



**Youth
Employability
Competences**



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METHODOLOGICAL GUIDE

**YEC – Youth Employability Competences
Strategy for Developing Advisory Boards**
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STRATEGY FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE AND EMPLOYERS IN ADVISORY BOARDS

YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY COMPETENCES (YEC)

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It has long been established that young people must be supported to participate in the design and creation of responses to their ongoing educational, training and employment needs.

The Youth Employability Competences ("YEC") is a practitioner-led project and this Methodological Guide focuses on innovative and engaging approaches to help re-think how employability competences are developed.

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FOREWORD

The Youth Employment Competences (YEC) project was designed to help young people and youth workers validate and improve youth work practice through a Youth and Employer Advisory Board Methodology. This was to be achieved by identifying key gaps in employability competences to boost their respective employability and career prospects by co-producing with employers a practice-led programme of lifelong learning and continuing professional development learning opportunities. Enabling the Youth and Employer Board Methodology for the entire length of the YEC project ensured that young people had the opportunity to have input on all elements of project design, tool development and evaluation.

YEC was created from an identified need outlined by Youth Workers and the need for greater interagency collaboration and working practices that foster greater levels of positive transitions for young people. Effective practice was drawn not only from partner organisations but also the learning and legacies from projects such as Ep-Dem Labs (Equity, Participation and Decision-Making 562228-EPP-1-2015-1-DE-EPPKA3-PI-Forward), PETE (Positive Engagement for a Transition Towards Employment (2016-2-UK01-KA205-024937) and Euro-IVET which addressed the 'culture clash' between disadvantaged young people living in major urban and inner-city environments, employers and vocational education provision. Whilst the resources and legacies from such projects are valued, so are the emerging innovations, creative and practice-led thinking within the world of youth employability and especially Youth Work.

YEC was delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting health and well-being and economic crisis, which has disproportionately impacted young people and the sectors that primarily provide employment and apprenticeships for young people. From the outset, it was the intention of the YEC partners to ensure that it provides a case study and blueprint for others seeking to engage young people and local employers in employability programme design that responds **to local socio-economic conditions and dynamics**. It seems now, more than ever, unlocking the full potential of **local partners and stakeholders** to fuel and support community and economic recovery is needed, especially given the significance of young people being the future workforce for Europe's economy.

ABSTRACT

With the intention of presenting a practical evidence-based practice approach, this Methodological Guide is meant to provide assistance to those seeking to and implement a co-design and co-production approach to locally-focused employability programmes. The Guide aims to draw upon the experiences of project partners and collaborators with the longer-term aim to promote an effective practice approach of such initiatives in the future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the heart of the Youth Employability Competences (YEC) project is a commitment to embedding a youth work approach in employability programmes designed for young people. This is important as it is broadly suggested that Youth Work is a distinct educational process adapted across a variety of settings to support a young person's personal, social and educational development, to facilitate their exploration of values, beliefs, ideas and issues, enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society, and to acquire a set of practical or technical skills and competencies, to realise their full potential.¹

Another key feature of YEC is the fairly new concept of engaging young people (18-30), employers and youth workers in the co-production of employability programmes that uniquely address the needs of the local society and economy. Over a number of years, there has been a movement of innovation frameworks that have included a learner-centred or learner-led through to a co-design approach – it can be argued that each of these, whilst taking the learner into consideration, still place the 'power of production' in the hands of educational curriculum designers. However, the concept of co-production appears to offer an opportunity for involving more than one person in the design process and ultimately making something happen. Co-production offers huge scope for reducing failure rate and significantly improving the end user's experience of the employability service. Therefore, the YEC Methodological Guide focuses upon setting out and further exploring effective Youth and Employer Advisory Board Methodology along with capturing the impact of such approaches on key stakeholders.

1. A co-production approach

Tasked with facilitating Youth and Employer Advisory Boards those partners responsible focused on a co-production approach that would best help those furthest from the labour market, as a result of social and economic deprivation. Therefore, the method used to set up and implement the Advisory Boards needed to include engagement processes to retain and sustain participation. Further, Board activities needed to ensure that young people were given the opportunity to develop their motivation, autonomy and communication skills, along with being mindful of their personal wellness. Partner Rinova took responsibility for consulting with partners on the development of the Methodological Guide as an ongoing process throughout the project, which benefitted from the diversity of approaches traditionally used and the creative insight of partners Ballymun Job Centre, STRIM, Turku and CIOFS-FP. These four partners took responsibility for establishing the Youth and Employer Boards, with Rinova overseeing implementation through post-Advisory Board reflective reviews as part of the internal evaluation process.

