

A report by the Evaluation Support and Research Unit found that 'practically all learners were experiencing success to some degree in the centres visited, whether from an academic, personal or social viewpoint' (2010). Reviews of learner outcomes regularly show that over 75% of participants progress to the labour market or to further education and training. This rises to 85% for those who complete Progression training.

Evaluations report that participants value their experience and recommend it to others.

What resources are involved (material, space, amount of funding)?

Youthreach is funded by the Exchequer under the National Development Plan.

Youthreach is delivered through a network of 112 education centres across Ireland, managed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

The majority of the remainder of places are provided by SOLAS in 38 Community Training Centres. Resources are allocated to each ETB specifically for the Youthreach programme. They are allocated for tuition, provision for allowances and learner supports, administration and rent and other costs.

Further info (website, contact person e-mail, organisation details)

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