



Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes

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Glossary

Effectiveness: Examines the extent to which programme objectives have been achieved.

Efficiency: Measures the ratio of inputs to outputs. A programme is said to be efficient if it produces the maximum outputs for a given level of inputs.

Governance models: The organisational arrangements that services operate under.

Grant administering bodies: The organisations that administer funding from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to various youth services.

Hardiker Model: A model to help understand different levels of need within a population of children.

Horwath Review: A previous Value for Money review of the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF), published in 2009.

Impact: Measures the effect of an intervention on the wider society.

Inputs: Represent the funding and staff time that are invested in a particular programme.

Line department: The department that is responsible for funding the youth programmes.

National Quality Standards Framework: A support and developmental tool to assist youth work organisations to provide quality services.

Need level (group): This categorisation attempts to distinguish young people with varying needs based on the Hardiker Model.

Outcomes: The results that are produced from programme outputs.

Outputs: What is provided with the programme inputs.

Pobal: A not-for-profit company that manages programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the European Union.

Programme Logic Model: Provides a framework for examining the relationship between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes.

Progress reports: Annual reports submitted by youth services funded under the youth programmes. These reports contain financial, output and outcome data.

Public Spending Code: A set of rules and procedures for evaluation across the Irish public service, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Randomised Control Trial: A scientific experiment that involves comparing two groups of people over time (one that receives an intervention and one that does not). Participants in the trial are randomly assigned to a particular group.

Random sample: A proportion of a population that is randomly selected. Random sampling is used when it is not possible to gather information about the entire population.

Rationale: Examines the purpose of a particular programme.

Services: Refers to the providers of youth services funded under the programmes.

Steering Committee: A committee comprised of stakeholders and experts who oversee a value for money/policy review (VFMPR).

Theory of Change: Examines the link between outputs and outcomes.

Tusla: The Child and Family Agency, established in January 2014 as the dedicated State agency responsible for improving well-being and outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Unit cost: Refers to the funding per young person, calculated by dividing total funding in a service by the number of individual young people who participate over the year in the service.

Whole-time equivalent: Refers to the full-time equivalent number of full-time and part-time employees.

VFMPR Survey: The survey that was sent out to youth service providers to gather administrative and descriptive data from each respondent. The survey included questions on the type of young people participating and the type of evaluation tools used.

Youth Officers: Are employed by Education and Training Boards (former Vocational Education Committees) to oversee the youth sector locally. The Youth Officers are funded by the Youth Affairs Unit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Acronyms used

CIS	Crisis Intervention Service
CRE	Comprehensive Review of Expenditure
CSC	Children’s Services Committees
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
ETB	Education and Training Board
HSE	Health Service Executive
IYJS	Irish Youth Justice Service
GYDP	Garda Youth Diversion Projects
LDTF	Local Drugs Task Force
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAC	National Assessment Committee
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NEWB	National Educational Welfare Board
NQSF	National Quality Standards Framework
OMCYA	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
PLM	Programme Logic Model
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
SPY	Special Projects for Youth
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VFMPR	Value for Money/Policy Review
YAU	Youth Affairs Unit, DCYA
YPFSF	Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund

Executive Summary

In October 2012, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) identified certain ‘youth programmes’ to be the subject of a Value for Money and Policy Review (VFMPR). The guidance for selection of programmes is set out in the Public Spending Code, which specifies that ‘All VFMPRs should be targeted at areas of significant expenditure where there is greatest potential for them to add value and influence policy developments ...’¹ and ‘... significant elements of expenditure should be covered and VFMPRs should not be focused on schemes that account for very minor elements of spending ... Departments should focus in particular on the more discretionary areas of programme expenditure, where issues of both effectiveness and efficiency feature strongly’².

This is the first VFMPR exercise undertaken by the DCYA. Being a relatively new Government department, the DCYA was keen to harness the VFMPR as one of a range of change initiatives designed to rationalise, reform and improve programmes and areas of policy responsibility assumed by the department (from other departments) when it was set up.

In terms of the VFMPR *adding most value*, ‘measurability’ complexities, in addition to the scale of investment, were significant factors for DCYA senior management in the selection of youth programmes. ‘Human services’ as a generic category is regarded as an area of activity that presents inherent evaluation problems, particularly in relation to performance measurement.³ The youth programmes in question presented additional challenges, including complicated governance structures, considerable local discretion by practitioners and significant information asymmetry between service providers and DCYA officials. These performance measurement challenges are present variously in other areas of DCYA programme responsibility, which means that a VFMPR focus on youth programmes offered the likelihood of positive spill-over benefits in terms of strategic learning and potential application of findings.

The total budgeted expenditure for 2012 for the DCYA Youth Affairs Unit amounted to €56.806 million or €182.238 million for the 3-year period under review, 2010-2012 (see Table 1). Three specific funding streams⁴ within this overall expenditure were examined:

- Special Projects for Youth (€17.042 million);
- Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund 1 and 2 (€21.33 million);
- Local Drugs Task Force projects (€1.34 million).

Table 1: Total expenditure for youth programmes now administered by the Youth Affairs Unit, DCYA (2010-2012)

Programme	2010 (€m)	2011 (€m)	2012 (€m)	2010-2012 (€m)
Special Projects for Youth Scheme	19.476	18.156	17.042	54.674
Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund 1	7.859	7.192	6.725	21.776
Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund 2	17.888	16.354	14.607	48.849
Local Drugs Task Force Scheme		1.433	1.340	2.773
Youth Information Centres	2.005	1.862	1.425	5.292
Youth Service Grant Scheme	12.327	11.444	11.051	34.822
Local Youth Club Grant Scheme	1.3	1.035	1.035	3.37
Gaisce	0.819	0.738	0.690	2.247
Leargas	0.585	0.527	0.492	1.604
Capacity development of VEC/Youth Officers	1.495	1.368	1.39	4.253
Other programmes	0.732	0.837	1.009	2.578
Total	64.486	60.946	56.806	182.238

Source: Youth Affairs Unit, DCYA

It is important to note that this VFMPR deals with ‘**youth programmes**’ (i.e. the effective and efficient achievement of policy objectives) and not the effectiveness and efficiency of ‘**youth work**’, which is essentially a professional/policy consideration outside the scope of this review.⁵ Of equal importance, the focus of this examination from both efficiency and effectiveness perspectives relates to **the intended positive change brought about with and for a young person** (the policy objective) as a consequence of the Exchequer investment in these targeted schemes, as opposed to limiting its focus to an analysis of service output. A ‘programme’ as opposed to a ‘professional’ focus permits examination of efficiencies and effectiveness in securing objectives irrespective of the particular philosophical, practice and professional make-up of any one organisation within the large number and range of providers receiving grant income. Programme focus also permits examination of delivery in the context of new programme technologies in this area.

Given the broad array of provision funded across these schemes, it was not possible to capture every nuance; rather, this review aims to cover the bulk of service delivery, typically local targeted services delivered directly to youth.

The following Terms of Reference for the VFMPR on Youth Programmes are based on the standard Public Spending Code guidance but tailored to this specific VFMPR, and were adopted by the independent Steering Committee overseeing the VFMPR:

1. Identify the objectives of the youth programmes in question.
2. Examine the current and continued validity and relevance of the objectives of the youth programmes and their compatibility with the overall strategy of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.
3. Define the outputs associated with the youth programmes’ activities and identify the level and trend of those outputs.
4. Examine the extent that the youth programmes’ objectives have been achieved and comment on the effectiveness with which they have been achieved.
5. Identify the level and trend of costs and staffing resources associated with the youth programmes and thus comment on the efficiency with which they have achieved their objectives.
6. Evaluate the degree to which the objectives warrant the allocation of public funding on a current and ongoing basis, and examine the scope for alternative policy or organisational approaches to achieving these objectives on a more efficient and/or effective basis.
7. Make recommendations for the future operation of the initiative and specify potential future performance indicators that might be used to better monitor and manage the performance of the youth programmes.

Background

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) was established in 2011 and brings together a range of functions related to children and young people that were previously the responsibilities of the Ministers for Health, Education and Skills, Justice and Law Reform, and Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The DCYA has a mandate to provide a range of universal and targeted services for children and young people; to ensure quality arrangements are in place for interventions related to child welfare and protection, family support, adoption, school attendance and youth crime; and to harmonise Government policy to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

The Youth Affairs Unit (YAU) of the DCYA is responsible for promoting the development of youth services, including funding support for youth organisations as encompassed in the DCYA's *Statement of Strategy, 2011-2016* and in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020*. It provides grant funding for several hundred local youth service providers throughout the country through a number of different youth programmes. These programmes mostly provide funding to youth service organisations to provide services for young people in disadvantaged areas. The YAU also provides funding for capacity building in Education and Training Boards (ETBs)⁶ that administer the funding.

The Special Projects for Youth (SPY), Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF) and the Local Drugs Task Force (LDTF) are the subject of this VFMPR and relate to approximately 70% of total YAU programme expenditure. While the three programmes have different origins, there is a large degree of cross-over in terms of the objectives and the groups targeted, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Target groups for youth programmes

Target	YPFSF	SPY	LDTF
10-21 year-olds	✓	✓	✓
Area where drug problem exists	✓	✓	✓
Educational disadvantage	✓	✓	
Involvement in crime	✓	✓	
Disadvantaged area	✓	✓	
Homelessness		✓	

The programmes share similar objectives. At a minimal level, they share common descriptions in terms of being 'targeted' at young people or neighbourhoods where there is disadvantage, in particular but not exclusively, relating to preventing the onset of or reducing drug-taking.

A previous Value for Money review (Horwath Review, 2009) was undertaken on the YPFSF and found that a judgement could not be made regarding value for money because of the lack of discriminating data. It made several recommendations, but these were, by and large, not implemented.

However, some improvements have occurred. The National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF), led by the Youth Affairs Unit, commenced in July 2010.⁷ It has been an important element toward 'evidence-informed' service development alongside other such efforts often involving new partnerships between service providers, academic institutions and the philanthropic sector.

Methodology

Evaluation of youth programmes, like many human services, is complicated by the fact that there are few reliable measurement tools, possibly none other than the Randomised Control Trial (RCT), that have the capacity to 'prove' a direct cause-effect relationship between resource input and programme impact. In addition to the inherent measurability problems in this study area, the review was significantly hampered by poor and unreliable data.

Bearing in mind these considerable methodological challenges, a mixed-method approach was adopted:

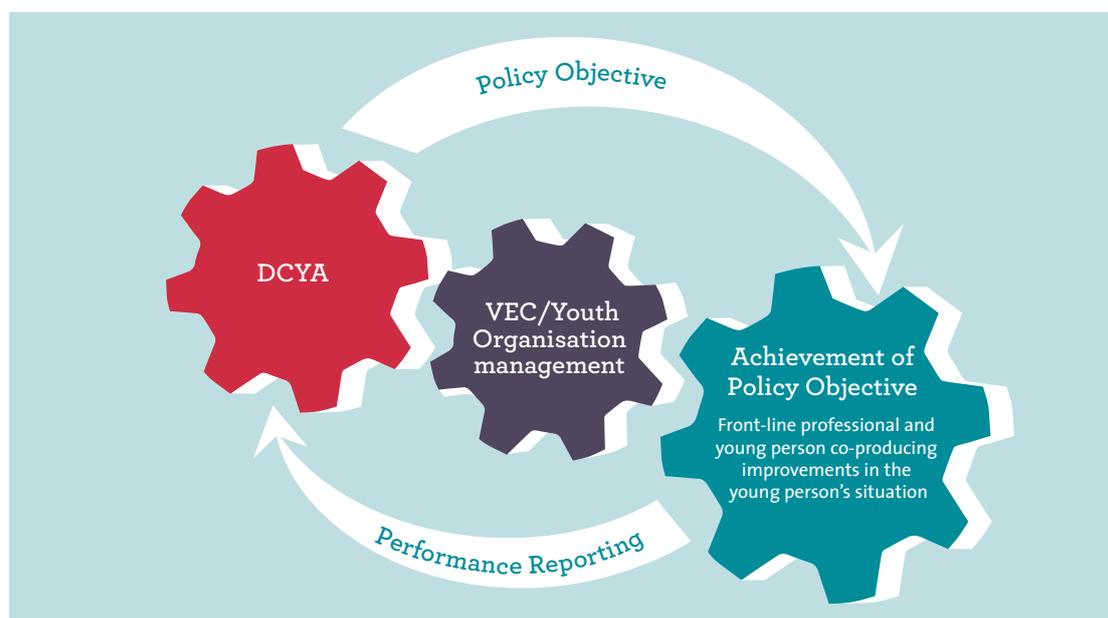
1. **Interview with Youth Affairs Unit** – designed to secure data relating to governance and oversight of the programmes or schemes.
2. **Analysis of high level statistical data** – designed to provide contextual and trend data to support judgements relating to rationale.
3. **Review of administrative data** – to secure financial and output-related data.
4. **Survey of all youth programme providers⁸** – to secure input and output data relating to local service provision.
5. **Site-based interviews with front-line staff and young people** – to secure detailed information about data returned to DCYA (2010-2012), the rationale for service delivery and first-hand accounts of the effects of interventions.
6. **Literature review** – to secure external data relating to identifying proximal outcomes that appear to possess efficacy in improvements in the main domain areas for young people.

Governance

The exchange between the front-line professional and the young person is the most important transaction in the governance system supporting youth programmes. This interaction produces the desired policy change – an improvement in the young person’s situation or circumstances. Therefore, any associated overhead cost or activity should demonstrate added value to this critical exchange.

Figure 1 illustrates the governance relationship. The objective of targeted youth programme objectives is for an improvement in outcomes for the young person. These improvements often relate to changed behaviour and where possible improvements in circumstances, as a result of the interaction between youth professionals and young people. This policy objective is mediated through a range of key actors in line departments, regional bodies and youth organisations. Given that it is not directly involved, the line department requires accurate data to indicate whether the system is delivering on its expectations.

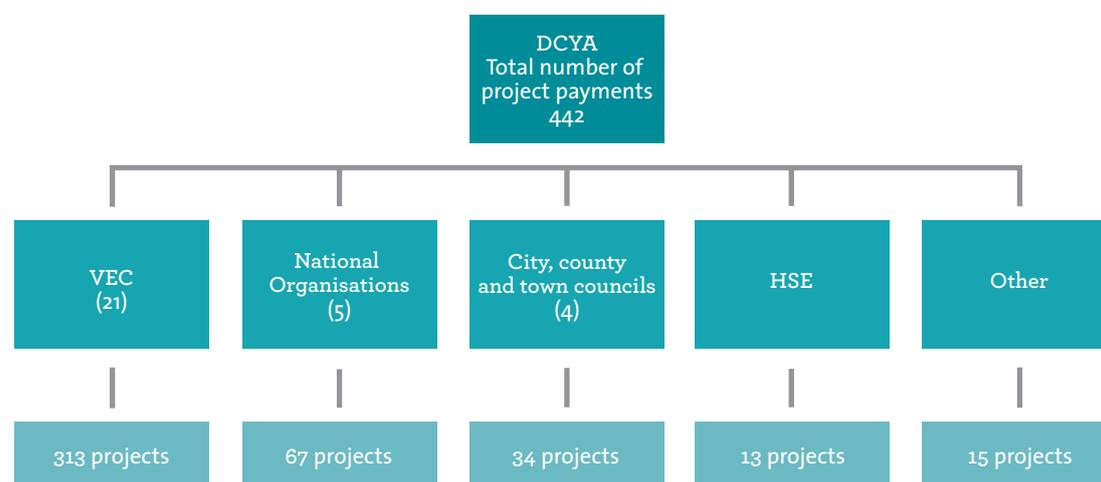
Figure 1: Implementing targeted youth programme objectives



Important to this analysis for the period of examination for the VFMPR (2010-2012), the programmes under review experienced a number of administrative changeovers. Prior to the commencement of the DCYA in June 2011, programme administration fell within the Departments of Education and Science; Health; Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The Youth Affairs Unit (YAU), which in recent years has been centrally involved in the administration of the programmes, also experienced changes of location: prior to 2009, it was located in the Department of Education and Science; it then moved to the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs before being located in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2011. The DCYA assumed responsibility for all three programmes in the second half of the VFMPR period of examination and thus the window for any required administrative reform for DCYA itself is limited to 18 months.

Figure 2 identifies the administrative structure for youth programmes. For example, in 2012 the DCYA issued 442 grants via a range of organisations to local services on the ground. The governance arrangements inherited by DCYA were complex. The YAU attempted to moderate some of the effects of structural complexity by modest administrative reforms.

Figure 2: Administrative structure for youth programmes (2012)



However, data consistency (which a governance system involving contractual partners relies on to indicate performance levels) was generally poor over the examination period. Given that judgements regarding performance in these circumstances are so data-reliant, the poor quality and reliability of data submitted rendered those with governance responsibility unable to make judgements regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the programmes. Moreover, the governance system, *inter alia*, was incapable of distinguishing between poor, satisfactory and excellent service provision. Lack of services being required to exit from the programmes as a consequence of poor performance perhaps further indicates this structural incapacity.

These findings question the capacity of the governance arrangements as they stand to adequately fulfil their purpose. The governance structure should actively support a process of focused implementation. However, the arrangements actually complicated the consistent application of programme objectives. Indeed, the activities of multiple actors without a clear department-led compliance structure communicating clear 'alignment' expectations permitted fuzzy interpretation of national programme objectives, most notably in some service providers' conception of targeting.

There is a need for a re-focusing and prioritisation of effort in the administrative system at all levels to improve governance capacity and a re-appraisal of compliance measures by the DCYA to require service providers to play their part in supporting appropriate oversight and stewardship. In the face of depleted resources and the need for improvement in the oversight arrangements for programmes for targeted youth, there is significant 'discretionary workload' at VEC Youth Officer level where the future preferences of the DCYA (as funder) should influence their work activity priorities.

Rationale

The youth programmes under review have a complex history. They were established in different years and in different Government departments.

The LDTF and the YPFSF were established in 1997 and 1998 respectively to combat drug use among young people in disadvantaged areas. The SPY was established in the mid-1980s to increase the life chances of young people from disadvantaged areas. The SPY focuses on tackling unemployment, increasing educational attainment and combating crime among young people, while the LDTF and the YPFSF focus on reducing drug use among young people.

Data trends for key indicators were examined over time to identify whether there remains a valid rationale for targeting these groups of young people. Outcomes for young people have been mixed in recent years. On the one hand, the deteriorating economic situation has increased unemployment and poverty rates for young people of working age. On the other hand, the available evidence shows that overall drug use, youth crime and youth homelessness have declined and Leaving Certificate retention rates have increased for young people.

The youth programmes under examination target 'at risk' young people who are disadvantaged in different ways, so the outcomes for young people from DEIS schools, from particular social classes and with low levels of education are particularly significant as measures of disadvantage. Young people from DEIS schools continue to experience higher levels of non-attendance, suspensions and expulsions at school and the gap between students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools is widening. Young people in DEIS schools also have lower Leaving Certificate retention rates, although the gap between students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools has narrowed.

Young people with lower levels of education have experienced proportionately higher unemployment levels and are more likely to not be in education employment or training (NEET) and young people whose parents are in a semi-skilled or unskilled profession are more likely to have engaged in illicit drug use.

In addition, youth crime appears to be more concentrated on a smaller number of young people as the gap between number of referrals to the Garda Diversion Programme and the number of young people referred has widened.

For these reasons, along with the projected increase in the overall youth population in the coming years (which will presumably include a proportionate increase in the number of young people requiring targeted support), there remains a valid rationale for the provision of youth programmes for young people who are disadvantaged.

Efficiency

Efficiency examines the ratio of inputs to outputs. An activity is said to be more efficient than another where more outputs are produced for a given level of inputs or where the same level of outputs are produced with a lower level of inputs.

There are a number of data issues that hampered a comprehensive analysis of efficiency from being made and prevented accurate comparisons of efficiency between providers. Consequently, a small sample had to be relied on for estimates of salary costs and staff numbers, as well as estimates of average daily and annual participant numbers and unit costs. Appropriate caution is therefore advised in terms of generalising findings.

Total expenditure on the programmes declined by approximately 16% between 2010 and 2012. Estimates of overall staff salaries and non-pay costs for local services under the programmes both declined. The estimated total number of staff in local services was relatively unchanged between 2010 and 2012, which suggests that staff salary levels are likely to have declined over the period. Median participant numbers appear to have increased between 2010 and 2012, while funding has decreased, which means that the corresponding median unit cost per individual young person has decreased over the period.

While there is some indication of overall efficiency given the decline in median unit cost, there appears to be some differences between services that provided for young people with different need levels. Unit costs for services that only provided for young people with higher needs appear to be greater than for services that only provided for young people with lower needs. For services that provided for combinations of need levels (i.e. the vast majority), the pattern is less clear. Indeed, some combinations of higher and lower need levels attracted smaller unit costs than combinations of lower need levels. However, a closer examination of a selection of services that provided for both lower and higher need levels revealed that such services tended to provide activities for young people with high needs alongside activities that would attract a large number of young people. However, the sample size for this analysis is very small. More useful, consistent and disaggregated data is needed to be able to make any full assessment of efficiency. The development of new data requirements, where unit costs are profiled to reflect the relative degree of complexity being engaged, will assist in making appropriate comparisons between services and may also assist the DCYA in the development of a future costing structure.

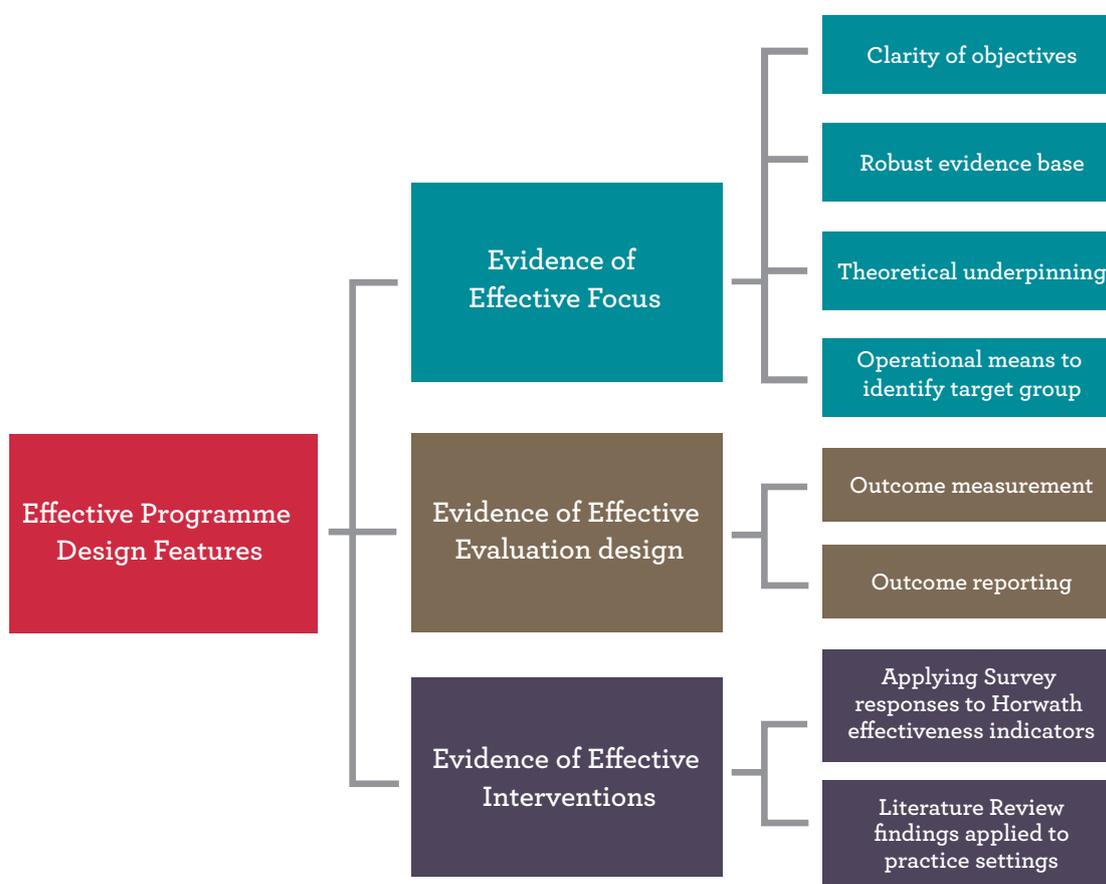
Effectiveness

The orthodox approach to measuring effectiveness is to attempt to gauge the degree of impact of the programmes, i.e. all things considered, are there demonstrable benefits derived from the programmes by young people that can be specifically attributed to programme inputs? In order to make such judgements, it would be necessary to be able to (a) clearly identify the target group for the programme; (b) randomly separate programme recipients from non-programme recipients; (c) apply specified programmes for specified periods and with specified intensity; (d) use standard instruments to establish a baseline measure and follow up measures to identify improvements; and (e) track individual young people over specified periods to determine whether the programme had longer term impact and/or identify the efficacy period of the programme. However, the lack of measurable and verifiable outcome data available for this VFMPR examination made the task of separating good performance from poor performance near impossible.

Notwithstanding the complexities, there are certain key programme design components that help determine whether resources are being used effectively. These components possibly fall short of a developing international Gold Standard of evidence⁹ in terms of evaluated programmes and the practice of evaluation. However, they do offer a coherent evidence-informed practical approach to determining rationale, efficiency and effectiveness, fitting more generally with a Theory of Change/Logic Model type approach which is attracting significant support in this area.

The present VFMPR provides a framework to indicate the degree to which certain design components are present in the programmes being delivered across the country (*see Figure 3*). Service design components can be broadly categorised into features that (a) focus on intended programme objectives; (b) relate to evaluation design; and (c) relate to effective interventions.

Figure 3: Framework for effectiveness analysis



The examination begins with an analysis of these effective programme design features. The VFMPR then uses findings from a review of the literature relating to targeted youth programmes, especially commissioned for the study, to identify seven potent programme outcomes, namely: Communication skills; confidence and agency; planning and problem-solving; relationships; creativity and imagination; resilience and determination; and emotional intelligence. These outcomes appear to be associated with improvements for targeted young people.

These outcomes are then used to further examine local practice in 13 sample sites to indicate evidence of effective practice. Data is secured from the VFMPR Survey, visits to the sample of local services (where both front-line staff and young people were interviewed) and an administrative review of a sample of progress reports spanning the period 2010-2012, in addition to effectiveness-related material derived from the literature.

Evidence of effective focus

Evidence from survey returns indicated a moderate degree of congruence between service effort and the needs domains intended by the programmes. While it is difficult to gauge whether targeting meets any normative expectations due to the absence of standards, the report finds evidence of progressive targeting, i.e. increased targeting correlating with need-complexity. The absence of requirements for services to specify geographical catchment areas is a key weakness in terms of performance reporting and local accountability. Using data from semi-structured interviews, the report indicates evidence of 'presence' of theory-of-change informing practice. This is a positive feature, demonstrating clear logic in deciding how to deploy finite professional effort. However, the report cannot make a judgement regarding how widespread or routine these theoretical underpinnings are in regulating practice due to the small sample size.

Evidence of effective design

The report identifies successive improvements in outcome reporting over the period of examination. However, this finding refers to a small sample of reports reviewed over a 3-year period. Moreover, these improvements start from a low base (i.e. accurate recording of information which legitimately constitutes an outcome). Very few outcomes were quantified, which means that service performance comparisons are near impossible. While most local services claimed to measure outcome and impact, from survey responses it is unlikely that sufficient tools are in place to conduct these measurements.

Evidence of effective interventions

A basic review of interventions/activities indicated by survey responses, using features identified in the Horwath Review (2009), yielded mixed results in terms of whether they were likely to be 'direct' and 'intense'. Seven outcome areas, identified in the VFMPR literature review, were applied retrospectively to local accounts of practice using semi-structured interviews in a selection of sites. Significantly, the study found evidence of 'presence' of these seven mechanisms that were (a) intentionally and consciously applied by professionals in pursuit of beneficial outcomes, and (b) where beneficial outcomes were experienced by young people. However, the method is limited to only highlighting *instances* specific to the sites visited. While *evidence of presence* is an important reference point, it falls far short of any claims regarding outcome-focused practice being adopted as routine.

The evidence suggests that complexity and uncertainty relating to performance measurement will continue to be a significant issue in such areas of human services, highlighting the current oversight inadequacies and future challenges for the funds' governance structure.

Continued relevance

The VFMPR examination identifies a fit between the targeted youth programmes and current DCYA strategy. While the evidence relating to programme efficacy is not conclusive, there is promising academic support that, effectively harnessed, these programmes can make a difference.

The report finds that the programmes can provide a significant contribution to improving outcomes for the young people involved and should be considered for ongoing public funding. However, this assessment is tempered by the firm belief, highlighted in the VFMPR, that the programmes and performance governance arrangements require significant reform. More specifically, the reform areas relate to the development of a robust performance evaluation

framework to inform the way in which the DCYA offers incentives for high programme performance and issues sanctions for poor programme performance.

The residual nature of systemic problems for a significant number of young people over time indicates that intervention over and above any solely market-based solution is required. The examination considers whether the DCYA should directly purchase individual youth 'programmes' rather than funding youth organisations to design *and* deliver services. However, uncertain evidence regarding 'need' and 'programme fit' introduces potential risks in terms of routine purchasing of off-the-peg programmes. Alternative propositions for the administration of the programmes are considered. However, given that many of the arrangements are only recently in situ, it is suggested that the DCYA focus its efforts on improving programme value and that this will be of benefit wherever ultimate governance responsibility for the programmes lies.

The analysis suggests that there is *no ideal* governance configuration. Both centralised and local governance options carry opportunities and risks. Centralising and ring-fencing resources for the DCYA derived from other parts of the administrative system, on the face of it, enhances oversight capability. However, the nature of these programmes is such that local presence and attention to the nuances of practice carry a performance evaluation premium. Nevertheless, local administration without reform is likely to retain the status quo position of an inability to gauge overall programme performance and distinguish relative performance between providers.

On balance, the report recommends that the DCYA works through the suggested reforms with the existing stakeholders. *The preference suggested is presented as a challenge rather than a solution.* The proposal is premised on the readiness for change on the part of each element of the existing governance system to participate in an improved accountability structure in line with the demands of a publicly funded programme of this magnitude. The alternative options should be kept under review.

Conclusion

This review of the Special Projects for Youth, Young People's Facilities and Services Fund and Local Drugs Task Force youth programmes has raised a number of issues that have significantly hampered the authors' attempts to determine value for money, whether of the programmes as a whole or in discriminating relative performance by individual service providers *within* the programmes. This is obviously an unsatisfactory situation for programmes, which accounted for approximately €128 million public investment for the period under examination.

Study in the area of human services evaluation presents inherent complexities in relation to performance measurement. These measurement problems become further complicated where programmes, such as those under examination, enjoy high levels of local discretion and are not uniformly codified. There are logical reasons why the programmes should be so tailored to suit local conditions in the many communities in Ireland which are served. However, a secondary complicating feature, poor data quality, presented the review with additional, and in parts insurmountable, analytical challenges.

Nevertheless, despite the weaknesses in data quality and in the structures and processes that govern the overall delivery of programmes, the review found evidence of service delivery which was reasonably well aligned with the original intentions of the programmes. Furthermore, from directly interviewing front-line staff and young people, elements of the relationship-based services delivered by youth providers clearly fitted with an (albeit imperfect) emerging evidence base, identified in a review of the literature specially commissioned for this study.

While the VFMPR itself is a summative evaluation, making judgements and reaching conclusions based on past performance, it also fulfils a necessary 'formative' role in terms of recommending focus for future direction. By identifying weaknesses in the arrangements during the period under examination (2010-2012), it is intended that the reforms necessary to improve future

efficiency and effectiveness can be more clearly determined and presented; with the intention that they are acted upon.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Recommendations of this VFMPR which are agreed should form part of a time-lined implementation plan, which DCYA officials should be responsible for.

Recommendation 2

The three youth programmes under review should be amalgamated into one funding scheme for targeted youth programmes.

Recommendation 3

The DCYA should design and construct a new performance-related governance system that is fit for purpose. Costs (including staffing resources), outputs and outcomes should be clearly specified as part of routine performance monitoring.

Recommendation 4

The governance capacity of the DCYA to manage performance should be enhanced. The required additional governance capacity for the programme should be sourced from existing Youth Officer time, requiring a rationalisation and replacement of professional effort from existing activities to governance oversight.

Recommendation 5

Overall demographic trends and the underlying patterns relating to the needs of young people outlined in this report should be clearly taken into account by the DCYA in terms of future prioritisation and the design of programmes.

Recommendation 6

The DCYA should require that local service planners, in identifying the groups of young people that will be engaged in a given year, include a quantified estimate of the differential need levels of the young people or groups of young people involved. This estimate should be based on clear demographic data and other local intelligence, and specify the operational means to assure appropriate engagement. The DCYA may wish to adapt the Hardiker Model as an overall frame of reference. DCYA output expectations and funding profile should reflect these more contoured assessments.

Recommendation 7

The DCYA should create new output counting rules to ensure fair comparability in terms of how and where service effort is deployed. This exercise should be routinely audited to improve national consistency in local assessments.

Recommendation 8

The DCYA should undertake a baseline exercise with all providers, working in conjunction with Pobal, to physically map the catchment area of each service to areas which are co-terminus with CSO units of measure.

Recommendation 9

The DCYA should create a deliberative forum involving officials, service providers and academics to weigh up the evidence and arrive at workable interpretations of the key messages that should inform policy and intervention choices. The forum should actively consider means of engaging young people in these deliberations.

Recommendation 10

The DCYA should construct a coherent logic model for targeted youth programmes, identifying the theory of change, specifying data collection points and giving clear direction in terms of methods of measurement.

Recommendation 11

The DCYA should adopt the seven outcome mechanisms identified in the literature review as a preliminary package of proximal outcomes for deliberation and which could form the focus point for service provider performance.

Recommendation 12

As part of the implementation plan, long-term governance arrangements should be kept under periodic review.

Introduction



This chapter outlines the context of the review and explains why the Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund, the Special Projects for Youth and the Local Drugs Task Force youth projects in particular were chosen for examination. It also outlines the scope and Terms of Reference for the review, and the composition and role of the Steering Committee.

1.1 Context of review

In October 2012, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) identified certain ‘youth programmes’ to be the subject of a Value for Money and Policy Review (VFMPR). The guidance for selection of programmes is set out in the Public Spending Code, which specifies that:

‘All VFMPRs should be targeted at areas of significant expenditure where there is greatest potential for them to add value and influence policy developments ...’¹⁰

and

‘... significant elements of expenditure should be covered and VFMPRs should not be focused on schemes that account for very minor elements of spending ... Departments should focus in particular on the more discretionary areas of programme expenditure, where issues of both effectiveness and efficiency feature strongly’¹¹.

This is the first VFMPR exercise undertaken by the DCYA. Being a relatively new Government department, the DCYA was keen to harness the VFMPR as one of a range of change initiatives designed to rationalise, reform and improve programmes and areas of policy responsibility assumed by the Department (from other departments) when it was set up. In this regard, the VFMPR was considered to have considerable ‘formative’ properties in addition to its core and more orthodox role of judging past programme performance.

1.2 Choice of programmes under examination

In terms of the VFMPR *adding most value*, ‘measurability’ complexities, in addition to the scale of investment, were significant factors for DCYA senior management in the selection of youth programmes. ‘Human services’ as a generic category is regarded as an area of activity that presents inherent evaluation problems, particularly in relation to performance measurement.¹² The youth programmes in question presented additional challenges, including complicated governance structures, considerable (and relatively uncodified) local discretion by practitioners and significant information asymmetry between service providers and DCYA officials. These performance measurement challenges are present variously in other areas of DCYA programme responsibility, which means that a VFMPR focus on youth programmes offered the likelihood of positive spill-over benefits in terms of strategic learning and potential application of findings.

The total budgeted expenditure for 2012 for the DCYA Youth Affairs Unit amounted to €56.806 million or €182.238 million for the 3-year period under review, 2010-2012 (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Total expenditure for youth programmes now administered by Youth Affairs Unit, DCYA¹³ (2010-2012)

Programme	2010 (€m)	2011 (€m)	2012 (€m)	2010-2012 (€m)
Special Projects for Youth Scheme	19.476	18.156	17.042	54.674
Young People's Facilities and Services Fund 1	7.859	7.192	6.725	21.776
Young People's Facilities and Services Fund 2	17.888	16.354	14.607	48.849
Local Drugs Task Force Scheme		1.433	1.340	2.773
Youth Information Centres	2.005	1.862	1.425	5.292
Youth Service Grant Scheme	12.327	11.444	11.051	34.822
Local Youth Club Grant Scheme	1.3	1.035	1.035	3.37
Gaisce	0.819	0.738	0.690	2.247
Leargas	0.585	0.527	0.492	1.604
Capacity development of VEC/Youth Officers	1.495	1.368	1.39	4.253
Other programmes	0.732	0.837	1.009	2.578
Total	64.486	60.946	56.806	182.238

Source: Youth Affairs Unit, DCYA

Three specific funding streams¹⁴ within this overall expenditure were examined:

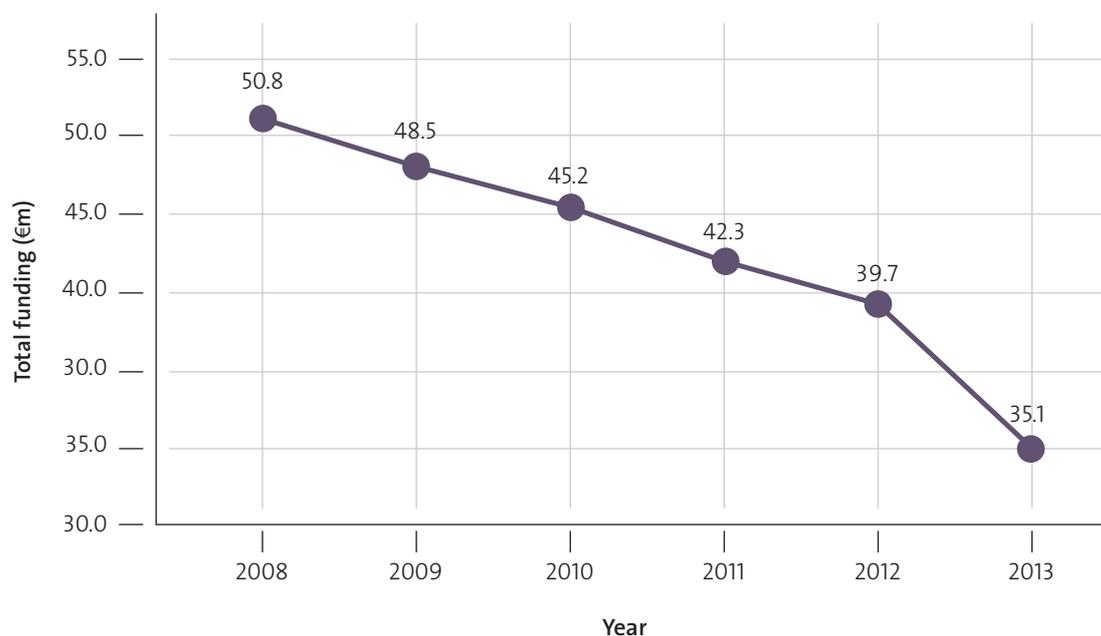
- Special Projects for Youth (€17.042 million);
- Young People's Facilities and Services Fund 1 and 2 (€21.33 million);
- Local Drugs Task Force projects (€1.34 million).

These budget lines totalled **€39.71 million or approximately 70%** of the total grants budget provision administered by the Youth Affairs Unit in 2012. Similarities in these funding streams¹⁵, specifically in relation to their intended 'targeted provision', local delivery, focus on 'disadvantaged or 'at risk'¹⁶ youth delivering direct human services, permitted, within the scope of the VFMPR, consideration of **a single examination** of the relationship between original programme objectives, service logic, inputs and outcomes. While individually each of these funding streams may have originated from different sources, the close convergence of the objectives of these programmes permits a VFMPR analysis to consider the individual funding streams within one common programme descriptor. This commonality should have permitted some calculation of service coverage across the country and across youth populations, profiled by levels of local need. Such an examination should also have yielded comparative cost-related data, of value in terms of gauging efficiencies.

The remaining funding streams within the Youth Affairs Unit's expenditure in Table 1.1 represent a number of grants that are more diverse in nature. In addition, with the exception of the Youth Service Grant Scheme, the remaining funding streams attract smaller budget allocations of between approximately €0.5 million and €2 million. These specific areas were excluded from the remit of the review, accepting that they may be nevertheless directly or indirectly impacted by the findings of the review. Funding that supported capacity development of Vocational Education Committees (VECs) (now Education and Training Boards (ETBs)) paid salaries of Youth Officers in most VECs. These Youth Officers had an oversight role in relation to youth work provision in their respective VEC areas. As a result, this funding line is referred to throughout the report.

While the analysis in this VFMPR is focused on the 2010-2012 time period, where more disaggregated data is available, Figure 1.1 shows the overall trend in funding for the programmes over a longer time period to get a broader sense of the changes in funding levels over recent years.

Figure 1.1: Overall trend in total funding of the YPFSS, SPY and LDTF (2008-2013)



Notes: Figure produced by VFMPR team based on information from the Youth Affairs Unit. Figures for 2008-2010 do not include funding for the LDTF since it was not administered by the Youth Affairs Unit until 2011.

Source: Youth Affairs Unit, DCYA

Funding for the youth programmes has been reduced consistently since 2008. Total funding has decreased from approximately €50.8m in 2008 to €35.1m in 2013, a decline of approximately 31%.

It is important to note that this VFMPR deals with **'youth programmes'** (i.e. the effective and efficient achievement of policy objectives) and not the effectiveness and efficiency of **'youth work'**, which is essentially a professional/policy consideration outside the scope of this review. Of equal importance, the focus of this examination from both efficiency and effectiveness perspectives relates to **the intended positive change brought about with and for a young person** (the policy objective) as a consequence of the Exchequer investment in these targeted schemes, as opposed to limiting its focus to an analysis of service output. A 'programme' as opposed to a 'professional' focus permits examination of efficiencies and effectiveness in securing objectives irrespective of the particular philosophical, practice and professional make-up of any one organisation within the large number and range of providers receiving grant income and a wider appreciation of new programme technologies in this area.

Given the broad array of provision funded across these schemes, it was not possible to capture every nuance; rather, the review aims to cover the bulk of service delivery, typically local targeted services delivered directly to youth. Without applying this focus, it would have added further complexity to an already complex evaluation task. The smaller range of provision which does not fit this profile can be considered separately by the DCYA, informed by the general VFMPR recommendations.

It should be stated at the outset that well-documented difficulties in evaluating human services, particular complexities in the arrangements for funding recipients for these programmes, the wide variety and diversity of practice and the paucity of reliable output or outcome data presented particular challenges for this VFMPR. These issues are dealt with in more detail in subsequent chapters. However, the review does attempt to indicate performance despite the data issues and proposes recommendations in terms of achieving more coherence to assist in future assessments of efficiency and effectiveness.

1.3 Terms of Reference for the VFMPR

There are standard questions for VFMPR Terms of Reference¹⁷, with a corresponding reporting framework in a ‘balanced scorecard’ format¹⁸:

1. What are the rationale and the objectives for the scheme?
2. Are the objectives still relevant, in light of policy priorities?
3. To what extent has the scheme been effective in achieving these objectives?
4. How efficiently has the scheme been delivered?
5. How does the scheme rate against alternative ways of achieving the same objectives?

The following Terms of Reference for the VFMPR on Youth Programmes are based on the above standards but tailored to this specific VFMPR, and were adopted by the Steering Committee overseeing the VFMPR:

1. Identify the objectives of the youth programmes in question.
2. Examine the current and continued validity and relevance of the objectives of the youth programmes and their compatibility with the overall strategy of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.
3. Define the outputs associated with the youth programmes’ activities and identify the level and trend of those outputs.
4. Examine the extent that the youth programmes’ objectives have been achieved and comment on the effectiveness with which they have been achieved.
5. Identify the level and trend of costs and staffing resources associated with the youth programmes and thus comment on the efficiency with which they have achieved their objectives.
6. Evaluate the degree to which the objectives warrant the allocation of public funding on a current and ongoing basis, and examine the scope for alternative policy or organisational approaches to achieving these objectives on a more efficient and/or effective basis.
7. Make recommendations for the future operation of the initiative and specify potential future performance indicators that might be used to better monitor and manage the performance of the youth programmes.

1.4 VFMPR Steering Committee

The Public Spending Code¹⁹ states that the Steering Committee should be chaired by an independent person. The Code also advises that the committee itself should be small and should meet only at key stages of the review. The committee should involve one senior official from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and other members ‘... *whether from within the Department/Office or from elsewhere – with knowledge and experience that is relevant*

to the subject matter of the review and/or to the Department's review/audit process more generally'. The Steering Committee should not involve any member with a sectional interest. Members of the Steering Committee for the VFMPR are listed in Table 1.2, together with their areas of expertise.

Table 1.2: Membership of Steering Committee for VFMPR of Youth Programmes

Position	Name	Expertise
Chairperson	Tim Maverley Department of Justice and Equality	Finance, economics, evaluation
Lead Evaluator	Sean Redmond Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Evaluation, governance
Evaluator	Richard Davis Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Economics
DCYA rep	Moira O'Mara Department of Children and Youth Affairs (replaced by Catherine Hazlett Department of Children and Youth Affairs)	Finance, youth affairs
DPER rep	Dermot O'Sullivan Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (replaced by Larry Dunne Department of Public Expenditure and Reform)	Finance, evaluating public expenditure
Independent	Ronan Tierney, Internal Audit, Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Audit, finance
Independent	Richard Boyle Institute of Public Administration	Economics, economic evaluation

1.5 Structure of report

Following this introductory chapter, the report is presented as follows:

Chapter 2 provides an outline of the roles of the DCYA and the Youth Affairs Unit, and an overview of youth provision nationally. It also provides a historical overview of the youth programmes under review, an outline of recent developments in the area and a summary of findings from previous evaluations of the programmes.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological strategy for the review. The methodology draws significantly on the Programme Logic Model (PLM) approach as its overall frame of reference. The chapter identifies the key elements of the PLM approach, applies the standard PLM elements to the youth programmes under examination and outlines the key evaluation questions for rationale, efficiency and effectiveness posed by the review. In addition, the chapter highlights the complexities inherent in evaluating human services, the data challenges associated specifically with the programmes under examination and the rationale for the choice of specific methods for the VFMPR; describing in particular how the review attempts to moderate these complexities and challenges.

Chapter 4 describes the governance arrangements of the youth programmes in terms of structure and business processes, originating at departmental level, passing through intermediary stages and finally to the co-production of improvements by front-line staff for young people – the ultimate policy objective. The chapter proposes a 'normative' position, i.e. what is required from the governance system at each stage in terms of efficient and effective implementation of policy objectives. The adequacy of the governance system is then examined in terms of VFMPR findings, particularly in the context of performance monitoring.

Chapter 5 examines the rationale of the three programmes to establish if the policy intervention is necessary by examining the programme objectives. The examination of programme objectives is intended to inform the selection of a number of outcome measures for the target group that are examined to identify whether the rationale remains valid.

Chapter 6 assesses the efficiency of the youth programmes under examination. The composition of inputs by department, subhead and programme expenditure are analysed, outlining pay and non-pay expenditure, administration and other components. The activities are examined by looking at survey responses from providers listing the activities that they are engaged in. The average daily and total numbers of participants are examined from a random sample of projects that completed the VFMPR Survey. These outputs are compared across the need levels of young people for whom services are provided. Efficiency is assessed by examining the unit cost per young person of each service. The unit costs are compared by need levels and governance model.

Chapter 7 considers the evidence supporting whether the objectives of the youth programmes have been achieved. It focuses on providing evidence of programme 'outcomes'. Attempts were made to examine those elements of programme design that facilitate greater effectiveness and identify to what extent these attributes were present. This section also draws on a literature review, undertaken by the Centre for Effective Services, commissioned to identify the key active ingredients of programmes which in our review of the evidence appear to bring about positive change for youth targeted in the key domains covered by the schemes. These outcomes are applied retrospectively to accounts of programme activity provided by front-line staff and young people.

Chapter 8 deals with the question of whether there is justification for the continued allocation of public funds to the schemes. In undertaking this task, we consider the schemes' continued relevance with reference to the focus of the DCYA's *Statement of Strategy, 2011-2014*, evidence of continuing need and evidence from the research literature regarding the suitability of such programmes in improving outcomes. The chapter summarises the shortcomings in current governance arrangements and outlines the features of governance necessary for the performance management of such programmes. Finally, the chapter reviews five delivery propositions in terms of improving efficiency and effectiveness.

Chapter 9 outlines the conclusions in terms of governance arrangements, rationale, efficiency, effectiveness and continued relevance, and makes appropriate recommendations based on these conclusions.

Attached to the report is a list of **References** that informed the review and a number of **appendices** detailing aspects of the analysis.

Background



This chapter provides an outline of the roles of the DCYA and the Youth Affairs Unit, as well as an overview of youth service provision nationally. It also provides a historical overview of the youth programmes under review, an outline of recent developments in the area and a summary of findings from previous evaluations of the programmes.

2.1 Department of Children and Youth Affairs

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) was established in 2011 and brings together a range of functions related to children and young people that were previously the responsibilities of the Ministers for Health; Education and Skills; Justice and Law Reform; and Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The DCYA has a mandate to provide a range of universal and targeted services for children and young people; to ensure quality arrangements are in place for interventions related to child welfare and protection, family support, adoption, school attendance and youth crime; and to harmonise Government policy to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.²⁰

In terms of service provision, the DCYA is responsible for arranging for the provision of services for youth, children in care, aftercare, services in respect of family support, education welfare and youth justice. The DCYA is also responsible for the Adoption Authority of Ireland, the Ombudsman for Children's Office and the newly formed Child and Family Agency, Tusla, which was established in 2014.

The Youth Affairs Unit (YAU) of the DCYA is responsible for the development and funding of youth services, including funding support for national youth organisations and for some other youth initiatives such as An Gaisce. It provides grant funding for several hundred local youth service providers throughout the country through a number of different youth programmes. These programmes mostly provide funding to youth service organisations to provide services for young people in disadvantaged areas. The YAU also provides funding for capacity building in Education and Training Boards (ETBs)²¹ that administer the funding. The Special Projects for Youth (SPY), Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSS) and the Local Drugs Task Force (LDTF) are the subject of this VFMPR and relate to approximately 70% of total YAU programme expenditure.

2.2 Provision of youth programmes in Ireland

The programmes under review are delivered by and large by voluntary youth work organisations. The Irish youth work sector is organisationally and thematically diverse, with a significant infrastructure comprising the voluntary sector and community-based organisations and services which provide services in the non-formal or out-of-school time domain. Such provision includes full-time staff-led youth organisations and youth services, volunteer-led youth activities, arts, recreational and culture-based initiatives, uniformed and faith-based provision and a range of national programmes in the areas of health promotion, child protection and youth exchanges, which support the youth sector in the provision of services for young people.

The work of local youth projects is assisted and supported by Youth Officers employed by Education and Training Boards (former Vocational Education Committees). These Youth Officers have a dual role in the implementation of the National Quality Standards Framework for youth work in local youth projects, both in supporting youth work projects during the process as well as carrying out an external assessment function in relation to progress being made in improving their practice and service provision.

Funding for youth programmes in Ireland is provided from a variety of sources. Public funding is mostly provided by the DCYA, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS). The DCYA provides the majority of funding for services through its youth programmes.²² The HSE provides funding to youth service providers for health-specific initiatives targeted at young people. The IYJS (which consists of staff from both the Department of Justice and Equality and the DCYA, and is co-located in the DCYA) administers funding to local youth organisations as part of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) programme. These projects are funded to divert children from crime by engaging them in activities to develop their sense of community and their social skills.²³

2.3 Youth programmes under review

The three programmes under review are now administered by the Youth Affairs Unit of the DCYA and are encompassed in the DCYA's *Statement of Strategy, 2011-2014* and in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020*. However, an important context is that the youth programmes originated in other line departments significantly pre-dating the commencement of the DCYA in June 2011. Funding for Special Projects for Youth (SPY) originated in the Department of Education and Science, the Local Drugs Task Force (LDTF) projects originated in the Department of Health, and the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF) originated in the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation.²⁴

From a review of references to the programmes from administrative and political sources²⁵, as well as a review of available references on websites of grant administrators, the programme objectives and the groups targeted by the youth programmes are presented below²⁶.

The **Special Projects for Youth (SPY)** were introduced in the mid-1980s, targeting the needs of young people who are disadvantaged due to a combination of all or some of the following needs:

- high youth population;
- youth unemployment;
- dependence on social welfare/unemployment assistance;
- social isolation;
- drug/substance abuse;
- homelessness (including temporary homelessness);
- problems of juvenile crime, vandalism and truancy;
- inadequate take-up of ordinary educational opportunities.

The **Local Drugs Task Force (LDTF)** programme was set up in 1997 and sought to encourage young people not to engage in drug-taking. In 2011, 21 of the LDTF projects were transferred to the DCYA's Youth Affairs Unit from the Department of Education.

The **Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF)** was established in 1998 to assist in the development of preventative strategies/initiatives in a targeted manner through the development of youth facilities in areas where a significant drug problem exists or has the potential to develop. The programme aims to attract 'at risk' young people and 'divert them away from the dangers of substance abuse'²⁷. The target group is 10-21 year-olds who are marginalised through a combination of risk factors relating to family background, environmental circumstances, educational disadvantage and involvement in crime and/or drugs. Originally operating in 14 Local Drugs Task Force Areas, as well as the urban areas of Limerick, Waterford, Carlow and Galway, recognising that the drug problem was not confined to the Task Force Areas, the programme was further extended in 2009 to Arklow, Athlone, Dundalk

and Wexford. The 1997 *Report of the Ministerial Task Force on Measures to Reduce the Demand for Drugs*²⁸ sets the context for the establishment of the YPFSP, when it recommended the establishment of a youth services development fund to develop youth services in disadvantaged areas where significant drug problems exist.

While these three programmes have different origins, there is a large degree of cross-over in terms of their objectives and the groups targeted, as seen in Table 2.1.