¹ National Youth Agency, England

One of YEC's key aims was to promote quality youth work and promote empowerment by achieving the following objectives:

- Increase the employability of young people
- Increase the validation of young people's employability competences
- Increase the engagement of young people in competency tool development
- Increase the focus on young people's employability and their youth practitioners

2. Advisory Board Methodology

The Youth and Employer Advisory Boards had a key role in advising the partnership on how to create employability programmes that respond to the needs of young people and support them in developing personal, social and employability competences. In conjunction with the Advisory Boards, each partner took responsibility for identifying the competences to be addressed by creating a youth-led training compendium of continuing professional development modules for youth-workers and employability practitioners. Therefore, it was essential that the Advisory Board methodology took the following into account:

- A methodology that created a space for dialogue between young people, employers and the project partnership.
- Ensured that the project promoted authentic youth engagement and participation.
- Created Youth and Employer Advisory Boards to influence and shape the tools developed through the project.
- Ensured that the Youth and Employer Advisory Boards provided a platform for the identification of lifelong employment competences.
- Facilitated the Youth and Employer Advisory Boards so that they were able to agree on the skills and competency agenda for the project.

Integral to the approach was:

A Youth Work Approach to foster an ethical way of working to ensure that young people are meaningfully engaged, and their voices heard to gain an insight into young people's experiences, and Employers being fully engaged in developing solutions that informed vocational education, training and employment practices that enable young people to gain lifelong employment competences.

Those responsible for facilitating the Advisory Boards fixed dates that best fit their local environment, however, were scheduled within the following timeframe:

• Advisory Board Meeting	No1 May 2019
• Advisory Board Meeting	No2 August 2019
• Advisory Board Meeting	No3 November 2019
• Advisory Board Meeting	No4 February 2020
• Advisory Board Meeting	No5 May 2020
• Advisory Board Meeting	No6 July 2020
• Advisory Board Meeting	No7 November 2020
• Advisory Board Meeting	No8 February 2021

Youth and Employer Advisory Boards

The Youth and Employer Advisory Boards will work together to establish a common working ground to agree on the skills and competency agenda for the project and inform project deliverables, including:

- Guiding and informing the project partners on the key competences for employability skills identified for the project.
- Advise on the content for the Train the Trainer course.
- Mapping of validation systems.
- Playing a key role in developing a public relations strategy for raising awareness of the need for lifelong learning through one's career, which will be especially targeted to those NEET or already engaged in employment.

Each of the Boards will have a slightly different focus:

Youth Advisory Boards:

- Enabling young people to engage with project partners and local employers to address what they feel are their training needs when it comes to lifelong employability skills competencies.
- Engaging with the project's external evaluator

Employer Advisory Boards:

- Allowing the exchange of learning and insight between young people and employers
- Providing employers with an opportunity to express the gaps they are witnessing in young people's employability skills.

Advisory Board Creation and Management: Four Project Partners

- Project Partners, STRIM, Ballymun Job Centre, CIOFS-FP and Turku will establish one Youth Advisory Board and one Employer Advisory Board.
- Each Board will meet quarterly throughout the lifetime of the project.

Each of the Boards will meet in accordance with the agreed IO1 timeline and will provide input to the project's activities for the lifetime of the project. Further, will be responsible for supporting the compilation of a LOCAL REPORT featuring local recommendations, as part of Intellectual Output (2).

Rinova and MetropolisNet

- Will be responsible for overseeing the quarterly Board meetings, allowing for unbiased monitoring of the Boards.

Advisory Board Set-up

Reasons for creating an Advisory Board

The main reason for creating an advisory board is to seek expertise outside of the project. In the case of YEC, we are seeking young people and employers who can provide project partners with knowledge, understanding, insight, experiences and in some cases, strategic thinking needed to develop tools and address employability needs.

Creating and operating an Advisory Board

There are two key questions to be asked when creating and operating an advisory board. The first question is “What are we trying to achieve?” and the second is “How should the advisory board be conducted?”

