

Training

Introduction

Someone once said ‘you are what you do’. Youth workers know that definition is limited. It needs a more holistic definition. You are also ‘how good you are at what you do’. You are also ‘what you know and what you’ve learned’. Youth workers value their skills and professionalism.

Most youth workers and management committees know that knowledge, skills and ability are not static. The world is changing and so is youth work. The lives and needs of the young people are changing. New legislation, guidelines and protocols all impact on a youth worker’s skill set and knowledge base. Because youth workers are involved in non-formal education with young people, they know only too well that education, training and learning are vital. The day-to-day activities involved in youth work expose youth workers to many different and stimulating specialised areas of endeavour both practical and creative. Many youth workers are keen to learn more and develop a wider skills set for themselves and also to deliver quality programmes to young people. Therefore it’s important that your youth project/service develops a training policy that has clear pathways and opportunities for youth workers and other staff.

In the “Essential Guidelines for Good Youth Work Practice” it’s recommended that youth workers avail of training to develop and enhance their practice. There are a number of elements to consider when developing a training policy. Having a planned, systematic and strategic training policy will ensure the youth project/service’s investment has the maximum impact on staff and as a consequence, on the young people.

Things to think about

If you are thinking of creating a policy in this area, the following questions are designed to get you thinking. They do not cover everything but should help to get you started.

Broader considerations

- What are the needs of the young people, what training is necessary to help meet these needs?
- How will your youth project/service support the professional development of the youth workers e.g. in-service training?
- What are the strategic goals and needs of the youth project/service and how do they influence the training required? How will areas of training be prioritised?
- Who else might be involved in the process of writing this policy? Can you get advice?
- What external links are needed to create a range of training opportunities e.g. VEC?
- What budget is available for training within your youth project/service?
- What are the implications for service delivery and staffing levels when youth workers are involved in training?
- Can your youth project/service create opportunities for progression e.g. from volunteer to youth worker?
- How can a culture of learning and development be fostered in your youth project/service?

Practical Considerations

- How will the training impact on the youth workers and other staff's availability for work?
- Outside of financial help, what other ways can the service support an individual's training e.g. study time?
- What is your youth project/service's view on supporting accredited and non-accredited training?
- Who can avail of training opportunities?
- What systems need to be put in place if a youth worker or other staff are looking for assistance to train e.g. application form to line manager?
- If youth workers or other staff receive support to undertake training are there conditions attached e.g. sharing learning with other team members?
- Are there specific conditions attached if a youth worker or other member of staff does not complete the training?
- How will decisions regarding training requests be assessed and who is responsible for the decision?
- With multi-annual training, should the youth worker be required to reapply each year?
- How will applications to attend conferences and seminars be dealt with?
- What training opportunities can be offered to young people engaged with the youth project/service?

Learning from the learning

- How will the learning from a youth worker or other staff members training be shared with others in the youth project/service?
- How will you measure the impact of the training on the performance of the youth worker and the service delivery to young people?
- When will you review the policy?

Key things to ensure

- A balance is maintained between the need to deliver a service to young people and providing training opportunities for youth worker and other staff
- There is equality of training opportunities for all staff
- Youth workers and other staff that are in need of training in specific areas of practice are not avoiding it

Relevant legislation/guidelines

In designing any policy, it is important to be aware of the wider context in which your youth project/ service exists. In many cases, how you have to act is dictated or influenced by the law:

- Code of Good Practice, Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector Department of Education and Science 2003
- Youth Work Act 2001
- The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005

Where else to get information and resources

A good policy keeps up to date with current practice, trends and legislation. Your policy should be a living document which directs and underpins the work you do and how it is done. Policy development takes time and effort but the return is worth the investment. There are a range of information sources and resources available to help you. Here are a few to get you started.

A resource database for the voluntary and community sector is currently available at www.cidb.ie/comhairlevcs.nsf and has a section on managing volunteers. This section has good general advice on developing a training policy.

As the national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) gives people the opportunity to gain recognition for learning in education or training centres, in the work place and in the community. FETAC's functions include: making and promoting awards, validating programmes, monitoring and ensuring the quality of programmes and determining standards. For more information see www.fetac.ie

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland sets out a ten level framework for qualification in Ireland. For more information see www.nfq.ie or www.nqai.ie

HETAC is the Higher Education Training Awards Council. See www.hetac.ie

A policy on training might use the following structure

- 1. A COVER PAGE.** This should include: the name of your youth project/service; the title of the policy; when it comes into force; the person(s) responsible for signing it off; and a date for reviewing it.
- 2. A POLICY STATEMENT.** This should state clearly, but in broad terms, what you want the training policy to cover. It is a statement of intent and vision, saying what your youth project/service believes. It can be quite short and need not go into all the practical details; these are covered by the sections below.
- 3. REASONS FOR THE POLICY.** This section should give, in clear bullet points, your reasons for creating this policy. Ask yourself questions such as: “Why is such a policy helpful?” and “What concerns would arise if we did not have a policy?” There are some practical reasons for having a policy like this, while other reasons may reflect values that are important to the youth project/service. All these reasons should be listed: they will help all those who are required to comply with the policy to understand its importance and accept it.
- 4. THOSE WHO MUST COMPLY WITH THIS POLICY.** This section could again be bullet-pointed, listing all those who you expect to follow the policy. They might include, for example, the project leader, youth workers, volunteers, students.
- 5. IMPLEMENTATION.** This will be the largest section of the document, setting out the practical details of how you intend to put the policy into practice. It states who is responsible for what, and how, in practical terms, you intend the policy to be carried out. It might name the tasks for which various people are responsible e.g. how a youth worker is to apply to the youth project/service for assistance. See the section on ‘Things to think about’ above for some more prompts.
- 6. LINKS TO OTHER POLICY AREAS.** This section should list the other policies of your youth project/service that link into your training policy. Links to other policy areas, such as your supervision policy, should be identified in this section. All your policies must interconnect; otherwise the vision for your youth project/service may become confused and pull people in different directions.