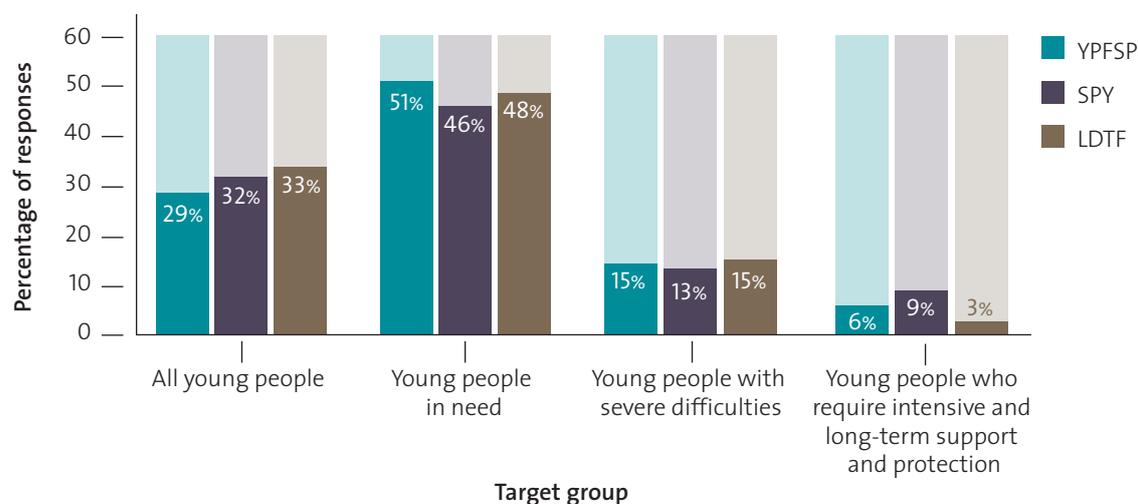
Table 2.1: Target groups for youth programmes

Target	YPFSF	SPY	LDTF
10-21 year-olds	✓	✓	✓
Area where drug problem exists	✓	✓	✓
Educational disadvantage	✓	✓	
Involvement in crime	✓	✓	
Disadvantaged area	✓	✓	
Homelessness		✓	

The three programmes share common objectives. At a minimal level, they share common descriptions in terms of being ‘targeted’ at young people or neighbourhoods where there is disadvantage, in particular, but not exclusively, relating to preventing the onset of or reducing drug-taking.

Figure 2.1 indicates how the three programmes apply effort to the different target groups. This information was obtained from the VFMPR Survey sent to service providers as part of this review.²⁹ While the policy matrix in Table 2.1 demonstrates the convergence of activity domains, Figure 2.1 clearly demonstrates that each of the three programmes are also fairly well distributed across the ‘need’ groupings. Although the ‘in need’ category appears to attract most service effort across *all programmes*, this finding is somewhat different to a recent economic analysis of youth work in this area which assumed that the different programmes were orientated at differing need levels.³⁰

Figure 2.1: Distribution of service effort across target groups



Note: Respondents could select a maximum of two options. N=290
 Source: VFMPR Survey

2.4 Current developments

The Youth Affairs Unit of the DCYA has been leading the development of an overarching and unifying youth policy framework, which is critical in the context of these programmes given their different origins. However, key roles have also fallen to service delivery organisations in terms of programme and knowledge development, often in collaboration with academic institutions and other sources of expertise³¹. The development of knowledge and theory has been critical given the imperfect evidence base in terms of youth programmes more generally³² and in terms of interventions designed to bring about behaviour change in particular³³.

The National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF)³⁴ led by the Youth Affairs Unit (YAU) commenced in July 2010 and has been an important element of this ‘evidence-informed’ policy development. While the framework is a discipline-centred model related to ‘youth work’, it aims to be cross-cutting across various practice methodologies employed by youth organisations and in service domains that extend beyond necessarily the youth work profession. Its intent and methods are therefore relevant here in the context of developing clear logic for **targeted** programmes for youth. The NQSF provides a comprehensive means of ‘self-assessment’ for local services to plan and evaluate their service provision, intended to result in ‘an improvement in good practice and better value for money and will assist youth organisations and services in addressing the developmental needs of young people to an even greater extent and in a more cost-effective manner’³⁵.

Most VEC Youth Officers are involved in providing support and verification for the quality framework for those services participating in the programme. The YAU intends to complete roll-out of the NQSF by the end of 2014. The ‘bottom-up’ approach to planning developed via the NQSF promotes a systematic means for local approaches to service development.

The DCYA is currently also developing a Youth Strategy as a constituent strategy of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People*, published in 2014. Work on the Youth Strategy is in the early stages of development, but is intended to be finalised in late 2014. It will aim to enhance the provision of youth services and activities, and will, *inter alia*, promote coordination between Government departments and youth sector organisations with a view to maximising the effectiveness of the State funding available to support services for young people in future years. The *National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* is the first overarching policy of its kind and comprehends the age ranges spanning children and young people (0-24 years). It sets and centralises common outcomes, captures the policy commitments and prioritises key transformational goals for children and young people to be realised over the next seven years. It will accommodate a number of constituent strategies, such as Early Years, Youth and Participation. Youth programmes (targeted and non-targeted) fall within commitments to achieve five national outcomes, which intend to ensure that children and young people:

1. are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing;
2. are achieving their full potential in all areas of learning and development;
3. are safe and protected from harm;
4. have economic security and opportunity;
5. are connected, respected and contributing to their world.

2.5 Previous evaluations

Horwath Consulting Ireland and Matrix Knowledge Group were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the **LDTF** interim funded projects by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The evaluation assessed the contribution of the projects to LDTF plans and the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy, 2001-2008. A report was published in 2008 examining the structures, effectiveness, efficiency and value for money of the projects. The evaluation of the education and prevention projects that are the focus of this VFMPR concluded that projects funded under the LDTF provide a wide range of activities from drugs awareness in schools to providing for early school-leavers who are experimenting with drugs. The report notes that the challenges for the projects are to improve links with other services and to review if the LDTF is the most appropriate funding source for these interventions, particularly where projects are addressing generic risk factors, only one of which is drug use.

Horwath Consulting was also commissioned to undertake a Value for Money review of the **YPFSF** by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in 2009. This report made a number of recommendations, including:

- better focusing of programme objectives;
- more localised identification of community need using reliable evidence;
- more standardised methods of data collection and reporting;
- more standardised approach to measuring and assessing the needs of young people;
- ensuring a closer proximity between national decision-makers and the work on the ground;
- performance indicators being agreed prior to funding being allocated to local service providers;
- move toward multi-annual funding commitments;
- streamlining of local structures to better determine 'differing community funding sources';
- progress on devising a framework for future impact measurement.

However, the most important (and disappointing) finding from the Horwath Review (2009) was that it could not make a judgement on whether the YPFSF represented good value for money because of the lack of discriminating data.

It appears that proposals suggested by Horwath were, by and large, not acted upon. Reference is made later in the present report to the fact that elements of on-the-ground practice appear to resonate positively with developments in knowledge about what works in such schemes. However, the more prosaic tasks like defining clear objectives or setting performance indicators have seen little progress. When these matters were discussed with the YAU³⁶, it was stated that, in the four years since the Horwath Review was completed, the scheme under question (the YPFSF) had moved between three Government departments and that a strategic decision had been taken to bring all youth schemes within one policy framework as opposed to acting upon the findings relating to only one. There is an acknowledgement by the YAU that information management across youth schemes is problematic. Given the similarities between the schemes, however, there was potential to act on the Horwath recommendations in a manner that would benefit the range of targeted youth programmes.

2.6 Summary

The DCYA is a relatively new Government department and has taken over programmes from several different departments. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs is responsible for national policy relating to youth work. The YAU in the DCYA is responsible for the provision of the majority of public funding for youth programmes and the ETBs support the provision, coordination, administration and assessment of youth work services at local level.

The three youth programmes under review originated in different years and in different departments, but share similar objectives and target similar groups of young people. Funding is provided to local youth projects through the programmes.

In recent years, there has been a focus on providing quality youth services. The NQSF provides a means of self-assessment for local services, aimed at improving quality. A previous Value for Money review was undertaken on the YPFSF and found that a judgement could not be made regarding value for money because of the lack of discriminating data. It made several recommendations, but these were, by and large, not implemented.

Methodology



This chapter presents the methodological approach for the review and outlines the operational means for data collection. The methodology draws significantly on the Programme Logic Model (PLM) approach as its overall frame of reference. The chapter identifies the key elements of the PLM approach, applies the standard PLM elements to the youth programmes under examination and outlines the key evaluation questions for rationale, efficiency and effectiveness posed by the review. In addition, it highlights the complexities inherent in evaluating human services, the data challenges associated specifically with the programmes under examination and the rationale for the choice of specific methods for the VFMPR, describing in particular how the review attempts to moderate these complexities and challenges.

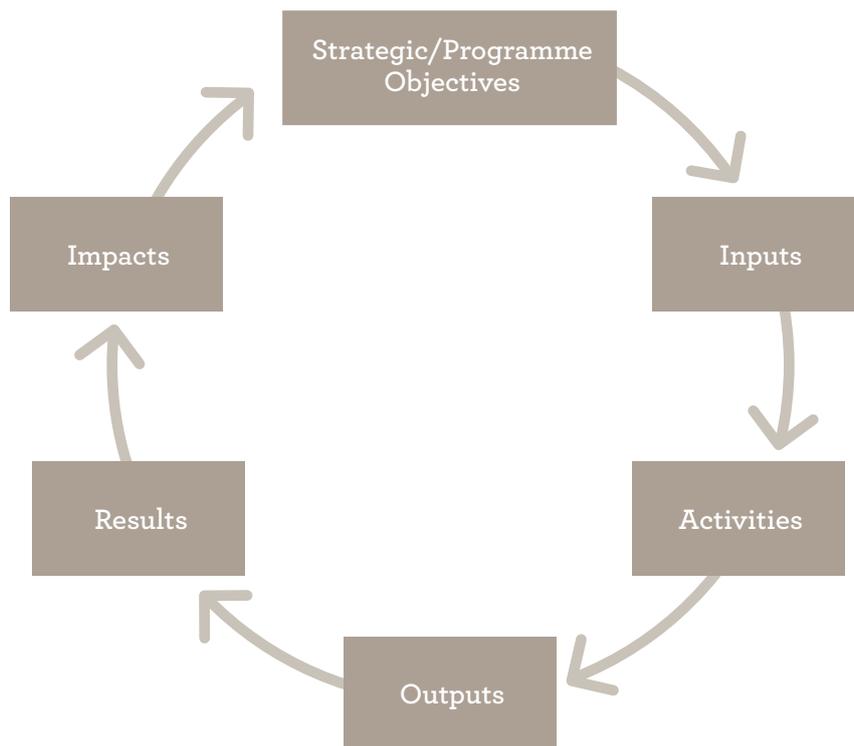
3.1 Applying standard logic model elements to the youth programmes under examination

The **Logic Model Approach** has become a widely employed model for assisting in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes. As advised in the *Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative: Guidance Manual* (Department of Finance, 2007), it has been adopted as the key evaluation framework for this study.

In its simplest form, the Programme Logic Model (PLM) can be summarised as a collection of interdependent programme elements which, when sequenced together, attempt to demonstrate a causal pathway linking resource inputs to beneficial outcomes (*see Figure 3.1*). These elements are:

- **Strategic/Programme Objectives** – identify ‘the desired outcome at the end of the strategy period’³⁷ as a consequence of successful implementation of the programme in question.
- **Inputs** – identify the resources (financial or otherwise) committed to a programme to support its design and delivery.
- **Activities** – refer to ‘the actions that transfer inputs into outputs’³⁸
- **Outputs** – refer to the goods or services produced by a programme.³⁹
- **Results** (also referred to as ‘outcomes’ or more specifically ‘proximal outcomes’ in this review) – refer to the ‘effects of the outputs on targeted beneficiaries’⁴⁰
- **Impacts** – refer to the wider benefits of the programme, including ‘the long-term effects on the targeted beneficiaries’.

Figure 3.1: Programme Logic Model – standard elements



These elements are now applied directly to the youth programmes under examination.

Strategic/Programme Objectives: Based on available documentation, the schemes are intended to improve outcomes for targeted youth. The objectives are top-line descriptors, permitting a large degree of local discretion. The needs domains covered by the schemes are wide, ranging from preventing drugs misuse to reducing anti-social behaviour to improving uptake of training and employment opportunities.

Inputs: The key inputs to the youth programmes relate to financial investment, which in turn supports staffing capacity to design and deliver programme activities. Funding is allocated under the three programmes by the DCYA's Youth Affairs Unit and is administered by a number of organisations, including VECs and local city and county councils, to smaller services and projects. Salaries for certain Youth Officers in most VECs⁴¹ were funded by the Youth Affairs Unit for capacity development and administrative functions in local VEC areas. The programme allocations include payments to local and national youth work providers (pay and non-pay) and payments for technical assistance, research, training and development. Financial data at a departmental level is available in the annual Revised Estimates for Public Services and is provided by the Youth Affairs Unit at the programme level. Total salary cost and the number of staff supported by the programme allocations are estimated based on the information provided in annual progress reports from a sample of providers. Management fees are estimated based on figures provided by respondents to the VFMPR Survey.

Activities: Service providers are engaged in multiple activities, which vary significantly at local level. Activities differ among providers in terms of (a) access and (b) intensity of engagement. Some activities are open to all young people in a given area, while other activities are targeted at young people with specific needs (e.g. young people in need, young people with severe difficulties, young people in need of long-term support and protection). Activities also differ by

intensity of engagement, with some more structured programmes for young people (such as 1:1 counselling) and others as once-off events (such as a concert or festival). Some providers may target one group of young people or specialise in one type of activity, and others will provide a range of activities for different target groups. Data on the types of young people targeted and the types of activities organised is available from the VFMPR Survey responses.

Outputs: Outputs for the youth programmes are the services that are provided to young people with the funding provided. This can be quantified by looking at the number of young people who engage with the services. Data have been provided by services on the average number of daily participants and the total number of individual participants in local services each year. Output data are provided by a sample of services where the correct calculation of outputs was confirmed.

Results: The results of programme activity (also described as ‘proximal outcomes’) refer to those improvements or changes that can specifically be attributed to programme activity. In these types of human service programmes, such proximal outcomes may relate to cognitive changes (e.g. behaviours and attitudes), skills or circumstantial improvements (e.g. getting a job) that can be directly attributable to programme effort.

Impact: The impact of youth programmes relates to significant improvements for young people in the specified needs domains.⁴² Proof of impact requires that programme beneficiaries should show demonstrably and significantly better outcomes than young people who have not been engaged. Aggregated together, local programmes should indicate trend improvements at county, regional and national level in the problem areas identified by the schemes and demonstrate that impacts can be attributed to programme effort. It should be noted that *proximal outcomes* are significantly more amenable to specification and measurement than *impact*. The impact analysis elements of the PLM presented insurmountable challenges to this VFMPR (see Section 3.3 below).

3.2 Evaluation criteria

The evaluation criteria (or questions posed by the review) have significantly determined the methodological design. Three evaluation criteria are considered – (a) rationale, (b) efficiency and (c) effectiveness⁴³. Each criterion is referenced to respective VFMPR Terms of Reference; the key questions are then identified and the approach to securing the data is described.

(a) Rationale

Terms of Reference

- Identify the objectives of the youth programmes in question.
- Examine the current and continued validity and relevance of the objectives of the youth programmes and their compatibility with the overall strategy of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Evaluation questions include: Why were the schemes originally conceived? Have these circumstances changed over time, in what direction and to what extent? Are the schemes in question the best means for securing the strategic objectives? What alternatives are available in terms of delivery?

The approach here is to secure and analyse evidence from original source documents setting out the funding conditions for the schemes. Continued relevance is examined with reference to analysis of top level data in the key domain areas (youth population, education, employment, youth crime, poverty, homelessness), examining trends over time and comparing original contexts with contemporary contexts (and forecasted trends where possible).

(b) Efficiency

Terms of Reference

- Define the outputs associated with the youth programmes' activities and identify the level and trend of those outputs.
- Identify the level and trend of costs and staffing resources associated with the youth programmes and thus comment on the efficiency with which they have achieved their objectives.

Efficiency examines the ratio of inputs to outputs. Evaluation questions include: What are the cost elements associated with the programmes and what are the trends in costs? What are the trends in salary costs and staff numbers associated with the youth programmes? What are the outputs for youth services? How are the outputs measured? What is the range of unit costs among different types of providers? Are programmes more efficient over time?

The different elements of the programme inputs are disaggregated to show the proportion of funding that is spent on programme administration and local projects (disaggregated to show estimates of salary cost and management fees) over the period of review. The trend in staff numbers is also shown over the period.

Daily and annual participant numbers are examined and trends analysed for the years under review. Median daily and annual participant numbers are compared across services that provide for young people with different need levels. Unit costs are calculated using total funding and the total numbers of individual annual participants to measure efficiency. Trends in unit costs are examined and median unit costs are compared across need levels.

The data used for the input analysis come from financial data in the annual *Revised Estimates for Public Service* publications and from the Youth Affairs Unit, as well as estimates of management fees and salary costs based on information from random samples of services. Output data was collected from a random sample of 43 projects since reliable output figures are not available for all projects.

(c) Effectiveness

Terms of Reference

- Examine the extent that the youth programmes' objectives have been achieved and comment on the effectiveness with which they have been achieved.

Evaluation questions include: What evidence is there of improved outcomes for programme participants? What evidence is there in relation to overall programme impact?

The types of outcomes and impact expected from the programmes will relate to evidence of reducing negative outcomes in the targeted domain areas (e.g. drugs misuse, unemployment, anti-social behaviour) and, correspondingly, positive improvements in behaviour and/or circumstances of the young people engaged.

However, as noted above, proof of impact is extremely difficult to substantiate in human service programmes and reliable outcome metrics are significantly limited. Consequently, significant scrutiny is also given to 'programme focus, design and intervention selection' as features associated with effectiveness. The evaluation criteria here include: How well are outcomes understood and documented by providers? Which outcomes are intended by providers and how

closely do these relate to overall scheme objectives? How well are outcomes measured? How does programme activity link with improved outcomes? What evidence is there that the types of activities engaged in by services have the capability to yield the desired results?

To answer these questions, a sample of documents (progress reports) completed annually by service providers is reviewed and supplemented by data secured by a survey of providers. These data are further triangulated with qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted locally with a purposeful sample of services. Interviews were undertaken directly with young people engaged in the programmes. Judgements regarding the likely effectiveness on interventions are further supported with reference to the available literature in the area.

Governance

Importantly, governance considerations cross-cut these evaluation criteria given that actual delivery of programmes occurs at the end of a series of transactions (*see Figure 3.2 for governance of youth programmes*). The governance system commences with DCYA efforts to implement policy at national level and ends with professionals delivering interventions on the ground, designed to improve a situation for a young person across a large number of different localities in Ireland. In Chapter 4 of this review on ‘Governance arrangements’, the components that *should* feature in a governance system designed to monitor performance are identified. Documentary evidence, data derived from semi-structured interviews and an exercise reviewing publicly available policy-related information (including Parliamentary questions) are used to compare the actual oversight arrangements with what would be expected to be in place to ensure appropriate performance governance.

3.3 Methodological limits

There are a number of issues and challenges relating to this VFMPR that the VFMPR Team and the Steering Committee were conscious of in designing its methodological approach.

Evaluating human services

Evaluation of youth programmes, like many human services, is complicated by the fact that there are few reliable measurement tools; possibly none other than the Randomised Control Trial (RCT), that have the capacity to ‘prove’ a direct cause–effect relationship between resource input and programme impact. This reality is certainly not unique to the youth programmes under examination and serves to temper the expectations of what can be deduced in terms of *impact* from this review.⁴⁴ Programme inputs and outputs are so distant from overall impact (further mediated by the many unforeseen circumstances and consequences that occur in local communities) that for this VFMPR focus is more appropriately applied to assessing *proximal outcomes*, which can be more directly attributed to programme effort. Proximal outcomes *can* be linked to overall impact using robust evidence-based theories of change, which are flexible enough to accommodate rival explanations and multiple path-dependent destinations for young people.⁴⁵ This type of methodological approach – which attempts to gauge the particular *contribution* of a programme to higher level positive change, as opposed to attempting to measure overall impact from the outset – is now attracting significant support in the evaluation literature⁴⁶ and is, for methodological and practical reasons, particularly apposite for this type of study. However, even with proximal outcomes, the literature acknowledges significant measurability problems⁴⁷, introducing significant complexity into any assessment of effectiveness and efficiency. These challenges should not be surprising given that the ‘improvement’, which is the focus for the evaluation, may be particularly nuanced, for example, positive behaviour or attitude changes. The difficulties regarding measurement are compounded

from an evaluation perspective by significant *information asymmetry*.⁴⁸ For the period in question, the DCYA was largely reliant on service provider organisations for information about efficiency and effectiveness. In an attempt to mitigate the measurability problems associated with the programmes, we revert to *programme design* as a proxy for effectiveness.

Data challenges specific to this VFMPR

All youth services in receipt of funding from the programmes under examination are required to submit annual progress reports to the Youth Affairs Unit. The reports contain information on salary costs and staff numbers, management fee and participant numbers. This information is not stored on a single database capable of being analysed. From a closer examination of a number of progress reports, it was discovered that many respondents had been calculating outputs incorrectly over the period under review. A sample of 96 providers (randomly selected by an online number generator from the list of respondents to the original VFMPR Survey⁴⁹) was contacted. Only 43 providers were able to provide confirmed, correctly calculated participant numbers. Salary costs and staff numbers were also collected from this sample. The sample is broadly representative in terms of location, programme type and target group⁵⁰, but the sample is too small to be statistically representative and thus caution is advised in interpreting the output figures.

Another reason for exercising caution is that the average daily and total annual participant numbers provided are based on the total number of young people or number of contacts over the year. The numbers are not disaggregated by activity or the need levels of the participants, which means that it is not known how many young people take part in different activities or how many are from different target groups within each service. Services may organise a number of different activities and target different groups of young people. The numbers also do not reflect the *extent* to which a young person engages in a service as, in the annual figures, a young person is counted once irrespective of the level of engagement. For example, one young person may attend daily counselling sessions while another may attend a youth café once in the year in the same youth service. Each young person would each only be counted once in the annual figures despite significant difference in service effort applied to each young person.

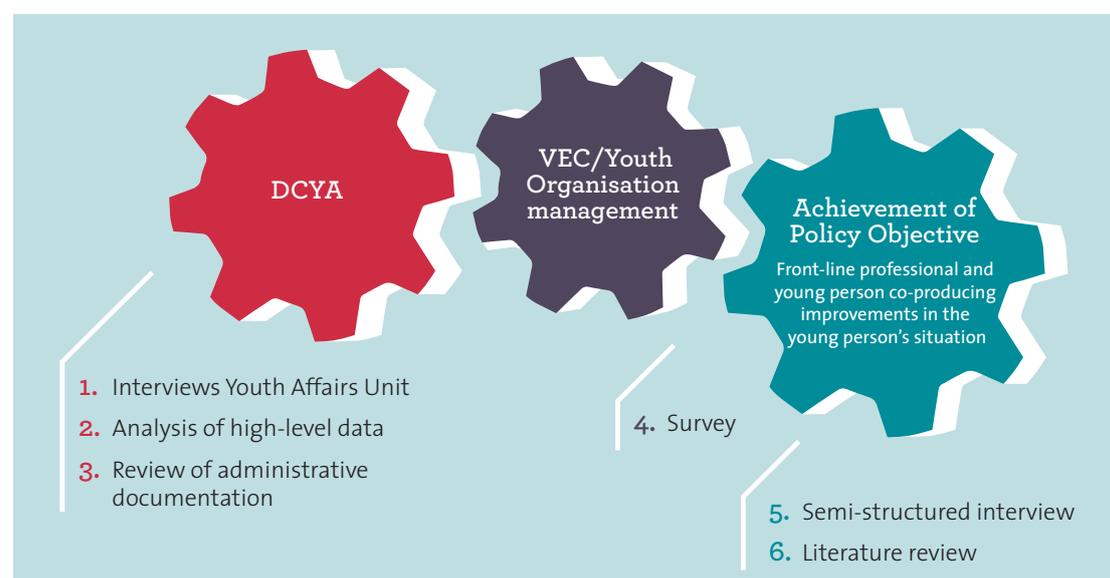
More general methodological challenges documented in the literature were certainly evident in this VFMPR. In terms of measurability and metrics, only a small number of local services provide outcomes-related data using standard instruments (3%), quasi-experimental methods (3%), results of randomised control trials (2%) or other forms of independent verification⁵¹ (3%).⁵² While the use of the logic model approach has increased significantly across the board in terms of specifying how, conceptually, inputs are transformed into outcomes, this has not necessarily transferred into better quality administrative data in progress reports, further evidenced by the discussions with local projects sites. Most services reported inputs and outputs using internal administrative data; some corroborated with data from referring agencies, families and young people to indicate outcomes. However, generally output data gleaned from annual service activity reports proved unreliable, requiring significant amounts of ‘cleaning’ and ultimately sampling to attempt to reconcile often misleading information.

Mixed-methods approach

Bearing in mind the considerable methodological challenges described above, a mixed-method approach was adopted. This involved documentary review, statistical analysis, survey⁵³, semi-structured interviews and a specially commissioned literature review tasked with identifying the types of proximal outcomes which could ‘contribute’ effectively to improved outcomes for targeted youth. In addition to employing quantitative methods, it was considered important to invest significant review effort in direct face-to-face data collection via interviews with service providers, local stakeholders and young people, given that ultimately any assessment of ‘value’ in

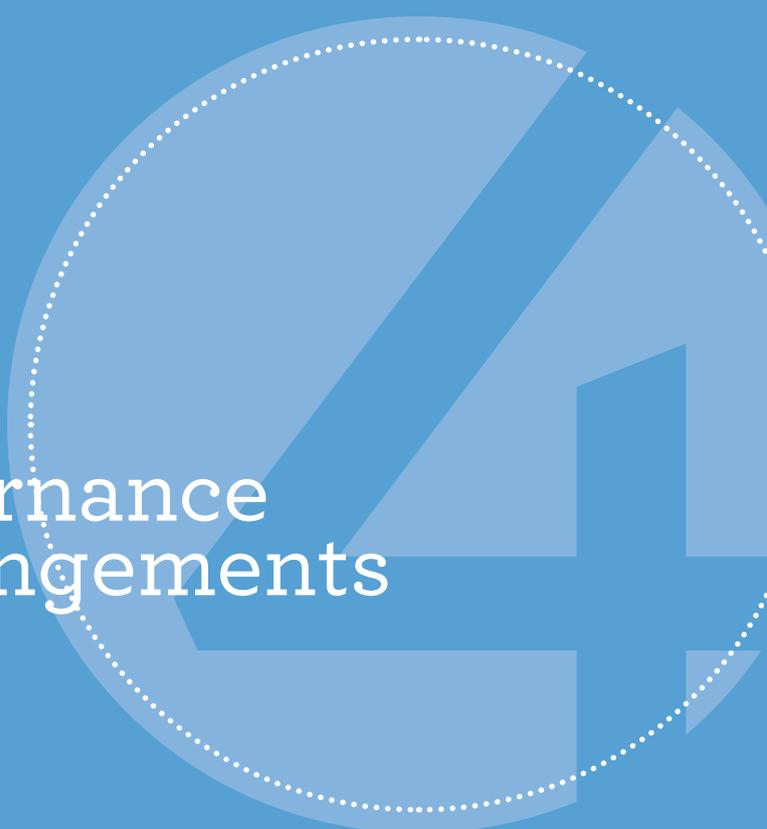
youth programmes must focus on the point of engagement between the front-line practitioner and the young person.⁵⁴ This mixed-methods approach has been considered appropriate in a previous VFMPR exercise in this area⁵⁵ and in more scholarly reviews of youth work practice⁵⁶. The methods were applied strategically at various parts of the governance system (see Figure 3.2) for these programmes and fashioned by the type of data required by the VFMPR. Importantly, the focused review of literature is utilised as a data source in the VFMPR rather than solely as a contextual reference point, particularly where internally generated data are insufficient. In particular, the literature review is used to generate key findings from the literature, identifying positive change mechanisms that are associated with improved outcomes. These mechanisms are then applied to accounts of existing practice using semi-structured interviews with a selection of staff and young people. While caveats and cautions were inevitable in evaluating data secured for the VFMPR, this mix of methods was considered most appropriate in reconciling the inherent methodological risks and in terms of reaching firm conclusions.

Figure 3.2: Deployment of mixed methods across youth programme governance system



3.4 Summary of methods used

1. **Interviews with Youth Affairs Unit** – designed to secure data relating to governance and oversight of the schemes and what presumptions and expectations were held by the DCYA in terms of the schemes' operations (*efficiency and effectiveness*).
2. **Analysis of high-level statistical data** – designed to provide contextual and trend data to support judgements relating to rationale.
3. **Review of administrative data** – to secure financial and output-related data (*efficiency*).
4. **Survey of all youth programme providers** – to secure additional data from **all providers** relating to identifying need and the rationale for service provision (*rationale, efficiency and effectiveness*).⁵⁷
5. **Site-based interviews with front-line staff and young people** – to secure detailed information about the data returned to the DCYA (2010-2012), rationale for service delivery and first-hand accounts of the effects of interventions (*rationale and effectiveness*).
6. **Literature review** – to secure external data relating to identifying proximal outcomes, which appear to possess efficacy in improvements in the main domain areas for young people. Where conclusive judgements are not possible due to the unavailability of measurement tools, reference to appropriate literature sources provides additional assurances.



Governance arrangements

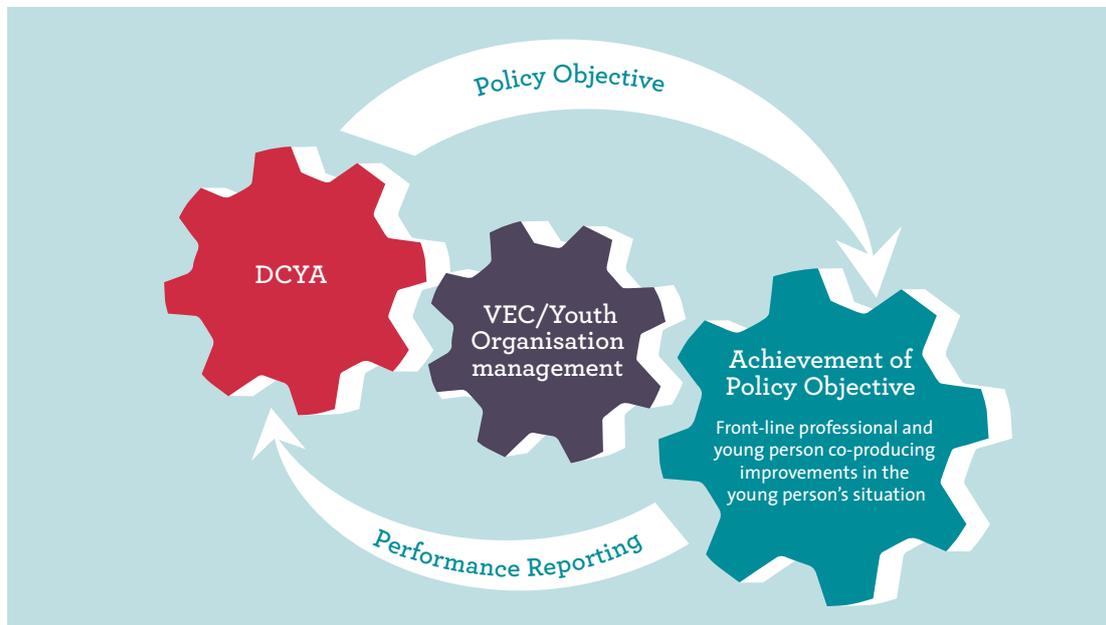
This chapter identifies ‘governance arrangements’ as a key consideration for the VFMPR. The governance of youth programmes is described from its origins at line department level, passing through intermediary stages and finally to the co-production of improvements by front-line staff and young people, which is the ultimate policy objective. The review outlines how governance arrangements have developed historically and ‘reasonable’ expectations are proposed, i.e. what should be in place in a performance governance system in terms of efficient and effective implementation of policy objectives. The adequacy of the governance system is then examined with reference to these expectations, specifically in the context of performance monitoring. Governance findings are presented at the end of the chapter.

4.1 Why is an examination of governance arrangements important in a VFMPR?

In addition to evaluating what is ‘produced’ by youth programmes, it is necessary to examine the oversight arrangements in place which govern service delivery. ‘Value’ in relation to targeted youth programmes is located at the point where young people engage with local professionals⁵⁸ and where improvements in their situation should occur (see ‘Achievement of policy objective’ in Figure 4.1).

The exchange between the front-line professional and the young person is the most important in targeted programmes. This interaction produces the desired policy change, an improvement in the young person’s situation or circumstances. Therefore, any associated overhead cost or activity should demonstrate added value to this critical exchange.

Figure 4.1: Implementing targeted youth programme objectives



Policy and programme implementation can rarely be realised in one simple and direct move, like by the push of a button linking policy objective with a successful outcome. In most cases, *transaction costs* apply. Analysis of such costs and the governance systems that support them are therefore an important focus of the VFMPR examination. By way of illustration, a national immunisation programme faces distribution, sourcing and application/administration

challenges, demanding a logistically focused governance system with adequate clinical oversight. In this example, the product itself (a unit of immunisation) is fixed. However, in contrast, youth programmes are not a fixed product – they are required to be reflexive, adapting to both local communities and the needs of individual young people. Therefore, youth programmes require local adjustment to accommodate multiple variables, demanding suitably flexible, proportionate and ongoing oversight. Youth programme quality is assured by processes and management as opposed to patent and license (as in the case of medicines in the immunisation example), which incur different types and levels of transaction costs.

It follows, therefore, that the considerations of ‘rationale’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’ that apply to service delivery also apply to the system that governs this delivery. Governance here relates not only to financial compliance, but also to ensuring effective and efficient delivery of the programmes as a whole, operating within any established rules. Various governance systems operate in the delivery of public services. Some, such as An Garda Síochána, operate nationally on a direct command and control basis. The governance system for youth programmes articulates expectations via funding agreements with service providers, common with many such statutory/voluntary sector partnerships. In a general sense, therefore, it can be described as a *contractual* as opposed to a direct management relationship. Expectations by the funder are delivered on trust by the service provider, underpinned by sufficient measures to assure compliance. In these types of arrangements, the line department is *principal* in the relationship, acting on behalf of the taxpayer, and intermediary organisations act as *agents*, designing, developing and delivering services. In reality, the governance relationship is not so dichotomous. While funding provides a significant incentive to leverage compliance, relationships are also copper-fastened by a common mission between Government department and voluntary sector service provider to improve outcomes for young people.

4.1.1 Changes in governance responsibilities during the VFMPR period of examination (2010-2012)

Important to this analysis for the period of examination for the VFMPR (2010-2012), the programmes under review experienced a number of administrative changeovers. As outlined in Chapter 2, prior to the commencement of the DCYA in June 2011, programme administration fell within the Departments of Education and Science; Health; Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The Youth Affairs Unit (YAU), which in recent years has been centrally involved in the administration of the programmes, also experienced changes of location: prior to 2009, it was located in the Department of Education and Science; it then moved to the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs before being located in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2011. The DCYA assumed responsibility for all three programmes in the second half of the VFMPR period of examination and thus the window for any required administrative reform for DCYA itself is limited to 18 months. Of course, in addition to programmes that the DCYA assumed responsibility for (such as the three under review), the department itself was in set-up mode.

For ease of reference, the DCYA is generally identified as the ‘line department’ in this governance analysis. However, it is important to be cognisant of the specific timeframe that relates to its particular administrative responsibility.

4.1.2 Organisation of chapter

The following sections in this chapter:

- identify the key actors in the governance system and the roles that they fulfil (*Section 4.2*);
- propose expected governance standards that should feature in a quality performance governance system (*Section 4.2*);⁵⁹
- test these proposed standards against the actual governance system using the evidence available (*Section 4.3*).

4.2 Key actors in the governance system

4.2.1 National oversight and stewardship

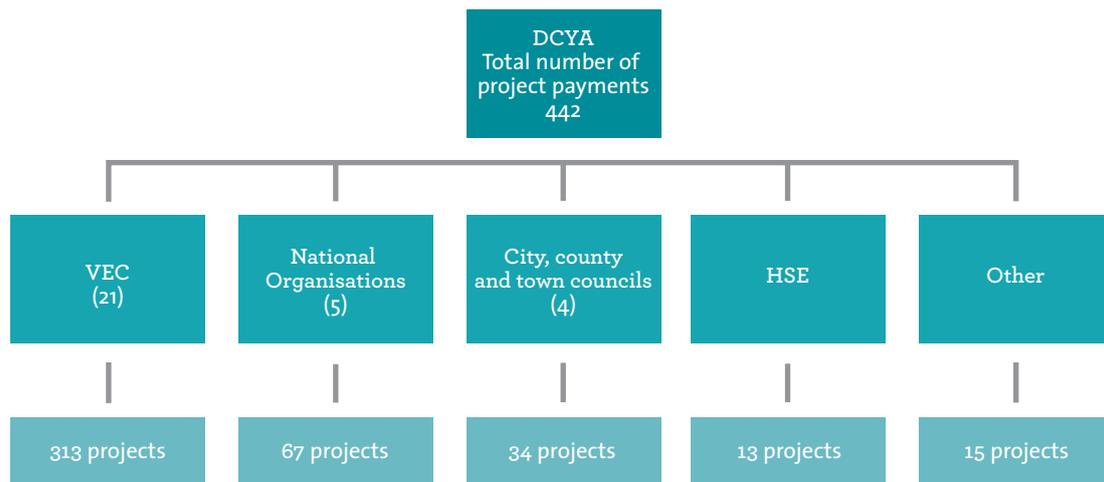
In terms of governance, the respective line department provided oversight and stewardship, ensuring that programmes were appropriately administered.

For the period under examination, a National Assessment Committee (NAC)⁶⁰ considered new applications for funding under the YPFSF, which had also been vetted by a local development group and reviewed by respective ‘channels of funding’. SPY funding applications received from applicants via their local VEC were reviewed by the Youth Affairs Unit (at this point) within the Department of Education and Science⁶¹. LDTF projects submitted for approval were initially funded on an annual basis subject to an interim reviewing process, whereby a local project would be formally evaluated using defined criteria.⁶² Where the project was favourably evaluated, the intention was that these services would be mainstreamed by a parent local State agency. Any proposed changes to the service needed to be agreed by all contracting parties. Service providers seeking ongoing funding to support operations under the youth programmes submitted a plan annually for approval to the line department.

A standardised funding application and reporting process was first developed, piloted, refined and initiated in 2010 by the Youth Affairs Unit located (at this point) in the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). Prior to this, there was no standardised format – each project reported its activities under each funding line. The standardised report required projects to report on all three funding lines in one report. This report also required financial information, including detailed income and expenditure data over and above the submission of annual audited accounts.⁶³ The funding application submitted by prospective service providers specified the intentions of the respective organisation(s) (service objectives) and the types of activities that the service intended to engage in to meet its stated objectives. Integral to this planning cycle was the report on the previous year’s activities. The progress report pro-forma, which was further modified by the DCYA when it assumed responsibility for the programmes, required providers to supply quantitative and qualitative data to the Department, which included service characteristics, activities (under the respective programmes), management and development activity, service output, use of funding including staffing levels, the provider’s strategic intentions and analysis of emerging needs.⁶⁴ Satisfactory annual progress reports and prospective annual plans triggered subsequent funding to providers via Grant Administering bodies on a quarterly basis.

The arrangements for ongoing administrative oversight of the programmes present as complex. Taking 2012 as an example, the DCYA issued annual payments via an administrative structure involving multiple ‘agents’, i.e. 21 VECs, 5 national organisations, 4 Local Authorities, the HSE and other smaller intermediaries (*see Figure 4.2*).

Figure 4.2: Administrative structure for youth programmes (2012)



Note: Figure 4.2 represents DCYA payments. Some youth service providers receive more than one payment.
Source: Youth Affairs Unit, DCYA

The configuration of this delivery system was largely historical and related to the arrangements put in place individually for the three respective programmes. This intermediary structure serviced the delivery of youth programmes or ‘projects’ at local level. In addition to this compliance-type governance, day-to-day operational governance and management was provided via service provider organisations and management committees (*see operational governance below*).

The DCYA took important first ‘process reform’ steps in attempting to moderate the effects of complexity in the governance arrangements. The Department clarified the principal objectives of the three programmes in its programme descriptions for the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure exercise in 2011, administratively integrated the programmes within one reporting schedule, reduced the number of Grant Administering bodies⁶⁵, permitted proposals for local reconfigurations of budgets⁶⁶ and (in terms of developing a common approach to planning, service design and evaluation) further progressed the NQSF coverage.

The staffing complement in the Youth Affairs Unit amounted to approximately 10.7 whole-time equivalent posts⁶⁷ at the end of 2012. In addition to governance and oversight of the three programmes, officials are assigned to a much larger range of Youth Affairs business.⁶⁸

Governance expectations – National oversight and stewardship

Limiting the governance analysis here solely to **performance monitoring**, important assumptions underpin the efficacy of the structure and processes. The first assumption is that programme sponsors provide sufficient structure and scope for the programmes, providing appropriate guidance and compliance direction for service providers. The second assumption is that poor performers can be distinguished from satisfactory and exemplary performers. Two related assumptions follow: that there is sufficient capacity within the DCYA to scrutinise progress reports and that there are data of a type and quality to indicate accurate readings of outputs and outcomes.

4.2.2 Grant administrators

Funding for the three schemes was mainly channelled by the DCYA through grant administrators. Given that approximately 70% of the funding was administered by VECs, closer examination is placed on the structure and processes supporting governance here. Key to the governance structure in VECs were the Chief Executive Officer and VEC Youth Officers.

In the case of the **VEC Youth Officers**, a Memorandum of Understanding, agreed in August 2010 by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) and the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), identifies overarching areas of agreed activity, including coordination of the work of the VEC Youth Officers.⁶⁹ In most VEC areas, these DCYA-funded Youth Officers have a role (with particular reference to this VFMPR examination) in⁷⁰:

- developing youth work plans for the respective VEC area;
- reporting on and evaluating youth work activity;
- coordinating the provision of various youth providers across the VEC area;
- making recommendations relating to grant applications;
- administering expenditure to national and local youth work organisations at local level;
- assessing and processing applications for funding from local youth organisations.

With particular reference to the schemes under examination, the VEC Youth Officers signed off on annual progress reports. With respect to renewal applications (from 2010), the VEC Youth Officers certified that they ‘have examined the content of the report and support the service/project’s application for the renewal of funding’.⁷¹ Most VEC Youth Officers were also involved in working with participating youth organisations to implement the NQSF.

In 2012, there were 29.5 VEC Youth Officer posts funded by the DCYA nationally.

Governance expectations – Grant Administrators

Similar to the DCYA, assumptions here related to the ability of VEC Youth Officers to distinguish between poor, satisfactory and exemplary service providers. Performance-related judgements should inform the exercise of a **key control measure**, i.e. whether an application for funding is ‘supported’. Similar data quality assumptions also apply here, although a value-added expectation would be that Youth Officers have more opportunity to evidence service performance due to their closer proximity to practice on the ground.

4.2.3 Service provider management

This VFMPR relates to ‘**youth programmes**’ and not to ‘**youth work**’. For the examination period, however, service providers were, by and large, youth work organisations. In terms of day-to-day and operational governance (i.e. how front-line staff use their time and resources), many of the professional staff are managed either by voluntary local management committees or more often by larger employer organisations that manage multiple services in communities locally⁷², regionally⁷³ or nationally⁷⁴. Four broad service provider governance models were identified: national organisations providing services in local communities under a central management command and control regime; services with regional command within a national federation⁷⁵; specialised services nested within other generic community-based services; and single services reliant mainly on funding from the programmes(s) under examination, governed by a local management committee.

In addition to performance monitoring, governance here also relates to financial matters, human resources, risk management and the delivery of services. These transaction costs were more difficult to decipher and locate. ‘Management fee’ reported in annual progress reports is the most distinguishable. Considerable (and unspecified) amounts of management oversight are contained within the *staffing* complements of service providers. However, at local level, a management or coordinator designation may be misleading, given that the majority of local managers’ time may be spent delivering direct services.⁷⁶

Governance expectations – Service provider management

Expectations here, relating solely to performance monitoring (as opposed to core financial, human resources and risk management⁷⁷), require that service design and delivery reflect national programme objectives and that service providers submit accurate accounts of output and outcome data in progress reports. It is also assumed that the data are accounted and input with reasonable consistency to permit performance-related comparisons to be made.

4.3 Testing the governance arrangements

4.3.1 Clarity of objectives

At line department level, a key governance consideration relates to how effectively and efficiently the objectives of programmes are communicated. Clear objectives provide basic compliance criteria for service providers and auditing tools for the line department.

This review has already referred to the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure (CRE) exercise undertaken by the DCYA that identified the three ‘staff-led’ schemes with common descriptors at policy level, which (certainly from 2011) clearly articulated the targeted focus of all three programmes.⁷⁸ However, the VFMPR examination of governance additionally requires historical analysis outlining the initial intent for each programme in the 1980s and 1990s (when they were commenced) through to their collective administration by the DCYA in the second half of 2011. However, attempts to secure documents for all schemes relating to the original funding decisions proved problematic. By way of illustration, a search relating to the three schemes undertaken by the Oireachtas library yielded (a) a previous VFM undertaken in relation to the YPFSF in 2009; (b) an evaluation of LDTF-funded projects in 2008; and (c) one Statutory Instrument transferring responsibility between Departments was made in 2008 for the YPFSF (transfer of Departmental and Ministerial functions). Further investigations found Parliamentary questions involving respective Ministers with political responsibility for the schemes, other material including various Departmental communications referencing the programmes, academic literature, and promotional material published on VEC and service provider websites relating to the programmes.

Table 4.1 identifies a number of selected sources, historical and contemporary, for the programmes under examination. Correspondence with relevant officials identifies multiple *references* to the programmes and charts their movements between Government departments. However, the policy origin of each programme was difficult to ascertain and this required that multiple sources be used to identify programme objectives. Material that was publicly available is prioritised. Attempts were also made to provide examples across three domains that straddle the interdependent governance system for these programmes – the **political** domain, the **administrative** domain and the **service provision** domain. From a governance perspective, a reasonable expectation is for consistency in vertical implementation from national to local level, and horizontally between key actors involved in implementation in the political, administrative and service provision domains.

Table 4.1: Sourcing objectives for youth programmes

Reference type	Source	Date	Description	Rationale for inclusion
Political	Oireachtas records	4 November 1998	Record of Adjournment debate: Exchange between Senator Joe Costello and Minister of State Treacy	Minister Treacy's response relates to the objectives of the YPFSS as of 1998.
	Oireachtas records	19 October 1999	Record of written answer by Minister Martin to Deputy O'Sullivan	Minister Martin's response relates to the objectives of Special Projects for Youth (SPY) as of 1999. ⁷⁹
	Oireachtas records	26 September 2012	Record of written answer by Minister Fitzgerald to Deputy Bernard Durkan	Minister Fitzgerald's response relates to the objectives of SPY, YPFSS and LDTF.
Administrative	Department of Education and Science	2005	Annual Report 2005	Outlines objectives for SPY and YPFSS.
	Comprehensive Review of Expenditure (CRE) – DCYA	November 2011	Comprehensive account of DCYA expenditure plans submitted to Department of Public Expenditure and Reform	In addition to outlining funding allocated specifically to SPY, YPFSS and LDTF, this document identifies each programme's objectives (national).
	Review of VEC websites	December 2013	Public information on funding schemes	Where referred to at all, these websites identify the rationale for all or some of the funding schemes (regional/county level).
Service provision	Foróige website	December 2012	Public information on funding schemes	Specific reference to SPY.
	Youth Work Ireland website	December 2013	Public information on funding schemes	Specific reference to the objectives of SPY.

Congruence in objectives

At political level, there appears to have been significant congruence in terms of what were envisaged as the programmes' key objectives.

Minister Treacy (1998) refers to the YPFSS as:

'the centrepiece of the Government's programme for young people at risk. The purpose of the fund is to assist in the development of youth facilities, including sport and recreational facilities and services, in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem exists or has the potential to develop, with a view to attracting young people in those areas, at risk of becoming involved in drugs, into more healthy and productive pursuits.'

Minister Martin (1999), referring to what are now called Special Projects for Youth (SPY), said:

‘Grants from the fund will be allocated to organisations and groups for specific projects which seek to address the needs of young people who are disadvantaged due to a combination of all or some of the following factors: a high youth population; a high level of youth unemployment; a high dependence of social welfare assistance – general unemployment; evidence of social isolation; evidence of drug substance abuse; evidence of the young homelessness problems, including temporary homelessness; problems of juvenile crime, vandalism and truancy; mainline youth services, as defined in the final report of the Customer Committee, have failed or do not exist; an inadequate take-up of ordinary educational opportunities.’

Minister Fitzgerald’s written response in 2012 refers to all three programmes:

‘Under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, grant-aid is made available to organisations and groups for specific projects which seek to address the needs of young people who are disadvantaged due to a combination of factors, e.g. social isolation, substance misuse, homelessness, early school-leaving and unemployment. Projects focus on the personal and social development of participants to enable them to realise their potential ... The Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund (Rounds 1 and 2) assists in the development of preventative strategies in a targeted manner through the development of youth facilities, including sports and recreational facilities, and services in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem exists or has the potential to develop ... Local Drug Task Force projects provide a range of supports for young people by way of targeted drug prevention and awareness programmes as well as referrals.’

While there are slight differences in the way that the programmes have been described in these political references, there is undoubted similarity between Ministers and across programmes; in particular that the programmes were (and are) designed to offset various forms of disadvantage for young people and the communities they live in.

At administrative level, the 2005 *Annual Report* of the Department of Education and Science refers to special projects to assist disadvantaged youth:

‘Grants are allocated to organisations and groups for specific out-of-school projects which seek to address the needs of young people who are disadvantaged.’

and to the YPFSS:

‘This fund is used for programmes or projects aimed at young people in disadvantaged areas who are at risk of substance misuse.’

Also at national level, the DCYA’s submission as part of the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure (CRE) outlined the objectives of each of the schemes. According to the CRE:

‘The SPY targets the needs of young people who are disadvantaged, due to a combination of all, or some of the following needs: High youth population, Youth unemployment, Dependence on social welfare/unemployment assistance, Social isolation, Drug/substance abuse, Homelessness (including temporary homelessness), Problems of juvenile crime, vandalism and truancy, Inadequate take-up of ordinary educational opportunities. The LDTF projects seek to encourage young people not to engage in drug-taking. The YPFSS aims to assist in the development of preventative strategies/initiatives in a targeted manner through the development of youth facilities in areas where a significant drug problem exists or has the potential to develop. The programme aims to attract ‘at risk’ young people and divert them away from the dangers of substance abuse. The target group are 10-21 year-olds who are marginalised through a combination of risk factors relating to family background, environmental circumstances, educational disadvantage, involvement in crime and/or drugs.’

At more 'local' administrative level, a search (2013) of VEC websites found that while only one-third of VECs appeared to publish material on the schemes in question⁸⁰, those that did used similar language for SPY and the YPFSF as did the 2005 *Annual Report* of the Department of Education and Science, and the CRE above.

Interpretation of objectives

Websites belonging to two of the larger service providers indicate a degree of interpretation for the Special Projects for Youth (SPY) funding schemes.

The Foróige website⁸¹ describes 'Special Youth Projects' as operating:

'to enable young people to take a full and active role in society. They are funded by the Youth Affairs section of the Department of Education and Science, through the local VEC. These projects are based in the local community and target young people who may be disadvantaged or at risk.'

Youth Work Ireland's website⁸² states:

'These grant aided youth work initiatives aim to facilitate the personal and social development of participants to realise their potential. In addition, they present opportunities for young people to undertake some actions corresponding to their own aspirations and assume responsibilities within their local communities. The SPY project also engages and works with parents, schools and other local agencies and volunteers to enhance the quality of the service. The overall aim is to support young people to reach their full potential through personal development and raising awareness on issues that affect young people's lives. SPY also provides support and information and a safe place for young people to meet and be themselves.'

While these descriptions of the SPY scheme certainly resonate with political and administrative descriptions, the treatments of *targeting* and *disadvantage* are particular points of interest and possible departure. Where targeting at disadvantage can be reasonably assessed as a 'presumption' in political and administrative (certainly nationally) descriptions of the programmes, in the service provision examples selected they are interpreted as 'may' in the case of Foróige and there is no reference to either 'targeting' or 'disadvantage' in the Youth Work Ireland example. **The inference here in these examples is that the scheme has been interpreted locally.** This in itself may not be significant; complex and reflexive programmes often require a degree of co-design by professionals within broad (ideally outcomes-related) policy expectations. However, **core principles** of any programme are normally non-negotiable. From the evidence reviewed, 'targeting' appears to be a core feature of the youth programmes in terms of their original intent and design.

Technical information and guidance accompanied funding-related correspondence issued by Government department(s) to service providers⁸³. Importantly, however, this **did not include statements issued by line departments regarding the objectives of the respective schemes**, which were clearly important in requiring that providers align local activity with national programme objectives in return for funding support. **One consequence of this governance gap was that variant conceptions of the schemes, particularly in relation to targeting, clearly operated concurrently. The degree to which the respective line departments effectively influenced these interpretations over the examination period is questionable, permitting local providers to exercise excessive discretion in the orientation as well as the design of local services.** Nevertheless, it is important to note that the report will present evidence in Chapter 7 to indicate that, despite potential structural weakness in the governance arrangements, 'on the ground' services appeared to understand programme objectives and were reasonably aligned.

In sum, it was possible to identify outline parameters for the programmes by piecing together various sources of information. The descriptions of the programmes were appropriately captured in DCYA documentation relating to the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure in 2011. However, it appears that policy objectives were vulnerable to interpretation and ‘drift’ at service provision level⁸⁴, particularly in terms of how certain service providers communicated their perception of ‘targeting’.

4.3.2 Data quality

In order for the type of governance arrangements in place for youth programmes to operate effectively, ‘reliable’ data are required, given that in the absence of direct *observation*, appropriate data are a key indicator of performance. It is not necessary to re-state the case here regarding data quality. Suffice it to say that this VFMPR review found that despite the **significant volume of data held by the DCYA regarding programme activities, it was largely unusable in terms of making efficiency and effectiveness judgements. Critically, this situation precluded respective line departments from making decisions about acceptable and unacceptable performance with respect to individual providers.**

The previous VFMPR of the YPF⁸⁵ (2009) identified a lack of coherent and consistently applied metrics and outcomes-related data. This rendered the 2009 review unable to make judgements about which interventions worked best, having to rely instead largely on ‘supposition’ supported by secondary literature relating to whether the schemes *should* work or not. Unfortunately, despite other necessary administrative reforms undertaken by the DCYA, the situation had progressed little in terms of providing *compelling* evidence of clear outcomes. Much of the data available in annual progress reports related to inputs, descriptions of activities and outputs. In addition, contact with service providers (a) to verify information submitted to the VFMPR Survey and (b) during site visits confirmed that data were inconsistent. Units of output misleadingly inferred equal weight to individual high input activities (e.g. 1:1 work) and collective (or group-based) low input work (e.g. youth cafés and events). Counting rules were interpreted at local level and varied from year to year. It was also apparent that some providers were aware that output figures were not subject to detailed examination at departmental level.