- **Mandate**

To ensure that the advisory board functions well and meets expectations, it will be important for those creating the advisory board to consider what the participants are expected to do and what input is expected from them. The advisory board may be more dynamic and productive if each board member has distinctive knowledge and/or different experiences. Ask yourself, “What is being sought from the advisory board / what sort of advice is being sought?”

- **Focus**

Individuals selected and taking part in an advisory board should share a commitment to the common goal and/or have similar interests. Essentially, the advisory board should determine the focus of the board. However, it will be the role of the Facilitator to guide, support and keep the board on track.

- **Size**

The size of the advisory board will influence both efficiency and effectiveness. Therefore, it may be beneficial to start from a fairly small group and then grow the board to its ultimate number. It is suggested that the maximum size for an advisory board is eight members so that there is a good group dynamic. For the YEC project, the following has been agreed:

- Partners will each recruit and engage 10 young people on the Youth Advisory Board
- Partners will each recruit and engage 10 employers on the Employer Advisory Board

See the **Ten Top Tips** for Engaging the Board Annex (1) and Annex (2)

Considering the benefits of bringing the two Advisory Boards together

Through YEC, two types of Advisory Boards will be created – (i) Youth Advisory Board and (ii) Employer/ Youth Worker Advisory Board. Whilst there are initial benefits of facilitating these groups separately, it is strongly advised that consideration is given to the benefits gained from bringing the two Advisory Boards together, especially during phases of reviewing training materials, providing guidance on the train the trainer programme, public relations and the validation of the project, for example.

Considering the project’s timeline, it is suggested that the Advisory Boards have the opportunity to meet one another, however, it should be the group and not the facilitator that decides how they should/could introduce one another. Some ideas are as follows:

- Once individual Board Profiles are created, individual partners should explore and implement creative ways in which those profiles can be exchanged between the Boards.

- Consider the group, especially the young people engaged, and make a judgement as to whether the young people could take part in a short online introduction session.
- If you have access to the appropriate facilities and resources, can a short video be made to have both Boards create a group introduction that can be shared?

Consider opportunities for the two Boards to meet in person, as follows:

- Create an opportunity for a social meeting. For example, this could take place at the beginning of the 'Performing' stage of the group.
- Consider whether it is possible to organise that the Boards both meet on the same day but at different times e.g. the Youth Advisory Board meet between 16:00-17:00 then take part in a social event (with food and refreshments) at which the Employer Advisory Board join the social before attending their meeting at 18:00-19:00.

To enable this creative and supportive process to happen it is recommended that:

- Those planning the arrangement for and timing of the Advisory Boards show the flexibility needed to ensure maximum engagement and retention.
- The facilitator(s) is/are highly skilled and competent in the facilitation of young people, professionals, or both.
- Those responsible for managing the Advisory Boards locally should demonstrate an extensive skills, knowledge and competency profile of each Facilitator engaged.

If further clarification of the role of the facilitator is required, the following Toolbox resource may be useful: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/leadership/group-facilitation/facilitation-skills/main>

Creating the right environment and facilitating the Advisory Boards

Setting your local agenda

The YEC model requires that eight Advisory Board meetings be held over the lifetime of the YEC project. It is envisaged that the first two Advisory Board meetings will be longer than the remaining six, as these will focus on forming and bonding the group and setting the foundations for their collaboration and work to be undertaken. It is recommended that the facilitator agrees on the length of the meetings with the Advisory Board so that they can take ownership of decision-making. Whilst setting a local agenda is considered important, it is recommended that the Advisory Boards are facilitated to create a Theory of Change and that format for the meetings are planned broadly with the following in mind:

- **Input:** activities reflect the needs of the group in terms of (i) the welfare and well-being of the group and (ii) the staged development of the group and the project's activities.
- **Output:** activities reflect what needs to be produced at each key stage of the project.
- **Reflective reports:** verbally and written to ensure (i) reflection on what went well, what went not so well and lessons learnt and (ii) resulting impact and what needs to be reflected back to the Advisory Board, especially in terms of what has changed in terms of their input.
- **Theme reports:** verbally and written to ensure (i) IO Leaders are informed of Advisory Board discussions, responses and actions.
- **Evaluation:** both Advisory Boards should be provided with an opportunity to evaluate their performance and progression. It is recommended that evidence of impact is captured at key stages, for example, at the time of reviewing training materials, public relations, train the trainer programme, and the like.

