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Disability, Integration and Youth

*Youth Services Grant Scheme (YSGS)
Reform project*

Policy Options Paper

June, 2022

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Purpose and Structure of Policy Options Paper:

The purpose of this paper is to:

- Provide an overview of the current state-of-play in the YSGS reform project.
- To outline the next steps that will be taken as the project moves beyond the preparatory stage.
- To signpost possible policy avenues that may be examined during the next phase of the project.

A version of this paper was presented by the YSGS Reform Project Team to both the DECDIY Management Board and to Minister Roderic O'Gorman in Q2, 2022. The original version of this paper allowed the Project Team to proceed with the reform as outlined herein. This version of the paper is modified only to the extent that the framing of the original paper has been revised.

The main focus for the project team in the period since July 2021 has been to intensively engage with this scheme's primary stakeholders: National Youth Organisations currently in receipt of the YSGS and young people. A Literature Review (benefits and measurable outcomes of universal youth work) has also been commissioned.

This paper provides a comprehensive snapshot of the inputs and insights that have been garnered from the preliminary engagement and data gathering phase and demonstrates how this input has facilitated the evolution of DCEDIY's perspective on the scope and objectives for the reform of the YSGS. The paper comprises 7 sections, outlined as follows:

1. **Executive Summary:** An encapsulation of the Policy Options Paper
2. **Background on scheme:** Overview of current YSGS participants
3. **Rationale for Reform:** Stating of the case for holistic reform of the YSGS
4. **Stakeholder Engagement**: Snapshot of consultation period with sector and young people
5. **Literature Review**: Assessment and implications of academic research
6. **Reform outputs:** Goals, objectives and deliverables of reform project
7. **Delivery timeframe**: How best to achieve reform (and next steps)

Section 1: Executive Summary

1.1 The rationale for reform

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth's (DCEDIY) overarching objective is to reform the YSGS in order to deliver a scheme that is more responsive to the current needs of young people, that facilitates the effectively delivery of services to young people by National Youth Organisations and that benefits from improved governance and oversight.

For almost 40 years, the Youth Services Grant Scheme (YSGS) has supported National Youth Organisations in delivering services that have benefited the social and personal development of children and young people. Over the last four decades, this funding has played a significant role in supporting the Irish youth work sector. However, certain aspects of the YSGS are outdated and in its current form, the scheme is no longer fit for purpose.

Public spending and grant funding rules and regulations have developed significantly since the inception of the YSGS. While the rules for oversight and administration of the YSGS have been updated to account for some of these changes, facilitated by the cooperation and commitment of the YSGS organisations, further reforms are required to fully modernise the YSGS. These include requirements for the implementation of performance management and outcome assessments now associated with grant funding.

A 2017 audit of the YSGS recommended a number of specific reforms of the scheme, several of which remain yet to be implemented. The holistic reform of the YSG will address these outstanding recommendations, taking into account the current and future needs of participating organisations and those of the young people who ultimately benefit from the services they provide.

1.2 Legislative and policy framework

The Youth Work Act, 2001 provides for the legislative basis for youth work in this state. Within the act, the nature of youth work is defined as:

> … *A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is—*
>
> a) *Complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and*
> b) *Provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.*

The reform of the YSGS will take cognisance of this definition when issues such as intent, purpose and eligibility criteria for the reformed scheme are reviewed and refined. In addition to this act, a number of national and trans-national strategies and frameworks will inform the reform of the YSGS; these include:

- Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF)
- National Youth Strategy
- National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF)
- Participation Framework
- EU Youth Strategy
- Charities Governance Code

1.3 Draft Reform Proposal and preliminary engagement

A proposal outlining the potential scope of the reform of the YSGS was approved by DCEDIY's Management Board and Minister Roderic O'Gorman in July 2021. This proposal identified potential deliverables and objectives associated with the reform project, on the understanding that these factors would evolve on foot of the project team's engagement with key stakeholders. The first project proposal provided the

framework for the project team's preliminary engagement with the YSGS's primary stakeholders, i.e. the national youth organisations participating on the YSGS, and children & young people who had experienced youth services.

– *Engagement with YSGS-funded organisations:*

The preliminary engagement phase with the funded organisations comprised three stages:

1. **Online consultation event**: All YSGS-funded organisations were invited to attend an online consultation event on October 18, 2021. This event was considered to have been very productive by all parties involved. Addresses from Minister O'Gorman, DCEDIY senior management and the project team all emphasised the importance of meaningful and consistent engagement between the project team and the funded organisations throughout the life-cycle of the reform project.
2. **Survey:** issued to the funded organisations the following month, structured to enable deeper engagement with issues that arose at the initial consultation.
3. **Written submissions:** The invitation to make submissions was structured around the draft project proposal so that organisations were afforded the opportunity to comment on the contents and structure of same, which amounted to a proto-Policy Options Paper. Thereby, the organisations contributed not only to the shaping of the current document, but also the deliverables associated with the reform of the YSGS.

– *Engagement with children and young people:*

DCEDIY worked extensively with the National Participation Office on seeking the voice of children and young people on the reform project. As part of this process, a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) was recruited in order to provide input on the engagement process.

Three consultations with children and young people took place in the first week of November 2021. These three consultations comprised of separate engagement with young people aged under and over 18. The funded organisations gave considerable assistance in recruiting participants for these consultations.

– *Literature Review:*

The approved project proposal also provided the project team with a frame of reference to commission a literature review (on the benefits and measurable outcomes of universal youth work). This review was conducted by Dr Bernadine Brady (NUIG) and her team and it has provided a number of insights including on youth work benefits, outcome assessment and emergent themes that will inform the YSGS reform project.

1.4 Overview of input from engagement and research

Reports have been commissioned from independent report writers on the engagement with children and young people and phases 1 and 2 of the engagement with the YSGS organisations. Additionally, the project team performed a thematic analysis on the written submissions received (so that the findings could be incorporated into this paper). An independent report will be commissioned to provide a deeper analysis of these written submissions; thus completing the report sequence for this phase of stakeholder engagement. All of these reports, upon completion, will be published (including the Literature Review). An in-depth assessment of these inputs is provided later in this paper; the key messages from this (preliminary) engagement and research can be expressed as follows:

1.4 (a) Literature Review

- There is overwhelming evidence that demonstrates the benefits and utility of Universal Youth Work/Mainstream Youth Work.
- Outcome Based Assessment should be undertaken as a joint-venture between DCEDIY and the YSGS Organisations.
- Emergent themes, such as digitalisation[1], owing to the relative scarcity of evidence, need to be rigorously assessed prior to any policy decisions being implemented with respect to the reform of the YSGS

1.4 (b) Engagement with children and young people - key recommendations:

- Increase general awareness of youth work organisations
- Involve young people in decision making
- Provide technical support and resources to youth work organisations

1.4 (c) Online consultation with YSGS funded organisations:

Table 1: High-level thematic input from online consultation

Funding	- Clear funding criteria. - Consideration for multi-annual funding
Governance	- Streamline administrative burden and avoiding duplication of reporting. - Scaled reporting structure, to avoid overburdening smaller organisations.
Policy Intent	- Clarify policy regarding age range. - Establish position of YSGS in relation to universal and targeted youth work.

1.4 (d) Follow-up Survey to YSGS organisations

Table 2: Snapshot of survey returns

Policy	• Need for clarity about what practice and activities are eligible under the funding
Governance Measures	• Support and guidance on scheme and application/Online tools for application to DCEDIY
Reporting	• Reduce burden of compliance/Transition to an online system.
Evaluation	• Emphasis on ability to demonstrate the benefits/outcomes of the services.
Funding	• More flexibility in how funding is allocated, and autonomy in spending.
Identifying Needs of Children	• Participation structures within the organisation/or engagement with other formal structures e.g. Youth Advisory Group

1.4 (e) Written submissions

Table 3: Snapshot of written submissions returns

Theme	**Recommendations**
Governance	Implement scalable governance standards to reflect diverse organisational complexity
Reform Delivery	Include engagement from volunteers and wider stakeholders generally.
Policy Intent	Transparent qualifying criteria /Entry & Exit from scheme to be carefully managed
Funding	Transparent (not % based) allocation process/ Consideration for multi-annual funding
Reporting	Joined up (digital) application process.
Accessibility	Hybrid service delivery/Raise awareness of services online

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[1] Refers to online/hybrid models of delivering youth services

1.5 Effect of input and research

The engagement with the YSGS's primary stakeholders described above, in conjunction with the commissioned research, has helped evolve the project team's thinking and planning about the reform of the YSGS. This has resulted in a reworking and development of the deliverables listed in the project proposal of July 2021, creating a more nuanced and responsive list.

Revised Deliverables (expansion in ambition from project proposal deliverables):

Core Deliverables

1. Clarify, (re)define and communicate the policy intent underpinning the reformed YSGS, having regard to the existing ethos of the YSGS and current legislation and policy frameworks.
2. Ensure qualifying criteria align with the redefined purpose/philosophy of the reformed YSGS and that same have regard to the current make-up of YSGS participants.
3. Ensure the reformed grant scheme rules and guidelines are in alignment with criteria and policy intent and can be efficiently monitored by the assigned funding intermediary
4. Create the conditions to enable the assigned funding intermediary to establish tailored Service Level Agreements/Performance Delivery Agreements with funded organisations.
5. Augment existing governance standards to ensure that all grantor/grantee obligations are adhered to in a transparent manner, scaled according to the complexity and capacity of participating organisations.
6. Implement a transparent facility to avail of YSGS funding (subject to minimum qualifying criteria) and develop a support system for existing YSGS struggling to meet qualifying criteria
7. Develop and implement a grant funding/allocation model that incorporates core funding with elements of performance-based funding and potentially, project specific and demand related funding

Core Deliverables 2, 4 & 7 address the three remaining outstanding recommendations from the Internal Audit conducted by Mazars

Core Plus Deliverables

8. Develop, in negotiation with YSGS funded organisations and subject-matter experts, an outcomes based assessment model designed to build an evidence base to demonstrate the multi-dimensional value of youth work
9. Incentivise participating organisations to enhance the active participation of young people throughout the youth work environment; providing scope for the voice of young people from policy formulation through to implementation.
10. Incentivise participating organisations to devised methods to reduce barriers to entering youth work services; including accessibility, awareness, equality and integration initiatives
11. Implement a mechanism that links adherence to the National Quality Standards Framework to the grant allocation/outcomes based assess model(s)
12. Transfer reporting and data collection/collation to an ICT platform; designed to both improve the evidence base and to lower the administrative burden on participating organisations.

1.6 Policy Option Recommendation

A two phase-delivery model for the reform of the YSGS was approved by Minister O'Gorman; this methodology will allow for the delivery of priority deliverables prior to the January 2024 funding cycle, with the remaining deliverables being brought on line in the subsequent funding cycle.