The effects of an inability to fix on agreed performance metrics at national level were amplified by *mainstreaming* presumptions in terms of original funding expectations. With both SPY and LDTF funding, for example, the inference appears to have been that once local services had been *accepted* into the scheme by the initial sponsoring departments, they would *continue* in the scheme.⁸⁶ No specific criteria appeared to be in place regarding underperformance, leaving evidence of ‘need’, priority changes, funding levels or ‘specific difficulties’⁸⁷ as the most likely reasons for terminating agreements with service providers. The Youth Affairs Unit indicated that in recent years there had been no movement in terms of new entries nor had there been exits from any of the programmes due to poor performance.⁸⁸ Given the scale of investment in these programmes and the breadth of deliverables, it is plausible to assert that there had been variable performance, but that any distinctions remained undetected. While the deficiencies outlined provide a rationale for why performance judgements were not possible, the incapacity to sanction poor performance – ultimately by replacing poorly performing service providers with better performing service providers – represents a key governance weakness.

4.3.3 Governance capacity issues

The normal problems associated with national policy oversight (given that *actual* implementation of the policy occurs at local level⁸⁹) were exacerbated by the **YAU's lack of capacity to comprehensively scrutinise progress reports and planning documents**. Reporting requirements had been standardised to ensure that the YAU had access to uniform detailed information about local services, including how funds were being used, outputs and (latterly) outcomes-related information, supplemented by quality-related data derived through the developing NQSF process. This information was also intended to be used to inform the YAU in terms of larger scale strategic issues, such as geographical allocation of resources and tracking trends, as well as responding to requests for information including Parliamentary questions. However, the YAU reported that insufficient human resource capacity within the unit⁹⁰, clearly amplified by problematic output data and significant volumes of qualitative content relating to activities and outcomes, resulted in reports not being scrutinised as fully as intended. Given the diversity of content of progress reports and the significant information asymmetry between service providers and the DCYA, regular review of the qualitative content of progress reports was required.

However, the evidence suggests that activity reports received little more than an (albeit necessary) examination of financial data. Greater scrutiny demands, therefore, spill over into other parts of the administrative system.

The increased governance demand inherent in effectively stewarding such human service programmes, coupled with corresponding oversight limitations at national level, requires that activity elsewhere in the administrative system needs to be examined. Within the middle tiers of administration, the YAU provided funding to VECs for the salaries of Youth Officers. Examination of annual progress reports submitted for 2011 demonstrates a variety of activities undertaken by VEC Youth Officers (*see Table 4.2*), which include (in addition to their role listed in Section 4.2.2) training, representing the VEC at various meetings, supporting Comhairle na nÓg, planning and youth work service audits/mapping exercises and interagency collaborations. While work directly supporting the programmes under examination in this VFMPR was undoubtedly included to varying degrees in these activity descriptions, in most cases it was not clear the extent to which VEC Youth Officers were effectively engaged in the governance arrangements. In addition, while greater transparency was intended by the YAU in terms of including Youth Officers' plans and activities in the annual reporting process, any leverage over discretionary activity was mediated by the limits of the Memorandum of Understanding and line management arrangements, which remained within each VEC area.

Table 4.2: VEC Youth Officers' average activity profile

Activity	Percentage of time spent
Provision of support and development to services/groups	20%
Administration/recording	17%
Meetings and networking	15%
Coordination	14%
Planning and evaluation	10%
Management	8%
Representation and advocacy	6%
Provision of training	5%
Practice delivery/service provision	3%
Other	1%

Note: While data for all VEC areas were not available, the data in this table identify the average breakdown of work type for 16 VECs.⁹¹

Source: Youth Affairs Unit, DCYA (2011)

4.4 Summary

The governance arrangements for oversight of youth programmes are a legitimate area of examination for the VFMPR. Governance describes the means to effectively and efficiently implement intended policy objectives within established rules. The report argues that the most important exchange in the governance *chain* for youth programmes is the local transaction between the youth professional and the young person. It is this 'local' transaction which brings about the desired national policy outcome; improvement in circumstances for a young person. Additionally it means that any overhead-related activity should represent added value to this transaction.

The governance structure should actively support a process of focused implementation. However, the arrangements actually complicated the consistent application of programme objectives. Indeed, the activities of multiple actors without a clear Department-led compliance structure communicating clear 'alignment' expectations permitted fuzzy interpretation of national programme objectives, most notably in some service providers' conception of 'targeting'.

The governance arrangements inherited by the DCYA in 2011 were complex. The YAU attempted to moderate some of the effects of structural complexity by modest administrative reforms. However, data consistency, which a governance system involving contractual partners relies on to indicate performance levels, was generally poor over the examination period. Given that judgements regarding performance in these circumstances are so data-reliant, the poor quality and reliability of data submitted rendered those with governance responsibility unable to make judgements and comparisons regarding efficiency and effectiveness. Moreover, the governance system was, *inter alia*, incapable of distinguishing between poor, satisfactory and excellent service provision. The lack of exits from the programmes as a consequence of poor performance perhaps further indicates this structural incapacity.

These findings question the capacity of the governance arrangements as they stand to adequately fulfil their purpose. There is a need for re-focusing and prioritisation of effort in the administrative system at all levels to improve governance capacity and a re-appraisal of compliance measures by the DCYA to require service providers to play their part in supporting appropriate oversight and stewardship. While there may be an appropriate rationale for the spread of workload effort in various local contexts, it is argued that, in the face of depleted resources and the need for improvement in the oversight arrangements for programmes for targeted youth, there is significant 'discretionary workload' at VEC Youth Officer level where the future preferences of the DCYA (as funder) should influence their work activity priorities.

Rationale



Terms of Reference

- Identify the objectives of the youth programmes in question.
- Examine the current and continued validity and relevance of the objectives of the youth programmes and their compatibility with the overall strategy of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

This chapter examines the rationale of the three programmes. It attempts to establish if the policy intervention is necessary by examining the programme objectives. The examination of programme objectives informs the selection of a number of outcome measures for the target group that are examined over time to identify whether the rationale remains valid.

5.1 Objectives of the programmes

The youth programmes under review have a complex history. They were established in different years and in different Government departments. There is consistency, however, around the objectives and the intended target groups of the three programmes from the information available at political, administrative and service level, as seen in Chapter 4.

The LDTF and the YPFSF were established in 1997 and 1998 respectively to combat drug use among young people in disadvantaged areas (see Table 5.1). The SPY was established in the mid-1980s to increase the life chances of young people from disadvantaged areas. The SPY focuses on tackling unemployment, increasing educational attainment and combating crime among young people, while the LDTF and the YPFSF focus on reducing drug use among young people.

Table 5.1: Year established and objectives of programmes

Programme	Year established	Objectives
SPY	Mid-1980s	Assist in the personal and social development of disadvantaged young people to increase their life chances and increase social cohesion.
LDTF	1997	Encourage young people not to engage in drug-taking.
YPFSF	1998	Divert 'at risk' young people in disadvantaged areas from the dangers of substance misuse.

According to the documentation reviewed, all three programmes are interventions aimed at young people who are disadvantaged in particular ways, substantially, though not exclusively, represented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Target groups of programmes and suggested indicators

Target	YPF SF	SPY	LDTF	Suggested indicators
10-21 year-olds ⁹²	✓	✓	✓	Youth population
Area where drug problem exists	✓	✓	✓	Drug use among young people
Educational disadvantage	✓	✓		Leaving Certificate retention rate, school attendance and conduct
Involvement in crime	✓	✓		Youth crime
Disadvantaged area	✓	✓		Youth unemployment, youth poverty
Homelessness		✓		Youth homelessness

Table compiled by VFMPR Team, based on information from the Youth Affairs Unit. Appropriate indicators selected by VFMPR Team.

Source: Youth Affairs Unit, DCYA

There are significant similarities in the target groups across the three programmes. All target young people aged 10-21 living in areas where drug problems exist. Both the SPY and the YPF SF target young people with poor levels of education, those who are involved in crime and those living in disadvantaged areas. The SPY also targets young people who are homeless. Trends in the associated indicators for each target group are examined below to identify if there are problems that need addressing and, therefore, a valid rationale for the programmes.

5.2 Analysis of data trends

This section examines relevant trends in the outcomes for young people in Ireland to assist in assessing whether the rationale for the programmes is valid. The outcome areas are:

- youth population;
- education;
- employment;
- substance use;
- crime;
- poverty;
- homelessness.

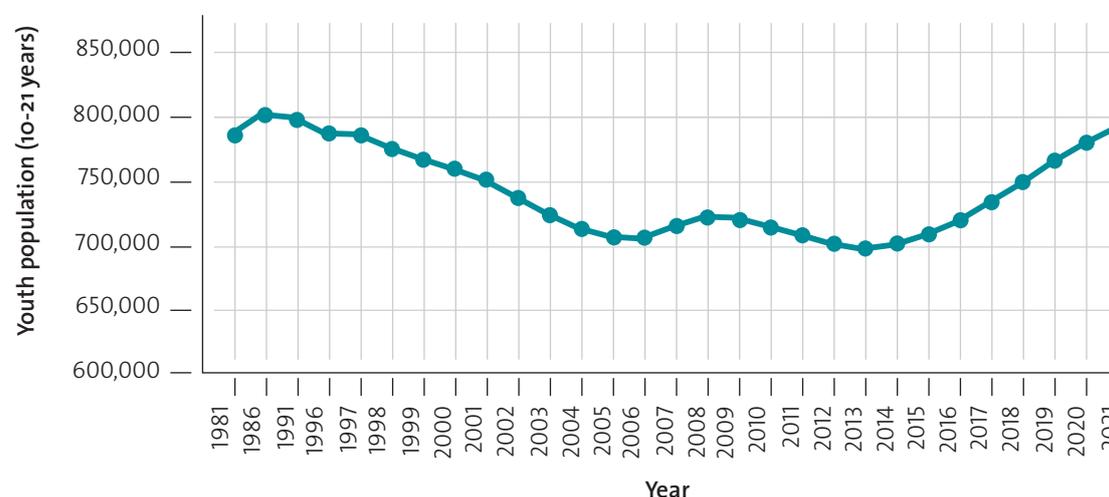
Given that the programmes are mostly aimed at young people who are disadvantaged in some way, comparisons are made, where possible, between outcomes for young people with different levels of education and from different social backgrounds.⁹³ While the programmes target young people aged 10-21 years, disaggregated data is not publicly available for many of the outcome indicators for this specific age range, thus the age cohorts vary slightly for different outcomes.

5.2.1 Youth population

The number of young people in Ireland has been mostly declining since the 1980s. Future estimates, however, predict a sharp increase in the number of young people over the next number of years. The YPF SF, LDTF and SPY each provide targeted services for young people. Figure 5.1 shows the trend in youth population in Ireland between 1981 and 2011, and the

population projection for the same age group until 2021. The projected population figures are included so future demand for the targeted youth services can be estimated. This projection comes from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and is based on the most conservative assumptions about future mortality and migration rates.

Figure 5.1: Number of young people in Ireland, aged 10-21 years (1981-2021)



Graph compiled by VFMPR Team using past and projected population figures for 10-21 year-olds from the CSO. Source: Central Statistics Office (2013)⁹⁴

As seen in Figure 5.1, the population of young people aged 10-21 years declined between 1986 (approximately when the SPY was introduced) and 2011. Population projections predict that youth population will increase significantly after 2013 to levels similar to those in the early 1980s. This projected increase in the youth population – to almost 800,000 in 2021 – is likely to increase the demand for the youth programmes in the coming years.

5.2.2 Education

The SPY and YPFSF programmes both target young people who experience educational disadvantage. These would include early school-leavers and young people who are at risk of not completing their schooling. Young people from disadvantaged areas continue to have poorer educational outcomes than other young people. The gap in attendance and conduct between those in DEIS schools and those in non-DEIS schools has also widened recently. On the other hand, however, the gap in Leaving Certificate retention rates between students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools has narrowed in recent years, showing a greater improvement for those in DEIS schools.

Reports on school attendance and conduct are published annually by the Educational Research Centre, based on data collected from primary and post-primary schools by the former National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). There are four variables in the reports by the Educational Research Centre. These are (1) the total number of days lost through student absence in the entire school year; (2) the number of students who were absent for 20 days or more in the school year; (3) the total number of students expelled in respect of whom all appeal processes have been exhausted; and (4) the total number of students who were suspended. These variables are disaggregated by school level and by DEIS and non-DEIS schools. The comparison of students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools are of particular interest here given the focus of the programmes on young people in disadvantaged areas.

Table 5.3 shows attendance and conduct rates for children in post-primary DEIS and non-DEIS schools between 2006/07 and 2010/11.

Table 5.3: Percentages of non-attendance, 20-day absence, expulsion and suspension rates in post-primary education for DEIS and non-DEIS schools

	2006/07 (%)		2007/08 (%)		2009/10 (%)		2010/11 (%)	
	DEIS	Non-DEIS	DEIS	Non-DEIS	DEIS	Non-DEIS	DEIS	Non-DEIS
Non-attendance	9.88	7.16	10.14	7.18	11.59	7.3	11.17	7.23
20-day absences	25.89	14.57	26.54	14.76	29.6	15.34	28.39	14.6
Expulsions	0.09	0.04	0.12	0.03	0.13	0.04	0.11	0.03
Suspensions	9.93	4.03	9.94	3.99	10.8	3.44	10.16	3.27

Notes:

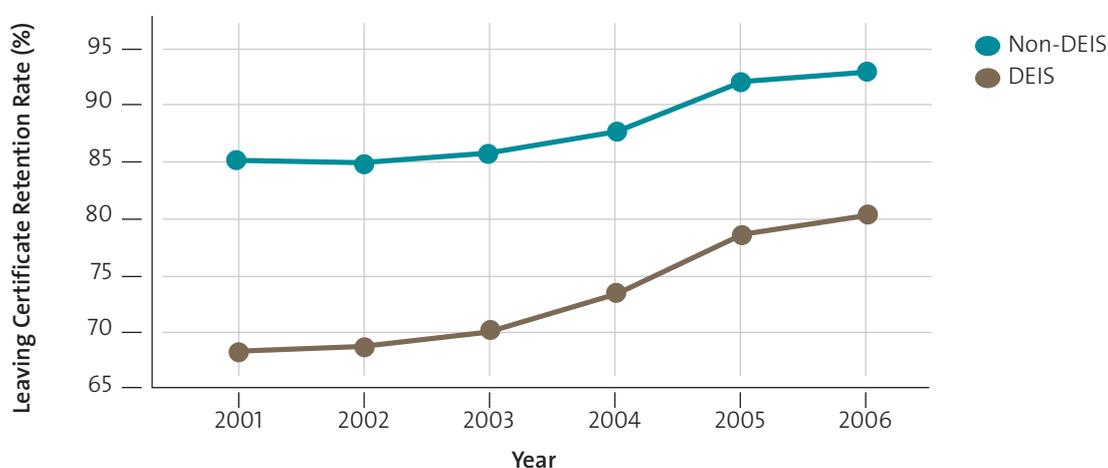
Non-attendance figures measure the percentage of overall student days lost through absences; 20-day absence figures measure the percentage of students who were absent for 20 days or more; expulsions figures measure the total percentage of expulsions; suspensions figures measure the percentage of suspensions.

Source: Educational Research Centre (2010, p. 17; 2013, p. 20)

As seen in Table 5.3, DEIS schools have reported higher non-attendance, absence, suspension and expulsion rates than non-DEIS schools, and the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools has increased between 2006/07 and 2010/11. In addition, the proportion of student days lost through absence and the proportion of students who were absent for 20 days or more increased in DEIS and non-DEIS schools (although only slightly in non-DEIS schools) between 2006/07 and 2010/11. There was a slight increase in the expulsion and suspension rates for DEIS schools and a slight decrease for non-DEIS schools over the period. The gap for non-attendance increased from 2.72 to 3.94 percentage points. The gap for 20-day absences increased from 11.32 to 13.79 percentage points. The gap in the expulsion rates increased from 0.05 to 0.08 percentage points. The gap in the proportion of suspensions increased from 5.9 to 6.89 percentage points for DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

While the non-attendance, expulsion and suspension rates for young people in DEIS schools have increased in recent years, the proportion of children completing the Leaving Certificate has been increasing steadily in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Figure 5.2 shows the trend in Leaving Certificate retention rates for DEIS and non-DEIS schools, which measures the proportion of children that started second-level who completed their Leaving Certificate 5 or 6 years later.

Figure 5.2: Leaving Certificate retention rates for DEIS and non-DEIS schools (2001-2006)



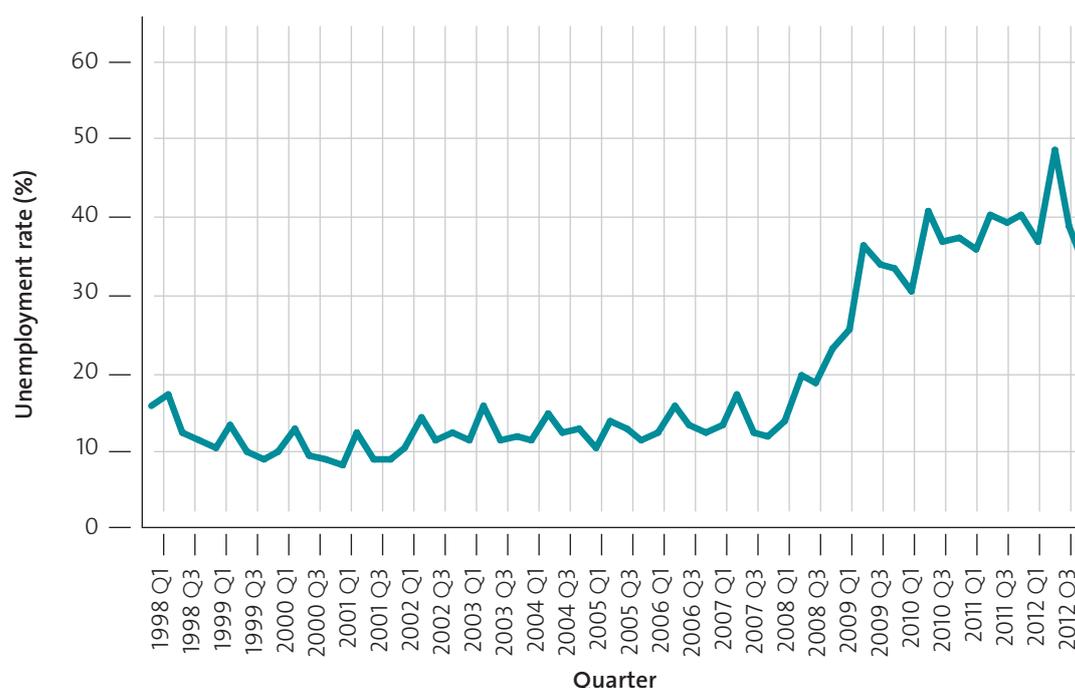
Source: Department of Education (2011, p. 21; 2012, p. 15)

The proportion of children enrolled in secondary school in 2006 who completed their Leaving Certificate in 2011 or 2012 was 90.3%, which represents an increase of 9 percentage points from a rate of 81.3% in 2001. The retention rates for children both in DEIS and non-DEIS schools has increased over time. While the retention rate for pupils in non-DEIS schools has increased from 85% for children enrolled in 2001 to almost 93% for children enrolled in 2006, the rate for pupils in DEIS schools has increased from 68% to 80% over the same period. There remains a gap in retention rates between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, although the gap has narrowed from 16.8 percentage points for children enrolled in 2006 compared to 12.6 percentage points for those enrolled in 2001.

5.2.3 Youth unemployment

Both the YPFSF and SPY programmes target young people who are disadvantaged due to unemployment. Services engage with unemployed young people with the aim of providing them with soft skills⁹⁵ or training opportunities that will assist them in gaining employment. Unemployment among young people in Ireland has increased significantly in recent years following the economic downturn. Figure 5.3 shows the overall trend in youth unemployment between 1998 and 2012.

Figure 5.3: Unemployment rate for young people under 25 years (1998-2012)

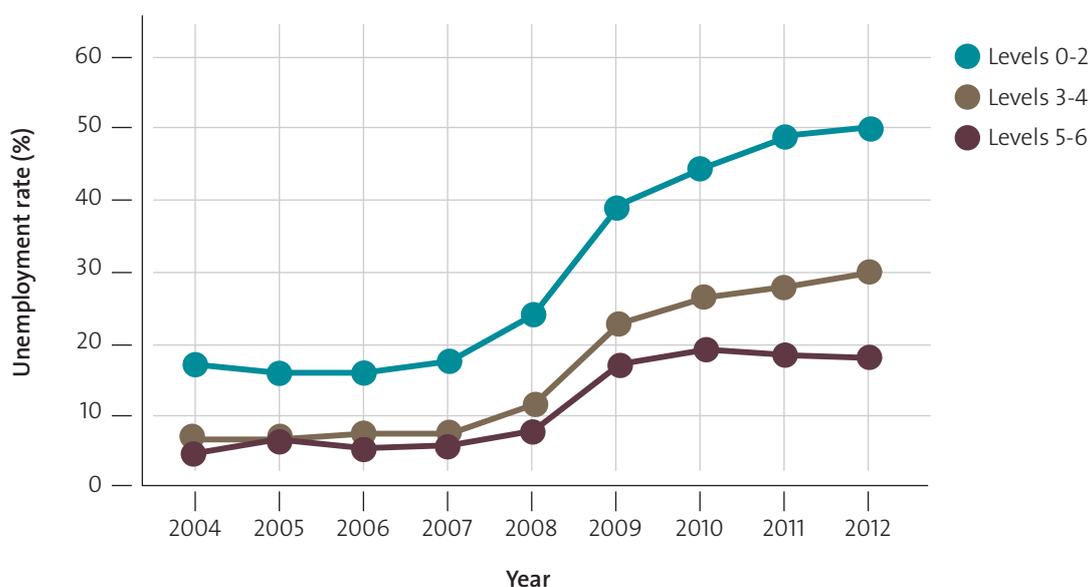


Source: Central Statistics Office (2013)

The unemployment rate for young people under 25 years fell from just under 20% in 1998 to approximately 8% in 2000. It increased to more than 40% in 2012. Over the same period, the overall unemployment rate increased from approximately 4% in 2000 to approximately 15% in 2012.⁹⁶

While total youth unemployment has increased recently, the gap in unemployment rates between young people with different levels of education has widened. Figure 5.4 shows the unemployment rates for young people whose highest level of education was (1) pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education; (2) upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education; and (3) first and second stage of tertiary education.

Figure 5.4: Youth unemployment rate (15-24 years) for young people by educational attainment

**Notes:**

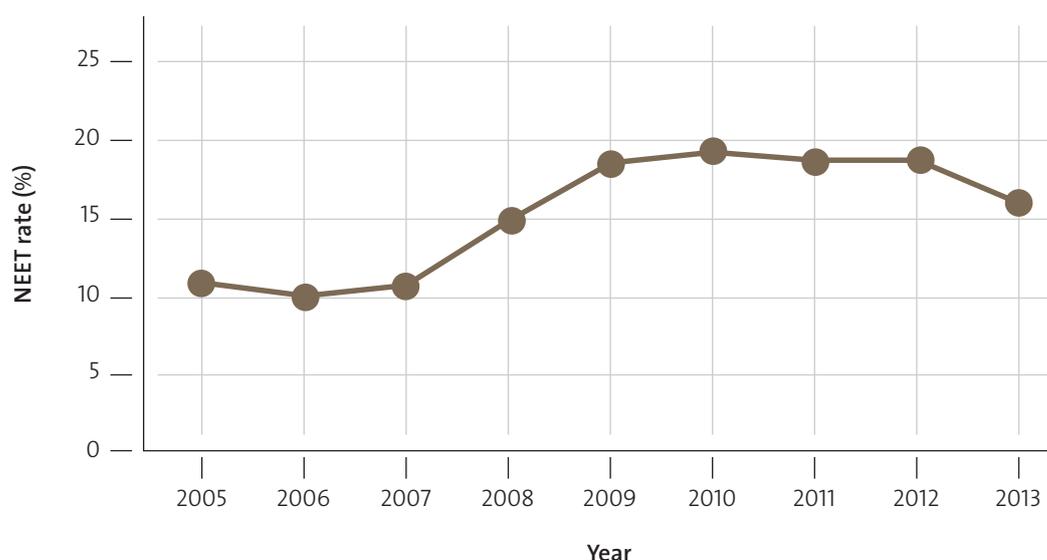
Levels 0-2: Pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education; Levels 3-4: Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education; Levels 5-6: First and second stage of tertiary education.

Source: Eurostat (2014a)

The unemployment rate increased for young people with all levels of educational attainment between 2004 and 2012. Young people whose highest level of educational attainment was pre-primary, primary or lower secondary education had the highest unemployment rates in 2004 and in 2012, but the gap between this group and other groups has widened over the period. While just under 20% of this group were unemployed in 2004, this had increased to approximately 50% in 2012. Unemployment rates for young people with a tertiary education increased from approximately 4% to almost 18% over the same period.

The gap between unemployment rates for young people with Levels 0-2 and Levels 5-6 increased from approximately 13 percentage points in 2004 to 33 percentage points in 2012. The unemployment rates for young people with Levels 3-4 and Levels 5-6 were relatively similar in 2004, but the gap had also widened between these two groups – from approximately 2 percentage points in 2004 to 12 percentage points in 2012.

The percentage of young people who are neither in employment, education or training (NEET) has also increased in recent years (see Figure 5.5). The percentage of young people who are NEET is relevant since it is used as a measure of social exclusion or disengagement.⁹⁷ Many of the young people targeted by the youth programmes are likely to be in this subgroup.

Figure 5.5: Young people (15-24 years) not in employment or not in any education or training (NEET)

Source: Eurostat (2014b)

The percentage of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) followed a similar trend to overall youth unemployment, with a sharp increase in the rate between 2007 and 2009. Approximately 16% of young people were NEET in 2013.⁹⁸ A recent study⁹⁹ analysed the determinants of being a young person (aged 15-24) who is NEET. The study looked at two time periods: 2006, at the height of the economic boom in Ireland, and 2011, when Ireland was in recession. The study also looked at the determinants of young people's transition to employment over three consecutive quarters and compares this to the transition for unemployed prime-aged individuals (defined as aged 25-54). This research found that the percentage of young people who remained NEET for three consecutive quarters increased from approximately 79% in 2006 to approximately 86% in 2011. This compares to an increase in continuous unemployment from approximately 39% to 63% for prime-aged individuals. A further 21% of unemployed prime-aged individuals transitioned into inactivity in 2011, a decrease from approximately 33% in 2006. Third-level qualifications had appreciating effects on transition to employment for young people who are NEET between 2006 and 2011. Possession of a Leaving Certificate or vocational-type qualification had a depreciating effect on transition between 2006 and 2011. While young people who were unemployed for longer durations were less likely to transition into employment in 2006 and 2011, the negative effect of previous unemployment was less pronounced in 2011, particularly for the long-term unemployed.

In summary, the percentage of young people who remained continuously NEET increased between 2006 and 2011. In addition, while young people with a third-level qualification were more likely to transition into employment in 2011, those with a Leaving Certificate or vocational-type qualification were less likely to transition into employment.

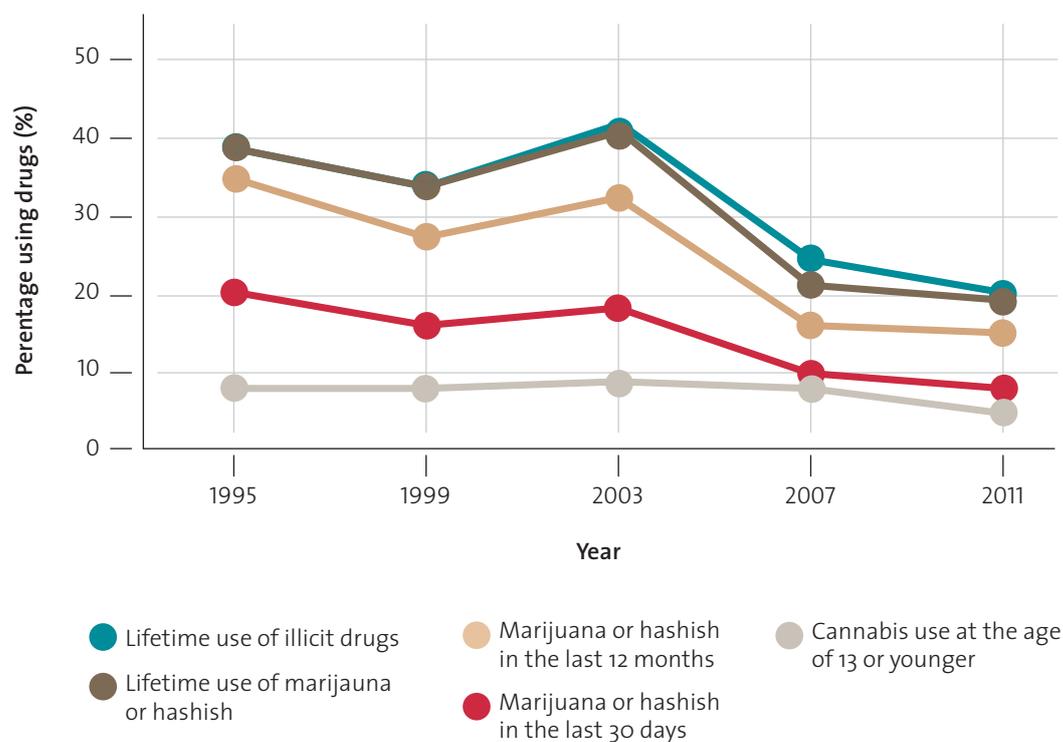
5.2.4 Substance abuse

Alcohol and illegal drug use among young people appears to have declined in recent years. The LDTF and the YPFSF explicitly aim to divert 'at risk' young people from substance misuse. Trends in drug and alcohol misuse among young people are examined here. The two most consistent sources of data for substance use among young people are the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) and the Health Behaviour in School-aged

Children (HBSC) Survey. The ESPAD is a cross-national project undertaken in European countries where comparable self-reported data on substance use is collected from young people aged 15-16 years.¹⁰⁰ While 15-16 year-olds are only a subset of the young people targeted in these programmes, the findings are presented (with suitable caution) as a proxy for wider drug use trends among young people. The HBSC Survey, conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), collects data on key indicators of health, health attitudes and health behaviour. It is a school-based survey, with self-completion of questionnaires administered by teachers in a classroom setting.¹⁰¹

Figure 5.6 shows the percentage of 15-16 year-olds that have used illicit drugs in their lifetime; have used marijuana or hashish in their lifetime, in the last 12 months and in the last 30 days; and have used cannabis at the age of 13 or younger. Drug use among all measures increased between 1999 and 2003, and fell substantially between 2003 and 2011. In 2011, 19% of 15-16 year-olds had used illicit drugs, with the vast majority of these having used marijuana or hashish; 14% of 15-16 year-olds have used marijuana or hashish in the last 12 months; while 7% used marijuana or hashish in the last 30 days. 4% said that they had used cannabis at the age of 13 or younger.

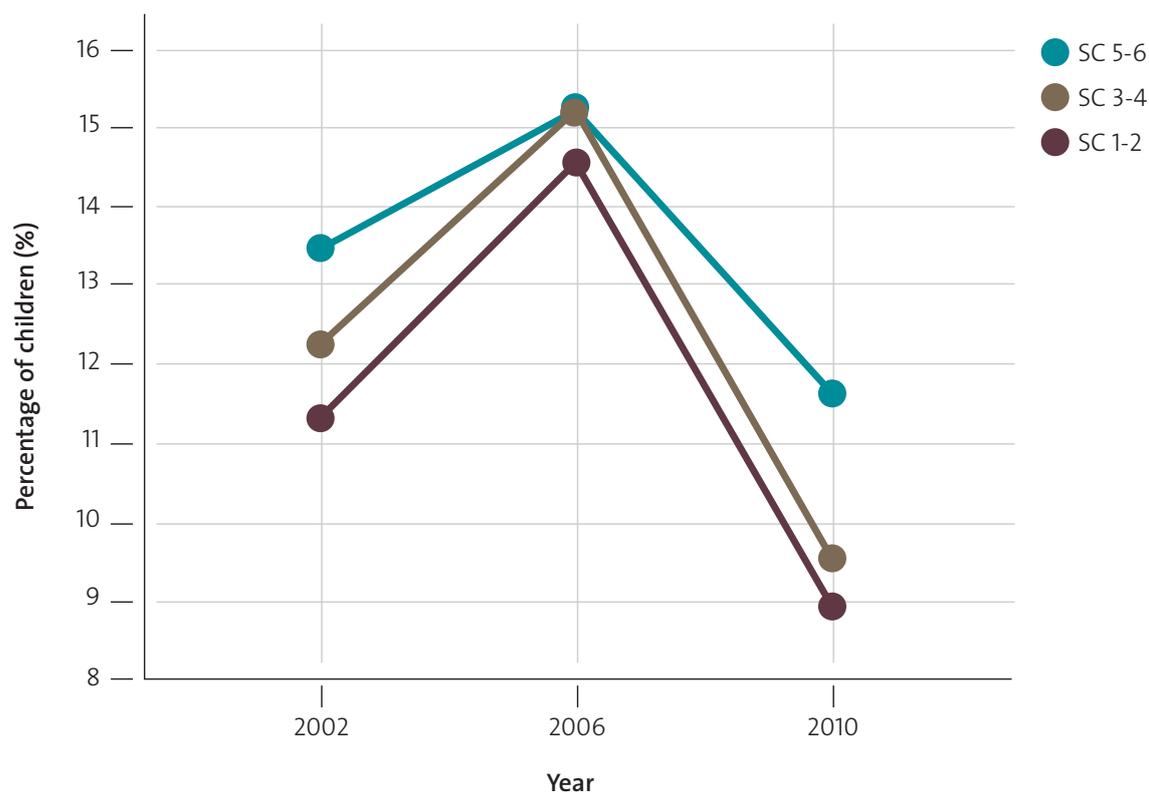
Figure 5.6: Percentage of 15-16 year-olds using illicit drugs (selected years 1995-2011)



Source: Hibell *et al* (2012) *The 2011 ESPAD Report*

HBSC surveys asked young people aged 10-17 about lifetime cannabis use. Findings show that the percentage of children who reported having taken cannabis in their lifetime increased between 2002 and 2006, and declined between 2006 and 2010. Trends were similar for children from all social backgrounds, with children from SC 3-4 and SC 5-6 more likely to report to have taken cannabis (*see Figure 5.7*). The difference in lifetime cannabis use between young people from SC 3-4 and SC 5-6 increased noticeably between 2006 and 2010. Overall lifetime cannabis use for this age group was 10.5% in 2010, which compares with lifetime use of marijuana or hashish of 18% among 16-17 year-olds surveyed for ESPAD (*see above*).

Figure 5.7: Percentage of children aged 10-17 who report to having taken cannabis at least once in their lifetime, by social background (2002, 2006, and 2010)



Notes:

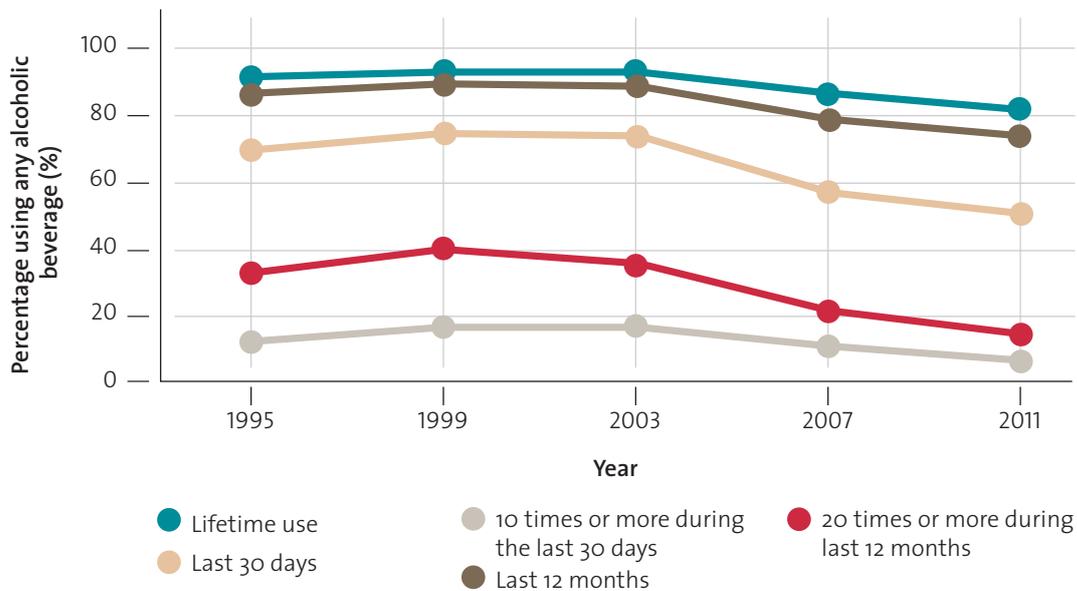
SC 1 = professional occupations; SC 2 = managerial occupations; SC 3 = non-manual occupations; SC 4 = skilled-manual occupations; SC 5 = semi-skilled occupations; SC 6 = unskilled occupations (Health Promotion Research Centre, 2012, p. 10).

Source: HBSC surveys, cited in *State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2012* (DCYA, 2012, p. 137)

Alcohol use among young people appears to have also declined in recent years. The ESPAD collects data on lifetime alcohol use, alcohol use in the last 12 months and alcohol use in the last 30 days for 15-16 year olds. The survey also collects data on the percentage of 15-16 year-olds who consumed alcohol 20 times or more during the last 12 months or 10 times or more during the last 30 days.

Alcohol use among 15-16 year-olds has fallen across all measures from 1999-2011, after increasing between 1995 and 1999 (see Figure 5.8). Lifetime alcohol use declined from 92% in 1999 to 81% in 2011. Alcohol use in the last 12 months and the last 30 days declined to 73% and 50% respectively in 2011. The percentage of 15-16 year-olds consuming alcohol 20 times or more in the last 12 months decreased from 39% in 1999 to 14% in 2011. The percentage consuming alcohol 10 times or more in the last month decreased from 16% in 1999 to 6% in 2011.

Figure 5.8: Percentage of 15-16 year-olds using any alcoholic beverage (selected years 1995-2011)

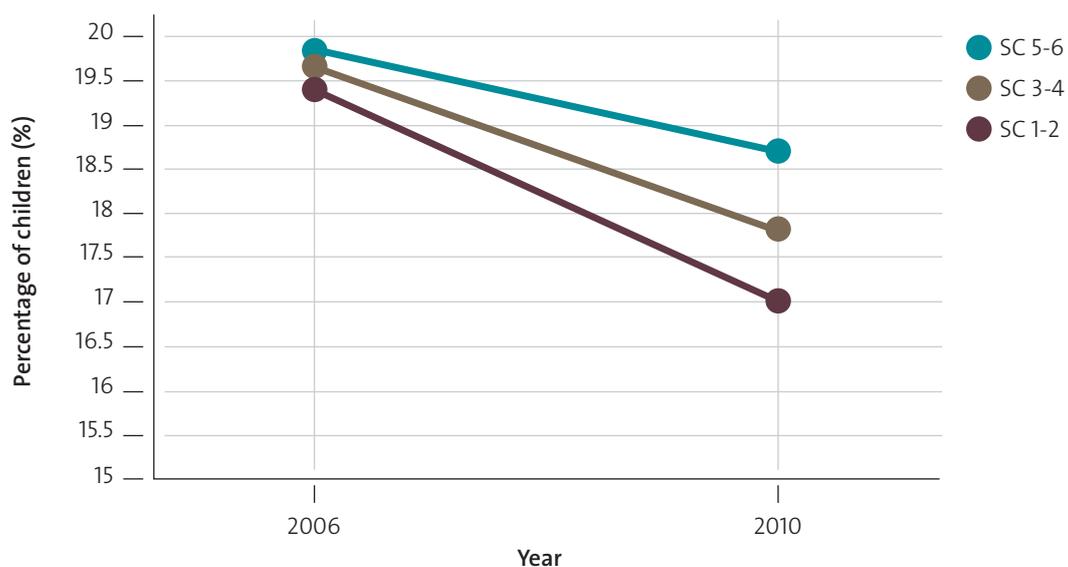


Source: Hibell *et al* (2012) *The 2011 ESPAD Report*

There appears to have been a decline in self-reported 'drunkenness' among young people. The HBSC Survey collected data on drunkenness for children aged 10-17 in 2006 and 2010. Survey respondents were asked if they had been drunk at least once in the last 30 days.

The percentage of children who reported that they had been drunk at least once in the last 30 days decreased from approximately 20% to approximately 18% between 2006 and 2010 (see Figure 5.9). There was no statistically significant difference between social groups.¹⁰²

Figure 5.9: Percentage of children aged 10-17 who report to have been drunk at least once in the last 30 days, by social background (2006 and 2010)

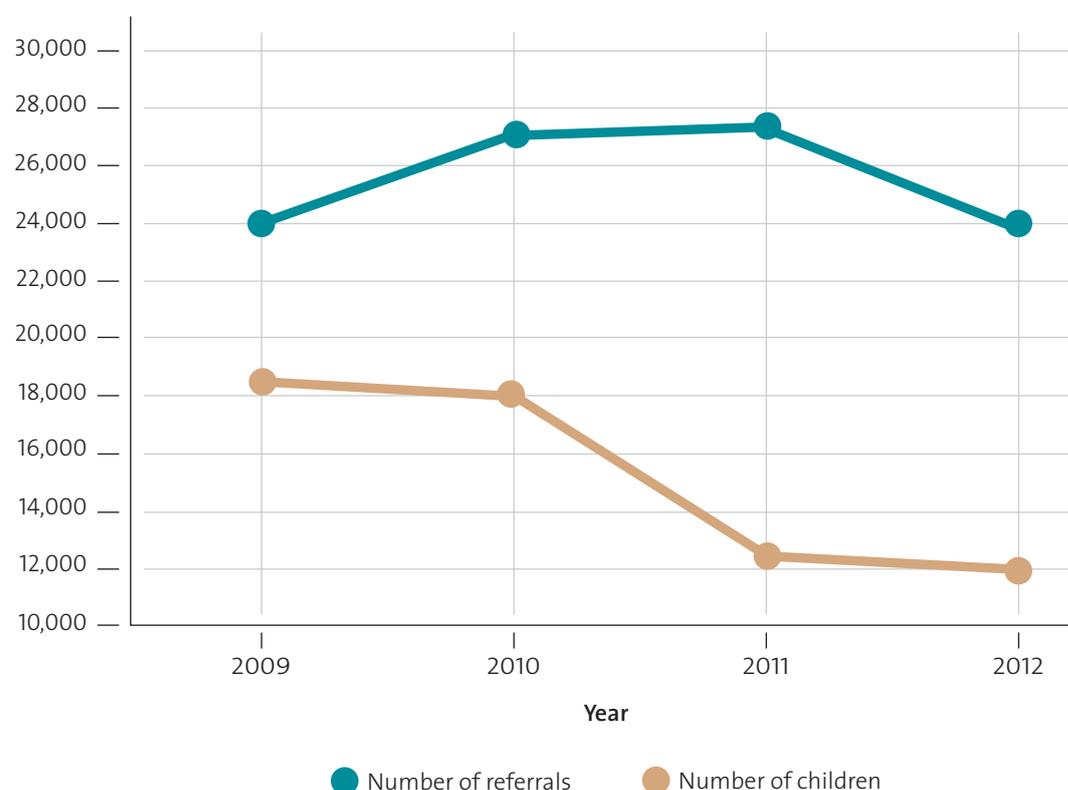


Source: HBSC surveys, cited in *State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2012* (DCYA, 2012, p. 129)

5.2.5 Crime

The SPY and YPFSF programmes target young people who have been involved in crime or are at risk of becoming involved in crime. Services that target such young people aim to change their behaviour by engaging them in various interventions/activities. The number of children involved in committing offences appears to have decreased in recent years, although the number of offences appears to have remained somewhat steady. The number of young people referred to the Garda Diversion Programme and the total number of referrals are used as a proxy for the number of young people involved in crime and the number of offences committed by young people respectively. A 'referral' relates to an offence as opposed to an individual. The number of referrals may therefore exceed the number of individuals. The vast majority of offences committed by young people in Ireland are referred to the Garda Diversion Programme; it is therefore a reliable data source. Figure 5.10 shows the trend in the number of referrals and the number of children referred to the Garda Diversion Programme between 2009 and 2012.

Figure 5.10: Number of referrals and number of children referred to the Garda Diversion Programme (2009-2012)



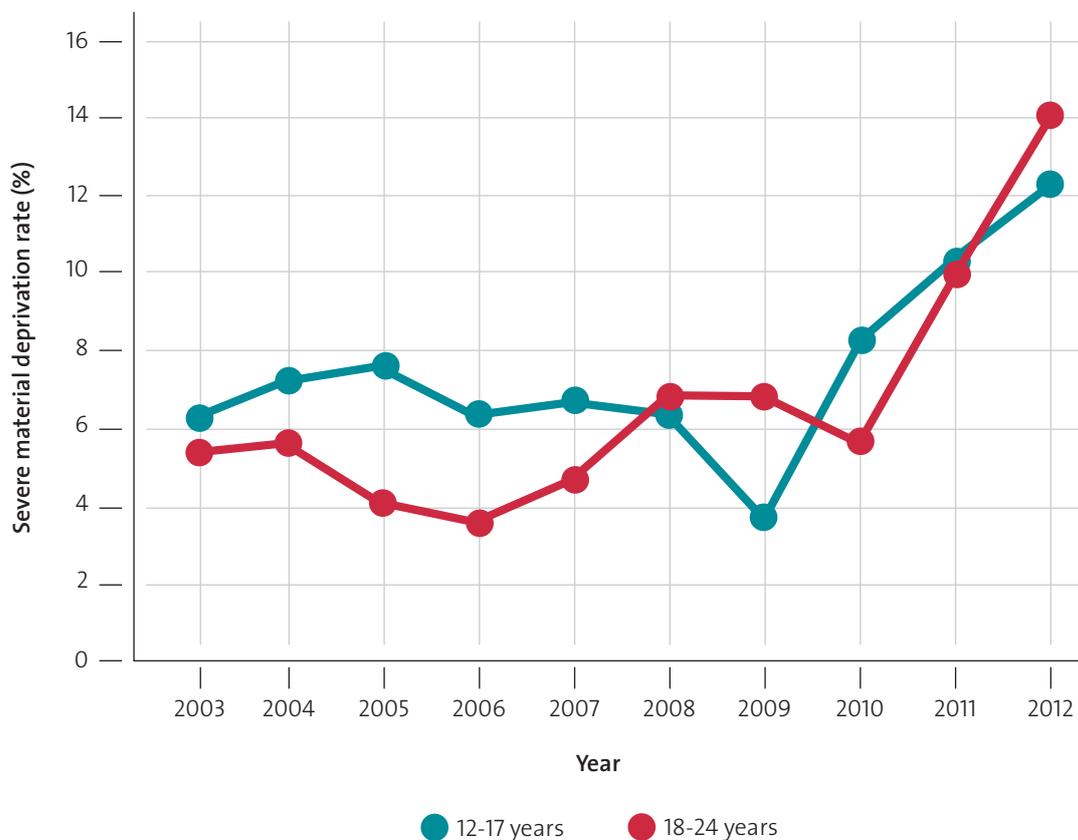
Source: Garda Office for Children and Youth Affairs (2011, pp. 10-12; 2012, pp. 10-12)

As seen in Figure 5.10, the number of referrals to the Garda Diversion Programme increased slightly from 23,952 in 2009 to 24,068 children in 2012. The number of children referred to the Programme decreased from 18,519 in 2009 to 12,246 children in 2012. It appears, on this basis, that a smaller number of individual children are committing more offences.

5.2.6 Poverty

The SPY and YPFSF programmes target young people who are disadvantaged as a result of poverty. Services engage with such young people with an aim to improve their life chances through participation in various interventions/activities. Rates of material deprivation among young people have increased following the economic downturn, although at-risk-of-poverty rates appear to be more mixed. People who are defined as suffering from severe material deprivation are those who are unable to pay (or come from households that are unable to pay) for at least four common household items.¹⁰³ Figure 5.11 shows the trend in the rate of severe material deprivation for young people aged 12-17 and 18-24 years.

Figure 5.11: Severe material deprivation rate for young people aged 12-17 and 18-24 (2003-2012)

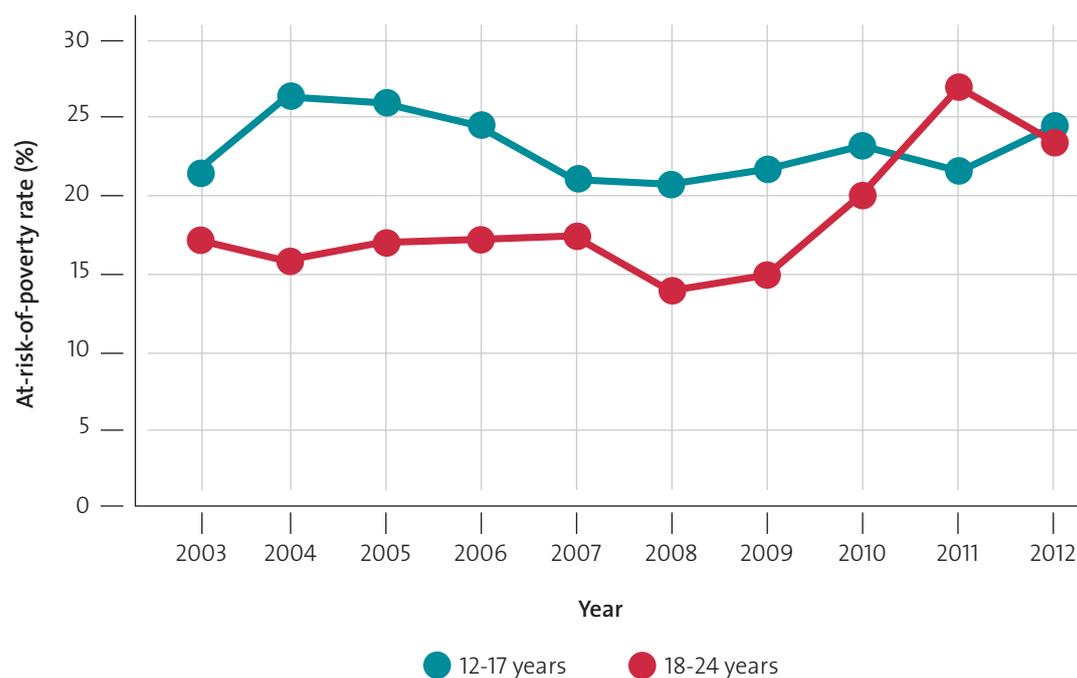


Source: Eurostat (2014d)

As seen in Figure 5.11, the rate of deprivation for 12-17 year-olds decreased between 2005 and 2009, but increased sharply between 2009 and 2012 – from below 4% to more than 12%. The rate for 18-24 year-olds has mostly increased between 2006 and 2012. The proportion of 18-24 year-olds who were severely materially deprived was approximately 14% in 2012.

The at-risk-of-poverty rate is the percentage of people with an equivalised disposable income of below 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers.¹⁰⁴ The at-risk-of-poverty rate does not measure poverty but income relative to the median income in the country. Figure 5.12 shows the at-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers for 12-17 year-olds and 18-24 year-olds. Social transfers include State social supports, such as unemployment benefits and housing allowances.

Figure 5.12: Percentage of young people aged 12-17 and 18-24 at risk of poverty (2003-2012)



Source: Eurostat (2014f)

As seen in Figure 5.12, the proportion of children aged 12-17 at risk of poverty has remained somewhat stable between 2003 and 2011, while the proportion of 18-24 year-olds at risk increased noticeably between 2009 and 2011, before falling in 2012. It appears that the economic downturn had a greater impact on the older cohort of young people. The at-risk-of-poverty rates were approximately 24% for 12-17 year-olds and approximately 23% for 18-24 year-olds in 2012.

5.2.7 Homelessness

The SPY is the only programme that explicitly targets young people who are homeless. Similar to those in poverty, services that target these young people aim to improve their life chances through engagement in interventions/activities that aim to improve various soft outcomes for young people. This can assist them in gaining employment or improving their educational opportunities. Although there is little data on homelessness among young people in Ireland, from the limited data available, it appears that youth homelessness has declined recently. Data on homelessness is available from the Census, from residential centres and from the Health Service Executive (HSE).

Census 2011 was the first attempt at comprehensively counting the number of homeless persons in the population. The total number of homeless persons counted on Census night in 2011 was 3,808. Of this total, 104 children aged 10-14 and 184 children and young people aged 15-19 were homeless on Census night. There were 339 young people aged 20-24 who were homeless at the time.

Data from residential centres and the HSE show that a total of 245 children aged 12-17 were accommodated in emergency residential accommodation in 2011. Of the 179 children referred to Crisis Intervention Service (CIS) residential services, 14 children were admitted as either seeking accommodation or being homeless. The remainder of the children were admitted as out of home due to a family relationship or placement breakdown. During January-September 2012, only one child presented as homeless to CIS residential services¹⁰⁵, which indicates a possible decrease in child homelessness¹⁰⁶.

5.3 Rationale for the current geographical distribution of funding

The distribution of funding for youth services was mostly located in local drugs task force areas (*see Section 2.3*). Therefore, the current geographical distribution of funding for the youth programmes has a historical context. The youth programmes under examination are intended to be targeted at disadvantaged young people, so for effective targeting, the catchment areas that are being served by the funded youth providers should indicate elevated disadvantage. There is no rationale for targeted youth services operating in areas with relatively few young people who are disadvantaged. In rural areas, this may mean that a single service may have to support several small pockets of deprivation to be viable. Currently, data on specific catchment areas for each youth service is not available so it cannot be assessed whether there is a rationale for the current distribution of services.