Group Development Stages: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing and Adjourning

It is important to remember that the Advisory Boards come together as a new group of individuals. As a group, collectively, they will go through a staged pathway from getting to know one another through to performing as a group, building relationships and facing challenges along the way. It is important to bear this in mind. It might be wise to facilitate an understanding of the stages of team/group development during the first meeting so that everyone understands that what is happening at the various stages fits in with a recognisable pattern of behaviours. Further, by following these various stages the facilitator will be able to design and embed group activities that will enhance the group's potential within each stage and achieve their set goals. The path that most groups/teams follow, as identified by psychologist Bruce Tuckman's is as follows:

Forming: At this stage, the Advisor Board members are positive, polite, some anxious, excited, and some, if not all, will not have a clear idea of what the Board has to do and achieve.

Storming: This is the stage when Board members and indeed sometimes the entire group push boundaries. It is at this stage when many groups/teams fail. Authority may be challenged people might challenge formed perception of position or role. Individuals within the Advisory Board might find this situation stressful.

Norming: This is when people start to resolve their differences, appreciate one another and their strengths, etc. It might be now that the Board feel more social and that they feel sufficiently secure to give and receive constructive feedback.

Performing: At this stage, the Board will work hard towards goals, milestones and targets and the functioning of the Advisory Board will be effective and efficient.

Adjourning: Members of the Board who like routine, or who have developed close working relationships with others may find this stage difficult, and therefore, careful disbanding of the Board must be built into the programme of facilitation.

Facilitation

For YEC to be successful the Advisory Boards will need to be facilitated through authentic engagement. Therefore, those responsible for the Advisory Boards need to ensure that they are effectively facilitated. The person appointed as the facilitator for either one or both of the Advisory Boards is required to have the following skills:

- Communication Skills
- Active Listening Skills
- Ability to Build Rapport
- Capable of implementing Structure and recording Facts and Feelings
- Capable of developing Synergy
- Ability to use Effective Questioning Techniques

The qualities of a good facilitator are:

- Understanding/experience of the need to ensure the well-being of all participants
- Experience of and skill in participatory and peer-to-peer facilitation methods
- Ability to practice openness
- Demonstrates flexibility
- Demonstrates a passionate interest in the subject/theme

Safeguarded environments

YEC will engage young people who are experiencing a range of situations including (i) Educational Difficulties, (ii) Social Obstacles, (iii) Cultural Differences and (iv) Economic Obstacles.

Due to the complex characteristics the target group will have, it is important to ensure that the advisory board meetings will be held in a safeguarded environment. It is important that the young people feel safe and secure during the project activities as this will enable them to concentrate on the activities and benefit from the experience and gain skills and experiences. The participants should be able to feel safe in the environment to take risks and step outside their comfort zones to enable them to explore, innovate and be constructive.

From the outset, the advisory boards should agree on the principles that underpin a safeguarding culture to ensure vulnerability is identified, signs and indicators of abuse are recognised, recording and reporting procedures are in place, and that there are good practice guidelines in place. Overarching principles, for example, can include:

- Empowerment
- Prevention
- Proportionality
- Protection
- Partnership
- Accountability

Further, in creating a safe environment for the advisory board meetings the partners should undertake the following:

- Hold the meetings in a clean and orderly room.
- Ask the participants to create a code of conduct for the meetings (e.g. no personal or derogatory comments, respect the speaker, do not interrupt each other).
- Allow the participants to be openly expressive and encouraging to others
- Celebrate the work achieved during the meetings
- Turn mistakes into learning activities.
- Create connections and interact with the participants.
- Stay calm and controlled always.
- Model kindness at every opportunity.

More information on safeguarding can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safeguarding-duties-for-charity-trustees>

Methods and Approaches

Method No1: Participatory Appraisal

In terms of the YEC Methodological Guide, flexibility and good facilitation are paramount. The following four methods or approaches can be used in their entirety at different stages of the Advisory Board development and/or combined to ensure full and effective engagement.

One method of peer-to-peer facilitation that can be considered most useful for the types of Advisory Boards being created and developed is Participatory Appraisal.