The categorisation of deliverables into *Core* and *Core Plus* facilitates this multiphase delivery. The achievement of 7 *Core* deliverables will see the foundations of the reformed scheme in place, while *Core Plus* deliverables will build on these components and will maximise the impact of the reform of the YSGS. *Core* deliverables will include all 3 outstanding recommendations from the 2017 audit, along with those deliverables upon which all other deliverables are contingent (i.e. policy intent, qualifying criteria, etc.).

1.7 Next Steps:

The YSGS reform project team is currently working on the preparation of a project implementation plan, which will map out in detail how the reform objectives and deliverables will be achieved.

In support of the implementation plan, the project team has put in place appropriate project governance structures, including a Project Steering Committee and Project Advisory Group. In addition, a comprehensive communications plan has been operationalised, which maps out how the project team will engage with each of the identified stakeholders on the YSGS reform project; throughout the life-cycle of the project.

All of these outputs (governance model, communications plan, etc.) will be uploaded to the YSGS Reform microsite on Gov.ie (which will be launched in conjunction with the project implementation plan)

Section 2: Overview and function of organisations funded under the YSGS

2.1 Overview of the Youth Services Grant Scheme (YSGS):

The YSGS has been in operation for almost 4 decades. The scheme originated within the Department of Education, before coming under the remit firstly of the Department of Health, and then the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

A paper on the YSGS, originating in the Department of Education (DOE) shortly after the scheme's commencement, noted that:

Youth Work organisations seek to promote and facilitate the development of young people as individuals, as members of their local and unique communities, and as members of society (p. 3)

Within the DOE paper, the criteria necessary for organisations to qualify for funding under the YSGS, were also outlined:

- Their aims, objectives and practice are within the terms of the goals and philosophy of voluntary youth organisations;
- They operate and provide planned and ongoing programmes, activities and services for young people under 25, focusing predominantly on developing the experiences and opportunities of young people between the ages of 12 and 21 years;
- They are national or major regional organisations;
- The organisation should be autonomous, democratic in structure and self-managing, and must provide for the meaningful participation and involvement by young people at all levels.

The ethos and qualifying criteria laid out for the YSGS in that paper continue to underpin the current operating environment of this scheme. Based on input received during the engagement process, a number of organisations currently funded under the YSGS are not fully aware of the above outlined criteria.

Both ethos and qualifying criteria will be fully reviewed, with a view to updating and modernising same, in a process that will involve the sector.

2.2 Function of YSGS-funded organisations:

A focus on social and personal development typically differentiates universal (or mainstream) youth work, from targeted youth work (usually focussed on deficit reduction), as evidenced by the ethos underpinning the YSGS expressed in the DOE paper:

Youth Work is concerned with the development of the total person and is primarily educational in philosophy and method (p. 2).

Input received from the sector and from young people themselves supports the view that the reform of the YSGS should be framed to support the universal nature of youth work provided by national youth organisations.

The YSGS was not explicitly designed to support universal youth work, but support for this sector of the youth work sphere is inherent to the ethos of the organisations funded under the YSGS. This is apparent in the overview of the vision/mission statements of the 30 National Youth Organisations currently participating on the YSGS, captured in figure 1 below (which captures a Wordcloud of the most commonly expressed key words in the Vision/Mission Statements of YSGS-recipient organisations).

It is acknowledged that in safeguarding the unique services supported by YSGS funding, the manner in which outcomes and outputs are monitored will be tailored to the developmental ethos underpinning the youth work provided by YSGS funded organisations.

2.3 Funding Overview:

The organisations currently funded under the YSGS are disparate with respect to organisational complexity, services provided and levels of funding.

The data in this section pertains to 2019 (the last full year of available collated data, when an organisational overview was undertaken by the project team). Figure 2 below captures the proportion of YSGS funding received by each organisation. As is demonstrated in this chart, there is a wide range between the top and bottom funding recipients; with the top 5 recipients of funding being awarded 69.2% of the total YSGS funding allocated in 2019.

Figure 2: Individual YSGS Allocation vs Average Allocation
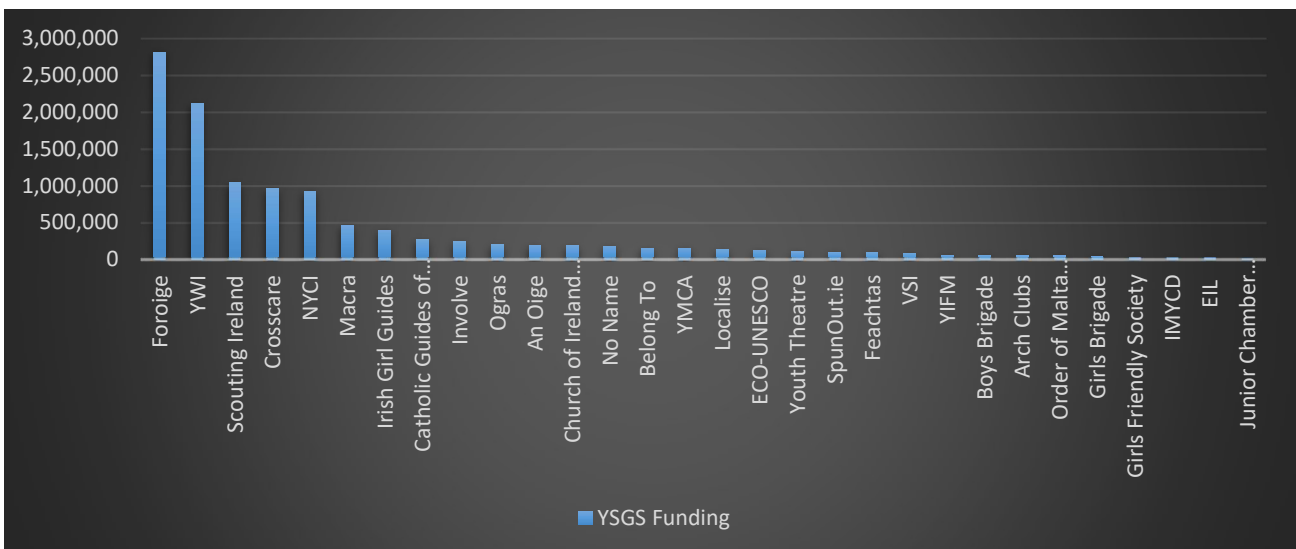
The full breakdown of YSGS funding allocated in 2019 is captured in table 4 below.

Table 4:2019 YSGS Allocations (inclusive of %s)

Organisation	Allocation	% of Total YSGS Allocation
Foróige	€2,814,965	24.8%
Youth Work Ireland	€2,117,869	18.6%
Scouting Ireland (total)	€1,044,000	9.2%
Crosscare	€965,868	8.5%
National Youth Council of Ireland	€928,306	8.2%
Macra na Feirme	€465,549	4.1%
Irish Girl Guides	€401,927	3.5%
Catholic Guides of Ireland	€272,242	2.4%
Involve	€240,764	2.1%
No Name Club Ltd	€201,075	1.8%
Ogras	€188,678	1.7%
An Oige	€187,189	1.6%
Church of Ireland Youth Department	€183,901	1.6%
Belong To Total	€159,269	1.4%
Young Mens Christian Association	€159,077	1.4%
Localise Youth and Community Service ltd	€135,403	1.2%
ECO - UNESCO Clubs	€128,666	1.1%
Youth Theatre Ireland	€107,064	0.9%
SpunOut	€102,167	0.9%
Feachtas	€93,716	0.8%
Voluntary Services International	€84,814	0.7%
Young Irish Film Makers	€61,458	0.5%
The Boys Brigade	€60,406	0.5%
National Federation of Arch Clubs	€54,948	0.5%
Order of Malta Cadets	€52,932	0.5%
Girls Brigade	€47,821	0.4%
Girls Friendly Society	€33,317	0.3%
Irish Methodist Youth & Children Dept.	€31,290	0.3%
Experiment In International Living	€30,302	0.3%
Junior Chamber Ireland	€17,810	0.2%
Total	**€11,372,793**	**100%**

The size and complexity of an organisation will be considered during the reform process. This will be of importance when considering how governance and reporting requirements can be tailored to the relative complexity and staffing resources of the YSGS organisations.

Another important consideration for the reform project, with respect to exchequer funding, is the grant funding rules stipulated in Circular 13/14. This Circular specifies that organisations in receipt of more than 50% of their funding from the exchequer are obliged to comply with more stringent financial reporting standards. Figure 3 demonstrates that well in excess of half the organisations currently in receipt of YSGS funding exceed this threshold (based on 2019 data). Other grantor/grantee obligations deriving from this circular will also need to fully addressed as part of the reform process.

Figure 3: Exchequer Funding as % of Total Income
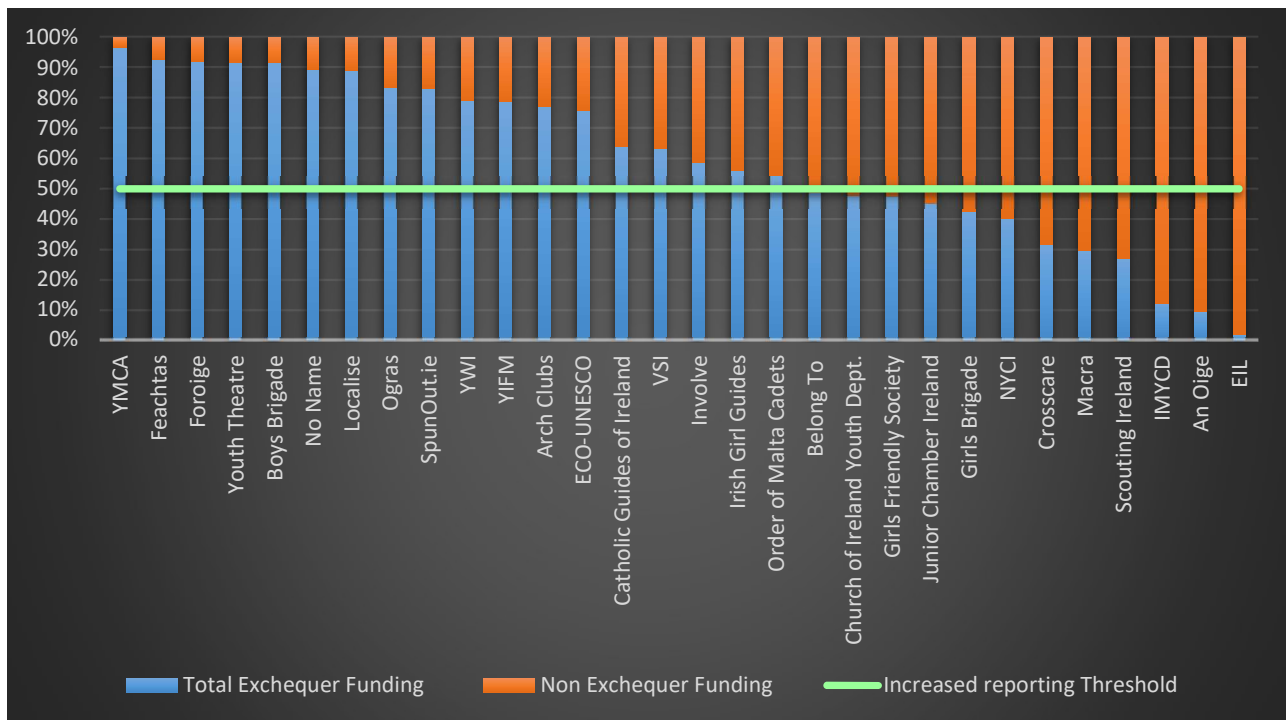
2.4 Budgeting overview:

As part of the YSGS renewal application process, organisations are required to break down the amount of YSGS funding they are requesting for the subsequent year into direct and indirect costs. In 2019, the ratio of direct/indirect costs was c. 60:40. Within this headline figure, there is again a high degree of variance with respect to apportionment, as seen in figure 4 below:

*Figure 4: Apportionment of costs by YSGS orgs (2019)*

2.5 Apportionment breakdown:

Within both the direct and indirect costs apportionment, salaries account for the largest cost component. With respect to direct costs in 2019, €5.9m (80%) of budget costs were attributed to direct salary costs, with €3.1m (74%) of indirect costs apportioned to indirect salary costs. In total, salaries accounted for c. €9m, or 79% of budgeted costs in the 2019 YSGS application process.