Matching the catchment areas of local service providers to electoral divisions or small area boundaries would enable a better examination of the efficiency of the current geographical spread of funding to examine if the most disadvantaged areas are being served. Various data are available from the Census at electoral division and small area level, such as age, unemployment and education level, that would assist in assessing whether the most disadvantaged areas are being served by the programmes. An illustration of how catchment areas can be mapped is provided in Appendix 3.

5.4 Summary

This chapter identifies the target groups for the programmes and appropriate outcome indicators for these groups of young people were selected by the VFMPR Team. Data trends for these indicators were examined over time to identify whether there remains a valid rationale for targeting these groups of young people. Outcomes for young people have been mixed in recent years. On the one hand, the deteriorating economic situation has increased unemployment and poverty rates for young people of working age. On the other hand, the available evidence shows that overall drug use, youth crime and youth homelessness have declined and Leaving Certificate retention rates have increased for young people.

These youth programmes target ‘at risk’ young people who are disadvantaged in different ways, thus the outcomes for young people from DEIS schools, from particular social backgrounds and with low levels of education are particularly significant as measures of disadvantage. Young people from DEIS schools continue to experience higher levels of non-attendance, suspensions and expulsions at school and the gap between students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools is widening. Young people in DEIS schools also have lower Leaving Certificate retention rates, although the gap here has narrowed. Young people with lower levels of education have experienced proportionately higher unemployment and NEET levels. Young people whose parents are in a semi-skilled or unskilled profession are more likely to have engaged in illicit drug use. In addition, youth crime appears to be more concentrated on a smaller number of young people since the gap between number of referrals to the Garda Diversion Programme and the number of young people referred has widened. For these reasons, along with the projected increase in the overall youth population in the coming years (which will presumably include an increase in the number of young people in disadvantaged areas), there remains a valid rationale for the provision of youth programmes for young people who are disadvantaged.

Efficiency



Terms of Reference

- Define the outputs associated with the youth programmes' activities and identify the level and trend of those outputs.
- Identify the level and trend of costs and staffing resources associated with the youth programmes and thus comment on the efficiency with which they have achieved their objectives.

This chapter assesses the efficiency of the youth programmes under examination. The level and trend of costs and staffing resources associated with the programmes are examined. The activities of the programmes are described by looking at survey responses from providers listing the activities they are engaged in. The average daily and total numbers of participants are examined from a random sample of projects that completed the VFMPR Survey. These outputs are compared across services that provide for young people with differing need levels. Efficiency is assessed by examining the unit cost per young person of each service and compared across the need level targeted and the governance model of services.

Efficiency analysis examines the ratio of inputs to outputs. An activity is said to be more efficient than another where more outputs are produced for a given level of inputs or where the same level of outputs are produced with a lower level of inputs.

6.1 Data issues

This chapter intended to provide a comprehensive breakdown of inputs and compare outputs and unit costs across different types of activities, different groups of young people and different types of providers. A full analysis, however, was not possible for a number of reasons.

Firstly, a comprehensive analysis of pay, non-pay and management fees was planned as part of the analysis of inputs. While providers included a breakdown of pay and non-pay expenditure in their progress reports that are sent into the YAU annually, data from the reports were not collected in a central database capable of being analysed. Many progress reports sent into the YAU provide figures that are in respect of several locally based service providers, so the figures that apply to individual providers are not known. These two issues prevented a straightforward analysis of pay and non-pay costs and management fees. The input analysis in this chapter includes estimates of salary costs and staff numbers based on samples of providers where a breakdown of figures was available from annual progress reports. Management fees are estimated based on responses to the VFMPR Survey, where management fees could be verified from progress reports.

Secondly, an analysis of outputs where the average annual and daily participant numbers could be compared across target groups and activity type was also intended for this chapter. It was discovered over the course of the VFMPR that many of the output figures that had been reported in annual progress reports between 2010 and 2012 had been calculated incorrectly by service providers. In an attempt to remedy this situation, a random sample of providers who completed the VFMPR Survey was contacted to confirm or provide correctly calculated output figures.

6.2 Analysis of inputs

The inputs associated with the youth programmes are the funding allocations provided to services and the staff effort that the allocations support. The costs associated with the administration of the programmes, namely Youth Affairs Unit salary costs, salary costs of VEC Youth Officers and technical assistance/administration costs, are also considered inputs of the programmes.

Table 6.1 summarises the total expenditure of the three programmes in Vote 40, Children and Youth Affairs in which the youth programmes are located. The DCYA was established in 2011 with programmes from different departments, thus figures from 2010 are not available.

Table 6.1: Total expenditure for Children and Youth Affairs (Vote 40) (€ million)

	2011	2012
Children and Family Support Programme	85.227	81.292
Sectoral Programmes for Children and Young People	316.001	323.035
Policy and Legislation Programme	17.935	18.037
Appropriations-In-Aid	(5.676)	(12.385)
Net Total	413.487	409.979
Administration	8.693	9.074
Exchequer pay	28.144	27.573
Associated public service employees	495	474

Source: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

As seen in Table 6.1, net total expenditure for Vote 40 decreased from approximately €413m in 2011 to approximately €410m in 2012. The expenditure items of this VFMPR are located within Programme B: Sectoral Programmes for Children and Young People. Total expenditure for this programme increased from approximately €316m in 2011 to approximately €323m in 2012. This was largely driven by the increase in funding for the Early Childhood Care and Education free pre-school year programme and general childcare programmes. Exchequer pay decreased between 2011 and 2012, while the number of associated public service employees also decreased over the same period.

The three youth programmes which are the subject of this VFMPR are within subhead B.6. The total allocation for this subhead has decreased over the period under review, from approximately €64m in 2010 to €57m in 2012 (*see Table 6.2*). This decline was spread across most programmes administered by the Youth Affairs Unit. Together, the programmes constitute approximately 70% of total expenditure on the subhead.

Table 6.2: Total allocations for programmes under subhead B.6 (Youth Organisations and Services) (€ million)

	2010	2011	2012	% change 2010-2012
Youth programmes under review				
Special Projects for Youth Scheme	19.476	18.156	17.042	-12.5%
Young People's Facilities and Services Fund 1	7.859	7.192	6.725	-14.4%
Young People's Facilities and Services Fund 2	17.888	16.354	14.607	-18.3%
Local Drugs Task Force Scheme*		1.433	1.340	-6.5%
Subtotal	45.223	43.135	39.714	-12.2%
Other youth programmes				
Youth Information Centres	2.005	1.862	1.425	-28.9%
Youth Service Grant Scheme	12.327	11.444	11.051	-10.4%
Local Youth Club Grant Scheme	1.300	1.035	1.035	-20.4%
Gaisce	0.819	0.738	0.690	-15.8%
Leargas	0.585	0.527	0.492	-15.9%
Capacity development of VEC/Youth Officers	1.495	1.368	1.390	-7.0%
Other programmes	0.732	0.837	1.009	37.8%
Subtotal	19.263	17.811	17.092	-11.3%
Total funding for all youth programmes	64.486	60.946	56.806	-11.9%
Exchequer pay		0.366**	0.646	
Number of staff (WTE)***		11.3	10.7	

* The LDTF was not in subhead B.6 in 2010. Change calculated from 2011-2012.

** Figure represents 2 June – 31 December 2011 (DCYA was established on 2 June 2011).

*** Number of WTE staff at end of year.

Source: Department of Children and Youth Affairs

While not specifically the focus of this review, funding was provided to VECs for capacity development to oversee the youth sector in the VEC area, which includes the youth programmes under review. This funding mostly pays the salaries of Youth Officers that oversee youth work in the local area. Funding on capacity development decreased from approximately €1.5m in 2010 to €1.4m in 2012. This funding supported the salary of Youth Officers in 28 VECs in 2012. Most VECs had one Youth Officer funded by the YAU regardless of how many funded projects there were within the VEC area.

Table 6.3 disaggregates total expenditure for the youth programmes. Total expenditure represents the amount spent on each programme for each of the three years of the review. The expenditure figures in Table 6.3 differ slightly from the overall subhead allocation in Table 6.2. Firstly, Table 6.3 includes expenditure under the LDTF, which was not included in 2010 in Table 6.2 since the scheme was not included in the subhead in 2010. Secondly, figures in Table 6.3 measure total expenditure on the programmes for the year, whereas Table 6.2 measures allocations, which may be less if there is some carryover from previous years for some services. Pay and staff numbers are estimated by obtaining the ratio of pay and staff numbers to funding for a random sample of 39 local services and applying this ratio to total funding for all local services. This assumes that the level of pay and staff numbers are correlated with total funding for the services so that the proportions of staff pay and numbers to funding from

the sample can be applied to all services. The management fee is estimated by obtaining the ratio of management fees to funding for local services and Sports Development Officers who completed the VFMPR Survey and applying this ratio to total funding for the proportion of services that reported that they paid a management fee in the VFMPR Survey.

Table 6.3: Total expenditure on the youth programmes under review (€ million)

	2010	2011	2012	% change 2010-2012
Local services	39.177	36.140	33.890	-13.5%
Technical assistance/administration	2.665	2.418	2.227	-15.0%
Payments to national organisations	2.640	2.490	2.308	-12.6%
Sports Development Officers	1.515	1.377	1.287	-16.4%
Capital	1.198	0.792		-100.0%
Total expenditure	47.194	43.217	39.713	-15.9%
Local services	39.177	36.140	33.890	-13.5%
of which Pay ¹⁰⁷	28.991	28.189	27.790	-4.1%
of which Non-pay	10.186	7.951	6.100	-40.1%
Staff numbers (WTE) for local services	654	636	653	-0.2%
Management fees ¹⁰⁸	1.052	1.228	1.001	-4.8%

Source: Youth Affairs Unit¹⁰⁹, VFMPR Survey

As can be seen in Table 6.3, total expenditure on the youth programmes under review fell from approximately €47m to €40m (representing a decline of approximately 16%) between 2010 and 2012. This total programme spend includes payments to local services as well as payments in respect of technical assistance/administration, payments to national organisations, Sports Development Officers and capital expenditure. The total expenditure on local services includes the estimated breakdown of pay and non-pay costs.

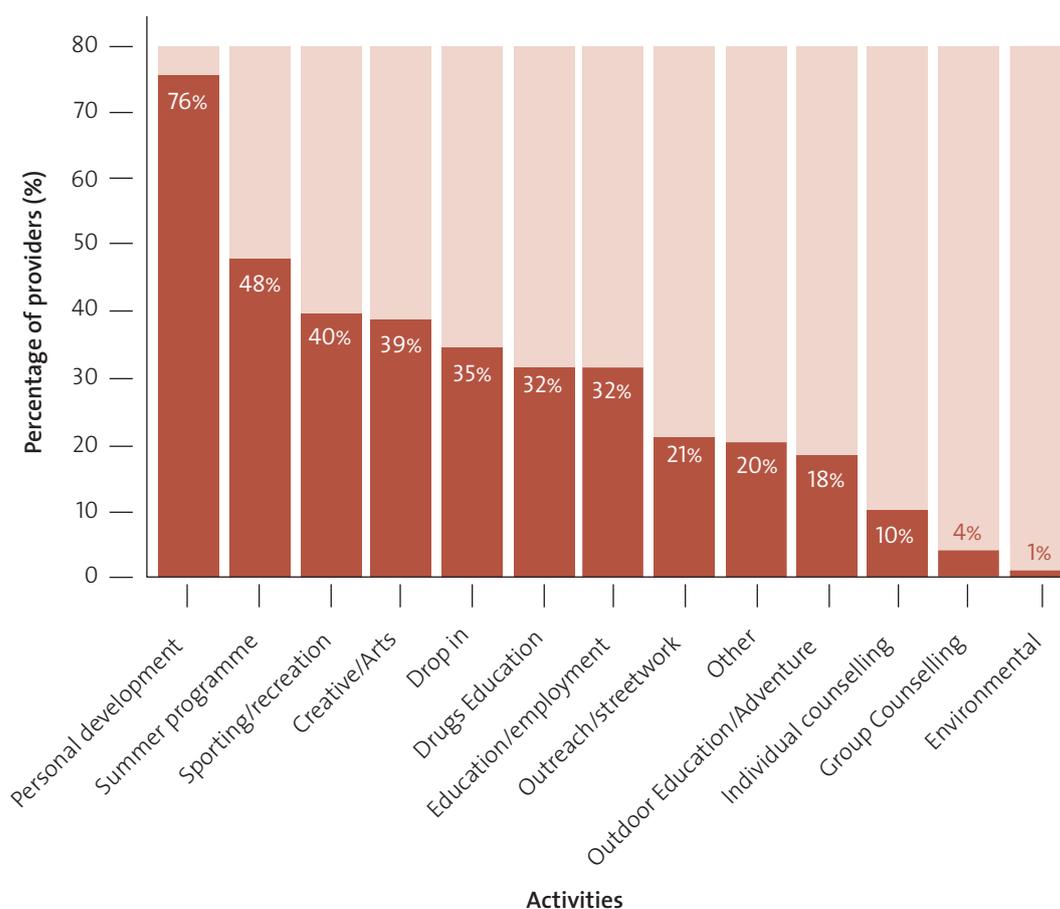
Total pay was estimated based on applying salary proportions for the sample of projects to total expenditure for local services in each year. The proportion of total expenditure that was spent on salaries for the sample was 74% in 2010, 78% in 2011 and 82% in 2012. Applying these proportions to total expenditure on local services, total pay is estimated to have declined from approximately €29m to €28m between 2010 and 2012. This represents a decline of approximately 4% compared to a decline of approximately 16% in total expenditure for local services. This indicates that the decline in allocations to local providers disproportionately impacted on non-pay expenditure, which decreased by an estimated 40% from 2010-2012. Non-pay expenditure may include administration, travel and subsistence, rent, heating, equipment and management fees. From later analysis in Section 6.3 below, it does not appear that services are being impacted, at least in terms of the number of young people participating, which has remained relatively stable. Given that the estimated number of staff members remained approximately the same between 2010 and 2012, it is likely that some of the reduction in pay expenditure is as a result of salary decreases. The number of whole-time equivalent (WTE) staff is estimated to be approximately 653 in 2012. Estimates of pay costs include costs in respect of management, administration and direct youth work positions. These positions may not be mutually exclusive since some managers and administrators may also engage in direct youth work provision. Management fees paid by services were estimated to have remained relatively constant at approximately €1m between 2010 and 2012. It is important to note that the figures provided for pay, non-pay and staff numbers are only estimated based on a small sample of 39 local service providers, thus appropriate caution is advised.

6.3 Analysis of activities and need levels

The youth programmes fund a variety of services. In the VFMPR Survey sent to all providers, respondents selected interventions/activities that they engaged in to secure improvements in outcomes for the young people involved in the service. Respondents could select a maximum of four interventions/activities from a confined list in the VFMPR Survey. This acknowledged the reality that requiring a provider to respond to one type would not reflect the breadth of the work that they are engaged in. The rationale was that the top four interventions/activities would capture a reasonable proportion, if not the majority, of the work. This restriction may have limited the answers of some providers engaged in more than four types of activities. However, limiting the selection to a reasonable number of options yielded more discriminating data than permitting services to respond to an exhaustive list.

Figure 6.1 represents the frequency of interventions/activities provided by respondents to the VFMPR Survey. The intervention/activity that most providers are engaged in is personal development, with approximately 76% of respondents saying that their organisation engaged in this type of intervention/activity. 48% of respondents said that their service provided a summer programme. Approximately 40% of respondents said that their service organised sporting/recreation activities. 10% or less of respondents said that their service engaged in individual or group counselling or environmental activities.

Figure 6.1: Interventions/activities provided by youth organisations



Note: Respondents could select a maximum of 4 activities, thus the total adds up to more than 100%. N=290
Source: VFMPR Survey

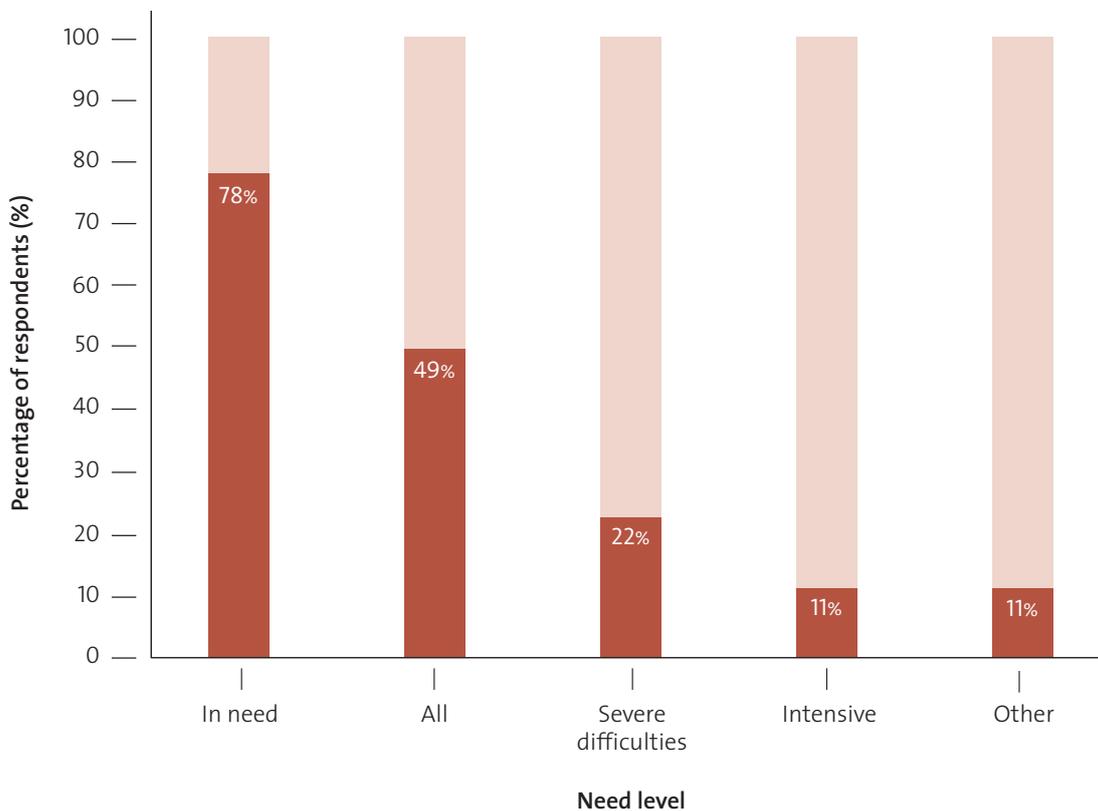
As part of the VFMPR Survey, respondents were asked where, in terms of need level, most service effort was applied. The aim here was to discover what levels of intervention are being used by services based on the reasonable assumption that a young person presenting with more complex needs is likely to require higher input costs than a young person presenting with less complex needs.¹¹⁰ Respondents could select a maximum of 2 levels of intervention from a possible 4.¹¹¹

The Hardiker Model outlines the 4 levels of intervention for children:

- Level 1 refers to mainstream services that are available to all children (*All*);
- Level 2 refers to services to children with some additional needs (*In need*);
- Level 3 refers to services provided to children with serious or chronic problems (*Severe difficulties*);
- Level 4 refers to services for children where the family has broken down or where the child may be looked after by social services (*Intensive*).

Figure 6.2 shows the proportion of respondents that provide for each need level.

Figure 6.2: Percentage of providers by need group provided for



Source: VFMPR Survey

In total, 78% of respondents said that their service targeted young people *In need*; 49% targeted *All* young people; and 22% and 11% provided for *the Severe difficulties* and *Intensive* groups respectively. This shows that the majority of services provided for all young people in the local community or young people with some additional needs, with only a small proportion applying most effort on those with serious needs.

As respondents could select a maximum of two need levels, Table 6.4 shows the proportion of respondents that provide for different combinations of young people. The number of observations is in brackets after each percentage listed.

Table 6.4: Number of providers by the group of young people where most service effort is applied

	All	In need	Severe difficulties	Intensive	Other
All	9.3% (27)				
In need	34.6% (100)	14.5% (42)			
Severe difficulties	1.4% (4)	18.7% (54)	0.3% (1)		
Intensive	1.7% (5)	5.5% (16)	2.1% (6)	1.0% (3)	
Other	2.1% (6)	4.8% (14)	0.0% (0)	0.3% (1)	3.5% (10)

Source: VFMPR Survey

Of the 289 respondents to the question related to need level in the VFMPR Survey, approximately 25% of services focused on only one need group, whereas the remainder focused on a mix of need levels. Approximately 9% of respondents applied most service effort to *All* young people without specifying a second target group; these providers appear not to target specific young people, but offer services to all young people in the locality. Approximately 35% of respondents apply most service effort on both *All* young people and on young people *In need*, where there would be a mixture of universal and targeted services offered. Approximately 15% of respondents said that their service applied most effort on those *In need* only. Only 3% said that their service applied most effort only on those with serious needs (i.e. in the *Severe difficulties* or *Intensive* groups). Approximately 4% said that their service applied most effort on none of the four main target groups.

6.4 Analysis of outputs

The outputs associated with the youth programmes are the number of young people who are provided with a service. There are two measures of youth participation used in this analysis:

1. the average number of young people who engage with a service each day that the service operates over the whole year;
2. the number of individual young people who engage with a service annually.

Measuring the central tendency of data

There are two ways of looking at the central tendency of a dataset to summarise a piece of data:

- The *mean* is the arithmetic average and is an appropriate measure for *normal* distributions of data. It is calculated by dividing the total figure by the number of observations.
- The *median* is the middle value of the set of numbers and is more appropriate for *skewed distributions*. Skewed distributions can be caused by the presence of large outliers in the dataset. The large outliers that are present in the sample of services used for this VFMPR mean that examining the median is more appropriate for the analysis of the programmes under review.

Table 6.5 shows the median number of daily and annual participants in the sample of services for each year under review.

Table 6.5: Median number of daily and annual participants

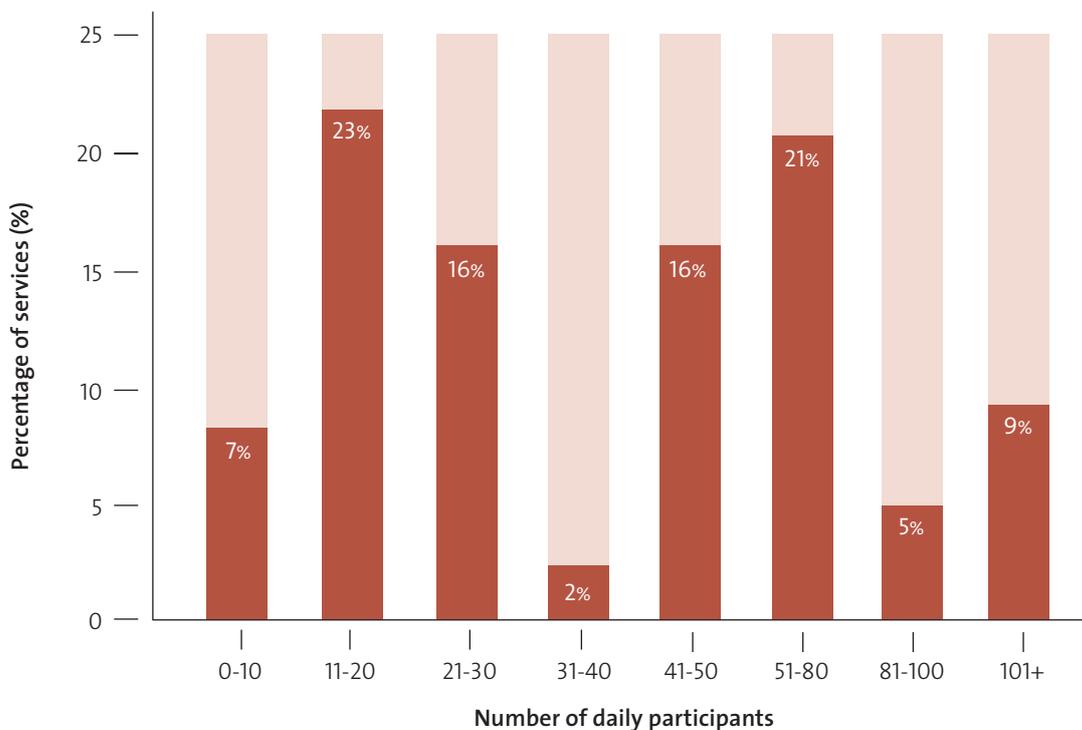
	2010	2011	2012	N
Daily participant numbers	30	34	40	42
Annual participants numbers	234	217	266	41

Source: Correspondence with a sample of respondents to the VFMPR Survey.

A sample of services was contacted to confirm their daily and annual participant numbers for each year under review. In total, 42 respondents were able to confirm their daily figures, while 41 could confirm annual numbers for all three years. The median number of participants who attended services on an average day increased from 30 to 40 young people between 2010 and 2012. The median number of individual young people participating in each year decreased between 2010 and 2011, and increased between 2011 and 2012. Between 2010 and 2012, the median annual number of participants increased by approximately 14% between 2010 and 2012.

Figure 6.3 shows the proportion of respondents that reported different ranges of average daily participant numbers. The figures provided are in respect of 2012. More than half of respondents reported that their service had an average of more than 40 young people participating daily, with just under half of respondents reporting average numbers of 40 or less. There are a considerable number of outliers, with approximately 7% of respondents reporting daily numbers of 10 participants or less and approximately 9% reporting figures of more than 100 young people per day.

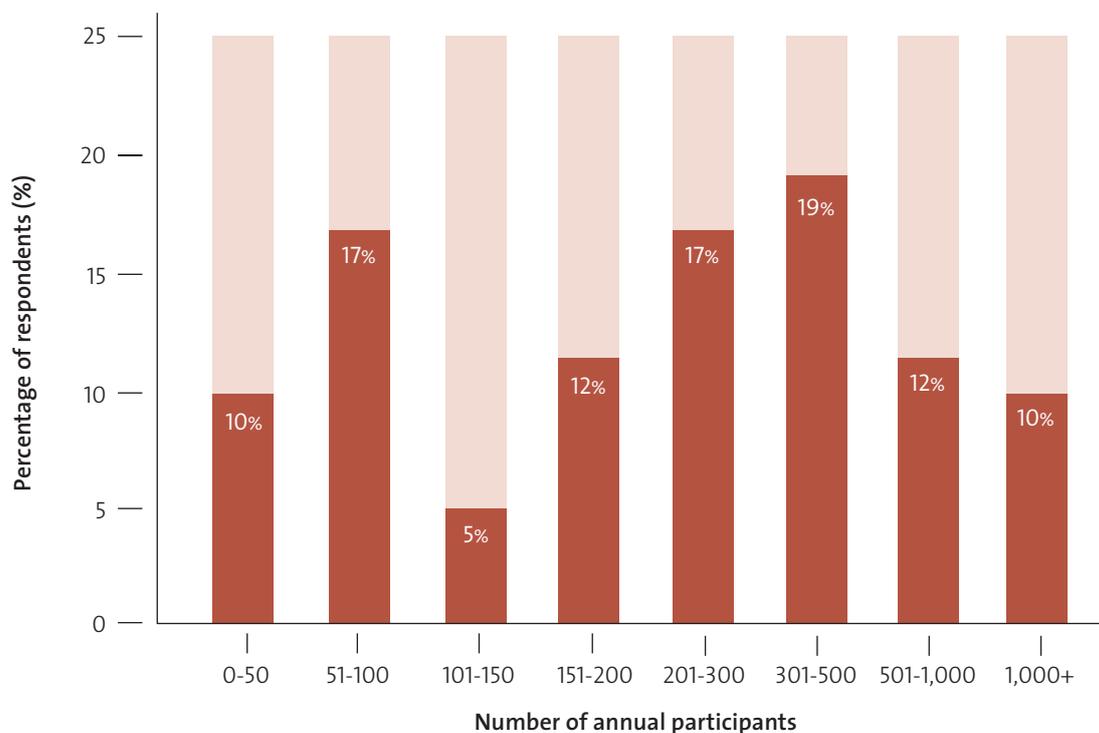
Figure 6.3: Distribution of daily participants (2012)



Source: Correspondence with a sample of respondents to the VFMPR Survey. N=43

Figure 6.4 shows the proportion of respondents that reported different ranges of annual participant numbers for 2012. Just under 60% of services reported annual participant numbers of more than 200 individual young people. Less than 50% of services reported annual participant figures of 200 or less. 10% of services had 50 or less participants over the year, while the same percentage had more than 1,000 young people participating in 2012.

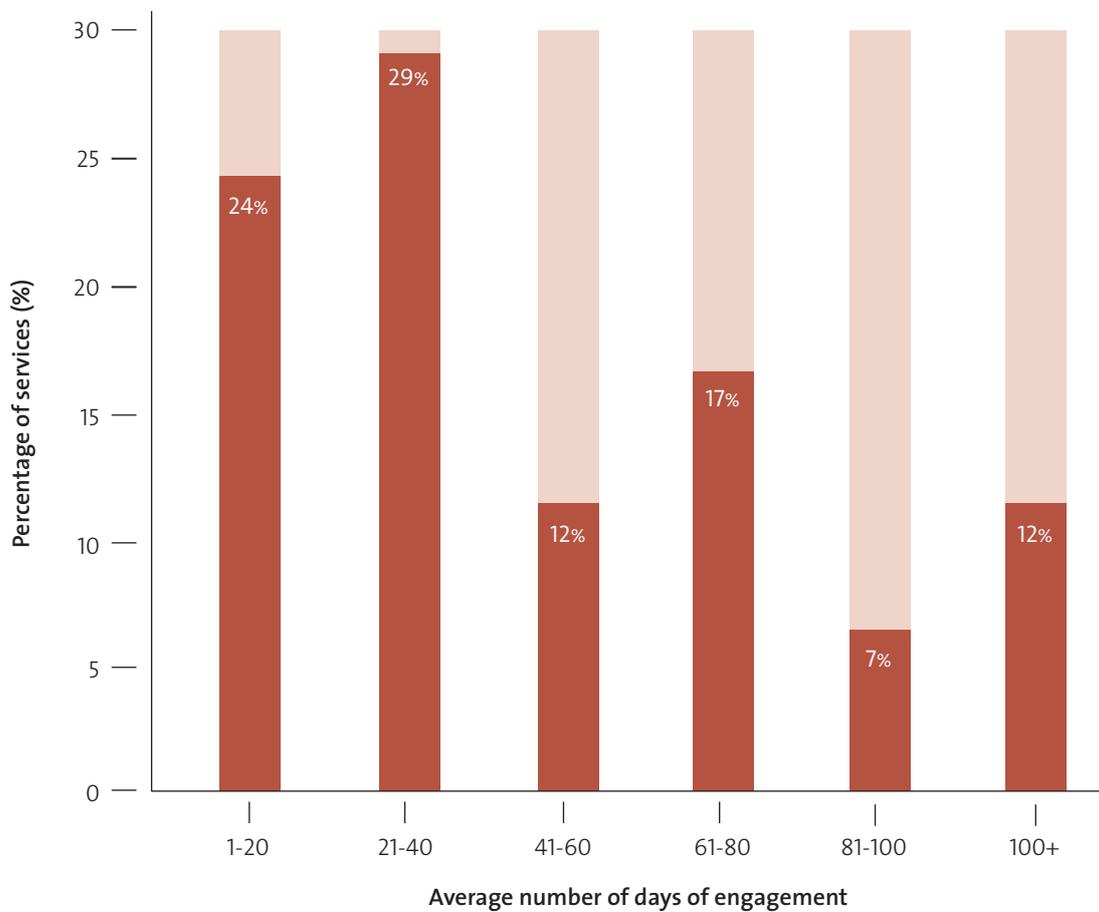
Figure 6.4: Distribution of individual annual participants (2012)



Source: Correspondence with a sample of respondents to the VFMPR Survey. N=42

By calculating ratios of individual annual to average daily participants for each service, the average length of engagement by young people in each service can be estimated. Based on 251 working days in 2012, the number of days over the year that a young person engages in each service on average is estimated. The proportion of services that have different average lengths of engagement is shown in Figure 6.5.

Figure 6.5: Average length of engagement by young people with services (2012)



Note: Number of engagement days is estimated by computing annual/daily participant ratios for each service and applying these ratios to the number of working days in the year (251 days).¹¹²

Source: Correspondence with a sample of respondents to the VFMPR Survey. N=42

It is estimated that in more than half of services in the sample, young people engaged for an average of 40 days or less. These services may have reported numbers that participated in once-off events, which would mean that the annual numbers would be far greater than the daily numbers. In approximately 20% of services, young people engaged for more than 80 days over the year. This indicates quite an intensive engagement with a relatively small group of young people.

Given that the difference in participant numbers could be explained by the need levels of the young people who participate, the median participant numbers are presented by the need levels already discussed in Section 6.2. Tables 6.6 – 6.8 show the median daily and annual participant numbers and unit costs respectively for respondents by the need level of the young people whom providers said they applied most effort on. The number of services that provided for each combination of the four need levels is in brackets. The numbers indicated in **bold** represent the median number of participants for services that only provide for one need level.

Table 6.6: Median daily participant numbers by the combination of young people targeted (2010-2012)

		All	In need	Severe difficulties	Intensive
2010	All	39 (4)			
	In need	39 (16)	17 (4)		
	Severe difficulties	51 (1)	24 (6)		
	Intensive	125 (1)	38 (4)	7 (3)	18 (1)
2011	All	34 (4)			
	In need	49 (17)	16 (4)		
	Severe difficulties	58 (1)	21 (6)		
	Intensive	102 (1)	50 (4)	8 (3)	17 (1)
2012	All	32 (4)			
	In need	47 (17)	18 (4)		
	Severe difficulties	55 (1)	20 (6)		
	Intensive	103 (1)	50 (4)	14 (3)	17 (1)

Source: Correspondence with a sample of respondents to the VFMPR Survey. N=41

Of the respondents that provided for only one need level, those that provided for *All* young people had the highest median daily participant numbers, followed by the *In need* and *Intensive* groups respectively. No respondents in the sample reported that their service provided for those with *Severe difficulties* only. This is the trend that would be expected given that both the *In need* and *Intensive* groups would be expected to require a more intensive engagement than young people who are not specifically targeted (those that provide for *All* young people). Of respondents that provided for a combination of need levels, those that applied most effort on both the *Severe difficulties* and *Intensive* groups had lower median participant numbers than respondents that provided for other need levels.

Of the respondents that provided for *All* young people, those that also provided for the *Intensive* group had higher median participant numbers compared to those that provided for *All* young people only. This is unexpected since it would be assumed that services that provide for a combination of low and high need levels would report lower participant numbers than those that provide only for young people with lower needs. A similar pattern is seen when comparing services that provide for the *In need* group, with higher participant numbers reported in respect of higher need levels served.

These trends are seen for all 3 years under review. The 12 services that provided for the four combinations of high and low need (*All* and *Severe difficulties*, *All* and *Intensive*, *In need* and *Severe difficulties*, *In need* and *Intensive*) were examined by the VFMPR Team and most of these services provided activities for large numbers of young people as well as some one-to-one or small group work, which may explain the unexpectedly large participant numbers seen for these services in Table 6.6. The small number of observations for these services also means that the median numbers for the sample may not be representative of all services.

Table 6.7 presents the median number of individual annual participants for services that provide for different combinations of need levels.

Table 6.7: Median annual participant numbers by young people targeted (2010-2012)

		All	In need	Severe difficulties	Intensive
2010	All	288 (2)			
	In need	268 (17)	263 (4)		
	Severe difficulties	645 (1)	198 (6)		
	Intensive	1500 (1)	291 (4)	26 (3)	68 (1)
2011	All	233 (3)			
	In need	260 (17)	232 (4)		
	Severe difficulties	495 (1)	175 (6)		
	Intensive	1224 (1)	327 (4)	24 (3)	65 (1)
2012	All	195 (3)			
	In need	295 (17)	225 (4)		
	Severe difficulties	504 (1)	248 (6)		
	Intensive	1236 (1)	303 (4)	24 (3)	68 (1)

Source: Correspondence with a sample of respondents to the VFMPR Survey. N=40

Similar to the trend observed in respect of median daily participant numbers, respondents that applied most effort on the *Intensive* group only had lower median annual participant numbers than other respondents that only provided for one need level. Those that provided for *All* young people only had higher participant numbers than those that provided for only the *In need* group in 2010 and 2011, but this was reversed in 2012.

The trend for respondents that provided for a combination of need levels is similar to the trend found for the daily participant numbers, although the trend is less obvious. Of those respondents that provided for *All* young people, services that also provided for higher need levels reported higher annual participant figures than those that provided for *All* young people only in 2011 and 2012. Of those that provided for the *In need* group, those that provided for this group only had higher median participant numbers than those that provided for the *Severe difficulties* group but lower than those that provided for the *Intensive* group.

Both Tables 6.6 and 6.7 contain some unexpected trends, which may be due to the small number of services in the sample or may be related to differences in the mix of need levels provided for. These trends warrant a further investigation of participant numbers, which will only be possible with appropriately disaggregated data.

6.5 Efficiency analysis

Efficiency is assessed by calculating unit costs for the sample of providers. Unit costs are calculated by dividing the total annual funding allocated to a service by the total number of *individual young people* who participated in the service annually. This provides a cost per participant for each service in each year. Table 6.8 presents the trend in the median unit costs for all services in the sample.

Table 6.8: Median funding per annual participant (2010-2012)

	2010 (€)	2011 (€)	2012 (€)	N
Median unit cost	460	415	382	42*

* There were 41 respondents in 2010

Source: VFMPR Survey

Overall median unit costs for the sample of services have fallen from €460 per young person in 2010 to €382 in 2012. This is as a result of both a decline in annual funding for services and an increase in the number of annual participants.

Table 6.9 compares unit costs by the different need levels that are provided for by different services.

Table 6.9: Median funding per annual participant by young people targeted (2010-2012)

		All (€)	In need (€)	Severe difficulties (€)	Intensive (€)
2010	All	889 (2)			
	In need	466 (17)	312 (4)		
	Severe difficulties	425 (1)	619 (6)		
	Intensive	191 (1)	614 (4)	1,020 (3)	817 (1)
2011	All	201 (3)			
	In need	392 (17)	338 (4)		
	Severe difficulties	504 (1)	693 (6)		
	Intensive	219 (1)	459 (4)	1,033 (3)	769 (1)
2012	All	197 (3)			
	In need	350 (17)	309 (4)		
	Severe difficulties	471 (1)	626 (6)		
	Intensive	202 (1)	342 (4)	966 (3)	687 (1)

Source: VFMPR Survey, follow-up clarification of figures with a random sample of providers. N=40

As expected, median unit costs were generally higher for services that provided for higher need levels only. In 2011 and 2012, for example, respondents that provided for *All* young people only reported lower median unit costs than services that provided for either the *In need* only or the *Intensive* only groups. In 2010, the median unit cost for respondents that provided for *All* young people only was much higher than in the years following, which is as a result of a missing observation in 2010.¹¹³

For respondents that provided for more than one need group, median unit costs were highest in respect of those that provided for both the *Severe difficulties* and *Intensive* groups. Of the respondents that provided for *All* young people, median unit costs were higher for services that also provided for young people with higher needs, with the exception of those that also provided for the *Intensive* group. The same trend is observed for respondents that provided for the *In need* group.

In most cases, higher median unit costs were associated with services that provided for higher need levels, which is what would be expected. The main exception is for services that provided for the *Intensive* group, which had lower median unit costs when compared with some services that provided for lower need groups.

From a review of the services that provided for both high and low need levels, it was clear that most services provided a combination of high and low intensity activities, but the breakdown of participants by activity was not known. Given the small sample size (some combinations have only one observation), the median unit costs may not be representative of all services so it is not too surprising that there is no clear pattern in Table 6.8. The proportion of total participants or total spending by need level also is not known since information at this level of disaggregation is not currently collected by service providers. It is not known how many of the total participant numbers reported by providers fall into the different need groups. In the absence of this information, it is not possible to do a complete analysis of efficiency.

Table 6.10 compares the unit costs for services with different governance structures. The four governance models presented cover the majority of the sample of services and show that there is some difference between services operating under different models.

Table 6.10: Median unit cost by organisational status (2010-2012)

	2010 (€)	2011 (€)	2012 (€)	N
Is affiliated to a national youth work organisation	300	261	231	14
Is managed by a parent organisation	817	839	691	9
Is a youth work initiative within a generic service	450	336	266	6*
Is an independent youth work service/project	439	431	380	12
Other	1,549	1,365	1,337	1

* There were 5 respondents in 2010. N=42

Source: VFMPR Survey.

Median unit costs have fallen for services within all organisational groups over the period of review. Services that were managed by a parent organisation had the highest annual cost per participant, with a median unit cost of €691 in 2012. The lowest median unit cost was in respect of providers that were affiliated to a national youth work organisation, with a unit cost per participant of €231 in 2012. There are large differences in unit costs for providers that operate under different governance models. Similar to Table 6.9, the difference between governance models cannot be explained in this VFMPR given the lack of disaggregated data presently collected.

6.6 Summary

There are a number of data issues that hampered a comprehensive analysis of efficiency and prevented accurate comparisons of efficiency between providers from being made. A small sample had to be relied on for estimates of salary costs and staff numbers, as well as estimates of average daily and annual participant numbers and unit costs, thus appropriate caution is advised when interpreting these figures.

Total expenditure on the programmes declined by approximately 16% between 2010 and 2012. Estimates of overall staff salaries and non-pay costs for local services under the programmes both declined. The estimated total number of staff in local services was relatively unchanged between 2010 and 2012, which suggests that staff salary levels are likely to have declined over the period. Median participant numbers appear to have increased between 2010 and 2012, while funding has decreased, which means that the corresponding median unit cost per individual young person has decreased over the period.

While there is some indication of overall efficiency given the decline in average unit cost, there appears to be some differences between services that provided for young people with different need levels. Unit costs for services that only provided for young people with higher needs appear to be greater than for services that only provided for young people with lower needs. For services that provided for combinations of need levels (i.e. the vast majority), the pattern is less clear. Indeed, some combinations of higher and lower need levels attracted smaller unit costs than combinations of lower need levels. However, a closer examination of a selection of services that provided for both lower and higher need levels revealed that such services tended to provide activities for young people with high needs alongside activities that would attract a large number of young people. In addition, the sample size for this analysis is very small. These two factors may explain the unclear pattern outlined above.

There are considerable differences in median unit costs for services that have different governance models, but the reason for the difference is not clear. More useful, consistent and disaggregated data are needed to be able to make any full assessment of efficiency. The development of new data requirements, where unit costs are profiled to reflect the relative degree of complexity being engaged, will assist in making appropriate comparisons between services and may also assist the DCYA in the development of a future costing structure.

Terms of Reference

- Examine the extent that the youth programmes' objectives have been achieved and comment on the effectiveness with which they have been achieved.

This chapter considers the evidence supporting whether the objectives of the youth programmes have been achieved. It focuses on producing evidence of programme 'outcomes' and finds that the available data fall short of being able to determine performance in this area. However, attempts are made to examine the elements of programme design that facilitate greater effectiveness and identify to what extent these attributes were present in the programmes. It also draws on a literature review, specifically commissioned for this review and undertaken by the Centre for Effective Services, which attempts to identify the key mechanisms of programmes which in the review of the evidence appear to bring about positive change for youth targeted in the key domains covered by the schemes. These mechanisms are applied retrospectively to accounts of programme activity provided by front-line staff and young people.

7.1 Introduction

It is accepted in the evaluation literature that the measurement of human services is difficult and complex. Profound impacts are sometimes advanced in terms of the efficacy of community interventions for youth. For example, one respondent to the VFMPR Survey for the present review claimed that children in the area not going to prison over a 5-year period was the consequence of a youth intervention¹¹⁴; another attributed no teenage pregnancies due to a sexual health training intervention¹¹⁵; others were more general, including claims of significant savings to the Exchequer as a consequence of professional effort in this area¹¹⁶.

However, caution is advised. Reasonable individual *outcomes* from a programme – to improve, for example, employability or reduce the chances of drug-taking, mental health problems or anti-social behaviour by young people – may be more subtle and indicate changes in attitudes and motivation, improved decision-making, improved self-motivation, impulse-control and practical change in circumstances. Consequently, observing and measuring change is problematic in terms of providing evidence of improvement. The intended ultimate *impacts* of these programmes are often far more distant¹¹⁷ – outcomes such as success in securing sustainable employment, staying drug-free, becoming a self-governing, reasonably content and productive member of society and a contributor to the formal economy. These more 'distant' outcomes can be the result of many factors outside the reach and influence of the programme itself.

Having given an outline of the data and methodological issues encountered by the review, the substance of this chapter relates to the key components of effective programmes. It is clear from the earlier treatment of data problems that the youth programmes cannot, by and large, provide proof of impact. This incapacity is not unique to the programmes under examination; therefore 'programme design' is presented as a secondary, but important indicator of effectiveness.

The service design features examined relate to (a) **programme focus** – ensuring that effort devoted to the delivery of local programmes aligns with national policy intentions; (b) **evaluation design** – gauging the degree to which programmes *can* deliver outcomes-related data; and (c) **interventions** – the degree to which the type of engagements utilised with young people fit with an emerging, but imperfect evidence base. The rationale for inclusion of these three components is included in each respective section.

7.1.1 Methodology and data issues

As identified in Chapter 3, the normative methodological approach is to attempt to gauge outcome performance and the degree of impact of the programmes, i.e. all things considered, are there demonstrable benefits derived from the programmes by young people that can be specifically attributed to programme inputs? In order to make such judgements, it would be necessary to be able to (a) clearly identify the target group for the programme; (b) randomly separate programme recipients from non-programme recipients; (c) apply specified programmes for specified periods and with specified intensity; (d) use standard instruments to establish a baseline measure and follow-up measures to identify improvements; and (e) track individual young people over specified periods to determine whether the programme had longer term impact and/or identify the efficacy period of the programme. However, as previously mentioned, the diversity of the targeted youth intervention ‘product’ across the country and the lack of measurable and verifiable outcome data make this task near impossible using simple performance calculations to separate good performance from poor performance.

It is more generally difficult to prove cause and effect, or to be able to ‘attribute’ beneficial impact exclusively to a social programme input compared, for example, to the effect of a prescribed drug for an illness, where the input is defined and the outcome (subject to the patient observing clinical directions) is predictable.¹¹⁸ Outcomes for social programmes are not predictable due to the many path-dependencies that occur in real-life communities, which may improve or undermine an intended outcome for a young person. Proving cause and effect requires elaborate evaluation machinery. The only means to effectively prove ‘attribution’ for social programmes at present is the *randomised control trial*, but even this tool has its limitations.¹¹⁹ Complicating matters (in terms of the data collected for this review), it is clear that youth intervention inputs are not ‘constant’, certainly when compared across programmes at national level.

Given these challenges, the chapter proceeds to undertake a series of exercises examining whether youth programmes employ effective **service design** techniques. Where the data permit, each design component is tested empirically using administrative, survey and semi-structured interview data. Other sources, in particular the literature review commissioned for the study, are used where external references are required. Due to data problems, the period of analysis is not necessarily congruent with the time period for examination (2010-2012). Furthermore, the chapter on occasion presents ‘indications’ and ‘likelihoods’ as opposed to conclusive evidence because this is the limit of what the available evidence was able to yield.

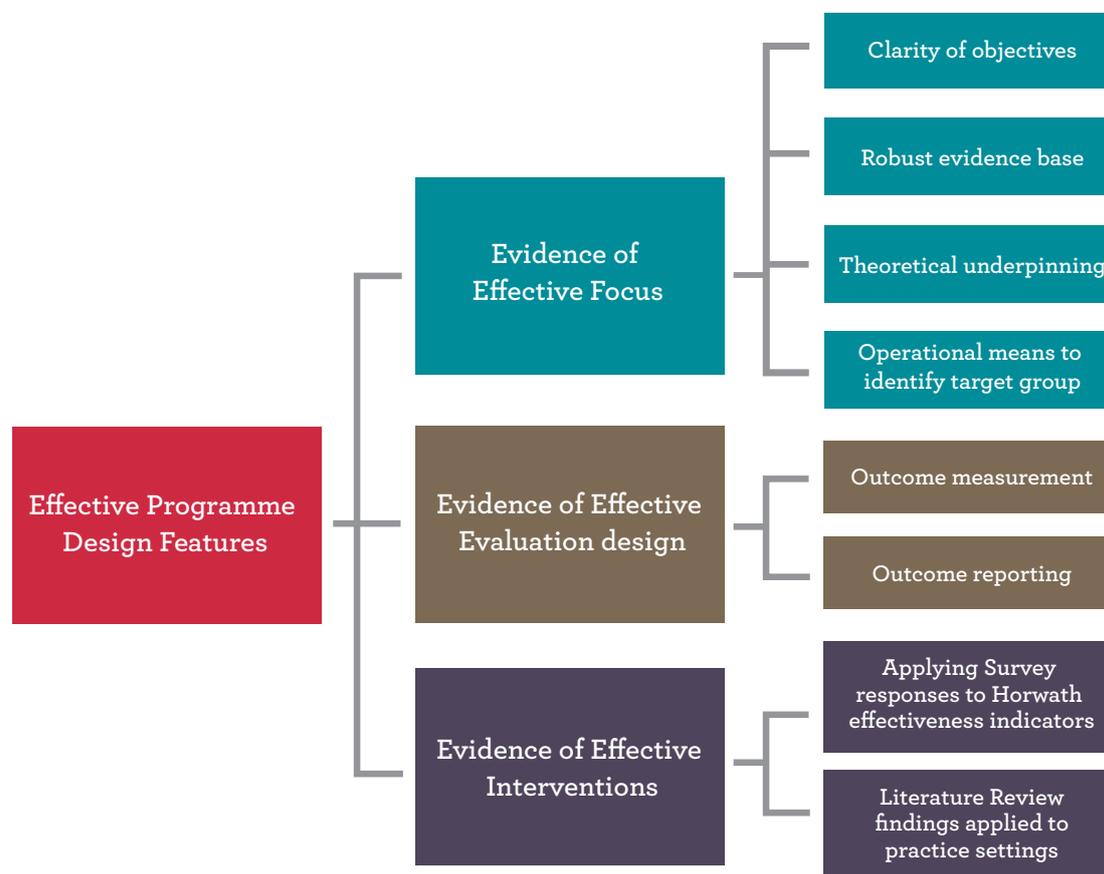
7.2 Identifying key programme components for effective programmes

Notwithstanding the complexities, there are certain key programme design components that help determine whether resources are being used effectively. These components possibly fall short of a developing international Gold Standard of evidence¹²⁰ in terms of evaluated programmes and the practise of evaluation. However, they do offer a coherent evidence-informed practical approach to determining rationale, efficiency and effectiveness fitting more generally with a **Theory of Change/Logic Model** type approach, which is attracting significant support in this area.

The examination begins with an analysis of effective programme design features (*see Figure 7.1*). The analysis is further developed to identify what appear to be desirable and arguably misrepresented ‘soft’ outcomes¹²¹, which offer efficacy across the principal needs domains

covered by youth programmes. These outcomes are then used to further examine local practice in 13 sample sites to indicate evidence of effective practice. In addition to effectiveness-related material derived from the literature, data is secured from the VFMPR Survey, visits to the sample of local services (where both front-line staff and young people were interviewed) and an administrative review of a sample of progress reports covering the period 2010-2012.

Figure 7.1: Effective programme design features



The review provides a framework to indicate the degree to which certain design components are present in the programmes being delivered across the country. Service design components can be broadly categorised into features which:

- focus on intended programme objectives;
- relate to evaluation design;
- provide effective interventions.

Table 7.1 identifies each element of programme design under these three main descriptors, states why this element is important in the context of effectiveness and describes how each element is assessed with respect to the programmes under review. Each design component is then dealt with in turn in the sections below.

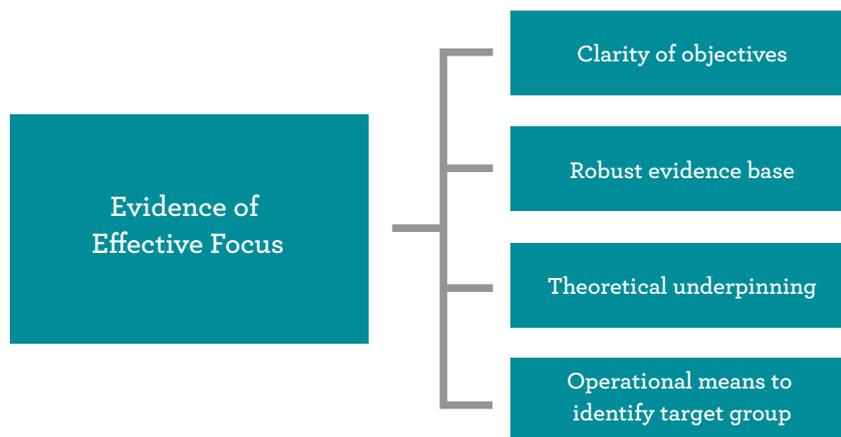
Table 7.1: Elements of programme design

	Design component	Importance in indicating effectiveness?	How is this assessed empirically in the report?
FOCUS	Clarity of objective(s)	This element is a basic compliance reference point. A service will be ineffective if the efforts of front-line staff are not aligned with the intended programme direction.	The degree to which local providers are clear about programme objectives is indicated by the response to the survey question relating to the areas of need served. This data is supplemented by data derived from the survey and semi-structured interviews with staff.
	Clear evidence base identifying the situation(s) to be addressed	It is important that a service is operating in the context of clear evidence of 'local' need. Overall national trends and patterns can mask significant variances in the type, level and quantity of need at local level. It is the <i>local</i> analysis that provides the rationale for a particular service design. Programmes will be ineffective if they are designed in the absence of local data relating to need.	The review examines current administrative compliance requirements by the DCYA in terms of funding applications.
	Clear evidence-informed theory of what needs to happen to bring about improvements	In the absence of an 'all-purpose' programme guaranteed to secure the requisite improvements, <i>theory development</i> is critical. In basic terms, an overt theory of change encourages transparency in terms of presenting the assumptions under which resources are being deployed by service providers. Theoretical propositions can also be scrutinised, challenged and compared in relation to other available (and possibly more effective) theoretical approaches.	Evidence here is limited to semi-structured interviews with staff in the sample of site visits and also comments from the VFMPR Survey.
	An operational means to identify the target group	In order to be effective, local services are required to 'operationalise' the use of needs-related data to ensure that young people who are most suitable for the service are <i>actually</i> engaged. This requirement presumes significant local knowledge and where appropriate the existence of appropriate referral pathways.	Evidence here is provided from survey responses identifying the need levels engaged by local services and the means by which young people access the service. This data is supplemented by semi-structured interviews undertaken with staff in site visits.