Participatory Appraisal can be considered an appropriate participatory facilitation model for YEC as it is one that enables local people to identify their own priorities and make their own decision about the future. Participatory Appraisal uses visual and flexible tools to ensure that everyone can join in regardless of their background, which is particularly useful for the engagement and participation of young people. Also, it is a method that can be used in a familiar environment/location, which should put everyone at ease.

A brief introduction to participatory appraisal is provided here: <http://shortwork.org.uk/participatory-research/an-introduction-to-participatory-appraisal/>

Participatory Appraisal Further Reading and Resources

https://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk/files/NESEP_Participatory_Appraisal_Handbook_2014.pdf

<https://en.healthnexus.ca/sites/en.healthnexus.ca/files/resources/participatoryevaltoolkit.pdf>

Essentially, participatory appraisal is best used when the users of the method are willing to let the community take control, when you want to base your actions on local knowledge and when you want to reach out to and engage diverse representatives of the community. With this in mind, it is considered that participatory appraisal can be used effectively for YEC. In terms of tools, appreciative inquiry is considered one of the most useful tools that can be used.

Importantly, participatory appraisal can deliver empowered participants, better relationships between participant groups, reliable and valid mapping of local knowledge and priorities, and is a good tool to make decisions with.

Method No2: Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry will help the Advisory Boards build a vision for the future. The facilitator will need to initially consider exploring what has worked in the past, the reasons why and then go on to imagine and create a vision of what would make a successful future. There are various stages of **appreciative inquiry** to consider, as follows:

- **Discovery Stage:** instead of focusing on “what are the problems” appreciative inquiry asks “what works”, which helps focus on identifiable positives.
- **Dream Stage:** allows for the focus on how ‘the community’ can contain all of the positive features (in the discovery stage).
- **Design Stage:** requires a focus on participants working together and trying to identify the steps that can make the dream stage a reality.
- **Destiny Stage:** is focused on making adjustments and implementing actions/stages with a view to attempt to secure future success.

Appreciative Inquiry Further Reading and Resources

<https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction/>

<https://positivepsychology.com/appreciative-inquiry-process/>

Method No2: Theory of Change

To ensure that YEC is reflective of the local environment and impact of the project's implementation is captured, it is recommended that by the end of the second meeting of the Advisory Boards there should be a Theory of Change (ToC) created and secures the "buy-in" of both Advisory Boards.

ToC is often referred to as a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. Basically, the ToC approach helps define long-term goals and then maps backwards to identify necessary preconditions. These are then mapped out in an Outcomes Framework, which then provides the basis for identifying what type of activity or intervention will lead to the outcomes identified. Overall, the development of a ToC will lead to better planning and evaluation.

Theory of Change Further Reading and Resources

<https://www.thinknpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Creating-your-theory-of-change1.pdf>

<https://www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/theory-change/>



Participant "J" thought that focusing on building a Theory of Change for the project helped the participants to understand their role in it, to have a sense of where the project is heading and to also see the bigger perspective of what the project is about. She also felt it would be useful in dissemination linked to the project.

Using the Theory of Change provided the young people with a chance to practice their communication skills, express their autonomy and build their confidence.



"N" felt that having a Theory of Change format provided a focus brought out more ideas and focus and helped discussion flow. Having a visual focus worked well and brought clarity to particular areas of the project.

Participants were given an introductory presentation to the Theory of Change before the meeting, so they could come prepared. Participants were aided in their clarity around the aims of the project and much discussion around how to get there, with a strong youth-led approach.

Throughout the process, you can consider what are your **enablers**, and this will help you see any potential gaps and flaws. Also, can look for **evidence** that is relevant to your theory of change e.g. published research, again check if there is evidence that goes against your theory and if necessary, modify what you do to reflect what the evidence tells you. You can reflect on **assumptions** e.g. about why one outcome will lead to another.

- Start with lots of **discussion and brainstorming** - by using post-its/sticky notes etc you can play with what is included and where it goes on the map
- As a group identify and write down the **long-term change** you want to make
- Consider '**what needs to be in place to reach this goal?**'
- And then start to go backwards and backwards, with each outcome asking 'what needs to be in place to achieve this outcome?'
- Try to be specific when filling in fields
- Make your steps action-orientated – link your outcomes to activities
- Notice where you have made assumptions and where there are gaps
- Think about how you might measure success
- Don't be too quick to fix your ideas into the chart, let yourselves be fluid
- Your theory of change will never be perfect. Avoid wasting time worrying too much over wording and specific links
- Remember it's a working document and can be used throughout the project to review and evaluate, and be changed and expanded upon
- Keep it simple!