It must be noted again that, within these headline data points, there was significant variability with respect to costs apportionment (as exemplified by figures 5 and 6 below):

Figure 5: Apportionment % of direct costs by org
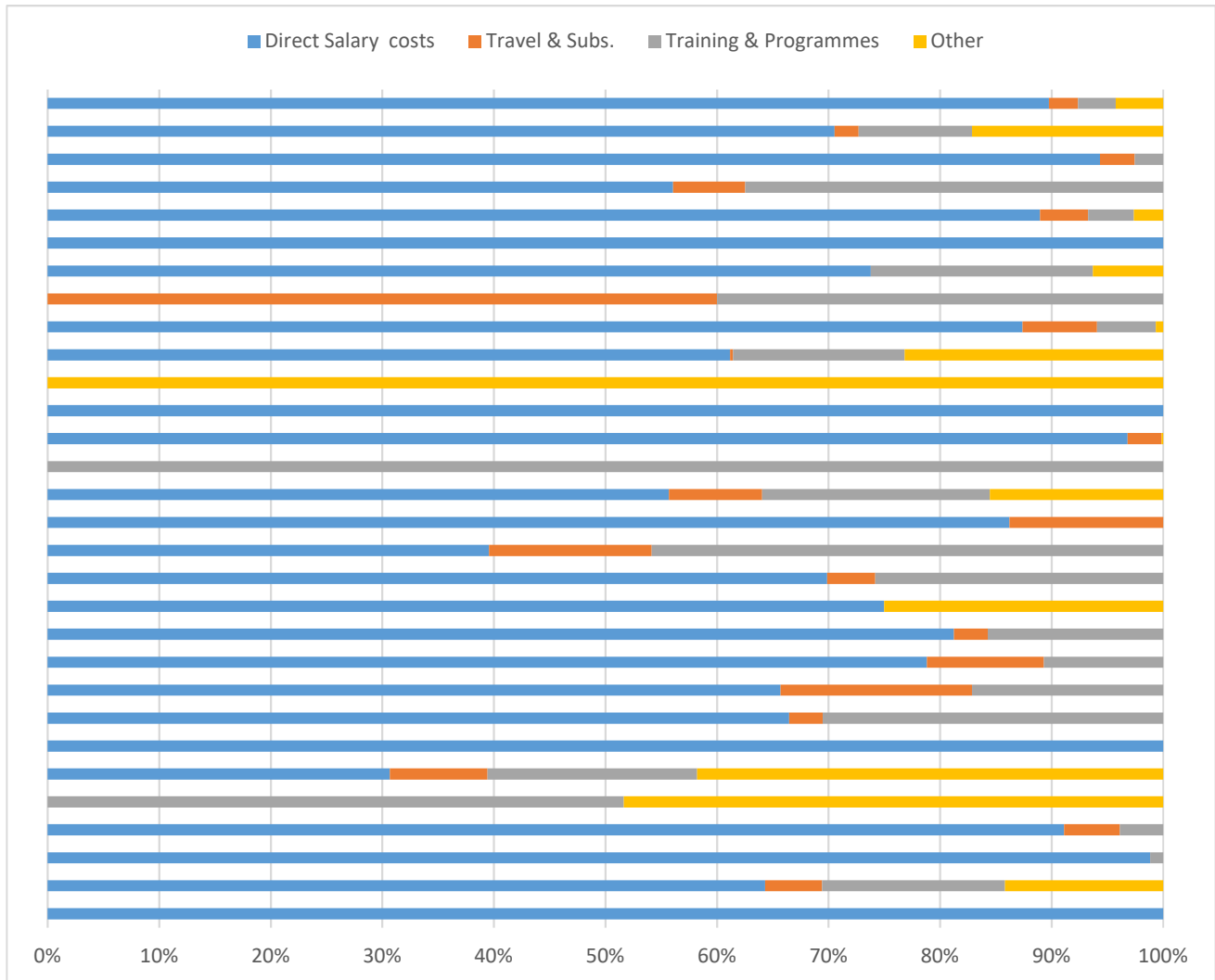
It should be noted that this data is captured and visualised in order to demonstrate the variability between organisations funded through the YSGS. There are currently no prescriptive obligations placed on YSGS organisations with respect to how they apportion their costs. We note that organisations are strongly in favour of retaining autonomy with respect to how they apportion their costs. This factor must, however be included in the ambit of the reform process to ensure complete complicity with public spending rules.

Figure 6: Indirect costs apportionment %s
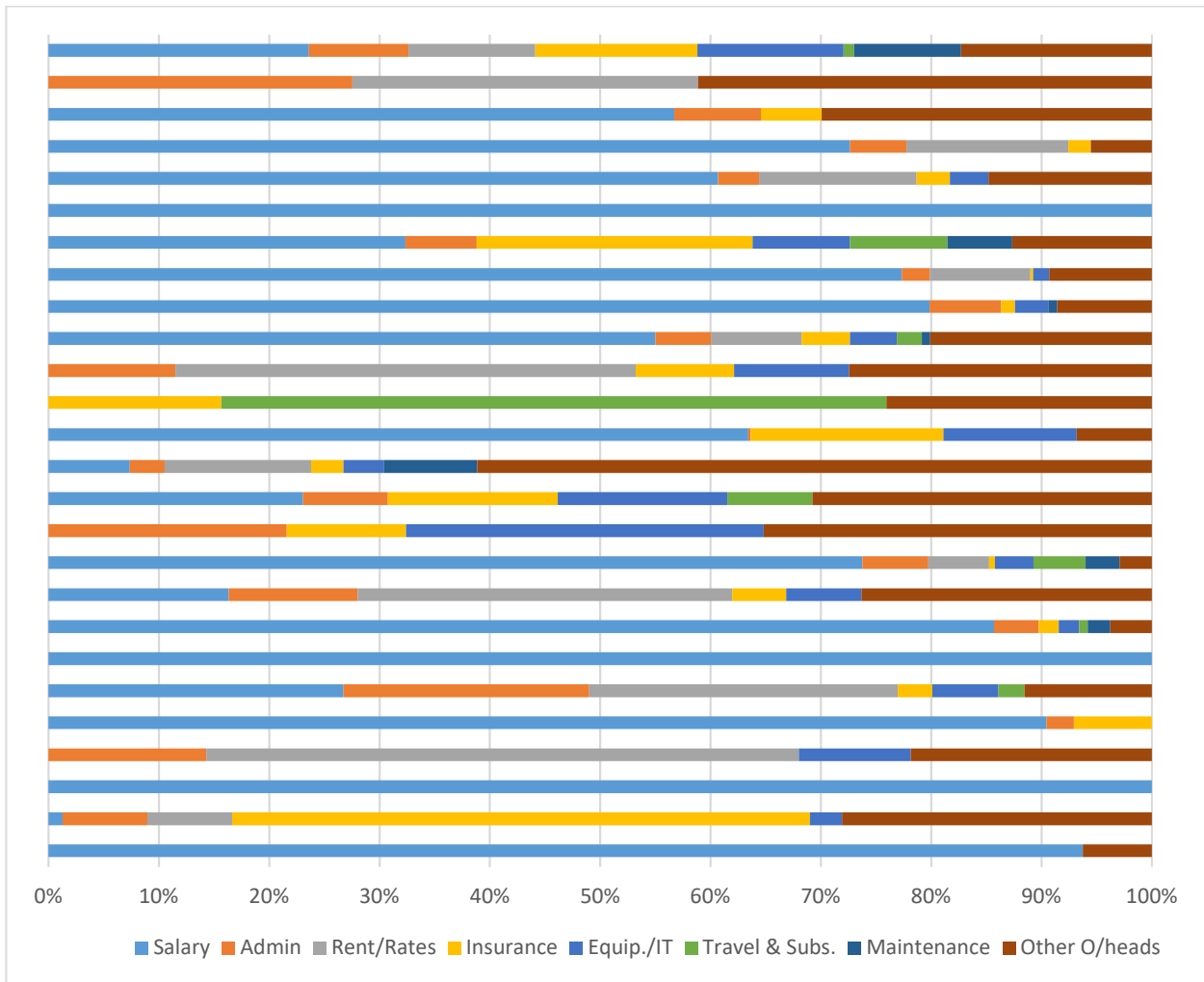
2.6 Reform reporting implications:

The reform of the YSGS will seek to address the current disconnect between budgeted costs and expenditure reporting. Currently, expenditure as recorded in annual progress reports does not speak directly and explicitly to the budgeted costs outlined in YSGS renewal applications. The *UBU: Your Place Your Space* scheme, launched by the DCEDIY in 2019 in order to better the delivery of targeted youth services, utilised an integrated financial reporting system. This may offer a model upon which the YSGS reporting framework can be built.

Section 3: Rationale for reforming the YSGS

3.1 Context:

The review and reform of the Youth Services Grant Scheme (YSGS) was one of 15 key priorities for the Department in 2021. To that end, a project team was formed within the Youth Reform Strategy and Participation unit of DCEDIY to lead on the reform of this scheme.

3.2 Initial project proposal

A proposal outlining the potential scope of this reform was approved by Minister O'Gorman in Q3, 2021. The objectives and deliverables identified in this proposal represented the Department's perspective on the reforms needed on the YSGS.

The purpose of this paper is to incorporate the other perspectives underpinning the broader rationale for reform, particularly those from the youth work sector and from children and young people themselves.

A number of objectives and deliverables were identified in this proposal approved in Q3 2021, on the understanding that the scope of the project would be subject to amendment following engagement with stakeholders and upon further research. The draft deliverables are captured in figure 7 below (Section 6 of this paper demonstrates the evolution of DCEDIY's ambition with respect to the deliverables identified as being within the scope of the reform of the YSGS).