EVALUATION DESIGN	Outcome reporting	In order to demonstrate effectiveness, services are required to report on and 'measure' performance.	The review closely examines a sample of progress reports completed by the services that hosted site visits over a 3-year period. This exercise attempted to indicate how 'conscious' local professionals were in citing outcomes for programme interventions.
	Outcome measurement		It was clear from the outset that conclusive data on outcomes were not available. However, this analysis attempts to indicate a baseline position by establishing with survey respondents the type(s) of measurement they employed.
EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS	Selection of interventions or approaches which are evidence-informed.	<p>Obviously 'interventions' are the most critical element in terms of bringing about effective outcomes. The Horwath Review (2009), drawing on its Rapid Evidence Assessment, suggested that programmes that were 'direct' and 'intensive' were likely to be more effective.</p> <p>The literature review for this VFMPR identifies 7 outcomes which according to the evidence are more likely to bring about improvements for young people engaged in targeted programmes.</p>	<p>Two exercises are undertaken here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using survey data, the first exercise uses findings from the Rapid Evidence Assessment undertaken in the Horwath Review (2009) to indicate how likely services provided by local projects are <i>direct</i> and <i>intense</i>. The second exercise involved semi-structured interviews with staff and young people in 13 sample site visits. This sought to indicate whether improvements in any of the 7 outcome areas identified in the literature review were secured in the exchanges between front-line staff and young people.

7.3 Focus on intended programme objectives

The selection of outcomes and interventions will be ineffective if they do not fit closely with overall policy objectives. Below, we address issues regarding alignment of local service effort to national programme objectives, the robustness of the evidence base informing service design, the theoretical underpinning for local programmes and the operational means to identify the target group.



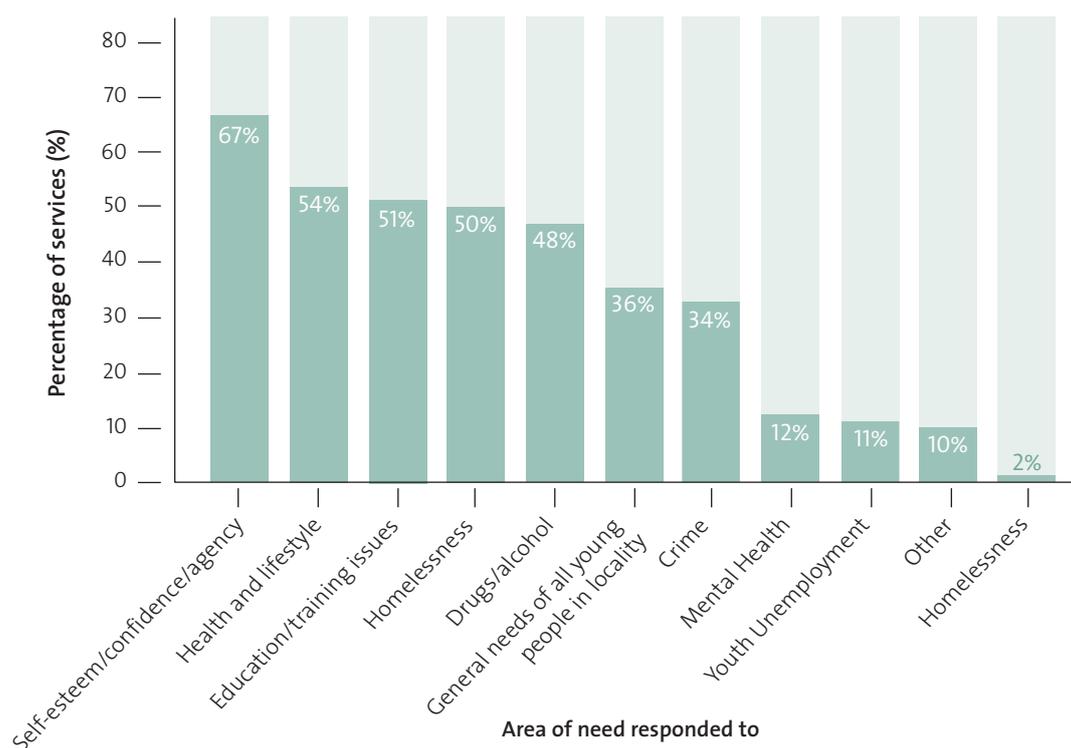
7.3.1 Clarity of objectives

National indicators suggest that the numbers of children and young people presenting with difficulties (i.e. those who necessitate targeted engagement) are small fractions of the overall youth population. For example, an estimated 3.8% of young people are involved in youth crime¹²², cannabis use among young people is indicated at 10.5%¹²³ and conduct disorder in school is indicated at 10%¹²⁴.

However, there may be significant departures from these national averages in particular local communities¹²⁵ and less overt behaviours, such as drug misuse, by their nature are difficult to identify and quantify. It is also clear from a review of the VFMPR Survey data and the detailed discussions with service providers in the site visits that the total figures reported in the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure in 2011 combine targeted activity (e.g. structured individual or group interventions) with activities that attract a lower cost in terms of professional time (e.g. participation in events).

Referring back to the policy objectives outlined in Chapter 2 ('Background'), Figure 7.2 indicates that there is a correlation between the domains intended by the national programmes in question and the areas of 'need' activity responded to by local services. Drugs and alcohol, education and training, mental health and crime feature significantly; homelessness and youth unemployment feature less. Significance is given to self-esteem, confidence, agency and health and lifestyle, which (as will be seen later in this chapter) appear to have significant cross-over benefits. 'General needs of all young people in the locality' also features strongly and is referred to below in the discussion regarding 'threshold' and 'open access' service delivery.

Figure 7.2: Percentage of services by area of need responded to



Note: Table indicating need areas responded to. Respondents could select a maximum of 4 options.
Source: VFMPR Survey

Of course, there is significant manoeuvrability in the space between acknowledging or observing policy objectives and actually implementing them. Nevertheless, the survey response findings were supported by the local site visits¹²⁶ where, of 13 services visited, 2 focused on drugs misuse¹²⁷; 1 on school attendance/ performance¹²⁸; 7 provided a combination of targeted and universal services to youth in disadvantaged communities¹²⁹ or ‘pockets of disadvantage’¹³⁰; and 3 provided more open access-type service over larger rural geographies, but with a capacity to target when necessary¹³¹.

While (according to the survey responses and the broad findings from the site reviews) the needs areas themselves are reasonably uncontested, a key issue is whether the programmes are *targeted* or *for all young people*. The top-level descriptions in the original policy objectives for the schemes under review all refer to ‘targeted’ provision.

The VFMPR Survey used a simple framework based on the widely used Hardiker Scale¹³², essentially asking respondents to provide a maximum of 2 selections from a confined list of 4 to indicate the general need levels that the service responded to¹³³. The options were:

- All young people.
- Young people *in need*.
- Young people with ‘*severe difficulties*’.
- Young people who require ‘*intensive and long-term support and protection*’.

Table 7.2 further elaborates this analysis. This analysis is important because it presents the **types** of needs responded to in Figure 7.2 in comparison with the **levels** of needs responded to (i.e. *all* young people, young people *in need*, young people with *severe difficulties* and young people who require *intensive* and long-term support and protection). This analysis provides for a more profiled account of service delivery.

Table 7.2: Percentage of services that target different need level combinations, by the type of need responded to

	Mental health	Homelessness	Drugs/alcohol	Crime/anti-social behaviour prevention	Family breakdown	Health and lifestyle	Youth unemployment	Education/training issues	Self-esteem/confidence/agency	General needs of all young people in locality	N
All only	30%	4%	37%	26%	4%	67%	22%	63%	56%	44%	27
All and higher	30%	0%	51%	28%	6%	58%	9%	46%	73%	72%	109
In need and higher	43%	3%	59%	45%	16%	48%	13%	56%	64%	34%	112
Severe difficulties and higher	29%	0%	29%	43%	14%	57%	14%	71%	86%	14%	7
Intensive only	100%	33%	33%	0%	67%	33%	33%	33%	67%	0%	3

Source: VFMPR Survey

From the survey, approximately 10% of respondents¹³⁴ (n=27) provided services for ‘all young people’ (e.g. where programme funding represents the only youth provision in the locality¹³⁵ or where there has been an attempt to spread the benefit of service effort as far as possible¹³⁶). However, Table 7.2 further indicates that local providers offer **combinations of services** which are delivered to **combinations of target groups**. The table compares responses from services that targeted (1) ‘all young people’ only, (2) ‘all young people’ and young people with higher needs, (3) ‘young people in need’ and those with higher needs, (4) ‘young people with severe difficulties’ and those with higher needs, and (5) ‘young people who require intensive and long-term support and protection’ only. Importantly (and setting aside the minority of respondents who provide services to all young people only), approximately 90% of respondents (n=263) provide services to need level categories which by their nature are targeted, including a substantial number that combine ‘young people in need’ and young people with higher need levels (n=112).

Table 7.2 indicates patterns of need type responded to, profiled against need level. It is instructive here to revert back initially to the minority of respondents who identified only ‘all young people’ as the target group. Within this category, ‘general needs of all young people in the locality’ (44%) was subordinate to health and lifestyle (67%), education/training (63%) and self-esteem/confidence/agency (56%). While some caution needs to be applied given the relatively small number of respondents that this refers to and potential misinterpretations of the survey categories, it indicates that even the small number of services responding that they serve ‘all young people’ only make priority decisions about how their effort is deployed, **suggesting that ‘all young people’ does not necessarily mean solely universal access.**

Discussions with the sample of local services further reinforce evidence that targeting is implemented in different ways:

- **individual targeting** (meaning resource effort loaded towards certain young people within a community);
- **community targeting** (meaning that within a prescribed locality, all or most young people are deemed 'in need' and are thus targeted partially with open-access services, perhaps misleadingly described as 'universal');
- **need-specific targeting** (usually specialist providers providing niche services to a small client-base, but within a large population area).

Each of the 13 sites visited provided some degree of open-access service as part of a 'progressive' targeting offering for one or more of the reasons outlined (in addition to trying to create and sustain a positive brand for the service, thus making it easier for targeted youth to access the service).¹³⁷ Targeted provision across the site visits ranged from 40% to 70% of service effort.

Added to this complexity is the urban/rural dimension. Put quite simply, while in urban environments a target population may be more visible and accessible, in rural areas it may take significant amounts of time and effort devoted to intelligence gathering to ensure that the 'one' young person within a given rural locality who is in need of a service subsequently receives the service. In the rural services visited as part of the VFMPR, there was evidence of this effort being deployed using both paid and volunteer effort.¹³⁸

It is also useful to examine what groups of needs are most responded to by services to consider whether services tend to specialise in particular issues. Table 7.3 shows the percentage of respondents that targeted particular needs. The right hand of the table includes the cluster of other needs that most of these services (over 50 per cent) additionally targeted. For example, more than half of services that responded to mental health needs also responded to issues around drugs/alcohol and self-esteem/confidence/agency. Of those services that deal with homelessness, more than half also deal with mental health issues and drugs/alcohol issues. Of those services that respond to youth unemployment, more than half also respond to education/training needs. Of those that respond to crime/anti-social behaviour, more than half also respond to drugs/alcohol issues.

Table 7.3: Percentage of services responding to particular needs and other needs responded to

Need responded to	Percentage of services	Other needs responded to by more than 50% of group
Self-esteem/confidence/agency	67%	Health and lifestyle; Education/training
Health and lifestyle	54%	Self-esteem/confidence/agency
Youth unemployment	51%	Education/training; Self-esteem/confidence/agency
Drugs/alcohol	50%	Health and lifestyle; Self-esteem/confidence/agency
General needs	48%	Health and lifestyle; Self-esteem/confidence/agency
Crime/anti-social behaviour	37%	Drugs/alcohol; Self-esteem/confidence/agency
Mental health	34%	Drugs/alcohol; Self-esteem/confidence/agency
Education/training	12%	Self-esteem/confidence/agency
Family breakdown	10%	Mental health
Homelessness	2%	Mental health; Drugs/alcohol

Source: VFMPR Survey

7.3.2 Clear evidence base identifying the situations to be addressed

The most recent DCYA progress report/renewal application form requests information relating to ‘emerging issues/trends identified through service and programme provision’. However, there is no more specific guidance given on what this entails apart from itemising and linking ‘programmes, objectives, outputs and outcomes so that a clear connection between these is evident’¹³⁹ and requesting an outline of ‘any emerging issues identified through service and programme provision’¹⁴⁰. **What is missing from this compliance measure is a request for a description of the specific service catchment area, an estimate of both the total population size and the youth population size, and how this relates to the evidence of the specific needs and outcomes linked to policy objectives – i.e. determining what is the nature and size of the issue(s) that each local service is expected to impact.**

The key weakness in relation to relying on knowledge acquired by ‘service activity’ is that it presumes (a) that the service in question is in receipt of *information* about all young people within a notional catchment area so that it can make the best judgements about how to apply its limited resources; (b) that the service is actually *engaging* the young people who are most suitable for the service; and (c) that young people who are suitable for the service are not being overlooked due to either the service not knowing about them or the young person not knowing about the service.

What is clear from the review of progress reports, survey responses, site visits and more general exposure to this work during this review is that while the situations being engaged by local services are not individually unique in terms of the risks and needs encountered, there is certainly distinctiveness significantly militating against a ‘one best generic answer’.¹⁴¹

7.3.3 Clear evidence-informed theory of what needs to happen to bring about improvements

VFMPR evidence here is limited to individual survey comments and references secured from semi-structured interviews in site visits. This limited examination can indicate only ‘presence of’ theory as opposed to widespread and deep application of theory to practice across programmes. Unless a theoretical approach is overtly branded in service-related promotional literature or codified in intervention manuals, evidence of theoretical appreciation usually surfaces in the context of practice discussions. The report is mainly reliant on the small sample of site visits to disclose evidence of the presence of theory in this area. The report refers to evidence of ‘presence’ later in the chapter (in an examination of ‘effective interventions’) as being a sub-optimal, but an important finding, nevertheless providing a normative baseline to inform the DCYA’s future service design expectations of providers.

The *site visits* disclosed examples of providers who had developed clear theoretical underpinnings for their work and transferred this into expectations regarding individual staff practice.¹⁴² These included the identification of ‘cornerstones’ or pivotal intervention points¹⁴³ to be identified and acted upon, and using ‘dissonance’ and ‘discrepancy’ as mechanisms to motivate young people who present as unwilling to change their behaviour¹⁴⁴, fitting with the available international literature in this area¹⁴⁵. This, of course, does not amount to evidence of widespread adoption of a particular theoretical model (or models), which when ‘operationalised’ could be subject to more formal evaluation. The interviews in site visits indicate a far more eclectic, reflexive and possibly ad hoc adoption of theory. However, it is also clear that alongside more *conceptual* theoretical references disclosed via semi-structured interviews, more routine application of theory is adopted and directly applied by some providers. By way of

example, Foróige has developed manuals of practice for its staff which are devoted to targeted interventions, incorporating cognitive behavioural approaches and utilising motivational techniques.¹⁴⁶

Although the term ‘theory’ may seem abstract, it is an exercise that **all** services already engage in, whether intuitively or informed by evidence. For example, the following statement from one service provider – ‘*There is a lot of boredom leading to substance misuse and crime*’¹⁴⁷ – carries with it significant causal assumptions about how and why youth crime and substance misuse occurs, leading logically to what the provider believes to be the most effective response. In this case, it logically infers that committing resources to ‘distraction’ activities or keeping young people ‘occupied’ is a sufficient response to reduce crime. This train of thought is of interest to this review because such a commitment of professional time relates to cost *and thus to the relative value secured* from this investment of professional time. With reference to the example cited, the evidence suggests that youth crime as a catchall (as suggested by the statement) is unhelpful. It depends on which specific types of behaviour and which contexts the intervention is attempting to address, often requiring cognitive and other systemic interventions. Distraction strategies alone may be significantly deficient.

A clearer fix on the ‘type’ of needs being encountered in a particular locality and the ‘size’ of the need permits a local service to demonstrate how its use of resources will make a difference in the life or circumstances of a young person (or scaled-up to a higher collective/ community impact). A local service that identifies its area of focus (referring to geographic population served and not limited to existing service users) and outlines its rationale for how it will use its resources *ex-ante* permits local accountability and transparent (rebuttable) assumptions about the most appropriate use of resources. For example, if the intention of a local service is to bring about ‘behaviour change’, which is entirely consistent with the programmes’ objectives of preventing a difficult situation occurring or getting worse (e.g. drugs misuse), then ‘*before setting out to develop a behaviour change intervention, it is necessary to be clear about whose behaviours to change and which specific behaviours to be targeted*’¹⁴⁸. While it is suggested that theory development is a suitable proxy for effective programmes, much of this relates to demonstrating the design discipline of substantiating the evidence base for a particular intervention or approach in the context of an imperfect ‘what works’ evidence base. Understanding the link between theory and effectiveness in the Irish context is further confounded (with the programmes under examination) by the paucity of outcomes-related data.

7.3.4 An ‘operational’ means to identify the target group, ensure that the target group is engaged and that work is prioritised

Table 7.4 presents the need levels responded to by 5 types of service providers, i.e. those that targeted (1) ‘all young people’ only (All only); (2) ‘all young people’ and young people with higher needs (All and higher); (3) ‘young people in need’ and young people with higher needs (In need and higher); (4) ‘young people with severe difficulties’ and young people with higher needs (Severe difficulties and higher); and (5) ‘young people who require intensive and long-term support and protection’ only (Intensive only). This data is cross-tabulated with data indicating how respondents report how young people accessed the service.¹⁴⁹

Setting aside the selections that were afforded to ‘all’ young people, the three remaining categories require that services are in receipt of the necessary intelligence to operationally target their resources and that appropriate referral pathways are in place. A key question here is *How are such young people selected and engaged?* While the survey did not ask the question ‘What means or tools did the service use to ensure that its services were prioritised

accordingly?', it asked respondents 'how' young people engaged with the service¹⁵⁰. 'Needs-appropriate' referral pathway is therefore suggested as proxy for ensuring that targeting intent is adequately operationalised.

Table 7.4: Percentage of services that target different need level combinations, by how young person engaged with service

	Open access/drop-in	Self-referral ¹⁵¹	Parental/family referral	School/education referral	HSE/social work	Drugs/alcohol/addiction service	An Garda Síochána/criminal justice system	N
All only	78%	59%	52%	59%	22%	11%	11%	27
All and higher	83%	87%	70%	65%	24%	5%	17%	109
In need and higher	62%	79%	63%	65%	42%	13%	23%	112
Severe difficulties and higher	29%	57%	29%	71%	57%	29%	29%	7
Intensive only	0%	67%	0%	100%	100%	33%	67%	3

Source: VFMPR Survey

There appears to be a relationship between services that target particular need groups and the type of referral methods that are used. A higher proportion of services that apply most effort on young people with lower needs use self-referral or have a drop-in service than services that target young people with higher need levels. For example, 78% of services that target *All only* have an open access/drop-in service compared to 62% for those that provide for *In need and higher* and 29% for those that target *Severe difficulties and higher*. None of the *Intensive only* respondents used this engagement method. On the other hand, those who provided for those with greater needs were more likely to use referrals from statutory agencies and addiction services. 11% of services in the *All only* category had referrals from An Garda Síochána/criminal justice system, which compares with 17% for *All and higher*, 23% for *In need and higher*, 29% for *Severe difficulties and higher* and 67% for *Intensive only*. This trend is similar for HSE/social work referrals and drugs/alcohol/addiction services.

This relationship between need level and referral type is what would be expected given that young people with greater needs would be more likely to be referred from another agency than young people with lower needs.

Analysis of the VFMPR Survey data indicates a correlation between need level and evidence of formal referral pathways. However, engagement for many providers was still biased toward self-referral and open access. It may be that these engagements occur on foot of local services having full knowledge of the specific young people who need to be targeted, or it may be that young people are receiving a combination of services (some of which may be referred), but such a strategy still runs the risk of young people within a community who may need the service most being overlooked.

The site visits provided qualitative evidence that branding and service pedigree¹⁵², along with sophisticated intelligence networks¹⁵³, means that a project can target within a local community and at the same time be accessible.

The attraction of an open-access approach to provision is understandable, underpinned by a belief that open access to services reduces stigma and therefore promotes engagement. However, such a model of service delivery may conflate high participation levels (being busy) with effective targeting (i.e. ensuring that the young people who most need the service and are most suitable are, resources permitting, actually engaged). As one survey respondent replied, *'We found that as the years passed our service has been very successful and that the demand for service increased steadily each year. We are busier with numbers and demand for our after-school service [and] youth café'*.¹⁵⁴ Other site visit evidence raised concerns that a service may base its assessment essentially on who came through the door, meaning that some young people whose needs directly fitted service objectives may be overlooked or the service may be used by a more exclusive cohort¹⁵⁵, thus diminishing any potential claims of overall community or neighbourhood impact by such services.

A detailed profile of the youth population within a particular catchment area, and a clear (and evidenced) commitment to ensuring that young people deemed suitable for the service are identified, also needs to be made *operational*. This ensures that young people who need and are suitable for the service are *actually* engaged, i.e. where appropriate, robust 'engagement' or 'referral' pathways. Evidence supporting the desirability for services offering interventions to targeted populations being well connected with statutory services is located at individual level (*'For targeted programmes, this should include developing strong interagency links in order to facilitate appropriate referrals'*¹⁵⁶) and at service planning level to facilitate better joined-up local service mapping¹⁵⁷. However, the difficulties in deciphering *output* data highlighted in the Horwath Review (2009) (*'Some organisations reported large numbers of individuals benefiting through attending one-off events, whilst other services reported more structured interventions'*¹⁵⁸) continued in this review and adds to the complexity in terms of understanding targeting techniques.

7.4 Evaluation design

Here, issues regarding outcome reporting and measurement are addressed. Firstly, a detailed quantitative analysis is undertaken of the outcome material in progress reports from the 13 sample site visits during 2010-2012. Secondly, survey responses are examined to analyse what *all services* attempt to measure in terms of performance and the means by which they do this.



7.4.1 Reporting outcomes – Analysis of progress reports from 13 service providers in period 2010-2012

The following exercise (results presented in Table 7.5) is designed to indicate whether understanding of ‘*what an outcome is*’ has improved at local service level over the VFMPR period of examination.¹⁵⁹ The significance of progress here, while extremely modest in the context of proving overall impact for programmes, relates to whether staff evaluative capacities have improved, particularly in terms of distinguishing between outputs and outcomes.¹⁶⁰ **The review involves all of the 13 sites selected for visits and participation in semi-structured interviews.**

The following guidance was provided by the DCYA (2010-2012) to services completing progress reports (located in ‘Section 2: Service provision’ of the report requesting the data, *see Appendix 5*):

‘**Outcomes** – the actual impact of the services, i.e. the changes or benefits that result’.

The exercise carried out by the VFMPR Team for this review uses the DCYA’s guidance on ‘outcomes’ as a reference point to identify the degree to which entries in the column entitled ‘Core outcomes achieved’ (for the respective year) actually fitted the description and thus where performance could be determined (if not compared). The contents of the progress reports from 13 sites over 3 years were reviewed to identify:

- total entries in this column for each year;
- the number of entries which the VFMPR Team determined to fit with the ‘outcomes’ description provided by the DCYA;
- the number of outcomes that are quantified.

These entries were also tracked over the 3-year period to establish any trends and indicate which sites participated in the NQSF process. (This information was collected from a short survey sent to services that participated in the site visits. In this analysis, services that were deemed to be implementing the NQSF are those that were participating in the framework in the period under review.)

In Table 7.5, a ‘positive’ direction of change (i.e. a progressively higher outcomes-related content) is indicated by a brown arrow. While ‘modest’, a positive change is desirable in terms of moving toward outcomes-based reporting.

Table 7.5: Analysis of 'Outcomes' in the progress reports of the services that participated in the site visits

		No. of entries in Outcomes column of progress report	No. of entries that are outcomes	Percentage of entries that are outcomes (%)	Direction of change 2010-2012	Number of outcomes that are quantified	NQSF Yes/No
Site 1 ¹⁶¹	2010	21	6	29	↑	0	No
	2011	36	13	36		2	
	2012	29 ¹⁶²	18	62		3	
Site 2	2010	24	4	17	→	0	No
	2011	24	4	17		0	
	2012	n/a ¹⁶³	n/a	n/a		n/a	
Site 3 ¹⁶⁴	2010	6	3	50	↑	3	Yes
	2011	8	4	50		3	
	2012	8	8	100		0	
Site 4 ¹⁶⁵	2010	22	1	5	↑	0	No
	2011	68	3	4		0	
	2012	13	5	38		0	
Site 5	2010	16	4	25	↓	0	No
	2011	15	3	20		0	
	2012	5	0	0		0	
Site 6 ¹⁶⁶	2010	8	1	12	↑	0	Yes
	2011	7	1	14		1	
	2012	19	9	47		0	
Site 7	2010	n/a	n/a ¹⁶⁷	n/a	↑	0	Yes
	2011	32	13	40		0	
	2012	23	12 ¹⁶⁸	52		0	
Site 8	2010	12	0	0	↑	0	Yes
	2011	6	3	50		0	
	2012	6	4	66		0	
Site 9	2010	136	19	14	↑	2	Yes
	2011	214 ¹⁶⁹	91 ¹⁷⁰	42		0	
	2012	54	40	74		0	
Site 10 ¹⁷¹	2010	11	5	45	↑	0	Yes
	2011	12	6	50		0	
	2012	12	7	58		0	
Site 11 ¹⁷²	2010	7	5	71	↑	0	Yes
	2011	5	4	80		0	
	2012	5	5	100		0	
Site 12	2010	20	15	75	↓	0	Yes
	2011	8	4	50		0	
	2012	25	0	0		0	
Site 13	2010	86	28	32	→	11	Yes
	2011	156	51	33		29	
	2012	141	45	32		19	

Notes:

n/a = not available

Source: Table compiled by VFMPR Team based on analysis of progress reports (2010-2012) of the 13 providers that participated in the site visits.

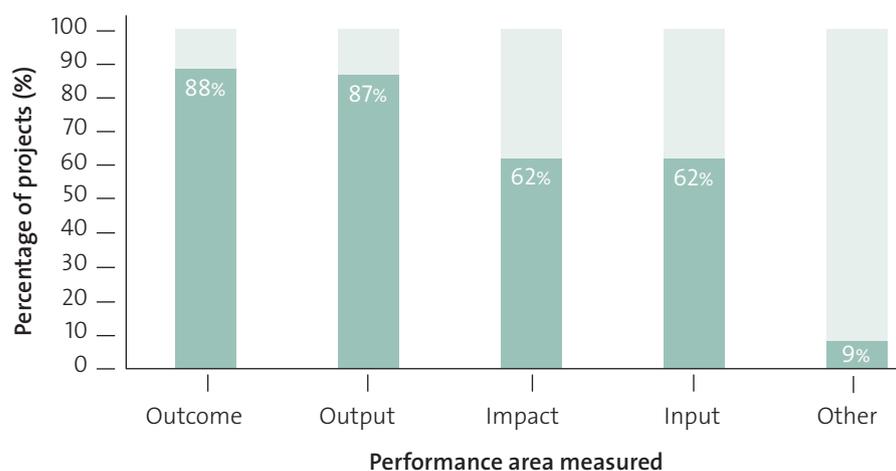
This examination indicates a range of 0%-75% of content in the 'core outcomes achieved' column in 2010 fitted the DCYA's 'outcomes' guidance. This range increased to 0%-100% of content in 2012, indicating a continued low base but an overall upward trend. It is assessed that 9 of the 13 services examined have improved over the period 2010-2012; 2 have remained broadly the same; and 2 have disimproved, moving from 25% and 75% alignment with the DCYA's 'outcomes' guidance in 2010 to '0%' in 2012. It is not possible to attribute the upward trend identified in this exercise to any policy or capacity-building activity. However, this exercise refers to a period when the three schemes were brought within the remit of one administering unit (the DCYA), when the NQSF was becoming established and at a time when philanthropic/academic and service provider partnerships were becoming more firmly established. Two of the 4 services **not** involved with the NQSF at this point improved; 1 remained static; and 1 disimproved. Seven out of the 9 services involved in the NQSF process improved in terms of correctly identifying outcomes-related material and 1 disimproved over the 3-year period. While the main logic underpinning the NQSF related to self-assessment, a detailed process of external validation was undertaken incorporating documentary evidence, practice observations and focus groups, including stakeholders and young people.¹⁷³

However, of particular significance is whether the progress reporting itself, and the associated oversight processes, facilitated **comparisons of performance**. Only 5 of the 13 sites included quantified outcomes in progress reports. Of these, only one service included more than 3 quantified outcomes in any year. This examination suggests that outcomes (hard and soft) were mostly presented in narrative form, meaning that, in effect, performance accountability has remained elusive by not being tied to specific *ex-ante* quantified targets either in terms of verifiable target groups or performance. The length of reports (the longest being 138 pages) and the number of outcome entries (the largest being 214 entries) also obscured performance analysis and inadvertently frustrated attempts to make important comparisons between service providers.

7.4.2 Reporting outcomes – Analysis of survey respondents

Here, *intended* areas of performance outcome measurement indicated by all service respondents are identified and matched with the measurement tools employed to gauge performance. As Figure 7.3 shows, **while most survey respondents reported that they measure outcomes and impacts (over and above inputs and outputs), it is not evident that the same services employ measurement tools capable of making these judgements.**

Figure 7.3: Performance area measured by projects

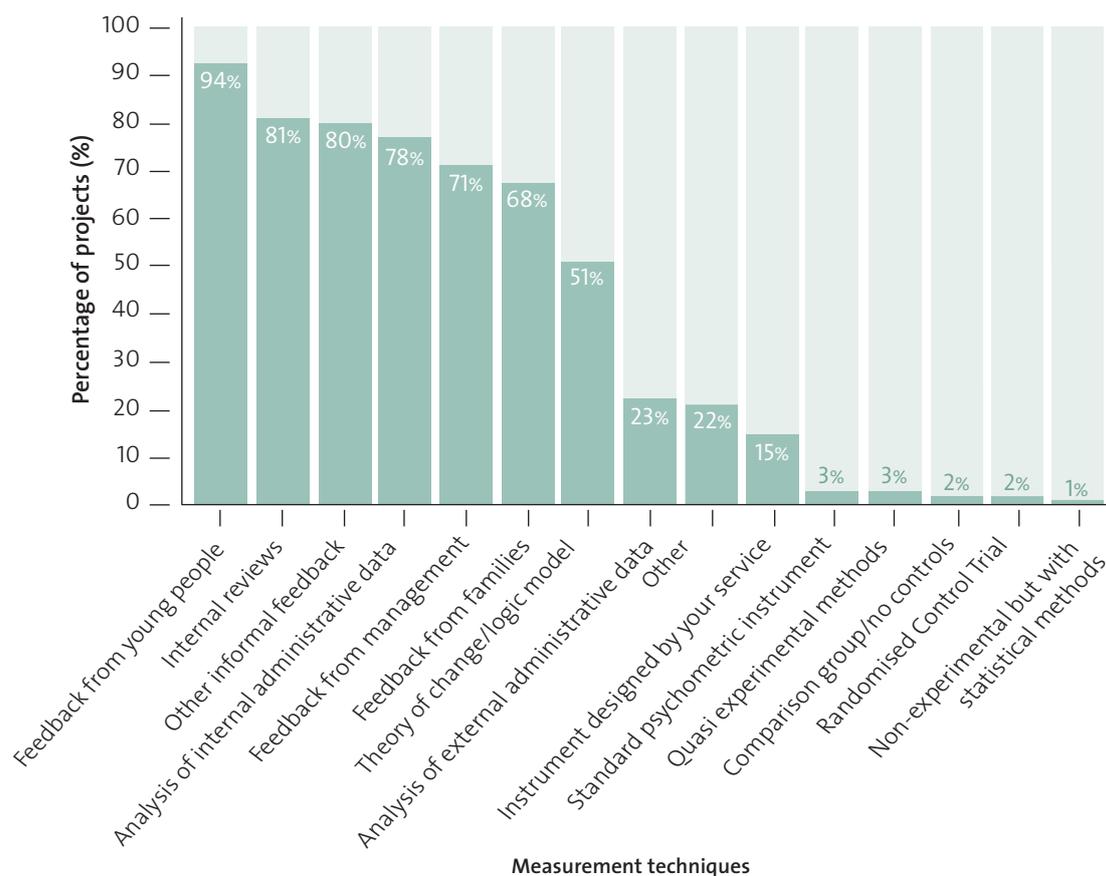


Source: VFMPR Survey

Outcome measurement can, of course, be evidenced in a number of ways, including verifiable professional observations and feedback from young people and parents, and perhaps further verified by extra-professional observations and reports (e.g. schools, social workers, Gardaí, etc). However, this assumes that intended outcomes have been clearly stated up front and that systems are in place for the routine capturing of such data over time.

Most data used to gauge performance derived from feedback from young people, internal reviews, other informal feedback and analysis of internal administrative data, feedback from management and feedback from families (see Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4: Measurement techniques employed by projects



Source: VFMPR Survey

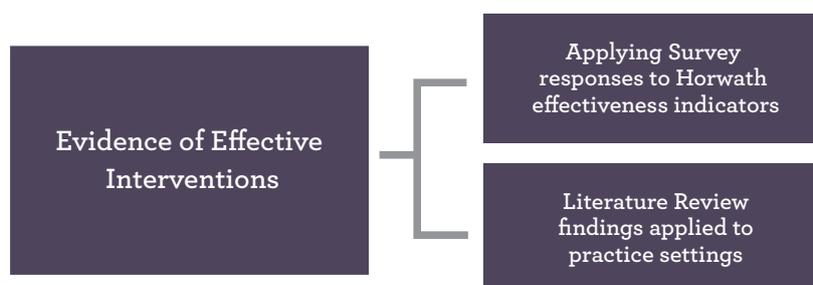
In terms of measurement, some degree of standardisation and external scrutiny is obviously desirable. **From the analysis of survey responses, only a small number of local services provide outcomes-related data using standard instruments**¹⁷⁴ (10 respondents or 3% of all respondents), quasi-experimental methods (8 respondents or 3%), randomised control trial (5 respondents or 2%) or other forms of independent verification (10 respondents or 3%)¹⁷⁵.

In terms of 'impact' measurement, the majority of tools advanced by survey respondents do not appear to be capable of providing robust impact judgements (i.e. the ability to substantially prove that an improvement was *caused* by a specific intervention or group of interventions), which to some degree questions the volume of impact measurement claims in Figure 7.4. The absence of objective performance data and lack of suitable tools to measure performance means that an improved outcome for a young person is neither easily decipherable nor can it be convincingly attributed to particular service efforts.

7.5 Interventions

Here, the subject of interventions is addressed, which is arguably the most important ‘value for money’ consideration given that what interventions ‘produce’ determines whether policy objectives relating to targeted youth programmes are achieved or not achieved. Proving cause and effect in terms of social programmes is always problematic, even when the inputs are well defined and constant, and with robust objective measures in place.¹⁷⁶ However, the challenges to producing evidence of effectiveness in this VFMPR are significantly elevated by virtue of poor data, significant local discretion and service variation. It is necessary, therefore, to approach this task using mixed methods – initially survey data, followed by data secured from semi-structured interviews with front-line staff and young people in selected service sites.

First, a basic comparison is made between the present VFMPR Survey responses and the observations made in the previous VFMPR review by Horwath (2009). Findings suggest that targeted programmes that are ‘direct’ and ‘intensive’ are more likely to be effective. Secondly, the findings of the literature review undertaken for the present VFMPR are applied, to examine evidence of effectiveness using data collected from site visit interviews with front-line staff and young people.



7.5.1 Survey data analysis – ‘Direct service provision’ and ‘Programme intensity’

In an initial *auditing* exercise, the present VFMPR attempts an indicative exercise to compare the findings of the Rapid Evidence Assessment in the Horwath Review (2009) with the actual deployment of effort by local services. Horwath’s findings indicate that improved effectiveness is associated with engagements that are (a) ‘direct’ and (b) ‘intense’.

A basic assessment is undertaken of *the likelihood* of each activity fitting with Horwath’s descriptions of (a) directness and (b) intensity (see Table 7.6). Responses are indicated as **Y** (assessed as likely to be direct and/or intense), **N** (assessed as likely not to be direct or intense) and **?** (unable to make a judgement of likelihood).

Table 7.6: Basic assessment of activity type by direct/non-direct intervention and programme intensity descriptors

Activity/Intervention	Percentage response (%)	Likelihood of Direct intervention to the individual?	Likelihood of High Intensity intervention?
Personal development programme	76	Y	Y
Sporting/Recreation	40	N	N
Education/Employment	32	?	Y
Outdoor Education/Adventure	18	?	Y
Creative/Arts	39	?	?
Drugs education	32	?	?
Counselling (Group)	4	Y	Y
Counselling (Individual)	10	Y	Y
Outreach/Street-work	21	?	?
Summer programme	48	N	N
Drop-in	35	N	N
Other	20	<i>not available</i>	<i>not available</i>

Notes:

Respondents could select a maximum of 4 activities in terms of service type from a confined list.

The VFMPR Team made a judgement about the likelihood of direct intervention and likelihood of high intensity intervention based on service categories.

Responses are indicated by Y (assessed as likely to be direct and/or intense), N (assessed as likely not to be direct or intense) and ? (unable to make a judgement of likelihood).

Source: VFMPR Survey

With reference to the first indicator (**direct interventions**), it was estimated that of the 11 activity/intervention areas, 3 are more likely to be 'direct' and 3 fall within the 'non-direct' category. We were unable to propose likelihood in 5 of the areas. With reference to the second indicator (**programme intensity**), it was estimated that 5 activity/intervention areas were more likely to require intensive design and delivery, and 3 were unlikely to require intensive design and delivery. The likelihood of programme intensity was unable to be assessed in 3 areas.

While there is merit in applying even rudimentary auditing tools (directness and intensity) to service provision which is often elusive to categorisation, it is important to note that this exercise has significant limitations, acknowledged by the review. Firstly, the analysis provides only top-line comparisons using generic service descriptions as proxies for the types of interventions being delivered, which means that 'likelihood' replaces more definitive assessment.¹⁷⁷ Secondly, responses from site visits clearly show that non-direct activities are often combined with direct activities as *combination programmes* for targeted young people. Thirdly, it is known from site visits that indirect activities are used strategically in a local community to make targeted services more acceptable by effectively offsetting a certain amount of total service effort to open-access activities. Fourthly, data in Table 7.6 may be interpreted as presenting activities as holding equal workload, where it is clear that more structured, intense activities present with significantly higher unit costs. Fifth, and arguably most important, whether a service is direct or intensive is of little consequence if it has little potency.

With this in mind, the review now turns to evidence secured directly from front-line staff and young people in semi-structured interviews during the site visits.

7.5.2 Applying findings from Literature Review to practice settings

This examination attempts to gauge whether there is evidence of ‘presence’ of effective practice using relevant external literature. Firstly, the findings from the literature review are summarised to present the logic for the use of these findings as a reference point for a closer examination of practice. Secondly, the findings are used as a framework to analyse practice using semi-structured interviews with staff and young people.

Findings from the Literature Review – Rationale for choice of outcomes to examine local practice

The VFMPR literature review for this study, undertaken by the Centre for Effective Services (2013), is reproduced in full in Appendix 4 of this report. Basically, the literature review:

- outlines evidence of the potency of *soft outcomes* relevant to the needs domains covered by targeted youth schemes;
- identifies 7 outcomes that appear to be significant;
- provides the evidence base for their selection;
- argues that performance relating to achieving these outcomes, far from being elusive, is measurable and manageable.

The VFMPR has established that the programmes under examination did *not* specify desired outcomes at national level to guide service providers. Here, the VFMPR attempts **retrospectively** to formulate the broad scheme objectives into practical programme outcomes. A focused literature review was undertaken for this VFMPR by the Centre for Effective Services (*see Appendix 4*), building in particular on the prior work undertaken in the Horwath Review (2009), which undertook a Rapid Evidence Assessment of diversionary schemes for ‘at risk’ young people, and the DCYA (2013) *Systematic Map of the Research Literature relating to Youth Work*, which focuses specifically on identifying the key mechanisms¹⁷⁸ that appear to yield the best outcomes for youth targeted in the needs domains covered by the schemes. The rationale for such focus responds directly to the ‘loose policy objectives’ identified in the previous VFM review (Horwath Review, 2009) and the need to operationalise overall programme objectives into evidence-based and measurable outcomes. **The channelling of professional effort to achieving certain evidence-informed outcomes is critical given that the relative value of funds allocated to the programmes is so significantly determined by how front-line staff use their time and, importantly, what they achieve with their time.**

In attempting to consolidate diverse activity into a relatively small number of programme outcomes, it is important to recognise that the science in this area is developing and will therefore require further deliberation, in particular with professionals responsible for implementation. The outcomes selected are thus examples of how knowledge and technologies in the area of beneficial outcomes for targeted youth have developed since these programmes were first devised.

Previous observations that youth interventions are subject to significant path dependencies in the communities in which they occur are reiterated here. With this in mind, it is important to note that as with any decision to concentrate effort in a particular area, there will always be external determinants beyond the scope of a programme and beyond the control of a young person (e.g. job or training availability, local neighbourhood factors in relation to norms for drugs misuse). This proposal focuses on internal *mechanisms* (attitude, cognition and skills) that should help young people both manage risks and seize pro-social opportunities.

Based on the review of the evidence (and a conviction that any subsequent recommendations should be *implementable*), the VFMPR identifies 7 ‘proximal’ outcomes which, on the balance of evidence, should yield improvements across the range of needs domains covered by the schemes (see Figure 7.5). The outcomes are ‘proximal’, thus a fairer measure of provider performance.¹⁷⁹

Figure 7.5: 7 potent mechanisms for delivering improvements in targeted youth programmes

7 potent mechanisms delivering improvements for targeted youth programmes

Communication skills are essential for a successful transition to work or training, for independence, and to access a range of life opportunities, to attainment, in forming positive relationships and in reductions in re-offending.

Confidence and agency enables young people to recognise that they can make a difference to their own lives and that effort has a purpose, is important to key outcomes such as career success. There is evidence of a link between positive outcomes and self-confidence.

Planning and problem-solving, alongside resilience, provides young people with a ‘positive protective armour’ against negative outcomes associated with risky life events. Problem-solving has also been shown to be associated with the ability to cope with stresses in life.

Relationships are an effective mechanism for getting young people involved in positive activities through valued personal relationships with peers, adults or siblings. A beneficial change in young people’s relationships with other adults through their participation in positive activities can be transferred to academic learning and may lead to better outcomes.

Creativity and imagination is related to resilience and well-being. Creativity can have a positive impact on both self-esteem and overall achievement.

Resilience and determination – If society intervenes early enough, it can improve cognitive and socio-emotional abilities and the health of disadvantaged children. Effective early interventions can promote schooling, reduce crime, foster workforce productivity and reduce teenage pregnancy. **Self-discipline** has been highlighted as a vital factor in building academic achievement, significantly better than IQ.

Emotional intelligence is associated with the ability to manage feelings by knowing one’s own emotions, as well as recognising and understanding other people’s emotions. This is vital in managing relationships (e.g. managing the emotions of others).

Source: Centre for Effective Services (2013)

The selection of such ‘soft’ outcomes may seem surprising when the appropriate policy ‘prize’ should be simply ‘getting a job’ or ‘successfully completing a college programme’ or ‘stopping taking drugs or engaging in anti-social activity’. However, **the evidence suggests that these ‘mechanisms’ are important steps to achieving more ambitious and ‘sustainable’ outcomes.** Effective relationships that young people develop with youth professionals permit them to ‘co-produce’ outcomes that can improve the chances of such higher level impacts occurring. Importantly for the youth respondents interviewed in this VFMPR, the route for them achieving improvements in their lives invariably related to the acquisition of soft skills and attributes imparted and learned through their relationships with youth professionals¹⁸⁰ – the ability to stop and reflect (e.g. about current behaviour), to take responsibility (motivation to change), to problem-solve (self-governance) and to execute decisions (agency). The intention is that these types of changes become hardwired and support the young person in negotiating the many risks and opportunities that they face.

These mechanisms are more difficult to detect, but they can be measured. However, they are arguably more substantial than simply providing or sourcing ‘opportunities’ given that they offer the promise of self-motivated change (as opposed to externally motivated) and self-regulated governance of behaviour (as opposed to externally applied). The skills learned will better help secure and sustain young people in relation to job and educational opportunities and are of equal importance in dealing with disappointment and setbacks. These types of skills and attributes have been variously depicted in the employment and education fields, for example, as necessary ‘company skill sets’¹⁸¹, ‘horizontal skills’ (within key competencies to ‘help learners find personal fulfilment and, later in life, find work and take part in society’¹⁸²) and ‘21st Century’ learning and innovation skills¹⁸³ to complement the acquisition of more formal qualifications, credentials and employment.

The degree of effort involved in the acquisition of these skills and attributes should also not be diminished. For example, they are pre-requisites for any *adult* attempting to improve their employability and health, or overcome an addiction; for a young person who may be living in very complex circumstances, they may be significantly more difficult to develop competence in.

Applying the 7 potent mechanisms to practice

By engaging front-line staff and young people in semi-structured discussions centring on outcomes, information was gathered that allows an assessment of the evidence of the existence of the potent change mechanisms referred to above. The analysis attempts to identify whether or to what degree the outcomes identified in the literature review are:

- conscious priorities by front-line staff and thus ‘practice intentions’ (making the implementation link between policy objective, programme outcomes and practice);
- evidenced in practice by the experience of young people who were interviewed (the final link in the policy implementation chain, ‘*co-producing*’ positive change).

Table 7.7 presents three performance-related perspectives: (1) the outcomes identified in the literature review (the 7 potent mechanisms); (2) ‘intentions’ communicated by front-line staff when questioned about how and why they deploy effort (and to what ends); and (3) the direct experiences of young people engaged with respective services, captured in their short quotations. A number of different scenarios and contexts were discussed, including school completion, bullying, bereavement, reductions in drugs misuse and criminal behaviour, dealing with issues of sexuality and coping with mental health-related problems. The semi-structured discussions were designed to elicit feedback on alignment to scheme objectives, fit with the outcomes identified in the VFMPR literature review, theoretical underpinning and implementation (staff) and ‘change’ narratives in terms of before and after intervention contexts (young people).

Table 7.7: Comparison between 7 potent mechanisms identified in literature review, outcomes intended by local services, and experiences of young people

Mechanisms identified in literature review	Examples of evidence of intent (from staff)	Examples of evidence of experience (from young people)
Communication skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Helping young people get their point across calmly and without conflict.¹⁸⁴ 2. Improving negotiating skills.¹⁸⁵ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I became far more confident in terms of speaking in front of crowds.¹⁸⁶ 2. Developed negotiation tactics to deal with peers that I used to get into trouble with.¹⁸⁷
Confidence and agency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build self-confidence.¹⁸⁸ 2. Encourage young people to 'give it a go'.¹⁸⁹ 3. Self-confidence through encouragement.¹⁹⁰ 4. Young people given a sense of purpose.¹⁹¹ 5. Helping young people take control over their lives.¹⁹² 6. Helping young people to 'self-govern'.¹⁹³ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Helped me to deal with my confidence around my sexuality.¹⁹⁴ 2. They push [motivate] you.¹⁹⁵ 3. Helped me to grow up and expand as a person.¹⁹⁶ 4. The project helps me experience 'successive cycles' of getting out of my comfort zone.¹⁹⁷ 5. The centre helped me to stop and think ... now I <i>always</i> think about what led to this. I try to figure it out and if I can't, I come here.¹⁹⁸
Planning and problem-solving	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning – encouraging young people to get involved in something they feel passionate about.¹⁹⁹ 2. Problem-solving – developing the capacity for intrinsic learning.²⁰⁰ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I never thought we would do it ... and now I think look at what we can do'.²⁰¹ 2. I made the decision to stop taking the drugs and the project helped me to realise this.²⁰² 3. The project helped me to work stuff out.²⁰³
Relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relationships – have respect for other people's feelings.²⁰⁴ 2. Leadership – paying back the community and involvement in volunteering.²⁰⁵ 3. We create opportunities where young people can take the lead.²⁰⁶ 4. Encourage young people to engage in altruistic acts.²⁰⁷ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meeting new friends²⁰⁸ to discuss problems with.²⁰⁹ 2. Encouraged to think differently and not follow the crowd.²¹⁰ 3. Important to give something back to the community.²¹¹
Creativity and imagination	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Helping young people understand things can be different.²¹² 2. Finding the 'hook' that will engage a young person.²¹³ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Even conversations can help young people expand their experiences.²¹⁴ 2. The Youth Service allows young people to share their creative side.²¹⁵ 3. Involved in the design and production of a film project.²¹⁶
Resilience and determination	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encouraging 'stickability' and perseverance.²¹⁷ 2. The professional relationship is designed to encourage and prompt.²¹⁸ 3. Helping young people engender a 'can-do' spirit.²¹⁹ 4. In difficult situations small changes are important.²²⁰ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I was helped to develop coping skills to deal with peers that I used to get into trouble with.²²¹ 2. Now I don't feel like everything is falling apart.²²² 3. I don't feel as though I have to stay stuck.²²³

continued

Mechanisms identified in literature review	Examples of evidence of intent (from staff)	Examples of evidence of experience (from young people)
Emotional intelligence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Processing problems and reflecting on how previous conflicts were dealt with.²²⁴ 2. We don't tip-toe around bad behaviour.²²⁵ 3. Attitude and behaviour change.²²⁶ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I used to lash out and now I have the outbursts 'in my head' – other people won't know I'm angry and I control my impulses.²²⁷

Source: VFMPR site visits

However idiosyncratic or context-specific these experiences were for staff and young people, they were based on real events that had actually occurred. Table 7.7 identified:

- (a) where the proposed outcome measures from the VFMPR literature review are reflected in terms of how local professionals allocated their time;
- (b) where the *transfer of intent* by professionals was experienced by the young people engaged in the programmes and permitted the co-production of improved circumstances for the young person.

The interviews also assisted the VFMPR Team in unpicking some of the more elusive areas of practice. One such example is '*the relationship*' or the professional bond that is engineered between the youth professional and young person or groups of young people. It is seen as a key 'mechanism' both in bringing about change, providing ongoing beneficial intervention 'in-between' any formal or structured programme activity; and as a reflexive intervention in its own right. However, 'the relationship' has retained an indefinable, enigmatic quality in terms of *what it is and what it does*. Data secured from interviews indicate that professional relationships are key to the process of 'co-producing change' by the professional and the young person. **As such, the relationship is defined by what it delivers rather than what it is, i.e. being goal-centred and having 'clear objectives'**.²²⁸ Though the relationship needs to be developed naturally and humanely²²⁹, *its value*, similar to any more formal programme input, is required to be gauged by whether the young person experiences beneficial outcomes. However, according to many of the young people interviewed, the *genuineness* of the relationship – 'feeling cared for' and generally feeling that a youth professional was willing to pull out all the stops in pursuit of improving a young person's situation (even if this meant challenging inappropriate behaviour) – appears to have been a significant 'affective' mechanism, predicting change, inferring that the engagement needs to be professional, but also genuine. The following representative quotes from young people illustrate their relationship with youth workers:

- 'I came in the middle of her lunch, but she [youth worker] knew I was upset ... She knows me very well.'²³⁰
- 'They say it like it is, but in a nice way. They don't put you down.'²³¹ (The fact that the youth workers were truthful with her meant that she could trust them more.)
- 'They [the youth workers] wouldn't say my drug use was OK.'²³² (Inferring that other people he had spoken to tended to play down the effect of drug misuse.)
- 'It doesn't feel like an inconvenience ... I don't feel as though I need to hide anything.'²³³
- 'I trusted her [youth worker] and she knew what she was doing.'²³⁴ (This young person reversed a decision to drop out of school.)
- 'She committed to us, so we committed to her.'²³⁵
- 'They are not trying to get you off the phone.'²³⁶ (He got the impression that the staff always had time for him.)

This exercise is intended to be illustrative, *shining a light* on practice examples where features of effective practice appeared to be present. The policy challenge is thus to consider how effort in this area can be further incentivised, sustained and delivered as efficiently as possible.

Some important considerations apply in terms of gauging the relative weight of this evidence. For example:

- While the sample of site visits attempted to reflect the key demographic differences and governance arrangements, it is still relatively small given the number of services and their degree of service diversity.
- Local services were permitted to identify young people for interview, which introduces bias considerations. However, guidance was provided in terms of selection.
- The proposed discussion areas in the semi-structured interviews were circulated in advance of visits to ensure that respondents did not ‘freeze’ and so that the best use could be made of the interview time available in terms of securing data. While inevitably there was a risk of scripted responses (and gaming), the probing format of the discussion mitigated this risk. Indeed, some of the exchanges and reflections (by young people in particular) were very emotive. Of note is the fact that participants in the interviews were unaware of the literature review and thus the selection of programme outcomes subsequently being proposed in the VFMPR.
- It was not possible to ensure chronological congruence with quantitative and administrative data in terms of ensuring that any evidence spanned the period 2010-2012. In practical terms, evidence provided by young people in particular simply recounted their experience of interventions prompted by interview questions. Given that this quality of data (evidence of outcomes all or partially achieved) was particularly sought by the VFMPR Team, the lack of specificity in relation to time periods was considered a reasonable trade-off given that all the events referred to were past events (i.e. they had happened) as opposed to discussing future plans.
- Individual perceptions of change and the reasons for change by young people do not necessarily correlate directly with the mechanisms actually being in place. The links inferred in Table 7.7 are associative and not causal.
- It should not be inferred that the mechanisms listed are present across the board or achieved in a systematic, sustained manner. Rather, the site visits are used collectively to identify whether there is evidence to indicate that the mechanisms identified in the literature review are present at all, using illustrative examples.

7.6 Summary

Evidence of effective focus

- Evidence from survey returns indicated a moderate degree of congruence between service effort and the needs domains intended by the programmes.
- While it is difficult to gauge whether targeting meets any normative expectations due to the absence of standards, the review finds evidence of progressive targeting, i.e. increased targeting correlating with need-complexity.
- The absence of requirements for services to specify geographical catchment areas is a key weakness in terms of performance reporting and accountability.
- Using data from semi-structured interviews, the report indicates evidence of ‘presence’ of theory-of-change informing practice. However, theoretical underpinnings (e.g. in routinely regulating practice) appear less common.

Evidence of effective design

- The review identifies successive improvements in outcome reporting over the period of examination. However, this finding refers to a small sample of reports reviewed over a 3-year period. Moreover, these improvements start from a low base (i.e. accurate recording of information, which legitimately constitutes an outcome). Very few outcomes were quantified, which means that service performance comparisons are near impossible.
- While most local services claimed to measure outcome and impact, from survey responses it is unlikely that sufficient tools and measures are in place to conduct these measurements.

Evidence of effective interventions

- A basic review of activities/interventions indicated by survey responses, using features identified in the Horwath Review (2009), yielded mixed results in terms of whether they were likely to be 'direct' and 'intense'.
- Seven outcome areas identified in the VFMPR literature were applied retrospectively to local accounts of practice, using semi-structured interviews in a selection of sites. The study found evidence of 'presence' of these 7 mechanisms that were (a) intentionally and consciously applied by professionals in pursuit of beneficial outcomes, and (b) experienced by young people. However, the method is limited to only highlighting instances. While evidence of presence is important, it falls far short of outcome-focused practice being adopted as routine.

In making such generalisations, it should be noted that the schemes represent a very broad range of interventions. Inevitably, there were higher and lower performers. Due to data insufficiency, the VFMPR Team was not able to provide a more detailed profile relating to individual provider effectiveness. For now, individual organisations and providers will be able to position themselves more accurately on the ineffective–effective continuum. However, it is intended that analysis will permit the DCYA to better arbitrate these calibrations in future. The evidence suggests that complexity and uncertainty relating to performance measurement will continue to be a significant issue in such areas of human services, highlighting the current oversight inadequacies and future challenges for the governance structure of the funds.

Continued
relevance



Terms of Reference

- Evaluate the degree to which the objectives warrant the allocation of public funding on a current and ongoing basis, and examine the scope for alternative policy or organisational approaches to achieving these objectives on a more efficient and/or effective basis.

This chapter deals with the question of whether there is justification for the continued allocation of public funds to the programmes.²³⁷ In undertaking this task, the VFMPR Team considers the schemes' continued relevance with reference to the focus of the DCYA's *Statement of Strategy, 2011-2014*, evidence of continuing need and evidence from the research literature regarding the suitability of such programmes in improving outcomes. The chapter summarises the shortcomings in current governance arrangements and outlines the features of governance necessary for the performance management of such programmes. Finally, the chapter reviews five delivery propositions in terms of improving efficiency and effectiveness.

8.1 Original rationale for programmes

This review has outlined a complex history for the three programmes, deriving from different political and administrative sources, but essentially addressing similar contexts and policy issues. An examination of the programmes *in action* indicates a clear integration in the delivery of programme effort in terms of how local providers describe the use of programme funds individually and collectively. There appears to be little differentiation in the way that respective programmes are deployed either (a) across need *groups* (e.g. drugs, employment, training, anti-social behaviour) or (b) across need *levels* (e.g. all young people, young people in need, young people with severe difficulties, young people who require intensive and long-term support and protection). While there are clear tensions and preferences by service providers in terms of retaining open-access services for young people at local level, within total programme effort it appears that in most cases this is part of a package of services which include those directed at targeted populations of young people. Moreover, there is evidence to show that the open-access services are utilised tactically as a conduit for limited, more intensive services where required.

However, this examination has also demonstrated that, among other things, the performance framework is currently incapable of measuring the value of the programmes as a whole and of discerning relative performance of individual providers in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. The types of intervention being provided by local programmes (in particular, the accounts offered by local practitioners and most importantly young people) appear to tally with an imperfect, but emerging evidence base of the types of youth outcomes that hold efficacy across the respective needs domains.

8.2 DCYA strategic priorities

Objective 5 in the DCYA's *Statement of Strategy, 2011-2014* situates the development of 'youth' policy and programmes as one of a number of policy areas intended to improve overall outcomes for children and young people.²³⁸ More specific to 'youth', the *Statement of Strategy* identifies the further development of the National Quality Standards Framework and enhanced knowledge-led practice development, and also commits to 'Youth Affairs funding schemes [being] renovated and re-oriented, ensuring responsive, policy and evidence-informed service

provision.²³⁹ The *Statement of Strategy* recognises key contextual issues relating to the schemes in question, notably alcohol and drug misuse and their effects on youth-related crime²⁴⁰, and how the collateral effects of the economic downturn require a focus on youth unemployment²⁴¹. It also makes multiple cross-cutting references to a commitment to ‘*evidence-informed policy*’ and programmes for its total portfolio, ensuring that its governance systems for delivery are thus fit for purpose.²⁴²

8.3 Evidence of need

This VFMPR has identified trend data across the domains covered by the schemes (drugs misuse, youth employment, school performance, youth crime, youth homelessness) to indicate continued relevance in terms of evidenced need. Indeed, a closer inspection of the data, in particular relating to youth employment, school performance and youth crime, indicates that while economic trends (positive and negative) appear to be generally associated with corresponding trends (of improvement and regression) in the needs domain areas, of concern is a smaller group of children and young people *whose poor outcomes appeared to have been little affected by boom or bust*. Consequently, what appears to have been an organic assimilation of the three programmes into one overall programme of delivery (albeit in significantly different local manifestations) offers strategic benefits in terms of continuing relevance.

8.4 Evidence from the literature

Over-reliance on the ‘evidence base’ to provide conclusive direction in gauging continued relevance is problematic. This situation relates not just for the programmes under examination, but in the field generally, particularly if the objective is to achieve ‘bright-line’ determinations of impact.²⁴³ As detailed in Chapter 7 on ‘Effectiveness’, knowledge in the area of youth services, programmes and interventions is still developing and subject to significant ongoing deliberation and debate. This reality means that the DCYA must consider the best strategy for managing the uncertainties inherent in negotiating and utilising ‘evidence’ and taking measured and informed risks with respect to programme selection or more generally how to deploy policy and professional effort. Importantly, this situation is not helped in the youth programmes under examination by generally poor data quality and reliability, which has served to frustrate the VFMPR’s attempts at even output comparisons.

However, this undoubted vagueness needs to be balanced against *what is known*. The focused literature review commissioned for this study identifies 7 potent mechanisms, or outcomes, that appear to possess efficacy potential in the needs domain areas covered by the programmes. In short, these attributes should help young people to be more employable, less likely to engage in problematic drug-taking or alcohol misuse, and less likely to drop out of school and/ or engage in anti-social behaviour. These mechanisms are:

- communication skills;
- confidence and agency;
- planning and problem-solving;
- relationships;
- creativity and imagination;
- resilience and determination;
- emotional intelligence.

Moreover, there is clear evidence (from an examination of the survey responses and particularly the site visits) that these outcome areas have been consciously targeted by staff and actually experienced by service users, corresponding with subsequent positive trajectories for a number of the young people interviewed. Given that improvements in these mechanisms were detected by the VFMPR review (by virtue of young people's change stories), it may well be that an unknown quantity of interventions are effective, but that we currently do not have the tools to detect them.²⁴⁴

While the suggested outcomes make no claim to offer wholesale solutions to what can be extremely challenging circumstances for an individual young person, they appear to offer a significant contribution for them to manage such inherent risks. Importantly, they are also *measurable*.

The proposed outcomes are intended to act as policy-led incentives for services to mobilise their resources and effort around, and to delineate where input effort should be applied and relative performance would be measured. The outcomes can accommodate diverse service activity and creativity, *providing there is a clear evidence-based logic linking activity to these outcomes*. Ongoing monitoring of such outcomes can also help to build a knowledge of 'what works' in Ireland. The outcomes also do not preclude more direct and obvious outcomes, such as school performance or securing training credentials or a job, where the metrics are far clearer; however, it is suggested that improvements in the soft skills areas will also positively contribute to these endeavours.

8.5 Governance structure

In this section, key governance weaknesses identified in the VFMPR review are summarised, the areas that need to be strengthened are highlighted and general observations regarding the style of governance required are proposed for the future in the context of performance oversight.

The DCYA's *Statement of Strategy, 2011-2014* requires that governance arrangements with agencies and providers operating on behalf of the DCYA are fit for purpose. Objective 2 in the strategy states:

'The DCYA has acquired significant service provision responsibility, particularly in the areas of child welfare and protection, youth services, children in care and aftercare, family support, education welfare and youth justice. While the arrangements for the local management and delivery of these responsibilities vary, there is clear Departmental governance accountability to ensure that day-to-day services are fit for purpose and that risk is adequately managed. The varying size, function and discretionary responsibility of these bodies will demand individually tailored governance that works and is appropriate.'

This VFMPR has highlighted weaknesses in the 'performance' governance structure for youth programmes that require re-design. The administrative arrangements and compliance controls have been modified to some degree since the DCYA took over administrative responsibility of the three programmes in mid-2011. However, programme performance, as with many human services, is difficult to measure and demands a capacity and capability for closer examination. While it is clear from this review that elements of effective practice occur at local level, the DCYA cannot demonstrate that such practices are sustained and systemic.

This is not to diminish the work being undertaken regarding the National Quality Standards Framework (NQS), which provides key foundations of quality assurance and a means for evidence-informed local problem-solving and programme selection. The NQS process has also

demonstrated that it is capable of arbitrating on quality with local Youth Officers involved in site-by-site standard assessments, identifying weaknesses and strengths, as well as areas where further service-related work is required.²⁴⁵ However, there is an immediate challenge relating to more routine 'output counting' requirements across all providers.

Operationally, the DCYA's efforts are biased toward financial and administrative compliance. It cannot comment with any degree of detail about how efficiently services are being delivered. Data supporting judgements about effectiveness and efficiency are two very basic requirements in making any evaluations of value. In terms of performance management, it may be that fixing on and measuring outcomes are mid-term governance requirements. In the short term, the key weakness is *transparency* and the ability to make (at least) efficiency comparisons across providers. As they stand, the current annual progress reports require huge completion effort by local service providers, do not provide discriminating or coherent data, and are not scrutinised by DCYA staff in terms of making judgements about performance. While there may be some argument for retaining a bank of descriptive data for future research, this is offset by its current lack of utility and the effort deployed.

In making these proposals it should be noted that the requirement to design and oversee performance should not obscure the primary purpose of local youth professionals, which is *to engage in purposeful and dynamic relationships with young people*. The caution specifically refers to ensuring that any demands made by the DCYA in terms of performance monitoring are examined in conjunction with service providers in terms of the *workload* associated with these tasks. The total workload for performance monitoring compliance should fit within an acceptable quantity of effort relating to transaction or overhead costs.²⁴⁶ This, in turn, will mean that the DCYA will need to clearly prioritise what information is essential and what is not, and what data needs to be held centrally and what data can be held locally.

Specific observations relating to efficiency and effectiveness reporting are made below.

8.5.1 Input and output (efficiency) measures

This VFMPR is unable to make any judgements about efficiency in terms of identifying the types of providers that are the most or least efficient at providing services for young people. Data on the number of daily and annual participants, staff salaries, the number of staff and a breakdown of administration costs are sent in annually by the recipients of programme funding. However, there are a number of **issues with the data** that are reported annually:

1. The data are not routinely transferred to a central database capable of being analysed and thus there was considerable effort involved in inputting the data into a database for this VFMPR.
2. In some annual reports, the data provided are in respect of several different providers or several different funding streams and thus it is not possible to measure the efficiency of each individual provider or of the activities funded as part of these programmes.
3. Many of the providers provided incorrectly calculated average daily and annual participant numbers.
4. Aggregate participant numbers are provided, rather than participant numbers by activity/intervention type or target group. Some activities/interventions engage more participants than others and certain groups of young people would require more professional effort. Cross-referencing output data with risk or needs level would greatly assist in a more nuanced, but necessary profile of efficiency.

Given the difficulties stated above, this VFMPR was required to rely on participant numbers and salary costs from a small sample of providers who were able to provide correctly calculated and disaggregated figures for the years under review (2010-2012). A follow-up survey was piloted with a small number of providers to obtain the split in participant numbers and cost, but the figures provided were clearly approximate and speculative. This was due to the fact that the data were not collected in this form previously.

The problems encountered in attempting to determine efficiency demonstrate that current reporting and oversight requires reform. In its current form, the data provided in the annual progress reports completed by services cannot be used to measure efficiency. The information required of providers in annual reports should include participant numbers and costs at least cross-referenced by the risk or needs level of the young people engaged. Instructions for the calculation of participant figures should be clearer, given the large number of providers who have calculated figures incorrectly. When annual reports are received, figures should be routinely input into a database to facilitate future data analysis.

To ensure that the above issues are addressed, the existing annual progress report format needs to be reviewed and, where necessary, re-designed to include the data requirements set out above. Greater oversight is needed on the part of the grant administrators in determining that the data provided in annual reports are in the required form and that participant numbers are correctly calculated. It is necessary that all figures provided in the reports are input into a database capable of being analysed and that the database is kept up to date.

A second efficiency-related issue relates to the **geographical spread of service providers** throughout the country. Given that funding should be provided to support young people who are most in need of the services, routine monitoring of relevant indicators is required to ensure that the spread of youth services reflects the levels of disadvantage in the catchment areas. There have been few formal exits and no new entrants to the programmes between 2010 and 2012, meaning that the current configuration of local services has remained largely unchanged. A periodic review of the areas being served and those not being served is required.

While there does not appear to be ongoing monitoring of relevant trends in the areas in which the services operate, there is currently no easy way of doing this. Requiring all services to match their catchment areas to electoral or small area boundaries would enable a better examination of geographical efficiency, by comparing relevant measures of disadvantage between catchment areas and identifying disadvantaged areas where there are no services. In future, this information could inform funding allocations throughout the country and the VFMPR will recommend that this matching exercise forms part of a new governance framework. An illustration of how providers can match their catchment areas to electoral or small area boundaries is outlined in Appendix 3.

8.5.2 Suggested performance indicators

As already stated, the efficiency of the youth programmes could not be established given the poor quality of output data provided by services in annual progress reports. This precluded the VFMPR from comparing outputs by different activities/interventions or by the group of young people provided for. Services currently provide average daily participant numbers and individual annual participant numbers in annual reports. Only overall output figures are provided, even though services engage with young people with different needs and in different types of activities/interventions.

In order to conduct a meaningful analysis of efficiency by comparing different services, it is necessary to discriminate outputs by the risk level of participants and possibly by activity/ intervention type. Annual funding allocations should also be split in the same way so meaningful unit costs can be computed. This would enable a comparison of the efficiency of services that target specific young people or that engage in particular types of activities/interventions. It is suggested that the administrative burden related to submitting data can be significantly mitigated by employing technological solutions.

Table 8.1 identifies the areas that the DCYA should consider in the design of a performance framework²⁴⁷. This framework should accompany other core governance data that are required to be held at DCYA national level, but, while not exclusive, should considerably reduce the burden on local providers while concurrently providing the DCYA with data capable of examination and comparison. Notwithstanding the intention here to reduce non-direct administrative burden, normative workload levels relating to documentation and reporting should be agreed between the DCYA and providers, and this should be kept under review to ensure an appropriate balance between direct and non-direct work. In turn, this will require the DCYA to prioritise the areas where data collection is required within a given staffing complement, which can be tested empirically.²⁴⁸

Table 8.1: Performance framework

Requirement
1. Specification of catchment area ²⁴⁹
2. Specification of target groups ²⁵⁰
3. Specification of improvements or outcomes intended ²⁵¹
4. Specify rationale ²⁵²
5. Specify inputs ²⁵³
6. Specify outputs ²⁵⁴
7. Specify activities ²⁵⁵
8. Identification of attribution problem to be addressed ²⁵⁶

8.5.3 Outcome and impact (effectiveness) measures

This VFMPR review was unable to make straightforward judgements regarding good, satisfactory and poor performance in terms of the schemes under examination. Part of this challenge relates to the nature of the type of intervention under examination. ‘Hard’ outcome measurement (e.g. employment, crime reduction, reduction in drugs consumption, school attendance and the acquisition of qualifications) is reasonably straightforward and can be easily quantified. However, in reality, the desired long-term impact of a programme is very distant from the specific youth intervention. For example, it is problematic to draw inferences from a specific intervention in a local authority estate in Dublin, Waterford or Limerick, or to analyse county level or national level trend data.

Closer examination needs to be paid to what changes actually *do occur* and which can be reasonably attributed to the intervention. These have been characterised in the literature as measures that are more ‘fair’ and ‘useful’ in terms of gauging performance.²⁵⁷ Indeed, the most effective and sustainable way to create an alternative ‘improved’ path for a targeted youth may be to *inspire* the young person to work out this path for him or herself and to execute their own plan. The most appropriate immediate outcomes here could well be ‘motivation, agency and execution’. A secondary task is forecasting on the basis of sound evidence how, with adequate support, these more realisable outcomes can be located within an overall

theory of change to improve the chances of targeted youth opting for alternative ‘improved’ path trajectories. These changes may be on the face of it far ‘softer’, but as the literature review commissioned for this VFMPR points out, they are potentially profound and can be measured. Bearing in mind the subtlety of such changes and that no such standard measures exist to compare performance at national level, it means that local services and provider organisations have been required to develop these from the ground up.

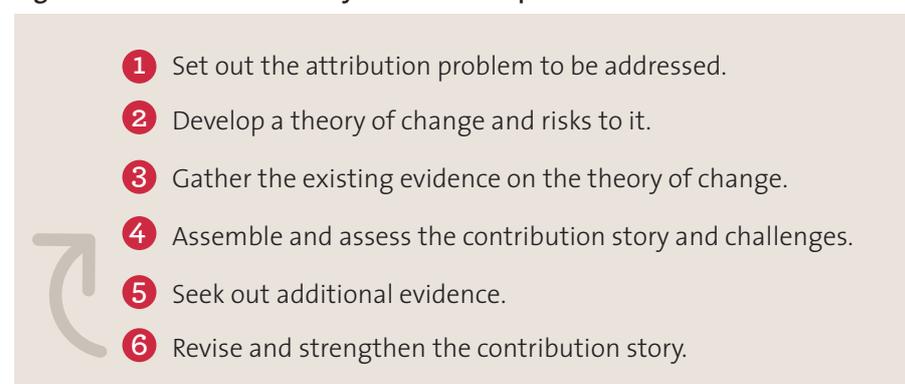
There is no further discussion in relation to measures and reports of *effectiveness* in 2010-2012 since this discussion has been well aired in previous chapters. The focus is therefore on outline design proposals (similar to efficiency) offsetting current weaknesses and permitting future examinations of effectiveness. The 7 outcomes identified by the literature review offer a useful starting point for discussion with providers. Obviously, given the degree of disagreement in the literature regarding ‘what works’, proposals such as these would require significant deliberation with professional providers in terms of suitability and feasibility. The 7 outcomes proposed are the best assessment guided by the focus of the programmes and the review of the literature.

Notwithstanding the precise selection of outcomes, some form of measurement will be required to establish baseline measurement (at population, group or individual level) to gauge which outcomes apply, when, where and to whom, as well as to determine progress. A clearer commitment to *specified* programme outcomes will permit a more focused search or design brief for measurement tools.

Given the increasing use and familiarisation of the logic model across providers, it is suggested that consideration be given to applying a ‘contribution’ approach to evaluation, augmented by more precise use of experimentation. The contribution approach specifies the proximal outcomes intended by a particular programme and develops an evidence-based ‘theory of change’ to test whether successful achievement of outcomes can be strongly associated with overall impact.

Mayne’s Contribution Analysis²⁵⁸ possibly offers a suitable model for performance evaluation, which could reasonably be accommodated by all providers (see Figure 8.1). The model fits well with a logic model approach and requires programme developers and service providers to think ‘up front’ what their contribution will be to improving overall outcomes for young people. The model is practical and, importantly, transparent. It offers 6 straightforward steps to demonstrating ‘contribution’. Local iterations of the model could also be aggregated into national models to provide effective communications about how the programmes operate and which features appear to be more (or less) effective.

Figure 8.1: Contribution Analysis: 6 basic steps



Source: Mayne (2008)

This contribution approach certainly does not preclude the use of experimental design. Indeed, the proposal in Section 8.5.1 above (on improving input and output measures) of matching local services to agreed CSO, electoral or small area boundaries permits far greater precision in like-for-like comparisons and the smaller population sizes involved offer a remedy to the confounding impact problem currently experienced in attempting to match small-scale programme outputs to county-level impacts.

8.6 Alternative models of delivery

This VFMPR analysis supports the view that there is a continuing relevance in terms of programme objectives and that the existing programmes under certain conditions offer an effective means to secure programme objectives. We now turn to considerations relating to delivery arrangements. Firstly, it is considered whether a market solution is sufficient. Secondly, recent organisational developments in the field are identified. Though these developments are so new that it precludes making any firm proposals²⁵⁹, possible future avenues, such as alternative commissioning bodies to the DCYA, are highlighted. Thirdly, the immediate issues facing the DCYA in terms of whether it would be more efficient to purchase 'off-the-peg' programmes directly, as opposed to relying on the youth professional sector to mediate solutions, is addressed. Fourthly, the merits of centralising middle tier supports to provide the DCYA with greater centralised governance capacity is considered. Finally, the merits of a deliberative model of governance are discussed, given the gaps in the evidence base and the risk of unintended consequences.

8.6.1 Market solution

This review of the evidence suggests that market forces alone appear to be incapable of resolving the situation for young people. This is particularly highlighted by those young people who have been largely unaffected by broader economic movements. We do not know whether the data in these areas refer to essentially the same young people (e.g. whether residually high levels of young people who are NEET, under-perform at school or in more recent years are responsible for higher ratios of crime in common populations), but the literature supports significant spill-over in these key risk areas. Of course, given the current economic circumstances and the upward demographic projections, the numbers of young people facing adversity are likely to rise, at least in the short term. Over and above the inability for the market to resolve this policy problem without intervention, the data suggest that not only should programmes continue to be targeted, but that they need to perform better with the more intransigent areas of work if there is to be any impact on what appear to be *ongoing* residual risks and difficulties for some young people.

8.6.2 Alternative options for commissioning of youth programmes

There have been a number of developments in policy, programme and practice areas since these schemes were first initiated and which have a bearing on continued relevance. The DCYA itself only came into existence in 2011, drawing together a number of responsibilities (including these programmes) originally administered by other line departments. There have also been new targeted investments in the needs domains dealt with in the initial policy matrix, for example, the National Educational Welfare Board, associated School Completion initiatives and an expansion of Garda Youth Diversion Projects.²⁶⁰

Importantly, the VFMPR must also acknowledge the setting up of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, which is probably the most significant operational development in terms of child protection and welfare for many years. The Agency has now incorporated the National Educational Welfare Board, School Completion Programmes and other responsibilities within its aegis. Of significance here is that the target groups, certainly for the more challenging areas of engagement with youth, should converge with the target groups for the new agency²⁶¹. As Minister Fitzgerald outlined recently:²⁶²

'It [Tusla] will pull together and give single coherent direction to all of the strands of service for our families most in need; in a way that has never happened in this country before, including prevention and early intervention programmes, both universal and targeted.'

While the strategic focus of Tusla may not lead to actual work duplication (this will be dependent on current and future workload priorities for the Agency and its capacity to meet many competing needs), its locally based management, nested within a national command and control structure, is at least likely to offer strengthened opportunities for governance, partnerships and referral pathways at local level. While this may present as a challenge for many providers who are committed to more universal provision, such partnerships are considered desirable to locate and engage effectively young people presenting with higher levels of need (see Chapter 7 on 'Effectiveness').

At a broader level, cognisance will also need to be taken of the development of Children's Services Committees (CSCs), which will be a key conduit for the delivery of policy and the coordination of services to children. The boundaries of these committees are unlikely to be co-terminus with delivery by most local youth programmes delivered under the schemes and may require (a) consortia of local targeted youth services offering clear CSC geographically aligned performance data; and/ or (b) the DCYA re-thinking the way in which ongoing or future service level agreements are determined (e.g. tying in with CSC boundaries or sub-boundaries).

The suitability of Tusla as the alternative commissioner of youth programmes has not been examined in this review given the Agency's recent commencement (in January 2014), although its operational remit²⁶³ and national management/local coverage capability suggest that it should remain under consideration as a potential alternative commissioning body to the DCYA.²⁶⁴ Rather, the focus of the proposals in this VFMPR report refers to improving the performance of the programmes as a whole by clearer expectations of outcomes and the development of a coherent evaluation framework.

8.6.3 DCYA as direct purchaser of 'youth programmes'

We have identified in this VFMPR how international debates regarding measurement become manifest in the local treatment of a VFMPR for youth programmes in Ireland.

There is significant support for experimental methods (and the RCT as the pinnacle) in terms of offering conclusive evidence regarding impact. Randomly allocating individuals to either a treatment or control group permits evaluators to determine easily whether an intervention works (i.e. across programme) or can identify relative performance between providers based on hard measures reinforced by the expected *effect sizes* of specific programmes that have been subject to multiple RCTs. In turn, this evidence base can inform purchasing decisions made by policy-makers who may wish to develop portfolios of programmes. International academic material describing the value of 'evidence-based policy' supporting such programme investments is now widely available, particularly in the USA²⁶⁵, but also gathering support in Europe²⁶⁶.

It is reasonable to assume that RCT, experimental methods and ‘proven’ programmes offer a degree of certainty in a policy area (as this examination has demonstrated) where performance appears to be obscured by poor definitions of outcomes, ill-defined metrics and significant difficulties in attributing impact. It follows that in a situation where ‘need’ has been established and full product knowledge is available in terms of programme efficacy, a reasonable approach to delivery is for the DCYA *to go to the ‘programme’ market* for the best price for proven targeted youth programmes. In this scenario, the DCYA would select a limited range of programmes with proven efficacy, competitively tender for services and design contract incentives and sanctions to yield optimum performance.

However, purchasing proven programmes assumes that the State is in receipt of sufficient knowledge to be clear about the need it is responding to, the specific attributes of a given programme in meeting these needs, how certain programmes may operate in unison together, what gaps may be left and how these will be reconciled. As has been proposed in this VFMPR, the knowledge base in terms of precisely profiling relevant need across the country and matching this to the evidence base for ‘proven’ youth interventions is limited. Caution needs to be applied given that the information asymmetry that currently exists between the DCYA and the range of voluntary sector providers may simply shift from the public or voluntary sphere to purveyors of programmes in the private sphere or outside the jurisdiction, when arguably the key challenge to improved commissioning expertise is for the State to build its own capacity.

While undoubtedly easier to monitor from the centre, an unintended consequence of selecting and rolling-out programmes in a context of evidence-uncertainty is that the wrong programme is chosen. The ‘Mate-Tricks’ experiment, run by the Childhood Development Initiative in Dublin’s Tallaght West, is instructive here given that while *ex-post* its effect was deemed to be counterproductive (*Recent evidence would suggest that this type of programme may not be a useful or cost-effective service in areas of particular social and economic disadvantage*²⁶⁷), the intrinsic programme objectives, of seeking to improve pro-social behaviour, are still intuitively appropriate. Adverse findings following RCTs have limited competency in terms of wider strategic ‘learning’; the outcome of such trials more often relates to the performance of a particular programme or particular set of contexts and circumstances, whereas the State’s responsibilities present as a much broader canvas.

8.6.4 Increasing DCYA governance capacity

At central DCYA level, there is insufficient staff capacity in the Youth Affairs Unit to provide the degree of *quantitative* and *qualitative* examination of plans and progress reports required to stand over the performance framework for complex human services. The DCYA needs to develop technologies to be closer to practice on the ground where, as has been demonstrated, just under €30 million of the total programme cost is deployed in day-to-day transactions between staff and young people.

One option could be for the DCYA to simply draw sufficient resources from the middle tiers of the current governance system, in particular those relating to ‘development’ (i.e. Youth Officers) where approximately €1.4 million (of DCYA funds) is currently deployed. Monitoring and evaluation of targeted human services programmes, which have significant degrees of local discretion, is *necessarily* resource-heavy if meaningful judgements are to be made about future performance. Such a resource transfer could provide the DCYA with a ring-fenced and enhanced performance evaluation capability – one it currently does not have – for no added cost. Such a move could also remove one contractual transaction in an already complex governance system, permitting the DCYA enhanced capability to deal directly with service providers.

However, on balance, the preferred option (if it is possible to achieve) is that a significantly more *outcomes-driven* Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) be agreed with the Education and Training Board (ETBs), tying an appropriate portion of ETB Youth Officer time aligned to DCYA programme outcomes for targeted youth. The current MoU with ETBs perceives a far wider brief than *active participation* in DCYA governance arrangements for these locally based specialist youth professionals. However, we reinforce the point that the funds under examination here represent almost 70% of DCYA-related expenditure, administered by the Youth Affairs Unit. The location of these posts close to local youth provider infrastructures obviously confers a strategic and logistical benefit for the DCYA in terms of proximity to practice, but only if this local effort is aligned with policy objectives and programme outcomes are set centrally. This approach significantly augments the existing sign-off responsibilities in terms of progress reports and annual plans. Such a role would change the nature of the relationship between the DCYA and ETB Youth Officer to principal and agent²⁶⁸ and ETB Youth Officer (and provider) from *development* to implementing DCYA policy, accountable to a unified national policy framework.

The current multi-actor structure mitigates against such consistency. A reasonable rule of thumb in these circumstances is to design complexity out of support systems, particularly where the services themselves are complex. A prerequisite of such a proposal, therefore, would be for Youth Officers to operate in a consistent fashion in terms of the delivery of a set of national programme objectives, agreed outcomes and responsibilities, which are led and performance-monitored by the DCYA.

8.6.5 DCYA stewardship of a deliberative model of problem-solving and service development

The choice of delivery model is a tactical decision: essentially, ‘contracting for outcomes’ in an uncertain knowledge environment with arguably higher potential rewards and risks or a more ‘deliberative model’ aiming to yield better value from reforming existing arrangements with more prudent incremental returns.²⁶⁹

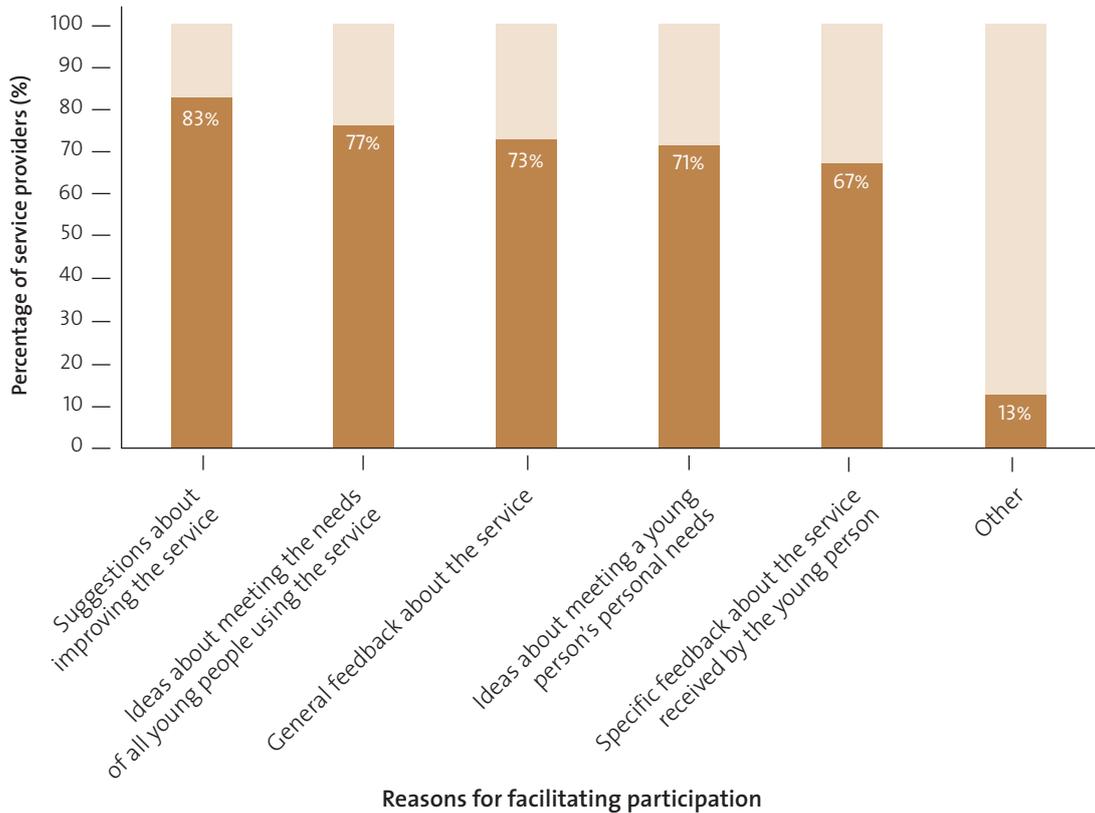
This VFMPR review has asserted that knowledge in the area of effective programmes is growing, but still limited. This suggests a more cautious ‘deliberative’ (as opposed to purchaser/provider) approach to governance, to mitigate the risks of poor investments (e.g. of purchasing poorly fitting programmes), the capture of ‘know-how’ evidence and the building-up of DCYA knowledge capacity to improve its commissioning performance.

In keeping with the literature review commissioned for this study, it is argued that the current state of knowledge (both in terms of the specific local needs and the efficacy and reach of ‘off-the-peg’ programmes) is simply not authoritative or clear enough for the DCYA to commit significant amounts of programme funds to a limited portfolio of programmes. However, this should not preclude the purchase of programmes that have demonstrated their impact in Ireland. Where programmes have been subject to evaluations using experimental design, these should be considered where the specific need level and type, and the specific outcome level and type in a given locality, match these programmes’ demonstrated efficacy. Where such specificity can be ascertained, given that benefits are reasonably assured, the only militating factor should be relative cost.

Complementing a more deliberative approach, another key development here is that consulting young people has become a ‘business-as-usual’ policy-driver by the DCYA for all its programmes. According to the VFMPR Survey, such participation processes are also valued and practised to varying degrees by most service providers (see *Figure 8.2*). From the survey, examples include

routinised consultation in terms of day-to-day practice, consultation events and ad hoc consultancy on a range of service-related matters. The rationale for consulting young people includes feedback about the service, suggestions for improvement (which has been seen as critical in terms of achieving greater effectiveness²⁷⁰) and local services involving young people in various areas of governance.

Figure 8.2: Reasons why local services facilitate participation with young people



Source: VFMPR Survey

It is also clear (certainly from the VFMPR site visits) that the *change stories* shared by young people (which they attributed, in all or part, to the service interventions) also provide insight and new knowledge about how and why such change occurs and in what circumstances. In at least two site visits, the respective youth professionals were unaware of the profound positive impact that their efforts had made with young respondents²⁷¹, indicating that such consultations may improve professional learning and have operational and practical benefits in addition to other rights-based merits associated with participation.

The deliberative approach proposed, informed by a clear package of approved programme outcomes and the knowledge that *is* available, could frame a new focused dynamic partnership between the DCYA, local Youth Officers and voluntary youth providers. At national level, such an engagement may seem to be little different to existing engagement arrangements with the service provider sector. However, framed by nationally 'approved' outcomes, informed by the literature review commissioned for this report, deliberations should focus on the most effective and efficient means of achieving these outcomes. Appropriately stewarded by the DCYA, this type of engagement will act to test existing programme knowledge, develop new knowledge and begin to develop a more robust performance framework to complement the DCYA's wider efforts in relation to youth policy.

As identified in the literature review, **once programme outcomes are made clear** (and align to overarching policy objectives), **then it is possible to develop metrics and measurement tools** (irrespective of how apparently intangible the outcomes are). A clear set of nationally agreed outcomes will also improve the yield of the NQSF and now widely used logic models, which rather than providing individual accounts of service activity could, and should, be tied to the achievement of policy objectives and outcomes set at national level. The problem currently is that outcomes are so diverse across these targeted schemes that the output from any additional strategic forum for deliberations between the DCYA and service providers, in the absence of national direction, could be equally diverse.

8.7 Conclusion: Assessment of whether programmes warrant the allocation of public funds

This VFMPR examination identifies a fit between the targeted youth programmes and current DCYA strategy. While the evidence relating to programme efficacy is not conclusive, there is promising academic support that, effectively harnessed, **these programmes can make a difference**. The programmes can provide a significant contribution to improving outcomes for the young people involved and should be considered for public funding.

However, this assessment is tempered by the firm belief, highlighted in the VFMPR, that the **programmes and performance governance arrangements require significant reform**. More specifically, the reform areas relate to the development of a robust performance evaluation framework to inform the way that the DCYA offers incentives for high programme performance and issues sanctions for poor programme performance.

Alternative delivery models available to the DCYA include a 'do-nothing' market solution, the direct purchase of specific programmes and alternative options for commissioning youth programmes. The residual nature of systemic problems for a significant number of young people over time indicates that intervention over and above any solely market-based solution is required. The examination considers whether the DCYA should directly purchase individual youth 'programmes' rather than funding youth organisations to design *and* deliver services. However, uncertain evidence regarding need and programme 'fit' introduces potential risks in terms of routine purchasing of 'off-the-peg' programmes.

Alternative propositions for the administration of the programmes are considered. However, given that many of the arrangements are only recently in situ, it is suggested that the DCYA **focus on improving programme value** and that this will be of benefit wherever ultimate governance responsibility for the programmes lies.

The analysis suggests that there is *no ideal* governance configuration. Both centralised and local governance options carry opportunities and risks. Centralising and ring-fencing resources for the DCYA derived from other parts of the administrative system, on the face of it, enhances oversight capability. However, the nature of these programmes is such that local presence and attention to the nuances of practice carry a performance evaluation premium. However, local administration without reform is likely to retain the status quo position of an inability to gauge overall programme performance and distinguish relative performance between providers.

The preferences suggested, therefore, in terms of both performance governance and deliberative problem-solving, are delivered as a challenge rather than a solution. The suggestion is premised on the readiness for change on the part of each element of the existing governance system to participate in an improved accountability structure in line with the demands of a publicly funded programme of this magnitude. If the DCYA accepts these proposals, the alternatives should be kept under review.

This review of the Special Projects for Youth, Young People's Facilities and Services Fund and Local Drugs Task Force youth programmes has raised a number of issues that have significantly hampered attempts to determine value for money, whether of the programmes as a whole or in discriminating relative performance by individual service providers *within* the programmes. This is obviously an unsatisfactory situation for programmes, which accounted for approximately €128 million public investment for the period under examination.

Study in the area of *human services* evaluation presents inherent complexities in relation to performance measurement. These measurement problems become further complicated where programmes, such as those under examination, enjoy high levels of local discretion and are not uniformly codified. There are logical reasons why the programmes should be so tailored to suit local conditions in the many communities in Ireland which are served. However, a secondary complicating feature, poor data quality, presented the review with additional and considerable analytical challenges.

Nevertheless, despite the weaknesses in data quality and in the structures and processes that govern the overall delivery of programmes, the review found evidence of service delivery that was reasonably well aligned with the original intentions of the programmes. Furthermore, from directly interviewing front-line staff and young people, elements of the relationship-based services delivered by youth providers clearly fitted with an (albeit imperfect) emerging evidence base, identified in a review of the literature specially commissioned for this study. While the VFMPR itself is a summative evaluation, making judgements and reaching conclusions based on past performance, it also fulfils a necessary 'formative' role in terms of recommending focus for future direction. By identifying weaknesses in the arrangements during the period under examination (2010-2012), it is intended that the reforms necessary to improve future efficiency and effectiveness can be more clearly determined and presented, with the intention that they are acted upon. With 'implementation' in mind and cognisant of the non-implementation of the previous VFM review²⁷², **Recommendation 1**, identified by both the VFMPR Steering Committee and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) senior management, requires that the VFMPR is accompanied by a time-lined action plan, which the Youth Affairs Unit of the DCYA will be responsible for delivering.

The VFMPR presents the individual histories of the three programmes. However, despite the differing origins, the VFMPR Team quickly formed the view that there were far more similarities than differences. These similarities referred to significant cross-over in the 'types' of needs targeted by the programmes, in particular addressing concerns relating to drugs misuse, crime/anti-social behaviour and educational disadvantage (*see Table 2.1*). In addition, the programmes further converged in relation to the 'level' of needs where service effort was distributed, with no discernable difference between the three programmes in relation to the varying *complexity* of target groups²⁷³ (*see Figure 2.1*). While the issue of 'targeting' itself appears to be contentious in discourse surrounding the programmes, the initial targeted intent for the programmes (identified in both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5²⁷⁴) is clear. Formal and informal contact with local service providers during the course of the review indicates that creative means have been employed to ensure that young people who need a service *get the service*, often using 'open-access' services within a local community as a gateway for more intensive interventions for certain young people. Given the similarities in the intended focus and the empirical findings that in reality there is very little difference in terms of how service effort is distributed between the programmes, **Recommendation 2** argues that the three programmes should be collapsed into one targeted programme for youth. Reform in this area provides for the construction of a single framework to gauge performance and in parallel bounds discretion in the context of NQSF-related bottom-up local planning. This recommendation attempts to remove unnecessary

complexity and facilitates greater accountability for a local provider in terms of demonstrating how its service effort will meet a single set of programme objectives.²⁷⁵ Advances in practice technologies since the inception of the programmes in the 1980s and 1990s provide an additional reference point for accountability, permitting the DCYA greater potential for examining practice logic in any given case.²⁷⁶

In addition to actual delivery, adequate *governance* or oversight capability is a prerequisite for the efficient and effective delivery of youth programmes. The review found that the governance system overseeing the youth programmes was deficient in terms of its configuration, operations and capacity. Human service programmes such as the youth programmes under examination require considerable oversight given the measurability complexities and the ongoing need for front-line practitioners to exercise discretion at local level, in addition to day-to-day operations and risk management. Oversight is provided in the form of direct *operational management*, support and development by service providers and in the form of programme *performance management* by the DCYA (with some responsibilities performed by funding administration bodies). Both these indirect expenditures should provide clear value added to the key transaction between the youth professional²⁷⁷ and young person where the actual policy objectives (e.g. improvements in the young person's circumstances or behaviour) is 'co-produced'. The review did not examine the detailed arrangements in place in terms of the value added by service provider management arrangements, of particular importance given the differential unit costs associated with the organisational models identified in Table 6.10 and the evidence supporting links between 'organisational climate' and effectiveness in children's services²⁷⁸. However, the report recommends a follow-up Focused Policy Assessment, which the VFMPR Team believes should further examine the costs and value associated with the various governance arrangements for service provider management. This exercise should be of value to the examination of other programmes funded by the DCYA and other line departments.

The review finds that the performance management arrangements are poor when compared to reasonably expected norms for governance. As a consequence, it is not possible to easily provide evidence in support of (or in opposition to) efficiency or effectiveness for the programmes overall or to discern between weaker and stronger performers. This is not satisfactory and it is in the interest not least of the young people engaged to ensure that the programme direction overall is well-evidenced, that stronger practice attracts incentives and weaker practice is sanctioned or replaced. Currently, data problems and oversight capacity preclude making these types of basic performance judgements. Administrative data examined for this study rendered all but input-related data significantly impaired. Efficiency measurement requires examination of the ratio of inputs to outputs. This was not possible across the board and required the VFMPR Team to 'sample' in order to compensate for data weakness and 'estimate' as opposed to providing conclusive comparisons. This type of governance system, where the DCYA operates as principal acting on behalf of the taxpayer and commissioning services from youth providers²⁷⁹, requires as a minimum that performance can be adequately and fairly monitored. This, in turn, presumes that data are of a sufficiently high quality. Consequently, **Recommendation 3** states that a new performance-related governance system should be designed and constructed, giving clear direction in relation to how outputs and outcomes are specified.

In addition to achieving greater clarity in terms of data comparisons, there are also basic oversight capacity issues. In sum, the oversight staffing complement within the DCYA is not sufficient for the governance task at hand, which requires a capability to both quantitatively review and analyse data submitted by providers, but also to routinely apply closer scrutiny to the qualitative content of local programmes. The report argues that there is a level of capacity required by human service programmes of this type²⁸⁰ which the DCYA must create or acquire

in order to adequately govern. The report argues that ETB Youth Officers, funded by the DCYA but managed locally by ETB management, are better placed to support the DCYA in terms of *capacity* (29.5 posts nationally), *proximity* (locally based) and *skill base* (professionally qualified and experienced youth workers) in fulfilling this critical role. This would require Youth Officers to operate more overtly as a key link in the performance governance chain for the programmes. Table 4.2, which identifies a range of activities undertaken by Youth Officers in 2011, indicates that the capacity created by Youth Officers to participate in programme governance will require a de-prioritisation in terms of where some current effort is deployed. **Recommendation 4** states that the required additional governance capacity for the programmes should be sourced from existing Youth Officer time, requiring a rationalisation and replacement of professional effort from existing activities to governance oversight.²⁸¹ The issue of reviewing longer term governance needs is referred to at the end of this chapter.

There have, of course, also been promising service developments and improvements. The knowledge base relating to effectiveness, while subject to ongoing conjecture and debate, is nonetheless growing. More directly, new collaborations between third-level institutions, philanthropists, experts and service providers are delivering more nuanced conceptual frameworks for youth programmes. Of these, the 'logic model' and 'theory of change' approaches offer means to capture the complexity of the contexts that youth programmes operate within.²⁸² Key to these general service developments is the National Quality Standards Framework (NQS) being led by the DCYA, which during the period of examination was being implemented in phases. Operationally, the NQS provides service providers with tools to assist in the design of services, communicate underlying logic and offers a means of calibration between providers in terms of quality. In addition, the NQS provides a structure for local planning activity within centrally determined programme objectives. The contribution of the NQS in terms of a developing appreciation of outcomes-related planning is therefore clear. The planned full roll-out of the NQS in 2014²⁸³ is, therefore, a key assumption underpinning these VFMPR recommendations.

The report argues that the context generally underpinning the original *rationale* for the programmes is still valid. While positive trends are detected in relation to drugs misuse, crime and educational improvement overall, there is evidence to suggest that the contexts for a small but significant number of young people appear to have bucked this trend: these data present a resistant flat-line profile. For example, while the number of offending incidents rose marginally from 2009-2011, the number of *individuals* involved reduced significantly (from approximately 18,000 individuals to 12,000 individuals), indicating a smaller number of young people engaged in a larger volume of offending behaviour and a higher ratio of offences per individual. Overall demographic projections (*see Figure 5.1*) suggest that by 2021, the number of young people aged 10-21 will increase considerably, from 700,000 to almost 800,000, returning to levels of the late 1980s and 1990s. **Recommendation 5** states that the overall demographic trends and the underlying patterns relating to the needs of young people outlined above should be clearly taken into account by the DCYA in terms of future prioritisation and the design of programmes.

The review's analysis of *efficiency* was limited by poor data quality. In terms of inputs, the picture is clearer. Expenditure on local services was reduced by approximately 14% in 2010-2012 (*see Table 6.3*). Estimates of overall staff salaries indicate that pay costs declined at a lower rate than non-pay costs, while staff numbers appear to have remained stable. In terms of output analysis, poor quality administrative data required the VFMPR Team to sample providers in order to regularise and verify information, meaning that findings require caution in terms of interpretation and generalisation. Even with the review's attempts at verification, local interpretation of output counting conflated low input activities (for example, attendance at

events or participation in a youth café) with high input activities (for example, a 1:1 intervention for a young person experiencing significant adverse circumstances) when accounting for the individuals engaged. Not surprisingly, the practical difference between these outputs is hugely significant in terms of presenting *quantities* of output and could inadvertently incentivise providers toward less complex engagements. However, in terms of efficient targeting, the survey undertaken for this VFMPR indicates a reasonable alignment with overall objectives, with providers reporting significant effort applied to ‘young people in need’ (see *Figure 6.2*), although this self-assessment would need to be routinely tested empirically going forward.

The output analysis used two measures that are captured annually in progress reports: (a) the number of young people who engage with a service over the year and (b) the average number of young people who engage daily with a service provider over the year. Bearing in mind the significant caveats that accompany the analysis, apparent variations in output between service provider organisation structures indicate differential unit costs (see *Table 6.10*). While the unit costs do not capture the varying complexities, arbitrate on service quality and, in the absence of firm outcome data, cannot distinguish between providers who perform well and those that do not, this exercise at least provides the DCYA with a framework for considering a more comprehensive costing exercise once data issues have been resolved. Accordingly, **Recommendation 6** states that local service planning, in identifying the groups of young people that will be engaged in a given year, should include a quantified estimate of the differential need levels of the young people or groups of young people involved.²⁸⁴ This estimate should be based on clear demographic data and other local intelligence (discussed further in the description of Recommendation 8 below), specifying the operational means to ensure that the service reaches those young people intended.²⁸⁵ In turn, this will permit the DCYA to better compare efficiency in terms of inputs and profiled outputs and to develop over time both output norms profiled by need and funding allocations that better reflect the way effort is necessarily distributed. **Recommendation 7** states that specific output counting rules should accompany this restructuring of output counting. Given that assessments of this type are evidence-informed *approximations*, this process would need to be routinely audited to improve national consistency in local assessments.²⁸⁶ The findings here call more generally for an overhaul of existing reporting requirements based on the design and development of an essential minimum dataset with clear specifications and definitions. In addition to basic compliance checks, the system should analyse and compare data on a consistent basis and be capable of using this data as a basis for funding allocation, providing performance-related feedback to service providers and informing quality and capacity-building decisions.

The DCYA has inherited a system of funding distribution that appears skewed. This is partially explained by the original configurations of funding, which at the time reasonably targeted funds at areas across the country where young people were presented with the most significant risks and experienced the highest levels of disadvantage. In sum, the programmes were not designed to be equally distributed across youth populations. However, the large differences in investment levels demand a re-appraisal of the distribution strategy for funds. Geo-mapping technologies have improved unimaginably since the programmes were first devised and it is now possible to evidence local demographic patterns and trends, accessing high-quality and consistent data using simple tools. With this in mind, **Recommendation 8** states that the DCYA should undertake a baseline exercise with all providers, working in conjunction with Pobal, to physically map the catchment area of each service.²⁸⁷ This baseline exercise will permit the DCYA to be far clearer about the communities being served by the total programme and the rationale for investment. It will also permit re-investments and new investments to be better evidenced. Agreement on geographical boundaries²⁸⁸ will also provide the DCYA with more traction to ensure a local coverage fit with national expectations by requiring that proposed modifications

to catchment areas be subject to a change control procedure. Finally, fixing geographical catchment areas, particularly at very local level, facilitates greater transparency and local accountability.

An added consideration regarding efficient distribution relates to the deployment of targeted resources for young people by departments, agencies and funders *other* than the DCYA. This VFMPR channelled its analysis through the lens of the three programmes in question. However, at local level there may be multiple funding sources converging on the same policy area, resulting in additional distribution inefficiencies. This VFMPR recommends a second follow-up Focused Policy Assessment to undertake an audit of the distribution of targeted funding allocated to young people across departments, agencies and other funders. Matched with newly available local demographic data referred to above, this should permit a more general cross-departmental funding allocation exercise to be undertaken to ensure a more efficient and fairer distribution of finite funding.

Difficulties in measuring efficiency are amplified when measuring *effectiveness*. ‘Early intervention’ is now an accepted policy norm (indeed, one of the key values of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs²⁸⁹) and ‘prevention science’ has accumulated a wealth of knowledge in this area informed by the works of leading experts such as Hawkins, Catalano and Farrington²⁹⁰. Discerning between effective and ineffective engagement (which clearly exists) within these broad descriptors is more challenging. Evidence-based programmes that have been subject to stringent experimental evaluation²⁹¹ offer an attractive solution, particularly where tested in Ireland. However, as discussed in Section 8.6.3, *informed* purchasing of such programmes requires confident assessment of the issue to be addressed, clear understanding of how programme outcomes will address the issues (particularly if being transferred from another jurisdiction) and a clear idea of where potential gaps may emerge in terms of the scopes of selected programmes or in the inclusion/exclusion criteria associated with individual programmes in the context of the actual needs that must be met. **Recommendation 9** states that the DCYA should create a deliberative forum involving officials, service providers and academics to examine the evidence and arrive at workable interpretations of the key messages that should inform policy and intervention choices. ‘Deliberation’ is suggested as a more prudent means of engaging with an imperfect knowledge base. In addition, outputs from this process should be closely tied to the time-lined plan, which will more generally regulate the pace of overall implementation. Furthermore, it is important to note that some of the more insightful contributions into *what works* and the contexts that are most suitable were imparted directly by young people in the process of interview. Any deliberative process should ensure that young people’s contributions to problem-solving are adequately considered and reflected in subsequent actions.

Turning to the examination of *programme delivery* during 2010-2012, the absence of verifiable outcome data precluded judgements regarding effectiveness for the programmes as a whole or for assessing differential levels of effectiveness between providers within the programmes. Accepting that the data challenges here were insurmountable in terms of direct outcome analysis, the VFMPR Team considered three alternative indicators ‘associated’ with effectiveness²⁹², using in particular survey and semi-structured interview methods. The three indicators related to ‘programme focus’, ‘evaluation design’ and the ‘content and outcomes of interventions’, with the latter involving the retrospective application of effective outcomes, derived from the review of the literature, to a sample of practice. In terms of programme focus, the review found that there was a reasonable alignment, indicating that professional effort generally and overall was directed toward the areas originally intended at the programmes’ inception. However, this examination also indicated that arrangements were not necessarily in place to transfer conceptual commitments to targeting into actual operations, suggesting that

this gap could result in certain young people most in need of a service being missed. In terms of evaluation design, the VFMPR found that while deciphering and calibrating outcomes in annual progress reports was problematic, outcomes-related commitments made in a sample of annual progress reports (which were theoretically capable of measurement) had improved over the period, particularly in relation to providers who were implementing the NQSF. Responses to the VFMPR Survey (see Figure 7.4) suggested that the actual measurement tools employed by many service providers were probably not capable of capturing the outcomes and impacts intended for measurement (see Figure 7.3).

A significant finding in the VFMPR was the presence, in the exchanges between professionals and young people, of potent ‘mechanisms’ which are associated with beneficial outcomes for young people. These ‘mechanisms’ (including communication skills, confidence and agency, planning and problem-solving, relationships, creativity, resilience and determination, and emotional intelligence) were identified in the review of literature and their presence was disclosed in focused semi-structured interviews with front-line staff and selected young people in sample sites (see Table 7.7). The ‘mechanisms’ also appeared (to different degrees) to be associated with a narrative involving positive change for the young people (i.e. based on actual events). We outline the cautions and caveats that accompany such findings, which after all are samples (of young people) within a sample (of all services), and claim only evidence of ‘presence’ based on the perceptions and accounts of staff and young people, as opposed to routine achievement. Evidence of presence, however, does provide a meaningful reference point for modelling and development for the DCYA in a field which is elusive to measurement²⁹³, supported by first-hand accounts in this VFMPR as opposed to second-hand literary reference.