Figure 7: Draft project deliverables - as outlined in 2021 project proposal

1. (Re)Define the policy intent of the YSGS
2. Establish criteria for organisations to qualify for YSGS funding
3. Ensure that the grant scheme rules are in alignment with the criteria and policy intent
4. Enable the funding intermediary (Pobal) to establish SLAs/PDAs with funded organisations
5. Implement a (scalable) governance framework for funded organisations
6. Create an entry mechanism into the scheme (refining the existing exit mechanism).
7. Implement a grant funding/service delivery model
8. Implement a performance evaluation framework
9. Create mechanisms to allow funding applications to respond to fluctuating demand levels
10. Establish a Quality framework (and link to performance and grant funding model)
11. Establish an equality/accessibility/integration framework (and link to performance)
12. Build and incorporate a platform that facilitates data collection and analysis

3.3 Rationale for reform:

The reform of the YSGS has been planned for a number of years having regard to DCEDIY's objective to strengthen its governance of all Exchequer funding, and an audit it commissioned from Mazars which was published in 2017.

From the Department's perspective, there are a number of drivers of reform, including a need to:

- Modernise the governance and oversight arrangements of the YSGS
- Ensure the scheme is equipped to respond to the evolving needs of children and young people.
- Create a transparent entry and exit mechanism to the YSGS.
- Fully incorporate recommendations from 2017 Internal Audit

One of the overarching goals of the reform of the YSGS is to design a scheme that facilitates the collation and analysis of data that can help demonstrate the value of youth work.

3.4 Economic & Societal relevance of the YSGS:

Academic research has repeatedly demonstrated the positive societal impacts generated in the field of youth work. A report commissioned by the European Commission in 2014 found that:

> *Where youth work is well designed, informed by an understanding of young people's situation and development process, and supported by competent youth workers, it can result in a range of positive results.*

In addition to these broad positive societal impacts, a report published by Indecon Economic Consultants in 2012 (commissioned by the National Youth Council of Ireland) demonstrated that:

> *For every €1 invested in youth work, the economic benefit/costs saved by the State in the long run are €2.20. This study demonstrates that investment in youth work not only supports young people to reach their full potential and become active citizens, it also reduces long-term costs for the State in relation to the health, justice and welfare services for young people.*

The Literature Review commissioned by DCEDIY in support of the reform of the YSGS (discussed below) outlines in great detail the benefits and positive outcomes associated with universal youth work.

The YSGS provides funding to 30 organisations who, in turn, provide beneficial services and activities to a large cohort of young people. The reform of the YSGS should not jeopardize this important work. Rather, the reform of the YSGS should be seen as an opportunity to optimally utilise the funds available on an annual basis, so the maximum possible benefit to young people is realised.

The reform of the YSGS also affords the opportunity to assess mechanisms to expand the cohort availing of services by participating organisations. This is of particular significance given the Department's expanded remit under the headings of equality, disability and integration and is in line with DCEDIY's Statement of Strategy (2021 – 2023).

3.5 Research and Stakeholder Engagement (a broadening of perspective)

As noted above, one of the primary functions of this paper is to demonstrate how the intensive stakeholder engagement, allied to ongoing research, has impacted the shape of the proposed reform of the YSGS. DCEDIY has benefitted from detailed, significant and insightful input from the youth work sector (including from young people) and from the Literature Review conducted by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (NUIG). This input has facilitated the evolution of the project team's perspective with respect to the aims, objectives and outputs the reform project needs to achieve in order to deliver a reform of the YSGS that has a positive impact on the youth sector, on young people, on DCEDIY (and by extension the Exchequer), and on society as a whole.

Section 4: Inputs from Stakeholder Engagement

The project proposal provided the project team with a framework to engage in the first instance with the YSGS's primary stakeholders – National Youth Organisations in receipt of YSGS funding and young people.

4.1 Engagement with YSGS organisations.

An intensive engagement process that included an online group consultation, follow-up survey and invitation to make written submissions on the outline of the proposed reform policy (an open call for written submissions was also issued at this juncture). Reports were commissioned for the first two phases of this engagement, with the project team undertaking a preliminary thematic analysis of the written submissions. These will also be assessed by an independent report writer in the near future.

Across the 3 phases of the preliminary engagement with national youth organisations, two recommendations were consistently put forth:

- Increase overall YSGS funding, and
- Consider the implementation of multiannual funding

It is important to note at this stage that the project team and DCEDIY acknowledge that whilst funding for the YSGS has increased by 16% in the last 4 budgets, funding on this scheme has not recovered (adjusting for inflation) to the level of funding allocated prior to the global financial crisis in 2008. Accordingly, it was understandable that the sector consistently highlighted the funding situation in their input to the project team. However, it is also important to note that reforming the YSGS will not automatically equate to a significant increase in funding. As has been stated on a number of occasions, successfully reforming the YSGS will strengthen the negotiating position of DCEDIY officials during the annual Estimates process. This is another reason for the project team and the sector to work closely and collaboratively on the reform of the YSGS, so that the value and impact of (universal) youth work can be better evidenced.

With regard to multi-annual funding, while we note that this could provide increased stability to the youth sector this would contravene the rules governance grant funding agreements. However, it is noted that such arrangements can be implemented in certain circumstances and the project team will seek further clarity in this regard. In order to prevent chronic repetition, these two factors are not captured in the below summaries of engagement (they are of course captured in the independent reports).

4.2 Overview of recommendations for engagement with YSGS funded organisations:

In this process of preliminary engagement, DCEDIY was appreciative of the depth and breadth of input provided by the national youth organisations currently in receipt of YSGS funding. The level of engagement from these organisations is captured in table 5 below:

Table 5: Level of engagement from funded organisations

Phase of Engagement	Max. respondents	Actual respondents	% Engagement uptake
Consultation event	30	28	93%
Follow-up survey	30	22	73%
Written Submissions	30	21	70%
Overall Engagement	**90**	**71**	**79%**

This high degree of engagement adds legitimacy to the inputs summarised below.

From these three phases of engagement, the following recommendations have been identified from the amalgamated inputs from the YSGS participating organisations:

1. Increased clarity on qualifying criteria for YSGS funding
2. Consideration for merit/performance based funding
3. Reduction of administrative burden (to include transition to online applications)
4. Tailored governance and compliance requirements (based on complexity of orgs)
5. Outcome based evaluations to be considered – to demonstrate value of youth work
6. Increased role for young people in determining youth policies
7. Instituting reforms under the existing (youth work) legislative and policy framework
8. Increased clarity on aims and objectives of YSGS
9. Increased transparency with respect to individual funding allocations
10. Ensure exit/entry proposals include support and guidance for organisations

4.3 Online Consultation with YSGS funded organisations

The first stage of the preliminary engagement with participating National Youth Organisations was an online consultation event. Some 42 individuals representing 28 organisations who currently receive the youth service grant attended this consultation; these individuals participated in both plenary and breakout sessions (in 4 groups).

The consultations explored five broad questions:

1.   What works well in the YSGS?
2.   How could we improve the scheme?
3.   What reforms to the YSGS should be viewed as priorities?
4.   What are the primary challenges to delivering universal youth services?
5.   What should the vision statement for the reform project include?

Thematic Summary of Findings

Funding Allocation: Aside from the two funding issues noted separately above, the most prominent theme throughout the online consultation was how funding is allocated.

Organisations expressed a desire for clarity on funding criteria, with some indicating that percentage increases disadvantaged smaller organisations. A number of organisations expressed a desire to see the option to apply for extra funding for specific projects in order to support capacity building and innovation.

Value of Core Funding: The YSGS's role in providing core funding to the participating organisations was viewed unanimously as a positive. All groups agreed that it provided a stable and reliable source of income, on which their organisations depended. Three of the four groups referred to the core nature of the funding allowing for autonomy and flexibility in spending.

Governance and Reporting: There was broad agreement that the current administrative burden placed upon funded organisations was excessive, and negatively impacting the delivery of services. Many felt that this could be improved by the streamlining of reporting processes and reducing the duplication of reporting across different funding streams, particularly those from exchequer funding. One group suggested the use of a user-friendly online system. There was a suggestion that a "one size fits all" approach to governance was not appropriate, disproportionately impacting smaller organisations. A scaled or banded structure was suggested. Similarly, one group referenced the need to avoid the "overly prescriptive" governance in place in the UBU Your Place Your Space.

Performance Evaluation: All four groups expressed a sense that there is a lack of value placed on youth work. Significant resistance to "value for money" criteria being utilised in evaluation of performance was expressed. There was concern that this type of evaluation would lead to "problematizing young people". Instead, there was support for evaluation based on outcomes, and empowering young people.

Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers: Falling volunteer numbers was expressed as a concern in all four groups. In particular, the effect of recent Covid-19 restrictions and the effect of volunteering on work/life balance were quoted as contributing factors. Furthermore, the increased administrative burden placed on volunteers was seen as a deterrent to potential volunteers. There was wide agreement that the recruitment, training and support of volunteers relies on the availability of professional staff and youth workers. Increased investment in capacity building was suggested as the most effective way to increase volunteer numbers.

Policy Intent: There was wide recognition that the scheme should only support volunteer led, community based and informal education services. Two areas were identified as needing clarification/agreement:

- Interface between targeted and universal service – (*i.e. where does the YSGS sit?)*
- The definition of young person within the YSGS. (*Legislation currently refers to young people as under 25 years of age, whilst BOBF and the National Youth Strategy defines a young person as being between the ages of 10 – 24).*

Accessible and Inclusive Services: There was consensus across all groups on the requirement for accessible and inclusive services:

- The scheme should be open to all young people
- Young people should not be disadvantaged by their background, ethnicity, religion geography, or infrastructure.
- Services should provide choice and diversity.
- For all stakeholders, including young people, to have ownership of decisions.
- Providing face-to-face and digital services need to continue but one should not replace the other.

Overarching Recommendations from Consultation: There was some overlap in the priority recommendations made by each of the Groups, collated in table 6 below:

Table 6: Snapshot of recommendations from consultation.

Funding	- Clear funding criteria. - Move away from percentage changes to merit based funding model. - Establish innovation fund for investment outside the regular allocation. - Invest in capacity building to support volunteers multi-annual funding. - Increased funding level overall.
Governance	- Streamline administrative burden and avoiding duplication of reporting. - Establish user-friendly online reporting system. - Scaled reporting structure, to avoid overburdening smaller organisations. - Evaluation based on outcomes instead of a strictly value for money basis. - Avoid problematizing young people.
Policy Intent	- Set policy regarding age range. - Establish position of YSGS in relation to universal and targeted youth work.

4.4 Follow-up survey:

After the online consultation, DCEDIY invited the 30 organisations to complete an online survey. This was completed by 22 organisations. The aim of this survey was to explore themes identified in the online consultation.