Recommendation 10, drawing on the previous recommendation to create a deliberative forum, requires the DCYA to construct a coherent logic model for targeted youth programmes, identifying the theory of change²⁹⁴, specifying data collection points and giving clear direction in terms of measurement²⁹⁵. **Recommendation 11** suggests that the DCYA adopt the seven outcome mechanisms identified in the literature review as a preliminary package of proximal outcomes, which could form the focus point for service provider performance.

It is recognised that these suggestions, particularly the refinement of measurement tools and the development of capacity to make best use of them, would take a number of years to complete. However, in the shorter term, operating on the principle that transparency improves accountability, it is suggested that the baseline exercise described above (in relation to Recommendation 8) will help to moderate the complexity involved in human services measurement by closing and bounding the gap between input and outcome at local level.

The report argues that given the intransigence of some young people’s contexts despite significant economic fluctuations, a market solution alone is probably insufficient and that intervention is required. This VFMPR has attempted – using evidence supplied by providers, young people and the literature – to provide direction and guidance in terms of what intervention could achieve and the configuration of performance governance and capacity building required to achieve it. There are, of course, alternative options for delivery oversight of programmes. In the report, given that the required level of oversight demand is unlikely to change due to the nature of the programmes and that oversight capacity is below what it needs to be, the possibility of the DCYA centrally ring-fencing existing resources currently allocated elsewhere within the governance structure was considered. In addition, the report considered the option of the DCYA simply acting as ‘purchaser’ of a portfolio of programmes from other sources that provide their own programme compliance arrangements. In the event, as outlined above (in the description of Recommendation 4), reforming the current Youth Officer middle tier to create a new locally based and more overt governance capability is advised. However, it is also advised to keep governance options under review. While

there is an intrinsic value in improving the end product of youth programmes for young people, longer term oversight, subject to adequate due diligence, may be better located in an organisation which has operational responsibilities in this area and central and local commissioning capability. **Recommendation 12**, therefore, states that as part of delivering the implementation plan associated with this VFMPR, long-term governance arrangements should be kept under periodic review, as well as alternative ongoing options considered in the review, if the governance arrangements suggested fail to perform.

Recommendations

A list of proposed timelines and dependencies for each recommendation is presented in Appendix 6.

Recommendation 1

Recommendations of this VFMPR which are agreed should form part of a time-lined implementation plan, which DCYA officials should be responsible for.

Recommendation 2

The three youth programmes under review should be amalgamated into one funding scheme for targeted youth programmes.

Recommendation 3

The DCYA should design and construct a new performance-related governance system that is fit for purpose. Costs (including staffing resources), outputs and outcomes should be clearly specified as part of routine performance monitoring.

Recommendation 4

The governance capacity of the DCYA to manage performance should be enhanced. The required additional governance capacity for the programme should be sourced from existing Youth Officer time, requiring a rationalisation and replacement of professional effort from existing activities to governance oversight.

Recommendation 5

Overall demographic trends and the underlying patterns relating to the needs of young people outlined in this report should be clearly taken into account by the DCYA in terms of future prioritisation and the design of programmes.

Recommendation 6

The DCYA should require that local service planners, in identifying the groups of young people that will be engaged in a given year, include a quantified estimate of the differential need levels of the young people or groups of young people involved. This estimate should be based on clear demographic data and other local intelligence, and specify the operational means to assure appropriate engagement. The DCYA may wish to adapt the Hardiker Model as an overall frame of reference. DCYA output expectations and funding profile should reflect these more contoured assessments.

Recommendation 7

The DCYA should create new output counting rules to ensure fair comparability in terms of how and where service effort is deployed. This exercise should be routinely audited to improve national consistency in local assessments.

Recommendation 8

The DCYA should undertake a baseline exercise with all providers, working in conjunction with Pobal, to physically map the catchment area of each service to areas which are co-terminus with CSO units of measure.

Recommendation 9

The DCYA should create a deliberative forum involving officials, service providers and academics to weigh up the evidence and arrive at workable interpretations of the key messages that should inform policy and intervention choices. The forum should actively consider means of engaging young people in these deliberations.

Recommendation 10

The DCYA should construct a coherent logic model for targeted youth programmes, identifying the theory of change, specifying data collection points and giving clear direction in terms of methods of measurement.

Recommendation 11

The DCYA should adopt the seven outcome mechanisms identified in the literature review as a preliminary package of proximal outcomes for deliberation and which could form the focus point for service provider performance.

Recommendation 12

As part of the implementation plan, long-term governance arrangements should be kept under periodic review.

Focused Policy Assessment (FPA) recommendations

Two areas identified in this examination merit more detailed study and may be of benefit to other line departments. These are:

- (a) Undertake an examination of the management arrangements in place by providers. This FPA should identify the types of supports or management overheads required by human service programmes, what should be expected in terms of output and outcome of the management supports, and to test these assumptions empirically. This FPA should be able to offer a means to compare provider costs and value for money.
- (b) Undertake an audit of targeted funding for young people to identify the degree (if any) of service duplication for young people at local level.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: VFMPR Survey questionnaire

Department of Children and Youth Affairs Value for Money and Policy

Introduction

Value for Money and Policy Review Survey of local services

This survey has been issued to all local services in receipt of funding from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) under the following programmes:

- Special Projects for Youth (SPY),
- Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSS) and
- Local Drugs Task Force (LDTF).

The survey relates specifically to your local service/project and not to any larger organisation that your local service may be part of or affiliated to. The purpose of the survey is to achieve a clearer local picture of how your service operates and relates only to the three funding programmes under examination. The data secured from the survey will complement administrative data held centrally relating to overall operation of the SPY, YPFSS and LDTF programmes.

The survey is a core element of the Value for Money and Policy Review (VFM/PR) relating to youth programmes being undertaken by DCYA in 2013. Your service is required to fully complete the survey as accurately as possible. Over the next few months a number of services will be selected to participate in an onsite interview with the VFM/PR team. Verification of information contained in your responses to this survey, as well as other documentation including activity reports supplied to DCYA, will form part of the interview. The individual completing the survey should have the authority to provide information on behalf of the local service. With appropriate preparation the survey should take no longer than 45-60 minutes to complete. The survey does not have to be completed in one sitting. It will automatically save any data that you enter. You can also amend any entry that you make as long as the survey is completed by the deadline of 5pm 31st May.

The survey is divided into four sections.

1. The first section deals with financial and administrative information.
2. The second section deals with identifying the population of young people that the service works with.
3. The third section deals with the core objectives of your service and performance measurement.
4. The fourth section deals with young people's participation.

Tips*

- Keep a note of the reference number that will be sent to you with the link for the online survey. You will be required to enter this reference number at the start of the survey.
- You should ensure that you have relevant annual progress reports to DCYA 2010-2012 and DCYA confirmations of funds allocation for these years. The first part of the survey requires a direct transfer of certain information.
- Most of the questions in this survey are compulsory, requiring at least one response. If you skip a question the survey will not permit you to continue. In certain questions 'not known' is an option and if selected this will permit you to continue. However this option should only be used exceptionally.
- Some of the questions require figures to be entered. Do not enter commas or symbols (e.g. €). The survey will not accept these. It will only accept 'simple' numbers. An error sign will be highlighted until the error is remedied.
- Certain questions offer you the option of a range of choices, stating a minimum number of responses required (always 1) and a maximum. If this maximum is exceeded you will not be able to proceed with the survey until you remedy your response in line with this maximum (e.g. you have a maximum of four choices).

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Section 1: Financial and Administrative Information

This section asks for contact details, financial and output-related information. The financial and output information relates to the period 2010-2012 inclusive. Where figures are requested please do not use commas or full stops. The survey tool can only process simple numbers and you will be asked to resubmit a response if anything other than numbers are entered.

1. Please enter the reference number for your survey return included in the e-mail that you received with the link to this survey

2. Name of local service

3. Name of person completing survey

4. Position of individual completing the survey in service or organisation

Local Manager Staff Member Other (please specify)

Local Leader/Coordinator Chairperson of Management Committee

5. E-mail address for local service

6. Telephone number of local service

7. Location of service

8. During the period 2010-2012 did you receive funding from the Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund (YPF SF)? Yes No

9. Average daily output (YPFSF Programme). Please enter the average number of ‘daily’ participants in your service funded by the YPF SF programme for the years 2010, 2011 and 2012. This can be calculated by aggregating the full year’s figures for YPF SF, in Section 4 Table (c) of your annual progress reports for each year 2010, 2011 and 2012 and dividing by 12 (or the number of months that the service was operating for if not a full year). Enter ‘o’ in the respective year if there was no activity.

Average daily number 2010

Average daily number 2011

Average daily number 2012

10. Annual output (YPFSF Programme). Please enter the total annual participant numbers of young people provided with a service under YPF SF in 2010, 2011, 2012. This figure can be sourced from Section 4 Table (d) of your annual progress report. Enter ‘o’ in the respective year if there was no activity.

Annual Total 2010

Annual Total 2011

Annual Total 2012

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11. During the period 2010-2012 did you receive funding from the Special Projects for Youth Programme? Yes No

12. Average daily output (SPY Programme). Please enter the average number of 'daily' participants in your service funded by the SPY programme for the years 2010, 2011 and 2012. This can be calculated by aggregating the full year's figures for SPY, in Section 4 Table (c) of your annual progress reports for each year 2010, 2011 and 2012 and dividing by 12 (or the number of months that the service was operating for if not a full year). Enter 'o' in the respective year if there was no activity.

Average daily number 2010

Average daily number 2011

Average daily number 2012

13. Annual output (SPY Programme). Please enter the total annual participant numbers of young people provided with a service under SPY in 2010, 2011, 2012. This figure can be sourced from Section 4 Table (d) of your annual progress report. Enter 'o' in the respective year if there was no activity.

Annual Total 2010

Annual Total 2011

Annual Total 2012

14. During the period 2010-2012 did you receive funding from the Local Drugs Task Force (LDTF) Programme? Yes No

15. Average daily output (LDTF Programme). Please enter the average number of 'daily' participants in your service funded by the LDTF Programme for the years 2010, 2011 and 2012. This can be calculated by aggregating the full year's figures for LDTF in Section 4 Table (c) of your annual progress reports for each year 2010, 2011 and 2012 and dividing by 12 (or the number of months that the service was operating for if not a full year). Enter 'o' in the respective year if there was no activity.

Average daily number 2010

Average daily number 2011

Average daily number 2012

16. Annual output (LDTF Programme). Please enter the total annual participant numbers of young people provided with a service under LDTF in 2010, 2011, 2012. This figure can be sourced from Section 4 Table (d) of your annual progress report. Enter 'o' in the respective year if there was no activity.

Annual Total 2010

Annual Total 2011

Annual Total 2012

17. Did any of the funding provided under SPY, YPFSS or LDTF in the years 2010-2012 contribute towards supporting volunteers and voluntary effort? Yes No

18. During 2010-2012 what was the estimated 'total amount' of volunteer effort supported each year for all SPY, YPFSS, LDTF programmes*? (*see Table 5 (a) annual progress report volunteer column/'Total'). Enter 'o' in the respective year if there was no activity.

Volunteers supported 2010

Volunteers supported 2011

Volunteers supported 2012

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19. Finance: Please enter 'all' funding received under SPY, YPFSF and LDTF for years 2010, 2011 and 2012 [i.e. the total received for 'all' programmes if in receipt of funding from more than one of these sources]. These figures should relate directly to your funding allocation letter from DCYA for the respective year. If you received no funding for a particular year enter 'o'.

N.B. The remainder of this survey is restricted 'only' to the services provided by the funding referred to in this answer.

Total funding under SPY, YPFSF and LDTF 2010

Total funding under SPY, YPFSF and LDTF 2011

Total funding under SPY, YPFSF and LDTF 2012

20. Did any of the funding provided under SPY, YPFSF or LDTF in the years 2010-2012 contribute towards the salary cost of manager(s) or administrator(s) for your service? This information can be sourced from Table 5 (a) of your annual progress report.

Funding supported salary costs of local manager(s)/administrator(s)

Funding did not support salary costs of local manager(s)/administrator(s)

21. Please enter total costs of salaries for management/administration in your local service for years 2010, 2011, 2012. (These figures can be sourced from Section 5 (d) of your annual progress reports). Enter 'o' if there was no cost in a respective year.

Total cost of manager/administrator salary in local service 2010

Total cost of manager/administrator salary in local service 2011

Total cost of manager/administrator salary in local service 2012

22. Did any of the funding provided under SPY, YPFSF or LDTF contribute to a management or administration 'fee'* in the years 2010-2012 charged or paid by your service?

*** A management or administration fee is a fee charged internally or paid externally for the administration of the service/project. [Source: Annual Progress Report Section 4 Table (e) (n)]**

Management or administration fee was charged

Management or administration fee was not charged

23. Management/admin fee*: Please identify the total amount 'charged' or 'paid' on management or administration fees for 2010, 2011 and 2012. (This information can be sourced from your annual progress report Table 5 (e) (n) 'Management/admin fees'.) **N.B. RESTRICT TO YOUTH AFFAIRS UNIT FUNDING.** Enter 'o' if there was no cost in a respective year.

Management fee 2010

Management fee 2011

Management fee 2012

24. Which of the following best describes your service's organisational status (this can be sourced from your Annual Progress Report Section 1.4)

Is affiliated to a national youth work organisation

Is managed by a parent organisation

Is an independent youth work service/project

Is a youth work initiative within a generic service

Other (please specify)

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Section 2: About the population being served by your service

The purpose of this section is to achieve a greater understanding of the local context in which your service operates. The section asks for information about the total geographical catchment area and more particularly the target group of young people which are the focus for the service.

25. Can you briefly describe the 'geographical catchment area' that you served in the period 2010-2012? Be as specific as possible, e.g. the name of a city, a town, a parish, or in the case of a neighbourhood, describe the roads/streets which form the boundaries.

26. Please estimate the 'total' population of the geographical catchment area referred to in the previous question (i.e. not just young people). If your service does not currently hold this information it can be sourced from CSO (<http://census.cso.ie/sapmap/>) or your Local Authority. In the case of smaller neighbourhoods an estimated calculation based on households will suffice. (If you choose the latter option you should keep a record of how you have made this calculation.) Please tick one answer:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 10,000-20,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1,000-2,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 20,000-30,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2,000-5,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 30,000+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5,000-10,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Not known |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10,000-20,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) <input type="text"/> |

27. (This question is optional) How many young people within this catchment area do you estimate fit the criteria for your service?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 100 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1,500-2,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 100-200 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2000-3,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 200-500 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3000-5,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 500-1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5,000+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1,000-1,500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) <input type="text"/> |

28. 'Type' of need responded to: Referring to your service records for 2010-2012 which of the following better describe the 'type' of needs that your service responded to? You can choose a minimum of one and a maximum of four options.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health | <input type="checkbox"/> Family breakdown |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Homelessness | <input type="checkbox"/> Health and lifestyle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth unemployment | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-esteem/confidence/agency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drugs/alcohol | <input type="checkbox"/> General needs of all young people in the locality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education/training issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Not known |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crime/antisocial behaviour prevention | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) <input type="text"/> |

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29. Referring to the period 2010-2012, which of the following better describe where most of your service effort was applied? You can choose a minimum of one and a maximum of two options.

- We provided services for 'all' young people in the service catchment area described
- We provided services for young people 'in need' in the service catchment area described
- We provided services for young people with 'severe difficulties' in the service catchment area described
- We provided services for young people who require 'Intensive and long term' support and protection in the service catchment area described
- Not known
- Other (please specify)

30. How did young people engage with your service?: Which of the following better describe how young people engaged with your service in 2010-2012. Please identify a minimum of one and a maximum of four choices.

- Open access/drop in
- Young person self-referral
- Parental/family referral
- School/education referral
- HSE/social work referral
- Drugs/alcohol/addiction service referral
- An Garda Síochána/criminal justice system referral
- Not known
- Other (please specify)

Section 3: Objectives, Rationale and Performance Measurement issues relat...

The purpose of this section is to identify the contribution that your service made in your service catchment area to improving the situation for young people targeted under SPY, YPFSF and LDTF in the period 2010-2012.

The section asks you to declare what specific improvements the service made, how this is evidenced and what activities or interventions your service engages in to make these improvements.

31. Improving outcomes for young people: Please identify the areas where you believe your service has made more impact for young people in 2010-2012. You can choose a minimum of one and a maximum of four options which best describe your service's contribution.

- Improving mental health
- Improving homelessness
- Improving youth employment
- Improving drugs/alcohol
- Improving education/training outcomes
- Improving crime/antisocial behaviour prevention
- Improving family functioning
- Improving health and lifestyle
- Improving self-esteem/confidence/agency
- Improving general needs of all young people in the locality
- Not known
- Other (please specify)

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32. How did your service contribute to securing these improvements? Referring to the period 2010-2012 please identify which of the following intervention(s)/activities better describe 'how' your service used its effort to secure the improvements you described. You can choose a minimum of one and a maximum of four options.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal development programme (inc. health and relationships) | <input type="checkbox"/> Counselling/therapeutic (individual intervention for young person) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sporting/recreation | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education/employment | <input type="checkbox"/> Outreach/streetwork |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor education/adventure | <input type="checkbox"/> Summer programme |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative/arts | <input type="checkbox"/> Drop in |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drugs education | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counselling/therapeutic (group intervention) | <input type="text"/> |

33. What do you measure in terms of service performance?

During the period 2010-2012 which of the following describe the performance areas measured by your service? Please tick box to indicate Y and leave blank to indicate N.

- | |
|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A Impact (i.e. the longer term benefit that the service makes to the young person, their family or wider community) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B Outcome (i.e. the direct improvement(s) that the young person derives as a consequence of your service) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C Output (i.e. how many young people that your service engages over a period of time) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D Input (i.e. the costs of service, staffing levels, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) <input type="text"/> |

34. During the period 2010-2012 which of the following describes 'how' your service measures its performance?: Please tick box to indicate Y and leave blank to indicate N. You are required to choose at least one option, there is no maximum number of choices.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Standard psychometric instrument to measure behaviour/attitude change | <input type="checkbox"/> Feedback from young people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instrument designed by your service to measure behaviour/attitude change | <input type="checkbox"/> Feedback from families of young people engaged |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analysis of internal administrative data (e.g. attendance) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other informal feedback |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analysis of external administrative data (e.g. school attendance, HSE data, Garda data) | <input type="checkbox"/> Comparison group/no controls |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Internal reviews of performance by your service | <input type="checkbox"/> Quasi experimental methods |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feedback from management/management board | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-experimental but with statistical methods |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Theory of change/logic model | <input type="checkbox"/> Randomised control trial |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |
| | <input type="text"/> |

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Section 4: Young Persons' Participation

The purpose of this section is to ascertain to what degree young people participate in your service, how and why any such participation takes place.

35. In the period 2010-2012 how often were young people engaged by your service involved in participating in 'any' aspect of its governance, strategy or operations?

- A Routinely (as part of the service's core operation)
- B Regularly (periodic but regular consultation outside of core operations)
- C Occasionally (ad hoc consultation events)
- D Rarely
- E Never

36. In the period 2010-2012 what method(s) of participation did you most frequently use? Please tick any that apply.

- Individual consultation
- Group consultation
- Survey consultation
- Other (please specify)

37. In the period 2010-2012 what were the main reasons for facilitating participation for young people? Please tick any options which apply.

- General feedback about the service
- Specific feedback about the service received by the young person
- Suggestions about improving the service
- Ideas about meeting a young person's personal needs
- Ideas about meeting the needs of all young people using the service
- Other (please specify)

38. (Optional Comment) In no more than 100 words please identify any further information about your service which you believe to be of importance to the Value for Money and Policy Review Youth Programmes.

Thank you for completing the Youth Programmes Value for Money/Policy Review Survey!

Appendix 2: Sampling method and comparison of sample to all survey respondents

Rationale for sampling

Data is produced in progress reports annually and is sent to the DCYA. Data on outputs, management fees and staff salary costs and numbers are produced. There are several problems with the way that data are reported:

1. Data were not routinely input into a database capable of being analysed.
2. Some progress reports contained aggregated data on several providers and across several funding streams, thus disaggregated data for the youth programmes under review were not available for many providers.
3. Output data were calculated incorrectly by many providers.

The following methods were used to obtain data.

Management fees

As part of the VFMPR Survey sent to all youth service providers, providers were asked if a management fee was paid and if so, to input the fee paid for 2010-2012 (*see Table A2-1*). The figures provided by respondents were checked against annual progress reports, where disaggregated information was provided. Where different figures were provided in the VFMPR Survey responses and the progress reports, the figures in the progress reports were used. Many of the VFMPR figures could not be checked against the figures provided in the progress reports because in many instances the reported management fee figures were in respect of several providers, thus fees for individual providers were not known.

In 2010, of the 278 respondents to the VFMPR Survey where total funding could be confirmed, 137 respondents said that their service paid a management fee. Of these, the management fee could be confirmed for 79 respondents.

In 2011, of the 283 respondents to the VFMPR Survey where total funding could be confirmed, 139 respondents said that their service paid a management fee. Of these, the management fee could be confirmed for 75 respondents.

In 2012, of the 280 respondents to the VFMPR Survey where total funding could be confirmed, 141 respondents said that their service paid a management fee. Of these, the management fee could be confirmed for 77 respondents.

Table A2-1: Calculation of estimates for management fees

	2010	2011	2012
Total funding less technical assistance and capital expenditure	€43,331,709	€40,006,529	€37,485,742
Estimated proportion of funding that relates to services that paid management fees	46%	46%	47%
Estimated funding for services that paid management fee	€19,977,823	€18,414,072	€17,453,903
Estimated management fee as a proportion of total* funding	5%	5%	5%
Estimated total management fees paid	€1,052,007	€1,228,170	€1,000,991

* This is the proportion of management fees to total funding for the samples (79 respondents in 2010, 75 respondents in 2011 and 77 respondents in 2012).

Output figures

Many of the output figures reported by youth organisations annually were incorrectly calculated. A sample of service providers, randomly selected from respondents to the original VFMPR Survey, was contacted to ask how output figures were calculated in 2012. Overall, 98 survey respondents (approximately one third of respondents to the VFMPR Survey) were e-mailed. Of the 98 respondents, 39 services reported that outputs figures were calculated correctly and 35 services reported that output figures were calculated incorrectly. There were 24 non-respondents. Service providers that calculated outputs incorrectly were asked to provide correctly calculated figures, if possible. Overall, 58 providers were able to provide correctly calculated figures for 2012. These 58 services were sent a follow-up e-mail and asked to provide correctly calculated figures for 2010-2012 and 48 services provided the requested figures. A final check was undertaken by contacting services to confirm the calculation: 43 services were able to confirm daily output figures for 2011-2012 (42 for 2010) and 42 services were able to confirm annual output figures for 2011-2012 (41 for 2010).

Table A2-2 compares all respondents to the VFMPR Survey and the sample of 43 providers that were used for the output analysis by location, youth programme, governance model and target group.

Table A2-2: Comparison of VFMPR Survey and sample used for outputs

	Percentage of respondents	
	VFMPR Survey (n=290)	Sample (n=43)
Location		
Carlow	1.4%	0.0%
Cavan	0.7%	2.3%
Clare	1.0%	0.0%
Cork	11.0%	18.6%
Donegal	1.0%	0.0%
Dublin	43.4%	32.6%
Galway	6.6%	9.3%
Kerry	1.4%	2.3%
Kildare	2.1%	0.0%
Kilkenny	1.0%	0.0%
Laois	0.3%	0.0%
Leitrim	0.3%	0.0%
Limerick	9.7%	9.3%
Longford	0.3%	2.3%
Louth	1.0%	0.0%
Meath	0.3%	0.0%
Monaghan	0.3%	0.0%
Offaly	0.7%	2.3%
Roscommon	0.7%	0.0%
Sligo	1.0%	0.0%
Tipperary	2.1%	2.3%
Waterford	6.6%	11.6%
Westmeath	1.4%	4.7%
Wexford	1.7%	0.0%
Wicklow	3.8%	2.3%
Youth programme		
YP	52.8%	53.5%
SPY	51.7%	48.8%
LDTF	7.2%	7.0%
Governance model		
Is a youth work initiative within a generic service	4.1%	9.3%
Is affiliated to a national youth work organisation	32.1%	30.2%
Is an independent youth work service/project	18.3%	23.3%
Is managed by a parent organisation	22.4%	20.9%
Other	22.8%	16.3%
Group where most service effort was applied		
We provided services for 'all' young people in the service catchment area described	49.0%	55.8%
We provided services for young people 'in need' in the service catchment area described	77.9%	74.4%
We provided services for young people with 'severe difficulties' in the service catchment area described	22.4%	23.3%
We provided services for young people who require 'intensive and long-term support and protection' in the service catchment area described	10.7%	20.9%

Staff pay and numbers

Staff pay and numbers are reported on annually by youth service providers. Data from the annual reports are not routinely input into a database, thus figures for staff pay and numbers had to be input individually. It was decided to use the sample that was used for the output analysis to estimate the percentage of funding spent on pay and total staff numbers. Data in respect of total staff salaries and numbers were extracted from the annual progress reports of the sample of 43 providers (see Table A2-3). Since staff salaries and numbers were reported on in respect of several different providers in some annual reports, data for individual providers could not be extracted for all 43 providers for 2010-2012. The estimates in the input analysis are based on a sample of 39 providers, representing approximately 12% of total funding for local projects. The sample does not include any national organisations or Sports Development Officers.

Table A2-3: Calculation of estimates of pay and staff numbers for local services

Staff salaries	2010	2011	2012
Local services*	€39,177,300	€36,139,992	€33,889,956
Total funding for sample	€4,960,929	€4,658,597	€4,304,324
Total salary cost for sample	€3,684,935	€3,621,274	€3,535,466
Total salary costs as a proportion of total funding for sample**	(€3,684,935/€4,960,929) = 0.74	(€3,621,274/€4,658,597) = 0.78	(€3,535,466/€4,304,324) = 0.82
Proportion of sample applied to total funding for local services	€28,991,202	€28,189,194	€27,789,764
Staff numbers (WTE)			
Local services	€39,177,300	€36,139,992	€33,889,956
Total funding for sample	€4,960,929	€4,658,597	€4,304,324
Total staff numbers for sample	82.85	82	82.95
Proportion of staff numbers from sample applied to total funding for local services	654	636	653

* These figures are calculated by subtracting expenditure on Sports Development Officers, national organisations, technical assistance/administration and capital from total expenditure.

** This is the percentage of pay to funding for the sample.

Appendix 3: Illustration of how catchment areas can be mapped using Pobal Maps

Population, age and data across a variety of indicators from the Census are available at 'small area' level. If projects that currently receive funding under the three youth programmes matched their catchment areas to CSO boundaries, including where appropriate a number of 'small areas', it would be possible to know the exact number of young people in the catchment area and make meaningful demographic predictions. Information on youth population, unemployment and level of deprivation within a specific catchment area allows an assessment of suitability of projects serving particular catchment areas. This would yield useful information about the areas that are currently being served by projects and identify disadvantaged areas that may not be served at present. Since projects were set up to serve young people in disadvantaged areas in the country, matching catchment areas to small areas makes it possible to check that projects are actually serving the most disadvantaged young people. In addition, analysis of data at the level of catchment area would greatly help in determining the most efficient allocation of programme funding and provide greater opportunities for studying and assessing overall impact.

As part of this VFMPR, the VFMPR Team asked Pobal to map projects in one county to demonstrate how projects could be mapped in the future. Westmeath was the county selected for this purpose. The following Pobal maps present the type of graphics and data that could be available should all projects be required to map their catchment areas to small area boundaries.

Figure A3-1 shows the locations of all projects in Co. Westmeath, from which we can see that Athlone is served by three youth projects, while there is only one other project in the rest of the county (in Mullingar).

Figure A3-1: Physical location of projects in Co. Westmeath

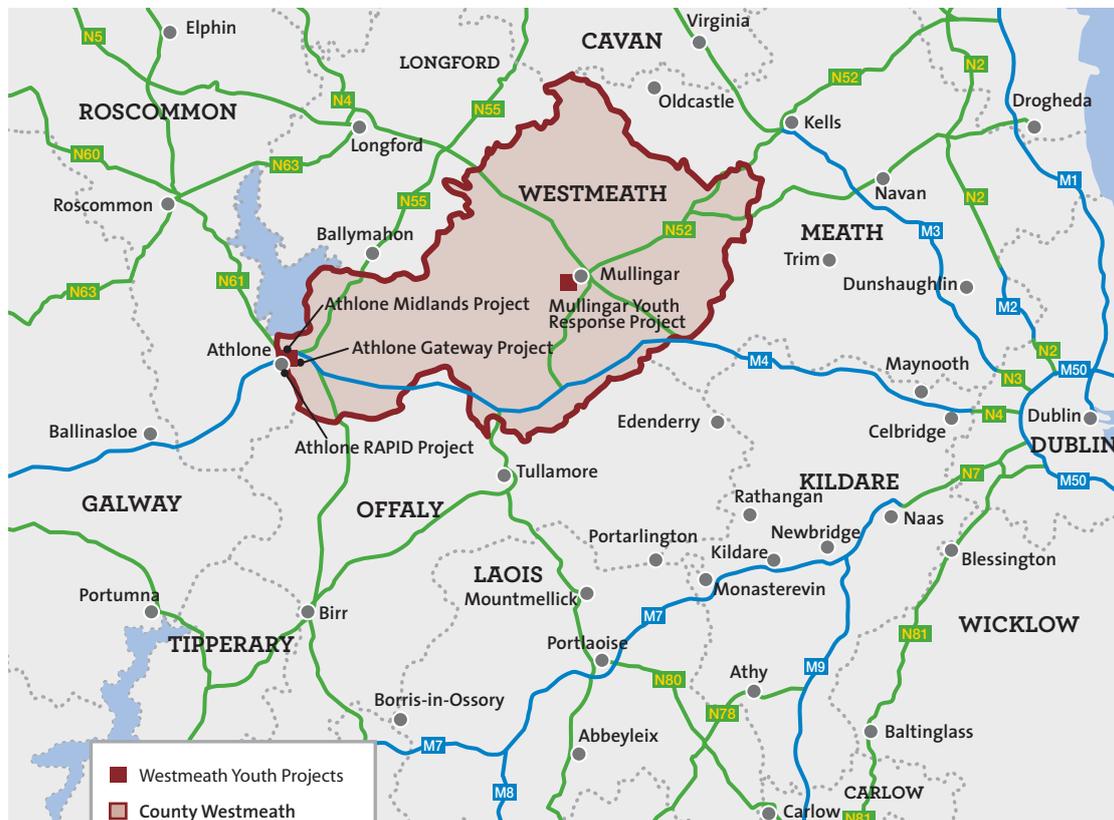


Figure A3-2 shows the estimated catchment area of the Mullingar Youth Response Project (on the assumption that the catchment area of the project is co-terminus with the town boundaries, done for demonstration purposes). This shows us the area that the project might serve if this were its catchment area. By highlighting the catchment area for a project, Census information on population, age profile, unemployment rate and other indicators can be known for the specific youth population being served by the project. The HP deprivation index score can also be seen in the maps of small areas.

Figure A3-2: Catchment area of Mullingar Youth Response Project

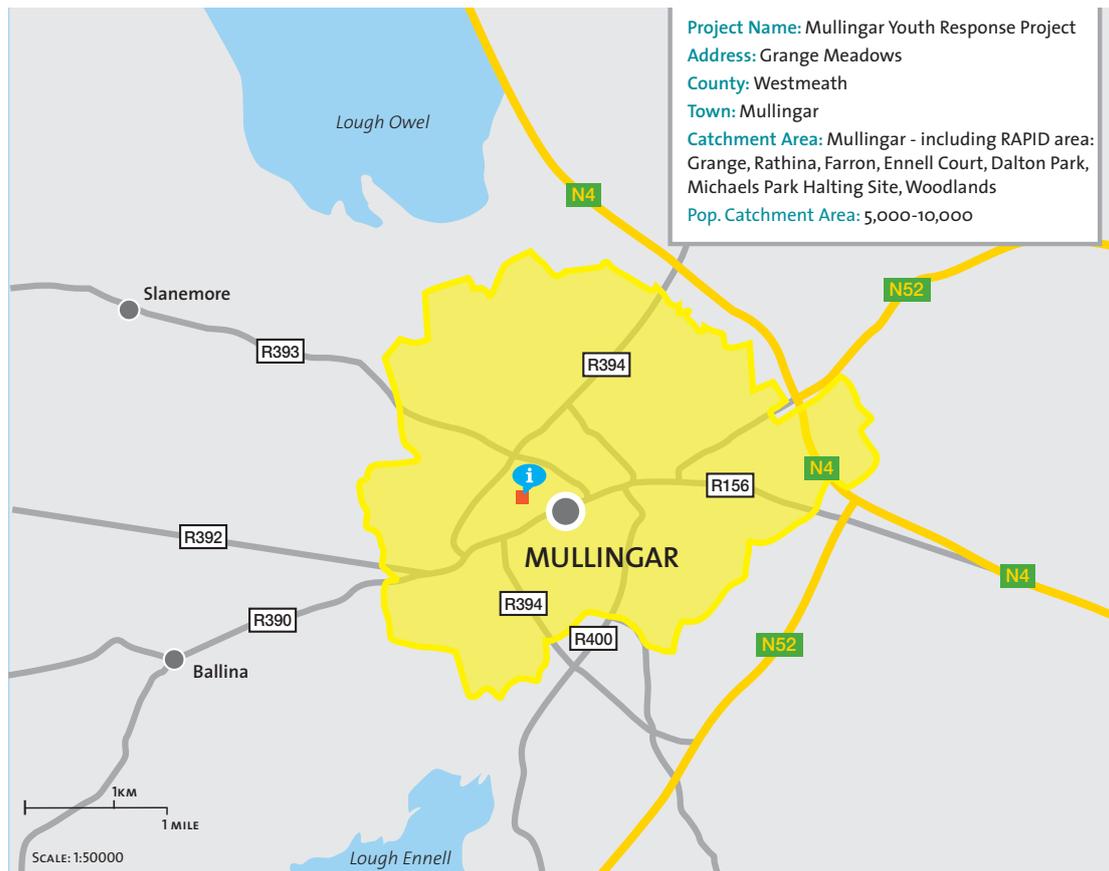
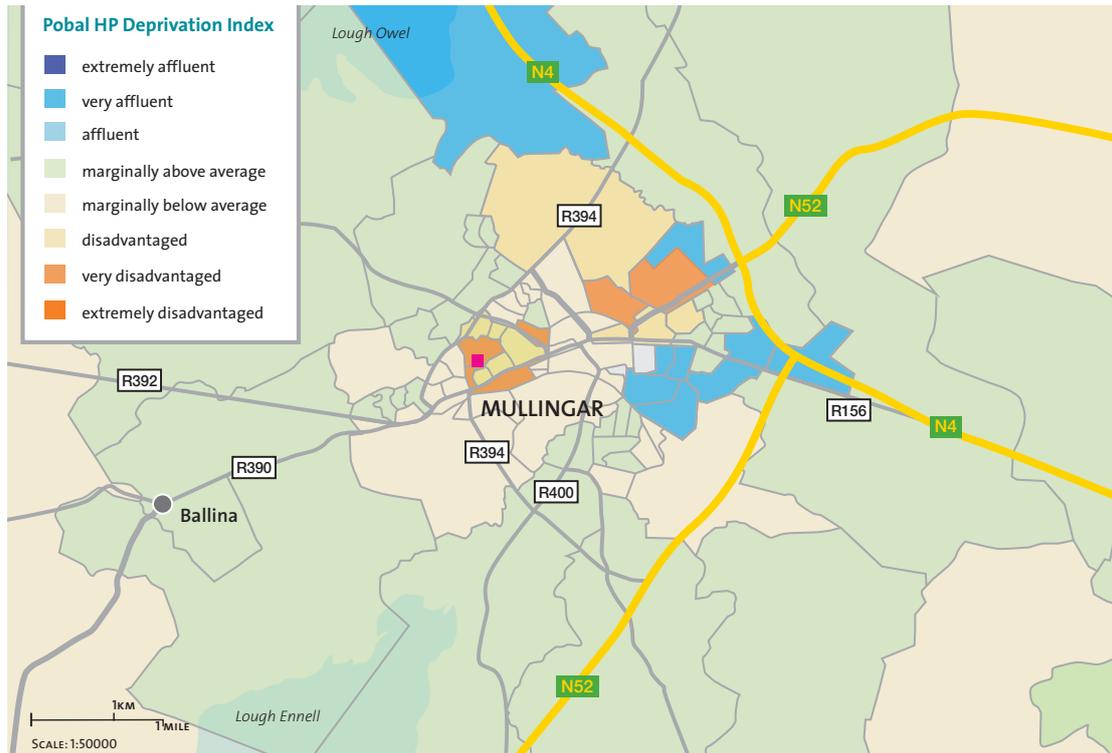


Figure A3-3 shows the relative deprivation scores for the small areas within Mullingar town. Small areas are shaded in different colours depending on the level of disadvantage, ranging from 'extremely affluent' in dark blue to 'extremely disadvantaged' in orange. As can be seen, most of the areas within Mullingar town are below average or disadvantaged, with a number of very disadvantaged areas; more affluent areas surround Mullingar town. This kind of information could be more helpful in determining the efficiency of the location of projects than data at county level. Given the targeted nature of the youth programmes, it would be expected that projects would be located within disadvantaged areas. Mapping project catchment areas to small areas allows the level of disadvantage in the catchment area to be known.

Figure A3-3: Small Areas in Mullingar showing deprivation levels using the Pobal HP Deprivation Index



Appendix 4: VFMPR Literature Review, conducted by the Centre for Effective Services

The following paper is reproduced by kind permission of the Centre for Effective Services (CES). This literature review was commissioned from CES by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs as part of its *Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes*. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Department.

Focusing on Outcomes relevant to Youth Intervention Programmes: Key messages from a short scan of the research literature

Dr. Sam O'Brien-Olinger and Dr. John Bamber (October 2013)

Introduction

In July 2013, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) requested the Centre for Effective Services (CES) to produce a paper on outcomes relevant to youth intervention programmes. The paper was to draw from research literature that would support the selection of programmes and interventions for young people targeted under the following programmes: the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF) 1 and 2, Special Projects for Youth (SPY) and Local Drugs Task Force (LDTF) schemes. It would focus on the relational exchange between professionals and participants, and include the key terms: youth, interventions, programmes, activities, outcomes, and measurement.

Overlapping outcomes

As shown in Table 1, there is considerable overlap in the outcomes for the featured programmes and interventions, all of which are relevant to DCYA policy objectives.

Table 1: Outcomes in DCYA youth intervention programmes and interventions

Outcome area	YPFSF 1	YPFSF 2	SPY	LDTF
Positive attitude to health and well-being	✓	✓	✓	✓
Diversion from drug/alcohol misuse and anti-social behaviour	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improved self-worth, resilience and coping skills	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improved school attendance and re-engagement with formal education process	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increased social inclusion and social integration	✓	✓	✓	✓
Successful or easier transitions between school and employment	✓	✓	✓	
Improved life chances and opportunities	✓	✓		
Improved inter-personal skills, confidence, leadership skills	✓		✓	
Reduction in early school leaving		✓		
Positive attitudes towards learning fostered by highlighting the practical benefits of education		✓		
Better prepared for active role in society			✓	

The need for measurement

The essential ingredients to achieving successful outcomes for young people, including those listed in Table 1, have been widely regarded as extremely difficult, if not impossible, to quantify, measure and evaluate, especially in terms of financial cost. Nevertheless, robust monitoring and evaluation of the costs and outcomes of intervention programmes for targeted youth is important for a variety of reasons:

- Funders need to know what can be expected in terms of impact, outcomes and returns on their social investment.
- Providers need to be able to identify which interventions are most likely to be cost-effective.
- Monitoring and evaluating the cost and impact of the funding programmes under examination can be beneficial to the intervention's success, if the knowledge and learning about what works is fed back into the funding programmes under examination.
- Better evidence helps to inform and develop a closer alignment between national policy and local delivery.

An emerging evidence base

In 2009, Horwath Consulting Ireland and Matrix Knowledge Group were appointed by the then Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to undertake a Value for Money Review of the YPFSS. The objective of the YPFSS is to attract 'at risk' young people into funded facilities and activities, and divert them from engaging in anti-social behaviour, criminal activity and the dangers of substance abuse. From its rapid evidence assessment (REA) of the international evidence base for diversionary schemes, the Horwath Review (2009, p. 8) concludes that: *'The YPFSS should work in achieving its objective of attracting young people away from substance misuse and crime. In this context, the international literature strongly suggests that a tighter focus on client need can pay better dividends, for example, by providing direct skills training rather than indirect interventions such as sport.'* The REA (2009, pp. 5-8) contains the following findings:

- There is a robust evidence base, although it is limited in terms of both breadth and depth, and the relevant studies are contradictory in terms of demonstrating the potential for impact.
- None of the evaluations of arts projects established a causal link between participation in diversionary activities and reduced crime rates or substance misuse rates.
- It is easier to find evidence to support direct interventions that focus on developing life skills rather than diversionary activities such as football or boxing, where impact may be less direct.
- User involvement in the design and management of diversionary activities is reported as having a positive effect on the impact of such activities.
- The greater the intensity of the programme, the greater the likelihood for beneficial short- and long-term impact.
- Programmes that involved mentoring and/or the use of key workers are reported positively, as is the ability to design bespoke interventions for individual young people.

Although no causal link could be inferred between interventions and outcomes, broadly the Horwath Review finds that such interventions have the potential to positively impact on the lives of young people. The review finds that **intensive interventions with a focus on client needs rather than activities, developing life skills, and actively involving users in design and management are more likely to lead to positive outcomes.**

The findings of the Horwath Review are broadly consistent with those of a recent systematic map of the international research literature on outcomes in youth work (Dickson *et al*, 2012). The map makes a particular reference to the ethos of youth work in Ireland, which is said to emphasise collaboration, empowerment and personal and social development. This ethos is shared by much of the international research literature across a range of different types of youth work activities, including youth provision which falls under the umbrella of ‘positive youth development’. This is apparent not from the terms employed in evaluations, particularly those conducted in the USA (e.g. ‘out-of-school time’, ‘4-H clubs’), but ‘from closer inspection of the theoretical approaches, aims and activities of youth work’ (2012, p. 43). Table 2 draws from the systematic map to show the outcomes that are most commonly associated with youth intervention activities.

Table 2: Outcomes and indicators in the youth work research literature

Outcome areas	Indicators	Number of studies
Relationship with others	Positive peer relationships; positive relationships with adults; pro-social skills; leadership skills; decision-making skills; empowerment	66
Sense of self	Personal development; self-esteem; confidence; self-efficacy; identity; character	64
Health and well-being	Reduced alcohol/substance misuse; diversion from crime; prevention of risky behaviours; making healthy choices; general mental health	36
Community and society	Civic engagement; strengthen bonds to community; partnership working; develop new social interests	36
Values and beliefs	Future aspirations; positive diversity attitudes	30
Formal education and training	Academic achievement; strengthen bonds to school	27

The importance of social and emotional capabilities

The view that youth interventions can have a positive impact on outcomes is supported by other sources such as Merton *et al* (2004), Young (2005) and Mundy-McPherson *et al* (2012). As well as a focus on needs (as suggested by the Horwath Review), **impact is greater when interventions also focus on the development of social and emotional capabilities in young people**, a point made clearly in a study for The Young Foundation by McNeil *et al* (2012, p. 4):

‘There is substantial and growing evidence that developing social and emotional capabilities supports the achievement of positive life outcomes, including educational attainment, employment and health. Capabilities such as resilience, communication, and negotiation are also increasingly cited as being the foundations of employability. Evidence shows that approaches that focus on building social and emotional capabilities such as these can have greater long-term impact than ones that focus on directly seeking to reduce the “symptoms” of poor outcomes for young people.’

The approaches noted in The Young Foundation study emphasise notions of agency, decision-making, confidence-building, friendships, pro-social skills and increased empathy. These social and emotional capabilities, and other ‘soft’ outcomes such as increasing young people’s self-motivation to change their own attitudes and behaviour, are linked in the literature to successes at other levels, including employability (Blades *et al*, 2013); developing career aspirations (Bielby *et al*, 2009); preventing teenage pregnancy; providing support and improvements to mental, physical and sexual health (Headspace, 2009); and decreasing violent behaviour, drug misuse and involvement with the criminal justice system (Adamson, 2011; Miles and Straus, 2008).

The relational dimensions of the work

It is important to be able to identify and reinforce the constructive ways in which youth work professionals work with participants, especially in terms of the translation of policy objectives into intended outcomes. A quantitative approach to matching outcomes with cost, risks and opportunities is necessary in relation to the inputs and outputs involved in programmes. Because cost is invested in time and people, however, capturing the relational dimensions of the work will also require a qualitative approach. It is particularly important to include what young people themselves feel and think about the impact of interventions. In a study of the effectiveness of the Big Brother Big Sister Programme in Ireland, for example, Dolan *et al* (2007, p. 6) state that:

- Young people with a mentor were more hopeful and had a greater sense of efficacy in relation to the future than those without a mentor.
- Young people with a mentor felt better supported overall than those without a mentor.
- Parents of mentored youth rated their pro-social behaviour more positively than did parents of non-mentored youth.

As previously noted in connection with the Horwath Review, it is difficult to conclusively prove the causal links between interventions and success in terms of achieving outcomes. Such attempts usually involve research designs that include comparison with control groups.

However, **in cases where it is not possible or desirable to establish a counterfactual case, an alternative is to 'build a case for reasonably inferring causality' to try to establish the contribution made by interventions** (Mayne, 2008, p. 5). Such an approach can be assisted by the use of techniques such as logic modeling which make explicit the connections between goals, inputs, outputs and outcomes (see the Wisconsin Logic Modeling Guide). It can also be assisted by making explicit the **active ingredients** in the exchange relationship between workers and young people. In other words, 'the component or components that are really necessary for the intervention or policy to be efficacious or effective' (Commission on Narcotic Drugs, 2013).

It can be anticipated that there will be resistance to interventions on the part of some young people and key workers and others need to be able to respond appropriately in this situation. In this regard, it is important to recognise the potential contribution of motivational interviewing (MI). This procedure, originally described by Miller and Rollnick in the early 1990s, is a directive, client-centred counselling style for eliciting behaviour change by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence (Rubak *et al*, 2005). MI has been subject to a significant number of evaluations and clinically controlled trials, with mixed results. The conclusion is that **the results depend much on the quality of delivery by the staff concerned** (Miller and Rose, 2009). Nevertheless, the basic tenets of MI have been adopted in many different spheres, including working with young people.

MI has been adapted by Foróige in Ireland and made available in its 'Life Choices Programme' for young people. This programme is designed to enhance engagement with young people at risk and enable them to explore crime-related issues. It has been developed as a way of engaging young people around the topics of pro-social behaviour, motivation, life choices and offending behaviour. It is designed to be used with young people aged 12-18 years in a group work setting. The resource focuses on developing core skills and competencies that enable young people to make positive life choices.

Summary of key messages

Studies, evaluations and reports focusing on programmes that target ‘youth at risk’ and employ ‘mentoring’ of various kinds and to different degrees of individual/group support make up a significant proportion of the evidence-base in this area. Most of the evidence from evaluations comes from the USA, but research in other jurisdictions, such as the UK, provide useful information, reference points and general framework for the Irish context because they describe the same kinds of universally applicable and transferrable ‘active ingredients’, whereby relationships and interactions with non-related adults, such as youth workers, teachers, sports coaches and community leaders, develop into a positive asset for the young people.

The evidence highlights that **a significant factor in the success of interventions such as the YSPF and SPY programmes, and the LDTF scheme is a positive relationship between workers and young people.** This is especially the case when workers interact with young people on a regular basis and support participants in achieving educational and developmental goals together. While involved in such programmes, young people have indicated to researchers and evaluators that having a mentor and/or youth worker in their lives helped them to stay away from alcohol and drugs, avoid fights and reduce gang involvement (Singh and White, 2000). Furthermore, the relationship between adult and participant can act as a mechanism or catalyst for bringing about broader positive changes and has been found to be linked to numerous positive outcomes for young people that cross-cut priority policy objectives and overlapping outcome areas.

As shown in Table 3, the research literature indicates a number of outcome areas that are relevant to DCYA policy objectives.

Table 3: Outcome areas relevant to DCYA policy objectives

Outcome area	Source
Communication skills are essential for a successful transition to work or training, for independence, and to access a range of life opportunities, to attainment, in forming positive relationships and in reductions in reoffending.	Clegg <i>et al</i> (1999) Rose (2006) Bercow (2008)
Confidence and agency enables young people to recognise that they can make a difference to their own lives and that effort has a purpose, is important to key outcomes such as career success. There is evidence of a link between positive outcomes and self-confidence.	Goodman and Gregg (2010) Dweck (2000)
Planning and problem-solving , alongside resilience, provides young people with a ‘positive protective armour’ against negative outcomes associated with risky life events. Problem-solving has also been shown to be associated with the ability to cope with stresses in life.	Turner (2000)
Relationships are an effective for getting young people involved in positive activities through valued personal relationships with peers, adults or siblings. A beneficial change in young people’s relationships with other adults through their participation in positive activities can be transferred to academic learning and may lead to better outcomes.	Adamson <i>et al</i> (2011)
Creativity and imagination is related to resilience and well-being. Creativity can have a positive impact on both self-esteem and overall achievement.	Benard (2004) National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (1999)

continued

Outcome area	Source
Resilience and determination: If society intervenes early enough, it can improve cognitive and socio-emotional abilities and the health of disadvantaged children. Effective early interventions can promote schooling, reduce crime, foster workforce productivity and reduce teenage pregnancy. Self-discipline has been highlighted as a vital factor in building academic achievement, significantly better than IQ.	Heckman (2008) Duckworth and Seligman (2005)
Emotional intelligence is associated with the ability to manage feelings by knowing one's own emotions, as well as recognising and understanding other people's emotions. This is vital in managing relationships, e.g. managing the emotions of others.	Goleman (1995)

Measurement tools and techniques

There have been some recent developments in improving the capacity to measure the achievement of outcomes in youth intervention programmes. The toolkit developed by Burford *et al* (2013) uses an original approach to evaluating work aimed at achieving soft outcomes and processes that have previously been generally considered 'intangible' because of their relational and value-based nature. According to the authors (2013, p. 1), this approach 'represents a step-wise, significant change in provision for the assessment of values-based achievements that are of absolutely key importance ... and fills a known gap in evaluation practice'. One part of their work has been to develop an indicator bank that helps to make outcomes more explicit and capable of evaluation, that can be used or adapted to suit particular circumstances. The approach, together with tools and resources, can be found on the project's website (<http://www.wevalue.org/>).

Similarly, the matrix of tools recently developed by The Young Foundation (McNeil *et al*, 2012) provides methods for measuring the development of attitudes, behaviour change and the development of skills. These latter are referred to by the authors as 'clusters of social and emotional capabilities' that are foundational to achieving the other outcomes for young people which providers, commissioners and funders have found most difficult to quantify. A review of the research literature with regard to measuring employability skills involving the personal, social and transferable skills relevant to all jobs (Blades *et al*, 2013) also features a range of tools and quantitative and qualitative indicators linked to case-studies, which assist in gauging the progress made by project participants.

In short, **an increasingly robust range of tools and techniques is available to assess the difference being made by youth interventions aimed at achieving policy objectives.** While there are some commercially developed tools, many local providers use bespoke tools or approaches they have developed in-house. Different types of tools produce different types of evidence. Some can be used for evaluation (making judgements about whether or not a project or programme 'works') and others for monitoring (collecting, analysing and learning from information).

Conclusion

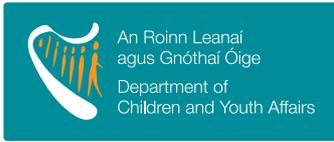
In conclusion, young people in disadvantaged circumstances who engage with youth workers within targeted programmes can experience significant positive changes in their lives. Although it is difficult to conclusively prove the causal links between interventions and success in terms of achieving outcomes, even with research designs that involve comparison with control groups, there is consensus that **a positive relationship between workers and participants contributes to the development of a number of important social and emotional capabilities.** Over time, these abilities have benefits in spheres of life such as education, health and well-being, and crime reduction, which are highly relevant to a range of important policy objectives.

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Appendix 5: Annual Progress Report template



Youth Affairs Unit

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT FOR 2012

PROJECT-BASED FUNDED SCHEMES

Please read the Information Memo accompanying this document **before** completing the report.

When completing this form, please note the following:

- If you are a service, please complete this in respect of the Youth Affairs Unit (YAU) funded projects under your remit within the VEC area as stated at 1.1. below.
- If you are an individual or stand-alone project, please complete this form in respect of the work of your project.

Section 1: Quantitative Information and Service Characteristics

1. Service/Project Details

1.1 Please state the VEC area in which the service/project is located/operates:

- If your service comprises a number of projects under specific YAU schemes, please state the name of the service and list the titles of these individual projects located within the VEC area.
- In the case of an individual or stand-alone project, please state the name of the project.

1.2 Please state:

Name of Service:

Name of Project(s):

1.3 Address of Service/Project and/or address of projects if separate to the service:

1.4 Funding line(s)

Please indicate (✓) the Department of Children and Youth Affairs funding line(s) of the service/project, making each entry on a separate row. If in receipt of multiple funding in 2012 indicate funding lines and the title of the individual projects under each funding line.

continued

3. Service management and development

Please provide a concise statement on both the provision and the progress of the following within your service or project (if an individual or standalone project) during 2012:

a) Planning and development:

Operational:

Strategic:

b) Management and governance:

c) Staff training, development and support:

d) Assessment and evaluation:

e) Please indicate if there has been any change in levels of service provision (increase/decrease) over the past year:

4. Participant analysis

a) Please indicate typical operating hours and contact hours of the service/project within the following time bands: 10am – 2pm; 2pm – 6pm; 6pm – 11pm, listing the titles of all projects funded under the various YAU schemes.

a) Service operating hours	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday		Saturday		Sunday	
	Operating hours	Contact hours ⁴	Operating hours	Contact hours										
SPY	10am – 2pm													
	2pm - 6pm													
	6pm - 11pm													
YPFSF 1	10am – 2pm													
	2pm - 6pm													
	6pm - 11pm													
YPFSF 2	10am – 2pm													
	2pm - 6pm													
	6pm - 11pm													
YIC	10am – 2pm													
	2pm - 6pm													
	6pm - 11pm													
LDTF (21 projects)	10am – 2pm													
	2 pm – 6 pm													
	6pm – 11 pm													

Additional clarifying information if necessary:

⁴ Contact hours, i.e. hours when young people are present during the service's operating hours.

b) Please specify the number of days the service/project operates in each month

b) No. of days	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
SPY												
YPFSF 1												
YPFSF 2												
YIC												
LDTF (21 projects)												

Additional clarifying information if necessary:

c) Please state number of daily individual participants each month

c) Daily participants	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
SPY												
YPFSF 1												
YPFSF 2												
YIC												
LDTF (21 projects)												

Additional clarifying information if necessary:

d) Participant numbers (A young person should be included once in the figures below.)