Topics explored in survey

The questionnaire furnished to YSGS funded organisations consisted of a combination of closed and open-ended questions exploring the following topics:

- Structure and Governance
- Analysing needs
- Reporting
- Funding

Thematic Summary of Findings

Structure and Governance:

Opinions on the application and the reporting systems were mixed with 13 viewing them to be working well, but 7 were neutral, and 2 perceiving them to be working poorly. Just over half of respondents felt the current reporting requirements are overly burdensome.

There were broadly positive views expressed on the suggestion of admitting new youth serving organisations to the scheme with 14 agreeing with this idea, and 8 having neutral responses.

Analysing and meeting young people's needs:

Respondents described a range of methods for assessing young people's needs. Fifteen described using formal processes such as surveys, focus groups, regular needs assessments, while eight organisations reported using some type of formal structure (e.g., advisory groups, councils etc.) to obtain young people's views. As part of the engagement on this topic, respondents were asked to identify the most common barriers facing young people attempting to participate in youth services:

1. Volunteer / staff numbers
2. Access to facilities
3. Awareness of services
4. Travelling to facilities
5. **Internet capacity**

The effectiveness of services and measuring outcomes:

Respondents emphasised the importance (and the associated value for money to the exchequer) of the crosscutting nature of youth services in providing a preventative approach emphasising early intervention.

In response to an open-ended question on how they measure the effectiveness and outcomes of the YSGS funding, organisations referenced four approaches:

- Monitoring and performance data
- Progress reports/Reviews of strategic planning
- Evaluations
- Feedback from users or staff/volunteers

YSGS Funding (e.g. use of Core funding, possible additions to core funding):

 Organisations agreed that the YSGS funding level has had a huge impact on the operation of their organisation. The majority of organisations reporting that they used funding primarily to fund administrative costs including rent, salaries, overheads and supporting core functions (e.g., recruiting volunteers, resources to allow volunteers to operate), training, delivering services and programmes, youth participation.

Recommendations:

Table 7 illustrates the recommendations to be incorporated/considered as part of the reform project. Further detail of other recommendations, including sectoral ones, are available in the final report.

Table 7: Recommendations from Survey of Funded Organisations

Policy	- Need for clarity about what practice and activities are eligible under the funding - YSGS should support the infrastructure of strong and well-functioning youth services, which deliver according to national policy such as BOBF.
Governance Measures	- Support and guidance on scheme and application (to include feedback from DCEDIY) - Involve young people in decision making - Online tools for application to DCEDIY
Reporting	- Reduce burden of compliance (inclusive of transition to online system). - Simplify the processes (application and reporting) and have the reporting structure to reflect application - Scale of reporting burden to depend on size, capacity and function of individual organisations.
Evaluation	- Address concerns about possible introduction of a performance-based funding model - Emphasis on ability to demonstrate the benefits/outcomes of the services. - Measurement needs to follow on from the aims and objectives of the scheme.
Funding	- More flexibility in how funding is allocated, and autonomy in spending. - Once off funding for special projects. Agreed percentage of funding for innovation, research or capacity building. - Funding to provide training and support for staff to recruit and support volunteers
Identifying Needs of Children	- Participation structures within the organisation/or engagement with other formal structures e.g. Youth Advisory Group - Research and evaluation of programmes/services - More inclusivity – Consider new services with focus on marginalised groups.

4.5 Written Submissions:

Submissions were sought from both current YSGS recipients and wider stakeholders in order to give the opportunity for comprehensive feedback on the ongoing reform. Identified external stakeholders were invited to make submissions, while an open call was put out for submissions from any interested party.

In total 25 organisations made written submissions with 21 coming from current YSGS participating organisations. Additionally, submissions were received from Ability West, Leargas, Pobal and Tusla.

Format of Submissions

The template for obtaining written submissions was structured on objectives and deliverables identified in the July 2021 policy proposal. This format was chosen as it provided organisations with an insight as to the objectives and priorities underpinning DCEDIY's perspective on reform of the YSGS. Table 8 captures the scope and focus of the input sought from stakeholders as part of this phase of the engagement.

Table 8: Submission template headings

1. Project Objectives
2. Core Deliverables
3. Core + Deliverables
4. Value added Deliverables
5. Project Delivery Options
6. Open Input
7. Stakeholder Engagement

Additionally, an open input section was included to enable organisations to voice any other views

Thematic Summary of Findings

Governance: Strong support was expressed for the implementation of a scalable governance model i.e. one which takes the capacity and resources of funded organisations into account. Furthermore, there was a desire for governance processes to be streamlined where possible. Broad support was also expressed for the utilisation of the Charities Regulator Governance Code as the basis for the reformed scheme's governance model.

Where organisations referenced performance evaluation, there was broad agreement that identifying the benefits of universal youth work can be difficult. The opinion was expressed by a number of respondents that any performance evaluation model should be based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative metrics, with a particular focus being placed on identifying and monitoring outcomes for young people.

Reform Delivery: A number of respondents expressed the opinion that the reform project should ensure the scheme is future-proofed, pointing to the most recent or ongoing policy work for guidance on the purpose and operation of the scheme e.g. BOBF 2.

The majority of respondents appreciated the efforts made by the project team to engage so far. However, there was a feeling that more time was required to digest information and provide comprehensive feedback. Many respondents also indicated the value in engaging with funded organisations in smaller groups, possibly based on their service delivery, size or location to identify specific needs.

Policy Intent: Most respondents identified the need for transparent qualifying criteria as being a fundamental reform requirement, with respondents providing differing opinions on issues such as the targeted age-range of the YSGS. There was broad agreement that any entry/exit mechanism should provide the opportunity for organisations to comply with the reformed scheme's requirements, prior to any decisions being made on potentially discontinuing the funding of non-compliant organisations.

Funding: The YSGS was universally identified as an essential source of funding, supporting the core functions of organisations and providing stability. However, many respondents referenced the need for increased funding levels, specifically to ensure consistent terms and conditions for staff across the sector. Many respondents suggested a move away from percentage increases in YSGS funding, to a transparent model where funding is allocated based on need or performance.

Reporting: Many respondents referenced the need for a more joined up application and progress reporting system. In particular, there was broad support for moving the process online, utilising autofill/auto calculate form templates to assist organisations. It was argued that a streamlined, digitalised and logical reporting system would reduce the administrative burden on participating organisations. This factor is of particular concern to participating organisations as it is often the responsibility of volunteers to comply with reporting requirements and a better system could lead to improved volunteer retention.

Accessibility: All respondents were in favour of increased accessibility for young people to youth services. Some felt that the recent experience of digitalisation demonstrated how this could increase accessibility, while others felt a reliance on online resources excluded those without the means to access technology. A number of respondents highlighted the need to increase the awareness of youth services amongst young people, and saw online methods as particularly effective.

Table 9: Summary of written submission findings

Theme	Concerns	Recommendations
Governance	• Additional administrative burden • Difficulty in demonstrating (soft) outcomes/metrics.	• Scalable governance • Utilise Charities Governance Code
Reform Delivery	• Short lead times on feedback • Differing opinions on target delivery timeline	• Consult subgroups of stakeholders • Include engagement from volunteers and wider stakeholders generally.
Policy Intent	• Lack of clarity on current policy intent • Differing opinions amongst respondents around qualifying criteria	• Transparent qualifying criteria • Entry/Exit model should be developmental (lead in times)
Funding	• Funding level generally too low (not recovered to pre-2008 levels)	• Transparent (not % based) allocation process. • Multi-annual funding/Innovation fund
Reporting	• Timeline for IT platform • Integration/compatibility of system with existing infrastructure	• Joined up (digital) application process. • Fast tracking of IT platform
Accessibility	• Young people's access to online resources • Need for extra funding if new entrants to scheme.	• Hybrid service delivery • Raise awareness of services online

4.6 Engagement with Children and Young People

Supported by the National Participation Office (NPO) and a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) convened specifically for this purpose, DCEDIY designed a bespoke engagement methodology in order to obtain input from children and young people on the reform of the YSGS.

Children and young people are the ultimate beneficiaries of youth work and, in accordance with the recommendations of the Participation Framework, the YSGS-reform project team conducted meaningful engagement with this key stakeholder cohort at an early stage in the reform process.

After an initial consultation design phase, three consultations were held. Twenty-five young people from across Ireland were subsequently recruited, via Comhairle Na nÓg and the National Youth Organisations, to participate in one of three online consultations which were held in November 2021.

The consultations explored four broad questions:

1. What is working well in universal youth services?
2. Are there barriers to accessing the services?
3. What are the current gaps in current provision?
4. Are there any changes you'd like to see?

Grouped Key Themes:

Table 10 illustrates the top priority identified by each consultation group; these priorities were then further consolidated by the independent report writer into 5 key themes (as outlined below).

Table 10: Priority themes by group

	Top Priority	Second Priority	Third Priority
Group 1	(Need for) Awareness	Personal Development	Technical Support
Group 2	Accessibility	Lack of Awareness	Social Development
Group 3	Barriers To Entry	Social Interaction	Youth Culture

Thematic Findings

1) Personal Development (Yellow)
Feedback on this theme was overwhelmingly positive, with young people valuing the opportunity to socialise and focus on personal growth. Some quotes voicing the value young people place on youth services:

- *"improves confidence in young people"*

- *"It gives young people an opportunity to learn new skills and make connections"*

2) Awareness of Services (Green)
The lack of awareness of available services to young people was a consistent theme across the consultations. In particular the groups highlighted the need for services to appreciate the "youth appeal" of their communications.

- *"Not a lot of young people know about the groups. In my group everyone who has joined found out from another friend… others don't know about these opportunities."*

- *"there is not an Instagram account to be seen"*

3) Accessibility and Availability (Purple)

This theme was broadly positive, reflecting the inclusive atmosphere within youth services. The transition to online or hybrid service provision was noted as a big positive over the last number of years. However, there was an acknowledgement that online provision has its drawbacks, particularly when used for extended periods.

- *"This online approach allows us to stay connected with the community. In my first move to college I lost the connection to my home club. But now it is lovely to be able to zoom back in"*

- *"Online works well when everyone knows each other. But if you aren't involved in the group, it can be hard to join in."*

4) Barriers to Entry and retention (Red)

A number of barriers were identified which related to joining or staying with youth services including (1) experience of bullying and intimidation; (2) needing to travel long distances to attend (3) capacity (4) costs (5) time commitment (6) reaching maximum age as a member (7) public and peer perception of UYS

- *"The biggest barrier is travel. As a small group we have had to think about this. We need to consider how best to address this e.g. rent a bus or ask parents."*

- *"One young person described bullying as a hidden barrier to participating in universal youth services."*

5) Technical Support (Blue)

Described as 'Technical Support', participants outlined some of the challenges facing services which included: (a) lack of trained leaders; (2) lack of volunteers; (3) Garda vetting; (4) buildings and spaces (5) funding and (6) internal communication issues

- *"If I want to go to the youth club, currently we don't have a youth leader to run it, so we haven't had youth council this year, so I have to go to the Galway one."*

- *"some services could be made more accessible for people who have disabilities, e.g. in wheel chairs"*

Three Overarching Recommendations:

Table 11: Recommendations made by young people that could be undertaken by the YSGS Reform Project

Recommendation	Specifics associated with each recommendation
Increased awareness of organisations providing Universal Youth Services	• Directory/Website providing info on local services • Proactive Engagement (via participants 'representing' their orgs to other children and young people – in appropriate for age)
Provide Technical Support and Resources	• Funding earmarked for training Leaders & Volunteers • Buildings and Spaces (accessibility and availability) • Funding (more effective usage)
Involve Young People in Decision Making	• Youth involvement on boards/steering groups • Input on programmes • Involve young people in Social Media campaigns

Section 5: Literature Review Assessment (Implications and insights for the reform project)

On foot of a competitive process, the project team commissioned Dr Bernadine Brady (UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUIG) to undertake a Literature Review of the benefits and measureable outcomes associated with (Universal) Youth Work.

There are four distinct aspects of the insights gleaned in the Literature Review that have the potential to directly impact the reform of the YSGS:

1. Defining Universal Youth Work
2. The benefits of Universal Youth Work
3. Measurable Outcomes and Universal Youth Work
4. Emergent Themes

5.1 Unpacking the meaning of Universal Youth Work:

This is a surprisingly ambiguous term and the Literature Review notes that many attempts have been made to pin this concept down – the ambiguous nature of this concept will have implications for the reform project; the project team will need to negotiate an agreed conception of universal youth work with the project's primary stakeholders, as part of the work envisaged on the *Policy Intent* deliverable.

Most commonly, universal youth work is defined in contradistinction to targeted youth work, and a number of theoretical criteria associated with universal (or 'open'/mainstream) youth work are captured in the Literature Review. The report notes that universal youth work can be said to be:

- Not pre-determined with respect to purpose, or aimed at addressing specific issues, needs or problems as defined by policy makers
- Recognises the unpredictable and flexible nature of the work in which outcomes are allowed to emerge and are negotiated with young people
- Is an open process in terms of access and curriculum – which necessarily entails a degree of indeterminacy
- Is associated with more positive framings – in contrast to the 'deficit' models adopted in targeted youth work practice
- Is often associated with 'soft' outcomes compared to meeting 'hard' or predetermined outcomes in targeted youth work.
- Is voluntary – young people can attend and leave at will

In the context of the YSGS, the above criteria can be useful in clarifying why *Involve* & *BeLong To* (to take two examples) are rightly considered as universal youth work services, even though they could be considered to have a targeted audience. In this interpretation, issue based work can be universal: *If adults and young people, being partners in the learning process and curriculum, emerging from the lived experience of young people, are regarded as foundational principles*[2]

In a similar fashion, Doherty et al (2019) perceive of 'open' youth work to mean open in its orientation. *In such an interpretation, while groups have an open remit, they may operate with boundaries such as age limits or some, for example black and minority ethnic youth groups, may be for those with 'specific shared identities and experiences'.*

The key point, as highlighted by the Literature Review, is that we must be careful in defining universal youth work; but this definition is worth elucidating as it will be of significant importance when establishing qualifying criteria for the YSGS for example, and an agreed definition may also help us in setting out the vision for the reformed YSGS

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[2] McGregor, Callum 2015. Universal Youth Work: A Critical Review of the Literature. Edinburgh Youth Work Consortium and The University of Edinburgh (p. 65)

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Personal Development & Growth	Civic Values & Behaviour	Health & Wellbeing	Education, Career & Hard Skills
192	82	41	15
Confidence/Self-Confidence	Civic Engagement/ Social action / Volunteering / Service to community	Having a Place of Safety	Academic/Grades Improvement
Identity Development	Leadership skills / taking leadership	Relational/Physical/ Emotional Wellbeing	Career aspirations
Communication/Presentation Skills	Understanding and embracing equality and diversity	Drug Taking/Intentions to use drugs lower in participants than in general population	Learned Skills [music production, creative arts, digital media technology]
Motivation to Participate in Youth Club/Engagement in Youth Programme	Critical Consciousness / awareness of social issues / empowerment	Alcohol intake/intentions lower in participants than in general population	IT Skills/Computer Programming
Strengthened Character/Personal Growth	Community connectedness	Happiness/Positive Affect	Positive Academic Attitude
Personal Agency Skills	Social responsibility values	Reduced Negative Affect	Studying
General Knowledge & Life Skills Development	Political Engagement / capital	Improved self-assessment of Risky Behaviour	Exam Preparation
Openness to feedback	Social Capital	Coping with Stress/Stress	Engagement in school/school

5.2 Benefits of Universal Youth Work:

Table 12 above condenses the findings from the literature review, with respect to positive outcomes associated with universal youth work. Some 72 research papers were fully reviewed as part of this lit review. Within these papers, some **440** individual positive outcomes/benefits of universal youth work were identified. These benefits were categorised in the literature review into the 5 domains, shown above.

The findings section of the Literature Review opens with a robust 'stating of the case' on the importance of universal youth work:

> *Universal youth work is primarily associated with 'positive' framings of youth, with a number of policy instruments emphasising its role in ensuring active participation, empowerment and youth citizenship. In response to the current and evolving needs of young people, policy debates and discourse increasingly highlight the potential for youth work to address issues such as integration, inter-culturalism and sustainable development and to incorporate democratic and rights-based perspectives (P. 62)*

Factors that can generate positive outcomes/benefits:

The Literature Review, in addition to identifying benefits of universal youth work, also tries to link these outcomes to the factors that help produce the outcomes.

Caution must be used when discussing factors and associated outcomes – as it is often difficult to demonstrate causation – a potentially useful way of thinking about this relationship is sketched out below

Figure 7: Associative links between factors and outcomes
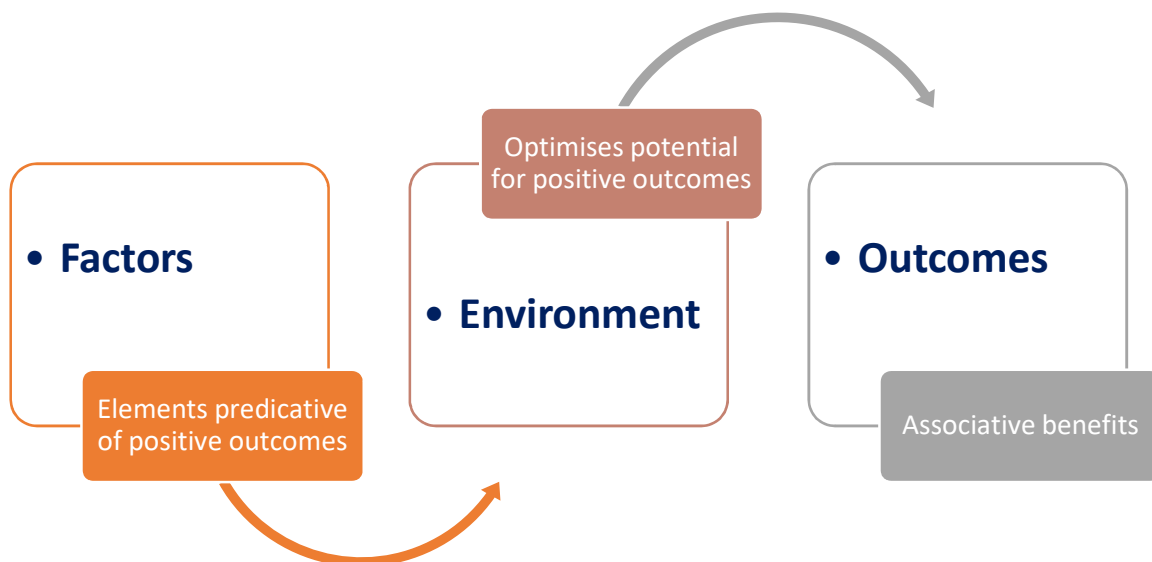
The Literature Review identifies 3 key factors/elements that are most associated with generating positive outcomes as follows:

- Having a safe, welcoming, accessible youth-work space
- Effective adult leadership

- Undertaking meaningful activities

As the factors and outcomes form an associative, rather than causative, relationship, this framework can only be relied upon to demonstrate the benefits of universal youth work, it doesn't provide a model for an outcome evaluation model. The Literature Review does however, provide a number of key insights into the evaluation process.

5.3 Measurable Outcomes and Universal Youth Work:

The Literature Review captures a definition of outcomes (from *Bovaird and Davies)* as: *the results that services provide that have an impact on the lives of service users and citizens[3]*. Expanding on this concept, the Literature Review states that: *In essence, adopting an outcome-based approach focuses attention on the impact of an intervention rather than on associated activities and outputs. (P19)*

The emergent opinion from the Literature Review is that outcome based assessment is particularly difficult with respect to universal youth work, because of its open nature and focus on personal growth and development, in contrast to the more deficit adjustment nature of targeted youth work. Some of the issues identified with outcome assessment include:

- Defining appropriate outcomes and obtaining operational performance indicators to assess them
- Prescribed outcomes can be harmful to youth work's distinctive ethos as young person led and centred
- Not assigning feasible and measurable operational indicators to desired outcomes

The Literature Review provides practical advice in this regard, which can be broken into two broad categories:

A. Negotiate appropriate outcomes with youth work organisations

Such engagement negates the likelihood that the outcomes remain developmental or aspirational. Engagement on this topic also allows both policy makers and the organisations working in the youth-work space to work together to demonstrate the value of youth-work.

B. Differentiate between hard and soft outcomes

Hard outcomes have clearly definable and quantifiable results that show the progress a beneficiary has made towards achieving desirable outcomes. Soft or developmental outcomes are less easy to observe or measure, often because they relate to the 'internal balance' of a person: a change in attitude, confidence or self-control.

The evidence captured in the Literature Review seems to indicate that not only should a performance evaluation model on the reformed YSGS seek to differentiate between these two types

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[3] Bovaird, T. and Davies, R. (2011) 'Outcome-based service commissioning and delivery: Does it make a difference?' in Groenveld, S. and Van De Walle, S., eds., *New Steering Concepts in Public Management.* Volume 21, Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 93–114.

of outcomes, but also that different techniques should be used in monitoring and assessing the performance of organisations with respect to outcomes.

Differentiation and preparation: In addition to agreeing on appropriate and relevant outcomes with participating organisations, another key aspect to outcome assessment, as evidenced in the Literature Review, is the importance of gathering base-line data prior to the operationalisation of an outcome assessment model.

Soft-skills: the evidence emphasises the importance of engaging with young people (the appendix to the Literature Review contains a number of models that can be used for this purpose) at different points in their experience with youth clubs/organisations. This would necessitate an engagement with young people shortly after they join the organisation (on a voluntary basis) to partake in a survey/focus group/etc. to establish baseline levels with respect to the outcomes identified as being measurable. The volunteers for this engagement would then be reengaged, via the same mechanism as the initial engagement, in order to track their *Distance travelled*.