Funding line	Age range												Total number of participants			
	less than 10		10-14		15-17		18-21		22-24		more than 25		M	F	Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F				
Annually																
SPY																
YPFSF 1																
YPFSF 2																
LDTF (21 projects)																
TOTAL																
YIC																
																Number of contacts ⁵

Of the total number of participants inserted above, please indicate the number of individual young people who participated in summer projects (if any):

Additional clarifying information if necessary:

⁵ Number of contacts refers to the overall numbers of visits/contacts by all young people, e.g. if a young person attends a group weekly for 40 weeks, then they will have 40 contacts.

5. Funding and Staffing (paid and non-paid) – Please provide the following information for 2012

a) Staffing levels under each scheme and in relation to the individual projects within these schemes

Funding line (please list the titles of each of the DCYA projects)	Full-time paid staff (type of work)	No. of full-time staff doing this work	No. of part-time staff (please state as whole-time equivalents using decimals, e.g. 1.5 ⁶)	CE Scheme Number of persons doing this work	CE Scheme Number of hours per week	Other staff (please specify)	Sessional/ ⁷ staff	Volunteers	Total
SPY	Youth work staff								
	Administration staff								
	Management								
YPFSF 1	Other staff, e.g. maintenance								
	Youth work staff								
	Administration staff								
YPFSF 2	Management								
	Other staff, e.g. maintenance								
	Youth work staff								
	Administration staff								
	Management								
	Other staff, e.g. maintenance								

⁶ For the purposes of this report, 'whole-time equivalent' should be taken to mean a 37-40 hour week.

⁷ Sessional staff, e.g. external staff contracted to deliver specific programmes and/or sessions within, or on behalf of, the service.

continued

Funding line (please list the titles of each of the DCVA projects)	Full-time paid staff (type of work)	No. of full-time staff doing this work	No. of part-time staff (please state as whole-time equivalents using decimals, e.g. 1.5 ⁶)	CE Scheme Number of persons doing this work	CE Scheme Number of hours per week	Other staff (please specify)	Sessional/ staff	Volunteers	Total
YIC	Youth work staff								
	Administration staff								
	Management								
	Other staff, e.g. maintenance								
LDTF (21 projects)	Youth work staff								
	Administration staff								
	Management								
	Other staff, e.g. maintenance								
Other									
Total*									
Please indicate any changes in staffing levels in 2012 over 2011 (e.g. number of redundancies, reduction in number of CE persons, etc).									
Additional clarifying information if necessary:									

* Total should correspond to the total adult staff (paid and unpaid) involved in the project.

- b) 2012 Funding Breakdown (under each scheme and in relation to individual projects within these schemes): Signed audited accounts, clearly showing the funding received from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, must be submitted annually in support of this form by 30th April 2013.

Funding source/line	2012 funding allocation	Amount of 2012 allocation assigned to pay
Youth Affairs:		
SPY		
YPFSF 1		
YPFSF 2 (current only)		
YIC		
LDTF (21 projects)		
Other (please specify amounts and sources of other (non-DCYA) funding received in 2012)		
Total*		

* Totals should correspond to total income, including carryover, for the service for 2012.

- c) Pay Breakdown

Please note salary is Salary Cost of the posts funded, including Employer's PRSI, etc. If salary costs are met from more than one source/funding line, indicate the amount from each source.

Funding sources/lines, i.e. identify all sources of funding, including funding agency and programme	Title of position (not individual) ⁸	No. of hours per week	Current salary
Total salary costs:			

- d) Total Non-Pay Breakdown of overall service/project provision. (Where possible, please divide expenditure into what can be attributed to Youth Affairs funding and other funding sources.)

Area of expenditure	Actual cost for 2012	
	YAU funding	Other sources
(a) Individual programmes		
(b) Specific services (either additional or time-bound initiatives, please identify same)		
(c) Travel and subsistence		
(d) Administration, e.g. telephone, photocopying, postal costs		
(e) Staff training		

continued

⁸ Title of position, i.e. please state name or title of the position held (e.g. project manager, youth worker, etc). Personal details (e.g. name of individual post-holder) are not required.

Area of expenditure	Actual cost for 2012	
	YAU funding	Other sources
(f) Rent/rates		
(g) Heating/Electricity		
(h) Insurance		
(i) Equipment		
(j) Materials		
(k) Publicity		
(l) IT Costs		
(m) Communications		
(n) Management/admin fees ⁹		
(o) Audit fees		
(p) Legal fees		
(q) Bank charges		
(r) Recruitment		
(s) Maintenance		
Other (please specify)		
Total		

e) Summary of the service/project's income/expenditure for year ended 31 December 2012

	€
1. Carry over/deficit from 2011 (please indicate which)	
2. Income for 2012 from all sources	
3. Total amount available for expenditure in 2012, i.e. total of 1. + 2. above	
4. Less expenditure for 2012	
5. Surplus/deficit as at 31st December 2012	
6. If any surplus/deficit is being carried forward into 2013, please specify amount and reason. In the case of a surplus, please indicate commitments/plans re. expenditure of same.	

⁹ Management/admin fees, i.e. fees paid either internally or externally for administration and management of the service/project – please state amount paid and detail the entity to which fee is paid.

6. Resource Management – Please provide the following information as fully and accurately as possible

Note:

- Please ensure that figures you provide tally with those provided in Part 4: Participant Analysis and the staffing and volunteer numbers provided in Part 5: Funding and Staffing.
- If there are atypical arrangements in place, e.g. where staff are designated to work with volunteers rather than young people, please include this information.

1. Please provide the following information:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total paid youth work staff in service • Total paid administration staff in service • Total paid management staff in service • Total other paid staff, e.g. maintenance staff 	
2. Number of paid youth work staff compared with young people	Paid staff	Young people
3. Number of volunteers to young people	Volunteers	Young people
4. Number of volunteers to paid youth workers	Volunteers	Paid workers
5. Percentage of paid youth workers' direct contact time with young people:		
6. Of the time paid youth workers are not in direct contact with young people, please provide a breakdown in percentage terms of how this time is used under the following categories:	%	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and evaluation • Training and development • Support and supervision • Meetings and networking • Management role • Administration/recording • Other 	
7. Percentage of overall budget assigned to programme costs:		
8. Numbers of student and work placements in 2012:		
Additional clarifying information:		

Section 2: Qualitative Information

Has your service/project commenced implementation of the National Quality Standards Framework (NQS) for youth work in 2012?

YES

NO

If YES, this section need not be completed as your service/project will be completing a Progress Report as part of the NQS process.

If NO, please complete this section in full.

1. Statement of Practice (for your service or project – if an individual or standalone project)

This statement should be accurate and realistic, should not be any longer than 2 pages and include:

- **What you do:** ethos; mission; service provision; defining features.
- **Why you do it:** rationale; vision; aim and objectives; outcomes.
- **Who is it for and with:** target group; partnerships; linkages; exchanges.
- **How you do it:** modes of provision; methodologies.
- **Where you do it:** geographical area; settings; levels; locations.

2. Emerging issues/trends identified through service and programme provision

Please outline any emerging issues and trends identified through service and programme provision during 2012, e.g. emerging needs of young people, service/project needs, specific trends, etc.

I, the undersigned, certify that all the information contained in this form is current and accurate:

.....
Signature of service/project Director/Chairperson

.....
Date

Section 3: Declaration of Assurance

Please ensure that either section (a) or (b) is completed as appropriate.

(a) For services in receipt of grant administration via VECs, please complete the following section:

Funding renewal application form must be returned in hard copy with original signatures to the officer below.

I, the undersigned, certify that I have examined the contents of this report:

.....
Signature of VEC Youth/Youth Development/Liaison Officer

.....
Date

I, the undersigned, am satisfied that:

- accounting systems and organisational arrangements in this service/project are adequate to ensure the proper administration of the money received from the Youth Affairs Unit.

.....
Signature of CEO,VEC

.....
Date

(b) For services in receipt of grant administration via other agencies, please complete the following section:

Declaration of assurance:

I, the undersigned, am satisfied that:

- accounting systems and organisational arrangements in this service/project are adequate to ensure the proper administration of the money received from the Youth Affairs Unit.

.....
Signature of Director/CEO

.....
Date

Appendix 6: Summary of recommendations and proposed timelines

Recommendation	Target date	Dependencies (if relevant)
1. Recommendations of this VFMPR which are agreed should form part of a time-lined implementation plan, which DCYA officials should be responsible for.	Q4/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following deliberative process and full consultation with all stakeholder interests, including youth sector providers of services.
2. The three youth programmes under review should be amalgamated into one funding scheme for targeted youth programmes.	Complete development of reformed scheme and introduce Q3/2015 Roll out Q1/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of consultation process with stakeholders. Timely completion of deliberative process and redesigned scheme agreed. Redesigned systems in place for performance oversight and governance in place.
3. The DCYA should design and construct a new performance-related governance system that is fit for purpose. Costs (including staffing resources), outputs and outcomes should be clearly specified as part of routine performance monitoring.	New governance arrangements constructed Q3/2015	As for Recommendation 2, and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MoUs/SLAs in place with services providers. Access to training/skills development in place.
4. The governance capacity of the DCYA to manage performance should be enhanced. The required additional governance capacity for the programme should be sourced from existing Youth Officer time, requiring a rationalisation and replacement of professional effort from existing activities to governance oversight.	Initiate Q3/ 2014 and fully in place Q1/2016	As for Recommendations 2, 3 and 4, and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> appropriate performance oversight and financial management systems in place in DCYA and ETBs.
5. Overall demographic trends and the underlying patterns relating to the needs of young people outlined in this report should be clearly taken into account by the DCYA in terms of future prioritisation and the design of programmes.	Model developed for introduction Q3/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mapping of catchment area of existing youth services complete. Access to appropriate data (e.g. Pobal mapping). Training and capacity building completed.
6. The DCYA should require that local service planners, in identifying the groups of young people that will be engaged in a given year, include a quantified estimate of the differential need levels of the young people or groups of young people involved. This estimate should be based on clear demographic data and other local intelligence, and specify the operational means to assure appropriate engagement. The DCYA may wish to adapt the Hardiker Model as an overall frame of reference. DCYA output expectations and funding profile should reflect these more contoured assessments.	Model developed for introduction Q3/2015	As for Recommendations 2, 4 and 5

Recommendation		Target date	Dependencies (if relevant)
7.	The DCYA should create new output counting rules to ensure fair comparability in terms of how and where service effort is deployed. This exercise should be routinely audited to improve national consistency in local assessments.	Model developed for introduction Q3/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCYA data management system developed and in place.
8.	The DCYA should undertake a baseline exercise with all providers, working in conjunction with Pobal, to physically map the catchment area of each service to areas which are co-terminus with CSO units of measure.	Initiate Q1/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of consultation process with stakeholders. • Resource availability and capacity of Pobal to complete the work.
9.	The DCYA should create a deliberative forum involving officials, service providers and academics to weigh up the evidence and arrive at workable interpretations of the key messages that should inform policy and intervention choices. The forum should actively consider means of engaging young people in these deliberations.	Initiate Q4/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert resources available. • Staff resources available.
10.	The DCYA should construct a coherent logic model for targeted youth programmes, identifying the theory of change, specifying data collection points and giving clear direction in terms of methods of measurement.	Model developed Q2/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to relevant expertise.
11.	The DCYA should adopt the seven outcome mechanisms identified in the literature review as a preliminary package of proximal outcomes for deliberation and which could form the focus point for service provider performance.	Outcomes adopted for introduction of reformed scheme Q3/2015	As for Recommendation 2
12.	As part of the implementation plan, long-term governance arrangements should be kept under periodic review.	Review Q4/2016	

Appendix 7: Balanced Scorecard

Quality of programme design	
Are the programme objectives clearly specified?	The programme objectives are specified based on a review of political, administrative and service provider sources. There is a fit between these objectives and current DCYA strategy.
Are performance indicators in place from the outset, to allow for an assessment of programme success or failure in meeting its objectives? If not, can such success/failure indicators be constructed <i>ex post</i> ?	No. It is recommended that a new performance-related governance system is designed and constructed, where outcomes are clearly specified.
Have alternative approaches been considered and costed, through cost-benefit analysis or other appropriate methodology?	Alternative approaches are outlined in Chapter 8 on 'Continued Relevance'.
Are resources (financial, staffing) clearly specified?	Yes, although a significant limitation is that estimates of staffing costs and numbers and management costs had to be relied on, based on small samples.
Implementation of programme/scheme	
To what extent have programme objectives been met? In particular, what do the success/failure indicators show?	Due to the lack of appropriate data, it was not possible to examine the extent to which objectives have been achieved. However, there is evidence of focus, effective design and effective intervention from the data collected in both the VFMPR Survey sent to providers and the site visits.
Is the programme efficient in terms of maximising output for a given input and is it administered efficiently?	A comprehensive analysis of efficiency was not possible due to the unreliable output data provided by services in annual progress reports. An analysis of a sample of services showed that outputs remained constant as funding was reduced. There were differences in unit costs between services in the sample that provided for young people with different need levels, which requires further examination.
Have the views of stakeholders been taken into account?	Yes. A survey was sent to all services that are funded under the programme and a sample of providers participated in site visits where staff and young people were interviewed. There were also several consultations with the Youth Affairs Unit, DCYA.

continued

Cross-cutting aspects	
Is there overlap/duplication with other programmes?	There appears to be an overlap within the three programmes under review. It is recommended that the three youth programmes under review should be amalgamated into one funding scheme for targeted youth programmes.
What scope is there for an integrated cross-departmental approach?	Two focused policy assessments are recommended, with a cross-departmental approach: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To identify the types of supports or management overheads required by human service programmes, what should be expected in terms of output and outcome of the management supports and to test these assumptions empirically. 2. Undertake an audit of targeted funding for young people to identify the degree (if any) of service duplication for young people at local level.
Can services be delivered more cost-effectively by external service providers?	This is covered in the report with reference to the fact that the DCYA is not in a position yet to commission externally, based on poor diagnostic data and an uncertain evidence base regarding what works, precluding the DCYA from purchasing specific programmes. A reform and development programme for voluntary organisations is recommended.

Notes

- ¹ Public Spending Code [C] section 2 [2.1]
- ² Public Spending Code [C] section 2 [2.2] (a)
- ³ For example, Brown (2005) states: 'It is easier to measure the quality of trash collection than of mental health services.'
- ⁴ Young People's Facilities and Services Funds 1+2 are treated as one scheme.
- ⁵ The Youth Affairs Unit of DCYA has responsibility for the development of youth work policy.
- ⁶ ETBs replaced Vocational Education Committees (VECs), which were in place during the period under review.
- ⁷ Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (2010).
- ⁸ The response rate was approximately 84%.
- ⁹ Not every commentator agrees with the *hierarchy of evidence* advanced by writers such as Drake, Aos and Miller (2009), which elevates the Randomised Control Trial to 'gold' standard. For alternative perspectives on evidence, see, for example, Sparrow (2011) and Pawson and Tilley (1997).
- ¹⁰ Public Spending Code [C] section 2 [2.1]
- ¹¹ Public Spending Code [C] section 2 [2.2] (a)
- ¹² For example, Brown (2005) states: 'It is easier to measure the quality of trash collection than of mental health services.'
- ¹³ The Department of Children and Youth Affairs was set up in June 2011.
- ¹⁴ Young People's Facilities and Services Funds 1+2 are treated as one scheme.
- ¹⁵ See DCYA (2011).
- ¹⁶ Within these targeted funding lines, reference is variously made to 'disadvantage' (SPY and YPFSF), substance abuse and/or drugs prevention/interventions (SPY, YPFSF and LDTF).
- ¹⁷ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2012), Public Spending Code, C. Implementation and Post-Implementation Reviewing and Assessing Expenditure Programmes (C.O.P. [C 04] 1)
- ¹⁸ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2012), Public Spending Code, C. Implementation and Post-Implementation Reviewing and Assessing Expenditure Programmes (C.O.P. [C 04], page 9 Box 1).
- ¹⁹ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2012), Public Spending Code, C. Implementation and Post-Implementation Reviewing and Assessing Expenditure Programmes (C.O.P. [C.04] 2.1 (b)).
- ²⁰ DCYA (2012a, pp. 3-4).
- ²¹ ETBs replaced Vocational Education Committees (VECs), which were in place during the period under review.
- ²² Indecon International Economic Consultants (2012, p. 41).
- ²³ Irish Youth Justice Service (2013).
- ²⁴ Since 2012, Government departments have been reconfigured and renamed. 'Community Affairs' now rests within the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. Department of Education and Science is now the Department of Education and Skills. The Department of Transport, Sport and Recreation is now the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.
- ²⁵ The political sources are a record of a Parliamentary debate in 1998 and answers to Parliamentary questions in 1999 and 2012. The administrative sources are the 2005 Department of Education and Skills' Annual Report, the DCYA submission for the CRE in 2011 and an analysis of websites of VECs that act as grant administrators to the projects.
- ²⁶ The original source documents for the youth programmes could not be located by the YAU or in the Oireachtas Library or the National Library of Ireland. However, the programmes' objectives and target groups are quite consistent across a number of political and administrative sources and at the level of grant administrators.
- ²⁷ DCYA (2014).
- ²⁸ Ministerial Task Force on Measures to Reduce the Demand for Drugs (1997, p. 11).
- ²⁹ The survey commissioned as part of this VFMPR is outlined further in Chapter 3. The questionnaire used for the survey is presented in Appendix 1.
- ³⁰ 'For the purposes of this assessment, we include under this heading the YPFSF Rounds 1 and 2, given that these funds are distributed to organisations whose programmes are directed towards young people who are at risk of substance abuse and the associated potential health-related impacts. We also include youth-related HSE funding and Local Drugs Task Force funding. YPFSF and HSE funding streams are assigned a low Level 1-2 risk under the Hardiker scale, while the Local Drugs Task Force programmes are assigned a higher Level 3-4 risk profile' (Indecon International Economic Consultants, 2012, p. 103).
- ³¹ One example of such progress is Foróige' Best Practice Unit, which has been involved in a significant number of research-related outputs. This example is merely intended to illustrate increased activity across the sector in Ireland in terms of knowledge building activity (Child and Family Research Centre, 2011).
- ³² For example, following an exhaustive review of the literature (and in common with many human service interventions), a systematic map of the research literature undertaken by the Centre for Effective Services (2013b, p. 43) found that 'Although we are able to describe the different types of youth work activities and the range of outcomes measured, including the methods used to assess those outcomes, it was not possible to ascertain causality'.
- ³³ A useful illustration of the broad and diverse theoretical debates regarding behaviour change can be found in Darnton (2008).
- ³⁴ Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (2010).
- ³⁵ DCYA (2011).
- ³⁶ Meeting with Youth Affairs Unit, 15th October 2013.
- ³⁷ Department of Finance (2007, p. 28).
- ³⁸ Department of Finance (2007, p. 28).
- ³⁹ Department of Finance (2007, p. 28).
- ⁴⁰ Department of Finance (2007, p. 28).
- ⁴¹ 28 VECs were allocated funding for a Youth Officer in 2012.

- ⁴² 'Needs domains' refer to the need levels of young people receiving a service. For the purposes of this VFMPR, the need levels are (1) all young people, (2) young people in need, (3) young people with severe difficulties and (4) young people who require intensive and long-term support and protection.
- ⁴³ 'Continuing relevance' is considered by undertaking analysis on data already collected (Department of Finance 2007, p. 36).
- ⁴⁴ Outcome data were collected at a county or regional level for this VFMPR to attempt to measure the impact of the programmes by comparing the change in appropriate outcomes for young people in different areas by the funding and participant numbers in the areas. Trends in youth unemployment, youth crime and educational attainment were examined across counties or regions. While it would be expected that areas that received greater funding or had higher participation levels would experience a more positive change in outcomes for young people, no such link could be observed. This is not surprising given the large number of variables that are likely to determine outcomes for young people, as well as the low participant levels relative to total youth population in an area.
- ⁴⁵ Constructing such an evaluation framework is a key recommendation in this report.
- ⁴⁶ See, for example, Mayne (2008).
- ⁴⁷ Kramer (1994).
- ⁴⁸ 'Information asymmetry' – where contracting agents (in this case youth providers) are in receipt of specialist knowledge exclusive to commissioning principals (in this case the DCYA) – is considered a key risk in Principal/Agent relationships. See, for example, Miller and Whitford (2007).
- ⁴⁹ The sampling method used is outlined in Appendix 2.
- ⁵⁰ See Appendix 2.
- ⁵¹ Comparison group/no controls and non-experimental, but with statistical methods.
- ⁵² Derived from the analysis of VFMPR Survey responses.
- ⁵³ VFMPR Survey questionnaire is provided in Appendix 1.
- ⁵⁴ It is estimated that between 74% and 82% of funding to local services in the three programmes is expended on staff salaries. This is not unusual for services of this type. Essentially, the programme logic for these services is that *the delivery* of programmes, interventions and/or the development of purposeful relationships *by professionals* with young people assist directly and indirectly in achieving the overall programme objectives (i.e. better outcomes for targeted youth). The effectiveness of this interaction between a youth professional and a young person is critical: it is essentially the young person's *experience* of the policy objectives for these schemes being implemented. How front-line staff use their time (effectively or ineffectively, efficiently or inefficiently) in this key interaction with a young person (or young people) is therefore a key 'economic' consideration in terms of how 70% of the schemes' funds were used. This means that desk research (e.g. a review of administrative data and survey methods, which will answer the what, where and how many questions) would not on its own yield the discriminating data required to make judgements about effectiveness.
- ⁵⁵ Horwath Consulting Ireland and Matrix Knowledge Group (2009).
- ⁵⁶ Devlin and Gunning (2009).
- ⁵⁷ The response rate was approximately 84%.
- ⁵⁸ This can include paid and unpaid staff.
- ⁵⁹ This act of a 'reasonable expectation' is an important element of process evaluation where administrative standards are not already in place. Without introducing external references here, there is a danger that the treatment of governance arrangements becomes merely *descriptive exercise* as opposed to assessing whether they are adequate or not (see Rossi and Lipsey, 2004).
- ⁶⁰ The NAC, which was mainly constituted by stakeholder Department officials (Departments of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; Justice, Equality and Law Reform; Education and Science) with input from the National Drugs Strategy team and other representatives from youth advocacy groups. The role of this group was to assess new applications, mainly for capital funding under YPFSF, and to make recommendations to the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for funding (Horwath Consulting Ireland and Matrix Knowledge Group, 2009). For the period under review, the NAC last met in 2011.
- ⁶¹ Following initial screening by the appropriate local statutory agencies (depending on the specific target group for the proposed project) (Department of Education and Science).
- ⁶² National Drugs Strategy Team (2011).
- ⁶³ Communication from Youth Affairs Unit, 4th April 2014.
- ⁶⁴ This refers to the 2012 version of the progress report.
- ⁶⁵ For the period under examination, the number of Grant Administering Bodies totalled 33, including VECs, local authorities, HSE and, sporting organisations. Relevant to this VFMPR (although outside the time scope) further work has been undertaken by the Youth Affairs Unit to rationalise the number of Grant Administering Bodies. In January 2013, administrative arrangements for some 84 local youth projects were transferred from 6 organisations to the City of Dublin Youth Service Board (CDYSB) (Youth Affairs Unit).
- ⁶⁶ ETBs/Grant Administering Agencies have more recently been afforded the opportunity to submit proposals for reconfiguration of the allocations to individual projects across the schemes within the allocated funding for the year. Proposals for reconfiguration of allocations require prior approval of the Youth Affairs Unit before being implemented (Source: Youth Affairs Unit).
- ⁶⁷ 1 Principal Officer, 2 Assistant Principal Officers, 2 Higher Executive Officers, 3.1 Executive Officers, 2.6 Clerical Officers.
- ⁶⁸ The Youth Affairs Unit's responsibilities include developing youth policies and strategies that enable and enhance young people's personal and social development (including employability); supporting the youth sector in providing effective youth work and associated opportunities for young people via a wider range of youth programmes and initiatives; monitoring and assessing the youth work structures, supports and services; supporting the alignment of youth policies and services with other DCYA policy and services initiatives; and liaising with the EU on youth policy and the implementation of EU programmes for youth (Source: Youth Affairs Unit).

- ⁶⁹ Correspondence IVEA to OMCYA, 19th August 2010.
- ⁷⁰ Youth Affairs Unit (2006) *Terms and Conditions for Youth Officers in Vocational Education Committees* (Appendix 1).
- ⁷¹ Annual Progress Report for 2012 and Renewal Application Form 2013. Appendix 5 of the present report provides the template for the Annual Progress Report.
- ⁷² For example, Catholic Youth Care (now Crosscare) operating in Dublin city and county, and parts of Kildare and Wicklow.
- ⁷³ For example, Youth Work Ireland, which is a federated organisation. Its regions are broadly co-terminus with county boundaries across Ireland and each region is headed by a Regional Director, who is operational manager for all services within the region.
- ⁷⁴ For example, Foróige, which is a national youth organisation operating in many communities across Ireland, but with a single command and control structure.
- ⁷⁵ Including, significantly, the Youth Work Ireland Federation.
- ⁷⁶ It was not possible to examine these costs any more closely in the context of this VFMPR. However, a Focused Policy Assessment, examining management costs and fees, is proposed later in the report.
- ⁷⁷ The quality of staff management provided by employers is critically important. There is growing evidence of the direct link between positive 'organisational climate' experienced by staff in human service provider organisations and positive outcomes for children and young people. In addition, *professional staff time* is where the core financial costs of the schemes are invested and where the impact of the policy is intended to be delivered. Closer examination of these arrangements and costs is proposed as per Focused Policy Assessment referred to above.
- ⁷⁸ DCYA (2011, pp. 21-22).
- ⁷⁹ Referred to as Special Projects to assist Disadvantaged Youth.
- ⁸⁰ The websites of the Education and Training Boards (former VECs) that administer funding under the YPFSE, SPY and LDTF were examined to see if there was any information on the programmes.
- ⁸¹ Foróige (2013).
- ⁸² Youth Work Ireland (2014).
- ⁸³ Documentation provided by Youth Affairs Unit for VFMPR examination.
- ⁸⁴ This concern is expressed as a vulnerability, as opposed to a widespread finding, given that, despite how overall targeting objectives had been interpreted by some service providers at a national level, survey responses from local service providers indicated a closer degree of alignment.
- ⁸⁵ Horwath Consulting Ireland and Matrix Knowledge Group (2009).
- ⁸⁶ 'It remains the intention of the Office of the Minister for Drugs that, unless specific difficulties emerge in relation to a particular project, it should continue to receive funding until it is evaluated formally and a decision is made on its continuation/mainstreaming' (National Drugs Strategy Team, 2011, pp. 44-45).
- ⁸⁷ National Drugs Strategy Team (2011, pp. 44-45).
- ⁸⁸ Interview with Youth Affairs Unit, 15th October 2013.
- ⁸⁹ For a detailed treatment of implementing street-level policy, see Lipsky (2010).
- ⁹⁰ Correspondence from Youth Affairs Unit, 29th April 2014.
- ⁹¹ Annual progress reports on file for Carlow, Clare, City of Cork, Cork County, Donegal, Co. Dublin (no percentage workload breakdown), City of Dublin, Kerry, Kilkenny, Laois, Louth, Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim, Tipperary NR, Tipperary SR, Westmeath and Wicklow.
- ⁹² The 2001 Youth Work Act makes special mention of young people aged 10-21 years.
- ⁹³ Social background is determined by the parental occupation of the young people: SC 1 represents professional occupations; SC 2 managerial occupations; SC 3 non-manual occupations; SC 4 skilled-manual occupations; SC 5 semi-skilled occupation; SC 6 unskilled occupations (Health Promotion Research Centre, 2012, p. 10).
- ⁹⁴ CSO projection based on the assumptions relating to future trends in fertility, mortality and migration. The figures presented here are from the M3F2 assumptions, which provide the most conservative estimate of youth population increase.
- ⁹⁵ These are explored in Chapter 7.
- ⁹⁶ Central Statistics Office (2013)
- ⁹⁷ Kelly and McGuinness (2013).
- ⁹⁸ This represents approximately 86,000 individuals.
- ⁹⁹ Kelly and McGuinness (2013).
- ¹⁰⁰ Hibell *et al* (2012).
- ¹⁰¹ Health Promotion Research Centre (2012, p. 5).
- ¹⁰² DCYA (2012b, p. 129).
- ¹⁰³ The nine items are (1) to pay rent, mortgage or utility bills; (2) to keep their home adequately warm; (3) to face unexpected expense; (4) to eat meat or proteins regularly; (5) to go on holiday; (6) a television set; (7) a washing machine; (8) a car; (9) a telephone (Eurostat, 2014c).
- ¹⁰⁴ Eurostat (2014e).
- ¹⁰⁵ Centre for Effective Services (2013c, p. 19) *Every Child a Home: A Review of the Implementation of the Youth Homelessness Strategy*.
- ¹⁰⁶ However, a strategic review of youth homelessness undertaken by the Centre for Effective Services found that while 'outcomes for children who are out-of-home have improved over the past decade ... improvements are needed in providing children at risk with responses based on a comprehensive assessment of need and the provision of high quality services and accommodation options' (Centre for Effective Services 2013c, p. 44).
- ¹⁰⁷ Pay costs and staff numbers for local services are estimated specifically for this VFMPR based on compiling pay proportions and staff numbers for a sample of 39 local services and applying these proportions to total costs for local providers. Sampling methodology is outlined in Appendix 2.
- ¹⁰⁸ Management fees are estimated based on responses to the VFMPR Survey. Sampling methodology is outlined in Appendix 2.

- ¹⁰⁹ Total expenditure in respect of
 1) technical assistance/administration
 2) payments to national organisation
 3) sports development officers
 4) capital
 were derived by the VFMPR Team from financial information held by the Youth Affairs Unit.
- ¹¹⁰ There is a well-established principle that greater levels of complexity in relation to children's services equate with higher input costs (see Centre for Effective Services, 2013d, pp. 11-12), where the service planning pyramid based on the Hardiker Model indicates higher input costs for Levels 3 and 4. Gillen (2013, p. 10) also demonstrates the application of Hardiker to risk levels.
- ¹¹¹ The purpose of this was to reflect the reality that local providers may provide services for a number of different groups, while at the same time bounding the number of options to identify where most service effort was applied to yield discriminating data. Some providers, however, may target more than two of these groups in terms of their total service offering.
- ¹¹² Some services may be open for more or less than 251 days.
- ¹¹³ Correctly calculated annual participant figures could not be confirmed for this service for 2010. This service had a unit cost of between €150 and €200 for 2011 and 2012.
- ¹¹⁴ Survey response RN1001.
- ¹¹⁵ Survey response LK1019.
- ¹¹⁶ The Indecon report commissioned by the National Youth Council of Ireland, for example, states: 'Youth Work Ireland also estimates that it contributes cost savings of €1 billion to the State through early intervention and prevention programmes. The cost saving is identified through costs associated with detaining young people. Indecon believes, however, that this represents a possible over-estimation of the benefits and it is important that the methodology applied utilises prudent assumptions in relation to what is likely to be the outcome for individuals in the absence of the programmes identified.'
- ¹¹⁷ See, for example, Mayne (2012 and 2008).
- ¹¹⁸ Pawson and Tilley (1997) argue that even seemingly fixed compounds can behave differently depending on conditions, for example, gunpowder.
- ¹¹⁹ Randomised control trials provide unequivocal performance-related data in relation to social programmes because they randomly assign individuals to groups which either receive the treatment (programme) or do not, creating a clear line and permitting judgements of attribution to be made. However, they have been criticised for only answering very specific questions about the performance of very specific tools (of relevance in youth programmes because the evidence base is still developing), that the high standard of evidence permits few studies and new insights in the context of literature reviews and they are costly (Bamber *et al*, 2012, pp. 41-43).
- ¹²⁰ Not every commentator agrees with *the hierarchy of evidence* advanced by writers such as Drake, Aos and Miller (2009), which elevates the Randomised Control Trial to 'gold' standard. For alternative perspectives on evidence, see, for example, Sparrow (2011) and Pawson and Tilley (1997).
- ¹²¹ The term 'soft' here may misleadingly infer fuzzy outcomes when it is intended to convey a set of deeper and sustainable attributes which are associated with self-regulation and self-governance.
- ¹²² Young people referred to Garda Diversion Programme in 2010 as a percentage of estimated population of young people (10-17 years) (Garda Youth Diversion Office, 2012).
- ¹²³ DCYA (2012b, p. 136).
- ¹²⁴ Centre for Effective Services (2013d).
- ¹²⁵ See, for example, Redmond (2009).
- ¹²⁶ The selection process was as follows: the site was a 'local' service provider, a representation of all governance models, fair divide between Dublin and outside Dublin, single and multiple funding sources. Reference is made to site visits throughout.
- ¹²⁷ Site visits 002 and 004.
- ¹²⁸ Site visit 012.
- ¹²⁹ Site visits 013, 010, 008, 006, 003, 001.
- ¹³⁰ Site visit 007.
- ¹³¹ Site visits 010, 009, 005.
- ¹³² See, for example, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2011).
- ¹³³ Local services were permitted to make two selections because it was clear from an early scoping exercise that most services had multiple risk or threshold-related targets. Requiring a response of one target only would have generated precise, but probably misleading data. The two-selection approach was intended to provide a more approximate and realistic sense of 'focus'. It did, however, present challenges in terms of conclusively determining and quantifying activity in certain areas. 'Other' was included here as an option as well.
- ¹³⁴ Figure from analysis of VFMPR Survey.
- ¹³⁵ For example, survey response KY1004.
- ¹³⁶ For example, survey response T1006.
- ¹³⁷ This typically meant trading off some degree of service effort to embed the service within a locality and make it easier for targeted youth to use the service without being labelled.
- ¹³⁸ Site visits 004 and 013 respectively.
- ¹³⁹ DCYA annual progress report 2012, Section 2. Progress Report template is provided in Appendix 5.
- ¹⁴⁰ DCYA renewal application form 2013, Section 2.
- ¹⁴¹ Supporting this more *profiled* account of need types and levels, the Centre for Effective Services (2013d) advises that local programmes should be informed by 'evidence of what works, as well as suitability of the local context' (authors' emphasis). Horwath Consulting Ireland and Matrix Knowledge Group (2009), acknowledging this complexity, argued that service providers should provide evidence of 'need' by locally based, but robust analyses of the population being served so that these 'bottom-up' assessments can be aggregated to national level, facilitating the development of more nuanced local/national profiles of the work and improving the oversight of programme delivery.

- ¹⁴² Site visit 009.
- ¹⁴³ Site visit 010.
- ¹⁴⁴ Site visits 008 and 003 respectively.
- ¹⁴⁵ For example, Miller and Rollnick (2002).
- ¹⁴⁶ See, for example, *CHART (Changing Habits and Reaching Targets) Programme* (Foróige, 2014a) and 'A Life of Choices' Programme (Foróige, 2014b), two manualised programmes designed by Foróige and based on substantial evidence-informed theoretical propositions.
- ¹⁴⁷ Survey response OY1001.
- ¹⁴⁸ Darnton (2008, p. 24).
- ¹⁴⁹ Bearing in mind that respondents were permitted to select two options in terms of need levels, Table 7.4 presents all the possible permutations and assigns numerical values based on how selections were made. The total numbers of respondents to each permutation is recorded in the last column of the table (N) and the percentage of responses of each permutation to referral type.
- ¹⁵⁰ Respondents were offered a maximum of 4 options from a confined list of 8 options, with an additional 'other' category.
- ¹⁵¹ 'Self-referral' here refers to a young person seeking out a service response in relation to a particular issue (as opposed to using the service as a drop-in facility).
- ¹⁵² From VFMPR Survey comments: 'rooted deeply' (D0128), 'deeply embedded' (D1003), 'uniquely positioned' (LK006), 'recognised landmark' (WD1004), 'well established' (WX1003).
- ¹⁵³ For example, site visits 001, 011, 003, 009.
- ¹⁵⁴ Survey response C1030.
- ¹⁵⁵ For example, site visit 008, where one concern was that some families might perceive ownership of the project.
- ¹⁵⁶ Centre for Effective Services (2013d).
- ¹⁵⁷ Darnton (2008, p. 22).
- ¹⁵⁸ Horwath Consulting Ireland and Matrix Knowledge Group (2009).
- ¹⁵⁹ This analysis is not dissimilar to gauging whether staff 'understand' the interventions that they are involved in delivering (discussed in relation to process evaluation in *The Magenta Book* (HM Treasury, 2011, p. 82).
- ¹⁶⁰ This was identified as a particularly important and 'problematic' area of required improvement in Horwath Consulting Ireland and Matrix Knowledge Group (2009, pp. 37-38).
- ¹⁶¹ A number of these outcomes are composite entries.
- ¹⁶² Restricted to direct interventions.
- ¹⁶³ Project closed in 2011.
- ¹⁶⁴ Includes composite outcomes.
- ¹⁶⁵ Excludes activity relating to organisational development.
- ¹⁶⁶ A number of references are composite entries in the outcomes column.
- ¹⁶⁷ Specific outcomes for this project were not specified in progress report.
- ¹⁶⁸ Specific outcomes for this projects were not specified in progress report.
- ¹⁶⁹ Due to combinations of youth, volunteer and organisational outcomes being entered, some filtering was applied to attempt to identify the entries most likely linked to actual youth outputs/outcomes – the number of entries may therefore be understated.
- ¹⁷⁰ As above.
- ¹⁷¹ Refers to a whole youth service analysis here limited to direct provision.
- ¹⁷² Small number of composite outcomes – including volunteer outcomes as proxy for young people.
- ¹⁷³ Report on the implementation of the NQSF with 39 Dublin-based Youth Work Projects in 2012.
- ¹⁷⁴ Survey respondents were permitted to tick unlimited options here on the basis that an affirmative response could be simply verified.
- ¹⁷⁵ Comparison group/no controls and non-experimental, but with statistical methods.
- ¹⁷⁶ The only evaluation tool that can currently deal with the outcome and attribution issue (i.e. *Was the outcome achieved?* and *Can achieving the outcome be attributed exclusively to the intervention?*) is the Randomised Control Trial (RCT). A small number of relevant programmes have participated in RCTs. Given that, by their nature, these types of exercise are evidence-heavy, including peer-reviewed academic journal articles outlining method and performance, it is unnecessary to dwell on the detail of the interventions, which can be sourced elsewhere. Of importance here are the results. For example, of the following three programmes that were designed and/or delivered in Ireland: *Mate-Tricks* (2012), designed 'to reduce child anti-social behaviour; develop self-esteem and problem-solving, reasoning and empathy skills; improve child-peer interactions; and improve parenting skills and parent-child interactions' was considered to be *ineffective*; *Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ireland* (Child and Family Research Centre, 2011) demonstrated statistically significant outcomes in terms of emotional well-being and positive, but non-significant trends in relation to social acceptance, school liking, plans for school and college completion, and drug and alcohol use'. In more recent trials, *Positive Systemic Practice* (Childhood Development Initiative, 2012) yielded significant improvements in adolescent emotional and behavioural outcomes. These interventions are programme-specific.
- ¹⁷⁷ For example, drugs education programmes may be delivered to individuals, small groups, whole schools or whole communities (as once-off events).
- ¹⁷⁸ By 'mechanism' here, we mean the thought processes, behaviours and actions that can lead to positive change.
- ¹⁷⁹ See Fiscal Policy Studies Institute (2013, p. 1, 3).
- ¹⁸⁰ And, where relevant, volunteers.
- ¹⁸¹ Accenture (2013, p. 11).
- ¹⁸² European Commission (2014).
- ¹⁸³ Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2014).
- ¹⁸⁴ Site visit 007.
- ¹⁸⁵ Site visit 005.

- ¹⁸⁶ Site visits 010, 007, 008.
- ¹⁸⁷ Site visits 009, 004, 002.
- ¹⁸⁸ Site visit 003.
- ¹⁸⁹ Site visit 004.
- ¹⁹⁰ Site visit 006.
- ¹⁹¹ Site visit 010.
- ¹⁹² Site visit 013.
- ¹⁹³ Site visits 008, 001, 005.
- ¹⁹⁴ Site visit 001.
- ¹⁹⁵ Site visit 003.
- ¹⁹⁶ Site visit 005.
- ¹⁹⁷ Site visit 010.
- ¹⁹⁸ Site visit 011.
- ¹⁹⁹ Site visit 010.
- ²⁰⁰ Site visit 009.
- ²⁰¹ Site visit 010, referring the planning and organisation of a cross-national event.
- ²⁰² Site visit 004.
- ²⁰³ Site visit 008.
- ²⁰⁴ Site visit 003.
- ²⁰⁵ Site visits 009 and 010.
- ²⁰⁶ Site visit 005.
- ²⁰⁷ Site visit 007.
- ²⁰⁸ Site visits 003, 004, 008, 009, 010.
- ²⁰⁹ Site visit 007.
- ²¹⁰ Site visit 003.
- ²¹¹ Site visits 009 and 006.
- ²¹² Site visit 008.
- ²¹³ Site visit 011.
- ²¹⁴ Site visit 010, context here was that there was less money available for trips and activities.
- ²¹⁵ Site visit 007.
- ²¹⁶ Site visit 003 and 005.
- ²¹⁷ Site visit 005.
- ²¹⁸ Site visit 012.
- ²¹⁹ Site visit 011.
- ²²⁰ Site visit 006.
- ²²¹ Site visits 001, 002, 009.
- ²²² Site visit 002.
- ²²³ Site visit 010.
- ²²⁴ Site visit 005.
- ²²⁵ Site visit 003.
- ²²⁶ Site visit 002.
- ²²⁷ Site visit 002.
- ²²⁸ Site visits 011 and 012.
- ²²⁹ Site visit 008.
- ²³⁰ Site visit 011.
- ²³¹ Site visit 008.
- ²³² Site visit 004.
- ²³³ Site visit 005.
- ²³⁴ Site visit 012.
- ²³⁵ Site visit 009.
- ²³⁶ Site visit 004.
- ²³⁷ Department of Finance (2007, pp. 35-36).
- ²³⁸ Objective 5 of DCYA's *Statement of Strategy* is to 'Support children and young people so that they can fully engage in active learning, including through the provision of high-quality early childhood care and education, youth services and addressing issues of school attendance and participation' (DCYA, 2012a, p. 30).
- ²³⁹ Objective 5.2.3 of DCYA's *Statement of Strategy*: National Quality Standards Initiatives implemented and adhered to by national voluntary youth organisations, staff-led services and projects, and local volunteer-led youth groups. Objective 5.4: Promote quality and effective youth work provision and practice, including by means of: improvements in information and knowledge base to support and enhance youth provision; enhanced coherence and continuity between youth policy, provision and practice. Objective 5.4.1: Robust information and financial management systems in place to support enhanced planning, delivery and assessment of quality youth provision. Objective 5.4.2: Youth Affairs funding schemes renovated and reoriented, ensuring responsive, policy and evidence-informed service provision (DCYA, 2012a, p. 30).
- ²⁴⁰ Some other health findings are troubling, particularly in respect of alcohol and drug use (Haase and Pratschke, 2010). The health and social impacts of alcohol misuse on young people are well documented elsewhere (Newbury-Birch *et al*, 2009). There is also a significant relationship between alcohol and youth crime, and alcohol-related offences account for a significant proportion of referrals to the Juvenile Diversion Programme (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2009, pp. 34-43).
- ²⁴¹ 'In this context also, the DCYA will identify how it can contribute to the broad agenda of national recovery, particularly in relation to jobs. An integrated approach in response to the very high incidence of youth unemployment will be an important focus' (DCYA, 2012a, p. 6).

- ²⁴² See DCYA (2012a): Outcomes and improving evidence informed policy and practice (p. vii); Governance and accountability (p. 21); External service delivery (p. 13); Responsibility for the governance of a wide range of professional service provision (p. 17); Objective 2.1.4: Govern day-to-day service quality through improved structures, processes and culture to ensure front-line professionals can deliver to the best of their capacity (p. 26).
- ²⁴³ Centre for Effective Services (2013b, p. 6).
- ²⁴⁴ Sparrow (2008).
- ²⁴⁵ The *Implementation of the National Quality Standards Framework* (2011) and the Report on the implementation of the NQSF with 39 Dublin-based Youth Work Projects (2012) identify a clear methodology to gauge quality. The 2012 report, for example, provides a matrix involving the assessment of 20 locally based projects across 10 standards and awarding assessment grades of 'Advanced', 'Achieved' and 'Acquiring'.
- ²⁴⁶ By 'costs' here we mean the professional effort deployed to demonstrating compliance via reporting given that professional time equals cost and is finite.
- ²⁴⁷ Subject to acceptance of the recommendations, it is intended that the DCYA Research Unit will assist the DCYA Youth Affairs Unit in the design of the performance framework.
- ²⁴⁸ It is important in the context of the VFMPR that 'rationing' and focus applies to *information demands* from the DCYA in equal measure to actual service output. This caution is intended to ensure that service providers are not further burdened with additional administrative workload when their core policy objective relates to engagement with young people. Normative standards here could test (a) what data is required as per Table 8.1 and measure the workload impact of this in sampled localities; (b) alternatively, norms could be tested that examine 90/10, 80/20, 70/30 splits in direct versus indirect effort and the performance data returned. 'Transaction costs' in the complex area of human services are inevitable; however, workload norms for the delivery of performance data are less well developed, so some trial and error testing may be required with samples of providers.
- ²⁴⁹ Our suggestion here is that this can be physically mapped using Pobal maps that will specify certain local demographic information. This determination can inform the ongoing service level agreement with the DCYA, which can only be changed via an agreed change control process. An illustration of how catchment areas are mapped is presented in Appendix 3.
- ²⁵⁰ By using local population data and national data relating to specific need groups, national norms can be transferred to local settings. Local intelligence can then identify variances from national norms (e.g. school performance, crime indicators). The DCYA should consider requiring providers to stratify this information based on a simple tool such as the Hardiker scale – identifying the number of young people each local service 'estimates' may fall into each category.
- ²⁵¹ The suggestion here obviously is that the 7 outcomes in the literature review should form the basis of a national set of proximal outcomes. However, we also accept that this needs to be further examined and refined in discussions with providers and at local level may be deployed differentially as determined by local needs analysis. Metrics for these outcomes will need to be sourced or designed and there will be a considerable capacity-building element to this.
- ²⁵² This can capitalise on work already undertaken by many providers (and the work of NQSF) in terms of logic model; however, a clear theory of change should be articulated.
- ²⁵³ Inputs here should be split across need levels (e.g. the Hardiker scale). For the service provider, this calculation could be undertaken automatically once total annual operating costs are agreed and the numbers of young people that the local service intends to engage have been estimated across the need categories. Costs should also be disaggregated by project so that the breakdown of costs and staffing resources can be clearly identified.
- ²⁵⁴ The DCYA should require providers to estimate, bearing in mind service capacity, how many young people will be engaged across the needs categories and relate to individual young people. These 'estimates' will initially be rough approximations based on imperfect data; however, their accuracy can be improved by reference to follow-up reports of actual activity and year-on-year familiarisation with the datasets.
- ²⁵⁵ It is suggested here that the level of current activity reporting could be significantly reduced. Summaries of activity types could accompany descriptions of need level (e.g. what types of activities relate to which need groups). Further examination of activity type by the DCYA could follow analyses of performance (i.e. what types of activities in what situations appear to be yielding the best outcomes and do these relate to the literature?).
- ²⁵⁶ Here, as we suggest in Section 8.5.2, consideration should be given to adopting and refining Mayne's 'Contribution Analysis' model (Mayne, 2008).
- ²⁵⁷ See, for example, Fiscal Policy Studies Institute (2013).
- ²⁵⁸ Mayne (2008).
- ²⁵⁹ Deliberations here would include convergence of strategic focus, organisational capacity and other more detailed due diligence examinations, which would need to be follow-up considerations for the DCYA.
- ²⁶⁰ It was not possible in this VFMPR to quantify any degree of operational overlap or the desirability of more integrated solutions because the spread of provision is so diverse at national and county level. We return to this issue in the recommendations, referring to the more general theme of *locally based planning* to suggest a Focused Policy Assessment to follow this VFMPR. The proposal for a Focused Policy Assessment would involve conducting a limited sample of locally based and youth focused 'total place audits' to examine the degree of provision available *across Government* and any areas of overlap for targeted youth in certain representative locations. It is anticipated that such an exercise could devise a method for mainstreaming similar assessments across the country and provide a basis for examining further efficiencies.
- ²⁶¹ It is accepted that the delivery of targeted youth interventions under the schemes is not limited to 18 years.
- ²⁶² Minister Frances Fitzgerald, TD (2014).
- ²⁶³ This is a general comment. It is noted that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency works with families and the age range (0-18 years) is not necessarily congruent with youth programmes.
- ²⁶⁴ Other options could include Children's Services Committees or, indeed, Local Authorities. However, at the time of writing, responsibilities in the areas of children and young people are also still in development.
- ²⁶⁵ See, for example, Colorado 'Blueprints' initiative (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence Institute, 2014).
- ²⁶⁶ See, for example, Dartington Social Research Unit (2013).

- ²⁶⁷ Childhood Development Initiative (2012, p. 3).
- ²⁶⁸ i.e. an agreed element of the local Youth Officer's time would be devoted to achieving outcome-led objectives devised by the DCYA.
- ²⁶⁹ Including internal DCYA capacity-building.
- ²⁷⁰ See Rapid Evidence Assessment in Horwath Consulting Ireland and Matrix Knowledge Group (2009, pp. 5-7).
- ²⁷¹ Site visits 001 and 004.
- ²⁷² Horwath Consulting Ireland and Matrix Knowledge Group (2009).
- ²⁷³ This finding was generated by responses to the survey commissioned for this VFMPR. The levels of need categories were informed by the Hardiker scale, a tool used widely in service planning. The categories were 'all young people', 'young people in need', 'young people with severe difficulties' and 'young people who require intensive and long-term support and protection.
- ²⁷⁴ See, for example, Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 on 'Governance arrangements' and Tables 5.1 and 5.2 in Chapter 5 on 'Rationale'.
- ²⁷⁵ Obviously the inference here relates to accountability to the funder, but greater clarity and transparency also benefit local communications regarding service intent and value.
- ²⁷⁶ For example, in addition to a service provider demonstrating how its intended service is aligned with a single set of programme objectives, improved knowledge in the area of programme design permits the question 'Where is the evidence that your intended intervention(s) will bring about improvements?'
- ²⁷⁷ Here, 'youth professional' refers to any profession working with youth and may involve both paid and unpaid staff.
- ²⁷⁸ See, for example, Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998).
- ²⁷⁹ It is accepted that this is a simplistic distinction and acknowledged that there is a developmental convergence between the DCYA and service providers. The point being made is that the DCYA does not have an operational management oversight; rather, its governance is by way of service agreement.
- ²⁸⁰ The report also discusses and cautions against the option of rolling-out a small number of manualised programmes. While the implementation and measurement task may be more straightforward, there are inherent risks in selecting programmes when specific needs have not been identified and where any gaps or cracks may emerge between programmes. The report is, however, in favour of selecting off-the-peg evidence-based programmes where need is clearly defined and the efficacy of the programme to deal with the specific need is clear.
- ²⁸¹ The point is made in the report that this staff grouping is probably best placed to fulfil the role. What is not in question is that oversight capacity needs to be increased. If such a rationalisation and replacement option is not possible, thought should be given to ring-fencing the finance from existing resources to create this capacity.
- ²⁸² In the absence of a means to provide proof of impact (as, for example, in the limited number of RCTs), these models also clearly demonstrate the contribution that a service can make to improving a situation for a young person, groups of young people or a community.
- ²⁸³ The Youth Affairs Unit informed the VFMPR Team that it plans to achieve full roll-out of the NQSF in 2014.
- ²⁸⁴ This exercise need not be overly technical or bureaucratic. For example, the Hardiker framework, which formed the basis for need-related questions in the VFMPR, offers a significantly improved option for profiling the work than is currently in place. Distinguishing need using the Hardiker Model also provides the DCYA with the opportunity to graduate its information demands. For example, while minimum baseline data should be collated for all young people engaging with a youth programme (e.g. Hardiker Level 1), enhanced levels of data should be required for young people who are engaged as presenting with more complex needs (e.g. Hardiker Level 2+).
- ²⁸⁵ This includes assumptions made in relation to other providers from the community, voluntary and statutory sector in terms of how referrals (where appropriate) will be sought and how other locally based resources will be accessed.
- ²⁸⁶ It is suggested that this could be one role for the enhanced governance capacity referred to in the description of Recommendation 4.
- ²⁸⁷ Discussions with Pobal and trialling this exercise for the purpose of this VFMPR suggest that this need not be burdensome. Pobal's assistance will be provided to undertake the initial exercise with providers if the recommendation is accepted.
- ²⁸⁸ Boundaries would need at least to be co-terminus with 'small areas', but given that these represent approximately 100 households, accommodating these units of measure should not be too disruptive.
- ²⁸⁹ 'Support prevention and early intervention approaches that help children, young people and their families realise their true potential' (DCYA, 2012a, p. 7).
- ²⁹⁰ See, for example, Farrington and Welsh (2008); Renita *et al* (2005).
- ²⁹¹ See, for example, Drake, Aos and Miller (2009).
- ²⁹² These indicators are sub-optimal, but solely relying on normative expectations (about what should be done) without an attempt at base-lining current arrangements complicates efforts at operationalising improvements.
- ²⁹³ Kramer (1994, p. 46).
- ²⁹⁴ Figure 8.1 identifies Mayne's 'Contribution Analysis' as being a useful evaluation framework.
- ²⁹⁵ The VFMPR Literature Review by the Centre for Effective Services (see *Appendix 4*) identifies two practical guides to measurement (Burford, 2013; The Young Foundation, 2012) that could form the basis of discussions with providers in the context of an overall evaluation framework.

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