Hard Skills: Similarly, it is recommended that baseline data be generated, with regard to key indicators associated with the agreed outcome prior to the implementation of the reformed scheme. Once the data has been collated on the relevant key indicators a model/tool could be designed (incorporating aspects of the renewed reporting requirements) that would allow for objective measurement and assessment of each organisation and the reformed scheme as a whole on an ongoing basis. This would enable the inclusion/development of a performance management component to the funding model.

5.4 Emergent Themes:

The Literature Review provides evidence and insights with respect to the following key emergent themes:

I.   *Digitalisation* - A key factor in determining the success of digital youth work related to the skills and commitment of youth workers and their ability to create safe online spaces for young people. A recent study also highlighted the reality that 72%[4] of young people in Ireland lacked adequate digital access. The reform project will need to consider the implications (training, upgrading of equipment, supports for young people, etc.) when considering whether increased online service delivery should be incentivised via the YSGS funding model.

II. *Integration and inter-culturalism* - Evidence suggests that young people can be fully supported to explore their cultural journey in mainstream youth groups. Importantly, their Involvement offered a 'normalising' experience, with an important facet of integration to be participating in the wider community and in groups and activities around a common interest. Critical to the experience however was having their 'cultural and ethnic identities recognised, embodied and shared in a positive light.

5.5 Conclusions and Recommendations:

The Literature Review furnished by Dr Brady and her team is a comprehensive assessment of recent research in the area of universal youth work. The research team has sought to leverage the insights

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[4] *Adequate digital access* refers to broadband access and access to appropriate equipment (laptop/desktop/tablet).

captured in this review by identifying a number of conclusions and recommendations from their research which have the potential to impact the reform of the YSGS:

- There is overwhelming evidence that demonstrates the benefits and utility of Universal Youth Work/Mainstream Youth Work.
- The reform project should attempt to clarify the meaning of universal youth work in order to provide clarity with respect to organisations seeking funding under the YSGS.
- Outcome Based Assessment should be undertaken as a joint-venture between DCEDIY and the organisations delivering universal youth services.
- Differentiation with respect to 'soft' and 'hard' outcomes should be factored into any outcome evaluation model; with consideration given for the inclusion of participatory evaluation within any such model.
- Emergent themes, such as digitalisation, owing to the relative scarcity of evidence, need to be rigorously assessed prior to any policy decisions being implemented with respect to the reform of the YSGS

Section 6: YSGS Reform Project Goal, Objectives and Deliverables:

6.1: Overarching goal of the reform project

The ultimate goal of this project is to reform the YSGS in order to deliver a scheme that is more responsive to the current needs of young people, facilitates national youth organisations to more effectively deliver services to young people and to improve the governance, oversight and performance of the scheme so that Exchequer funding is both protected end efficiently utilised.

6.2 Reform project objectives

The objectives underpinning the YSGS reform project are as follows:

- Improve accessibility to YSGS, utilising input and insights from children and young people to create conditions for increasing the rates of participation in universal youth services.
- Develop mechanisms that empowers funded organisations to actively and agilely respond to demographic and other dynamic factors impacting the eligible cohort of children and young people
- Institute governance standards that enhance levels of assurance and oversight with respect to Exchequer funding
- Ensure the grant funding process is transparent and rooted in evidence
- Provide for transparent access to the reformed YSGS, thereby facilitating the evolution of the YSGS to better reflect contemporary universal youth services environment

6.3 YSGS Reform Deliverables:

Having taken into consideration the input provided by key stakeholders and having regard to the Literature Review findings, DCEDIY has significantly revised the original project deliverables. The amended deliverables are 12 tangible outputs of the project with the potential to materially and positively affect how the YSGS is administered, and how the scheme impacts the lives of young people participating in universal youth services.

These deliverables have been broken down into 2 categories:

- *Core deliverables* – changes to the scheme necessary to meet the threshold for a successful reform of the YSGS (including the implementation of outstanding internal audit recommendations).

  Deliverables 1 – 7 below have been categorised as core reforms

- **Core + deliverables** – further changes to the scheme that would have a meaningful and positive impact

  Deliverables 8 – 12 below have been categorised as core+ reforms

The categorisation of deliverables in this manner facilitates a broader consideration of policy delivery options (as outlined below).

1. **Clarify, (re)define and communicate the policy intent underpinning the reformed YSGS, having regard to the existing philosophy of the YSGS and current legislation and policy frameworks.**

As noted above, the original policy intent underpinning the YSGS is not clearly understood by all of the participants on this scheme, owing in part to the longevity of this scheme. Whilst the guidance paper published by the (then) Department of Education in the mid-80s can act as a strong reference point for the proposed reset of the policy intent, the ultimate guiding principle in advancing this deliverable will be to develop a policy intent that delivers for the youth work sector, young people and the Exchequer.

Consistent feedback has been provided by participating organisations that they would benefit from having the policy intent of the YSGS clarified and clearly communicated to them. There is a clear mandate therefore to clarify the core policy intent underpinning the reformed YSGS. This mandate is strengthened by the fact that this deliverable is one of 3 outstanding recommendations to be implemented from the Internal Audit conducted by Mazars on behalf of DCEDIY.

In light of the importance of this deliverable, the YSGS-reform project team included a proposal for the establishment of a working group on this deliverable as part of the reform governance implementation plan. The objective of the policy intent working group is to generate a proposal for the Project Steering Committee's consideration and approval on the following key aspects of the project to reform the YSGS:

    I.   The policy intent of the (reformed) YSGS
    II. The Vision for the (reformed) YSGS

The working group's proposal will also be submitted to the YSGS Reform Project Advisory Group for input from this key stakeholder body.

The working group's parameters for resetting the policy intent are provided by current legislative (Youth Work Act, 2001) and key strategy documents (BOBF, National Youth Policy Framework, etc.). It is anticipated that the restated policy intent will seek to provide clarity with respect to currently ambiguous/contested issues pertaining to the YSGS, including:

- Defining the purpose of YSGS funding
- Outlining the ethos/core concepts that YSGS funding is designed to support
- The age-range of young people 'eligible' for services funded by the YSGS

2. **Ensure qualifying criteria align with the redefined purpose/philosophy of the reformed YSGS and that same have regard to the current make-up of YSGS participants.**

Another consistent component of the input provided by participating organisations was the recommendation that transparent and relevant criteria be established and utilised with respect to how organisations qualify for YSGS funding. This input is strongly in accordance with DCEDIY's recognition of the need for such qualifying criteria. The current lack of operationally active qualifying criteria for YSGS funding has created a number of issues with the administration of the YSGS, including:

- The inability to institute robust Service Level Agreements (SLAs) between the scheme's funding intermediary (Pobal) and participating organisations
- The inadvisability or risk of actively seeking new participants without established criteria

Given the diverse nature of the organisational complexity and typology, it is anticipated that organisations could be categorised, according to logical metrics, with varying criteria being tailored for the different strands. Whether this approach is taken or not, careful consideration will be given by DCEDIY as to how the composition of organisations currently in receipt of YSGS funding will need to be factored into the generation of applicable qualifying criteria. The project team undertakes to be especially receptive and sensitive to input provided by national youth organisations with regards to this deliverable.

3. **Ensure the reformed grant scheme rules and guidelines are in alignment with criteria and policy intent without being overly onerous for organisations.**

In accordance with public spending rules, there is a grant funding agreement currently in operation between DCEDIY and the 30 national youth organisations funded under the YSGS. It will be necessary to overhaul the existing funding agreement as part of the reform process.

The revised grant funding agreement should act as a compliment/supplement to the YSGS funding criteria. It is anticipated that DCEDIY will work closely with the YSGS's current funding intermediary (Pobal) in order to compile a revised grant funding that seeks to ensure both the grantors (DCEDIY) and grantees (funding recipients) are fully compliant with their obligations under Circular 2013/14 (and all other public spending rules)

Input from currently funded organisations has reinforced DCEDIY's perception that Pobal is performing its role as funding intermediary in an effective and efficient manner and DCEDIY anticipates being able to utilise Pobal's vast experience and expertise with respect to the pursuit of this deliverable.

4. **Create conditions to enable the assigned funding intermediary to establish tailored Service Level Agreements with funded organisations.**

Whilst the Department has in place an effective Performance Delivery Agreement (PDA) with the YSGS funding Intermediary (Pobal) there are no such agreements (or Service Level Agreements – SLAs) in place between Pobal and the funded organisations.

The absence of SLAs/PDAs between Pobal and the funded organisations is an oversight/governance gap that needs to be rectified quite urgently in order to give Pobal and the Department the mechanism to more effectively govern Exchequer funding. This deliverable is another of the outstanding recommendations from the Mazars audit.

DCEDIY will need to have cognisance that a number of organisations currently receiving funding under the YSGS are heavily reliant on volunteers to complete their administrative undertakings. Accordingly, DCEDIY will need to ensure that adequate supports are made available to those organisations when new requirements such as this deliverable are rolled out.

5. **Augment existing governance standards to ensure that all grantor/grantee obligations are adhered to in a transparent manner, having regard to governance requirements in relation to organisation complexity.**

Whilst some governance and oversight measures are currently in place on the YSGS, the reform of this scheme will include a strengthening and formalisation of all governance requirements and the development of a framework that will allow for the efficient and effective administration of YSGS funded organisations.

A number of factors will need to be considered by DCEDIY so as to recognise and act on the input received from funded organisations. Factors include:

- Ensuring the governance requirements are tailored to meet the relative complex organisations
- Actively considering how the YSGS governance framework can utilise the Charities Governance Code. (As all current participating YSGS organisations are either charities, or part of groups registered as charities, they need to be in compliance with the Charities Governance Code).

The intention behind the implementation of a governance framework on the reformed YSGS is to provide greater levels of assurance with respect to Exchequer funding without placing an excessive administrative burden on participating organisations.

6. **Implement a transparent facility to avail of YSGS funding (subject to minimum qualifying criteria) and develop a support system for existing YSGS struggling to meet qualifying criteria**

The landscape of the YSGS funded organisations is rooted in the period of this schemes inception i.e. the early 1980s. Owing to the operational deficiencies that currently limit DCEDIY's oversight and governance capacity, it has been rightly deemed, as a matter of policy, that the scheme is not currently on a stable enough footing to accept new applicants to the scheme.

The implementation of deliverables 1 – 5 (above) will allow for the creation of a transparent entry mechanism for those organisations in the youth work sector who meet the reformed scheme's qualifying criteria. It is important to note that other funding agreements between DCEDIY and NGOs in the social services field have been impacted by state aid rules, when deficiencies in transparency and accessibility for new entrants in accessing funding to deliver similar services were identified. Accordingly, ensuring that the reformed YSGS institutes such a transparent mechanism will safeguard this scheme from such concerns.

DCEDIY noted that a number of currently funded organisations expressed their support for opening the scheme for new entrants, whilst also expressing concerns regarding any proposed procedures for discontinuing funding for YSGS recipients. DCEDIY will therefore ensure that the support structures are available for any organisations currently receiving YSGS funding and experiencing difficulties in meeting their grantee obligations under the reformed scheme.

7. **Develop and implement a grant funding/allocation model; one that incorporates core funding with elements of performance-based funding (and potentially, project specific and demand related funding)**

A grant allocation model, based on a number of metrics/variables (to be agreed) , is one of the key recommendations from the 2017 Internal Audit that still requires integration into the YSGS.

The recommendation in the Mazars report states consideration should be given to the following key variables when calculating each grantee award:

- Type of organisation, its size and membership and the projects within
- Range and scope of services to be provided, the changes in service delivery from the previous year with detailed costings for approval.
- List of proposed expenditure (payroll/pension costs per staff member, office costs, 'other' costs).
- Checklist of expected annual outputs and deliverables.

- How payroll costs are applied and the element that relates to pension and pension arrangements.
- Detailed breakdown of non-pay costs and a list of all properties funded.
- Alignment of grantees to the National Youth Strategy 2015-2020.

DCEDIY retains the ability to vary the particulars of this recommendation, as more relevant metrics may be identified for such a model. However, the principle of identifying key variables, and utilising these for the calculation of funding will be followed. The audit report doesn't recognise the organisational diversity amongst current YSGS recipients and such variability will impact the scope and shape of this deliverable.

A variable that should be actively considered for inclusion in this model pertains to how volunteers are attained and retained, a recurring concern vocalised by both the YSGS-organisations and young people. In order to design and implement an effective grant funding model, concerted engagement with these two stakeholder groups will be paramount so as to ensure that their concerns in this area are appropriately addressed by the reform project.

The grant funding model should also incorporate a facility to allow DCEDIY and YSGS funded organisations to agilely respond to developments on the ground; as they arise. This may necessitate a portion of the (total) annual YSGS allocation being withheld at the commencement of each funding cycle (which begins in January). Such a methodology would also allow for the consideration of project-specific funding (a development which would be in alignment with consistent feedback provided by the feedback).

8. **Develop, in negotiation with YSGS funded organisations and subject-matter experts, an outcomes based assessment model; designed to build an evidence base to demonstrate multi-dimensional value of youth work**

As noted in the section on the Literature Review, there is strong evidence emerging that an outcomes bases assessment model is the preeminent methodology for measuring the impact of (universal) youth work on young people. Implementing such a model would also allow DCEDIY to respond to the strong input received from YSGS funded organisations on the need for this scheme to provide data that demonstrates the value of youth work, to young people participating and to society as a whole.

There is also an obligation on DCEDIY to ensure that the reform of the YSGS includes a mechanism for monitoring the performance of organisations receiving YSGS funding, with respect to a number of identified variables/metrics – which will be linked with the grant funding model. In order to develop this two-pronged evaluation framework it will be necessary (as demonstrated by evidence collated in the Literature Review) to differentiate between hard and soft outcomes. The former will focus on the performance of organisations and the latter on the impact that services funded by the YSGS are having on young people.

Both elements comprising the proposed evaluation framework will need to be built in close conjunction with young people and national youth organisations.

9. **Encourage and incentivise the active participation of young people throughout the youth work environment, providing scope for their voice on policy formulation through to implementation**

As outlined earlier in this paper, DCEDIY has already received insightful and compelling input from young people with regards to the reform of the YSGS.

The number one priority for young people is for their voice to be heard more often and more effectively with respect to the services and programmes that are funded via YSGS funding.

This is a priority recognised by both DCEDIY and, via their input to the project team, the funded organisations. DCEDIY will continue to provide a forum for young people to shape the reform of the YSGS and undertakes to rigorously assess how the voice of young people can be amplified as part of any future funding agreements between DCEDIY and national youth organisations.

This deliverable has the potential to positively disrupt the current dynamic between DCEDIY, national youth organisations and young people. It will only be achieved however, if all three parties play an active role in implementation/realisation.

10. **Encourage and incentivise methods for reducing the potential barriers young people can encounter in trying to participate in youth work services, including accessibility, awareness, equality and integration initiatives.**

DCEDIY had already intended for this deliverable to be included within the scope of the reform project's ambit. This intention was considerably sharpened and heightened by the insights provided by young people on this topic.

The unifying element of the wide-ranging input provided by young people was the breadth of sub-issues that can lie under bigger issues; demonstrating the need to fully interrogate the multiplicity of potential barriers being experienced by young people in accessing youth work services.

Previous research on this topic (captured in the Literature Review and elsewhere) also provides a number of insights which will have direct relevance on this issue – the fact that 72% of young people don't have the facility to properly engage with online services is something that needs to be addressed if online services are to continue beyond the lockdown era for example.

DCEDIY will continue to engage with young people, and national youth organisations, in order to explore optimum methodologies for reducing barriers however they manifest. The barrier most widely referenced by young people was a lack of awareness of what services are available to young people. Accordingly, the reform project team could look at future-proofing the grant funding model by enabling it to incorporate additional variables, such as awareness programmes (driven by young people), within the model's structure.

11. **Implement a mechanism that links adherence to the National Quality Standards Framework to the grant allocation/performance evaluation framework.**

There are multiple aspects of the proposed reform of the YSGS, as outlined in this paper, which 'speak to each other' – i.e. where the utility of one deliverable is contingent on other deliverables. Creating an environment for improving the quality of services delivered by youth organisations is another such example.

The National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work (NQSF) was rolled out on an incremental basis in 2012. The NQSF was designed as a support and development tool to encourage youth organisations to review and assess their work and to assist in the continuous development of their services.

In order to elevate quality-related aspects of youth services, DCEDIY undertakes to interrogate how best to incentivise adherence to the NQSF within the grant-funding/service delivery model i.e. all funded organisations would need to meet a minimum quality threshold, but those that exceed this threshold could qualify for additional funding.

This undertaking is supported by the input we received from funded organisations which highlights the benefits of utilising the existing framework in order to drive quality standards.

12. Transfer reporting and data collection/collation to an ICT platform, designed to both improve the evidence base and to lower the administrative burden on participating organisations.

Participating organisations have provided overwhelming support for the transfer of the YSGS application and reporting procedures to a fully online version – with the caveat that any such system should be user-friendly and reduce the administrative burden on organisations.

Requirements under this heading are closely aligned with the governance framework and the performance evaluation framework objectives.

Implementing this deliverable would allow for in-depth and real-time analysis of the data submitted by participating organisations, allowing the department to engage with the operational picture revealed by the data in an agile and proactive manner.

Section 7: YSGS Reform Delivery Options and next stages

7.1 Two Phase implementation of identified deliverables

A number of project delivery options were presented to the DCEDIY Management Board and to Minister O'Gorman, whereupon the preferred option of the project team (outlined below) was approved.

The project team will undertake to achieve all of the identified deliverables, in two distinct phases:

Phase 1 - **Core Deliverables** being readied for implementation by **January 2024**. These deliverables are those classified as most urgent based on being either outstanding Internal Audit recommendations, or being necessary to bring the oversight and administration of the scheme up to modern standards.

1. **Clarify, (re)define and communicate the policy intent underpinning the reformed YSGS**
2. **Ensure qualifying criteria align with the redefined purpose/philosophy of the reformed**
3. **Ensure the reformed grant scheme rules and guidelines are in alignment with criteria and policy intent**
4. **Create conditions to enable the assigned funding intermediary to establish tailored SLAs**
5. **Augment existing governance standards to ensure that all grantor/grantee obligations are observed**
6. **Implement a transparent 'entry/exit' mechanism system**
7. **Develop and implement a grant funding/allocation model**

Phase 2 would see the remaining (**Core Plus)** deliverables being readied for implementation by **January 2025** – these deliverables are not explicitly fundamental reforms, but they reflect a number of the deliverables that were identified on foot of our engagement with young people and the sector:

8. **Develop, an outcomes based assessment model**
9. **Encourage and incentivise the active participation of young people**
10. **Reduce barriers to entry**
11. **Layer quality standards (NQSF) onto the grant funding/evaluation framework**
12. **Transfer reporting and data collection/collation to an ICT platform**

This 2-phase strategy has the benefit of being able to implement all identified deliverables and takes cognisance of the need to proceed at as fast a pace as feasibly possible.

7.2 Project Governance:

The project team is cognisant of the need for effective project governance. Accordingly a project governance implementation paper has been prepared and the below components from same have been implemented/will be implemented in the near future:

Project Steering Committee

The Project Steering Committee (PSC) will be the key decision-making forum for the Youth Services Grant Scheme (YSGS) Reform project. All reforms to the YSGS are to be approved by the PSC and its role will be to ensure that these reforms are in line with the objectives and deliverables outlined in the Policy Option Paper and Project Implementation Plan.

The YSGS reform PSC had its first meeting in March, 2021 and it is planned for this body to meet on a monthly basis.

Project Advisory Group

The purpose of the Project Advisory Group (PAG) is to provide high-level advice and support to the YSGS project team and Steering Committee as required/requested. The Project Advisory Group (PAG) is to be comprised of stakeholders with expertise and experience of Youth Work and the needs of young people addressed by youth work in Ireland, under an independent Chairperson.

The first PAG meeting is scheduled to take place on July 1st, 2022 and it is planned to have between 4/6 PAG meetings a year.

Working Groups

It is the intention of the project team to establish working groups to bring proposals on domain-specific tasks to the Project Steering Committee for approval/input. In utilising working groups for support and additional insight, the project team is hoping to expand its capabilities to progress multiple work streams in parallel with one another. A pilot working group will be established to examine the policy intent and vision for the YSGS reform project, with a view to providing a paper to the PSC for consideration and assessment. In consultation with the PAG, the Steering Committee will ultimately approve the policy intent and vision underpinning the reformed YSGS.

7.3 Stakeholder Engagement

The project team, and DCEDIY, have committed to undertaking meaningful and ongoing engagement with project stakeholders. This commitment was borne out by the preliminary engagement undertaken since October 2021 with primary stakeholders. It is the project team's intention to maintain its active and attentive engagement ethos and to this end, a rigorous stakeholder analysis was undertaken.

On foot of this analysis, a comprehensive Communications Plan was prepared and actioned. This plan outlines in detail how and how often the project team intends to engage with each stakeholder group. Additionally, this plan is to be published on the YSGS Reform microsite on Gov.ie when this is available, so that our engagement intentions are transparent and the project team can be held accountable by all external stakeholders.

7.4 Project Visibility

It is anticipated that a YSGS reform project 'microsite' will go live on Gov.ie in Q2, 2022; this site will contain all material germane to the reform of the YSGS. Outputs generated in the course of the project will be approved for publication by the steering committee.

This website will allow DCEDIY to maintain a high degree of visibility and accountability for this important project and is in line with our Department's stated goal of working with all stakeholders to achieve better outcomes.

7.5 Project Implementation Plan

The project team are currently engaged in the development of an implementation plan which will set out the precise details and timeframes of the next phases of the project.