Method No3: Embedding a Youth Work Approach

• Youth Work Approach

As with the suggestion of taking a participatory appraisal approach that has a focus on exploring “what works”. Youth Work focuses on personal and social development – the skills and attributes of young people – rather than to ‘fix a problem’. It is an educational process that engages with young people in a curriculum that deepens a young person’s understanding of themselves, their community and the work in which they live and supports them to proactively bring about positive change.

Youth Work is informed by a set of beliefs which include a commitment to equal opportunity, to young people as partners in learning and decision-making and to helping young people to develop their own set of values.

• Youth Work Values

A Youth Work Approach is one that is underpinned by a clear set of shared values, which can include:

- Young people choosing to take part
- Utilising young people’s view of the world
- Treating young people with respect
- Working with young people to help them make informed choices about their personal responsibilities within their communities
- Helping young people develop stronger relationships and collective identities
- Respecting and valuing differences
- Promoting the voice of young people

For the YEC project, it is envisaged that the participation level via the advisory boards will be collaborative. The young people will be involved in the development of ideas and solutions. The partnership will work with the young people to incorporate the ideas and solutions that have been developed as a result of the advisory meetings.

Youth Work Approach Further Reading and Resources

<http://www.youthlink.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Core-Principles.pdf>

<https://www.eurodiaconia.org/resources/empower-youth/youth-work-models/>

Method No4: Having a Flexible Plan - Effective Facilitation

It is important that the Facilitator builds activities into the Advisory Board sessions so that the group is prepared for the tasks ahead. Equally, timing is everything – the Facilitator needs to carefully make informed judgements on the group dynamic and be able to adjust the task and the timing of the task/meeting to enable full engagement. Therefore, the Facilitator needs to consider:

- Using appropriate ice-breakers and activities that help put the group at ease and help the group to develop competencies needed to undertake the tasks ahead
- The Advisory Board provides an excellent opportunity for young people to develop their employability competencies, so each Advisory Board meeting should include activities that help build these competencies.
- Aligned to the above, it should be the role of the Facilitator to consider how young people can be encouraged to think about what employability competencies they are developing and applying to tasks, and how being involved in the Advisory Board might enhance employment prospects.

It will be the responsibility of the skilled Facilitator to create a framework for each of the Advisory Board Meetings. Initially, the framework will require significant input from the Facilitator, however, it is expected that over time, the Advisory Board will set the agenda and focus the activity of each Advisory Board Meeting. It will be the role of the Facilitator to support and facilitate progress aligned to the YEC project's Intellectual Outputs (IOs), for example:

- Advisory Board Meeting (1): ensure that the Employability Competences are explored
- Advisory Board Meeting (3): ensure that the Public Relations Strategy is agreed
- Advisory Board Meeting (5): ensure that there is consensus on the Training Materials
- Advisory Board Meeting (6): ensure that there is an agreement made on the Train the Trainer programme

Effective Facilitation Further Reading and Resources

<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/RoleofAFacilitator.htm>

<https://www.roffeypark.ac.uk/knowledge-and-learning-resources-hub/what-are-facilitation-skills-and-how-do-you-facilitate/>

Recruitment: Young People

In terms of recruiting and engaging young people, it is important to hold an initial informational meeting with a 'hook' to draw in young people. You will need to build excitement and awareness of the YEC project through appropriate communication channels and social media that young people prefer to use. In all communications, it will be essential to promote the benefits of getting involved.

Six Principles of Engagement

1. We know why we are engaging
2. We know who to engage
3. We know the history
4. We start together
5. We are genuine
6. We are relevant and engaging

Tools for Youth Engagement

- Be clear
- Be genuine
- Be meaningful
- Provide young people with skills
- Develop Relationships
- Build Resources
- Get the timing and location right
- Focus on accessibility
- Provide out of pocket expenses
- Be accountable
- Be supportive
- Use simple and accessible language
- Don't make assumptions
- Adults should not take over

At the stage of recruitment, it is advised that partners capture a baseline profile of the young people engaged. The baseline profile will be focused upon the soft skills identified in the project and monitoring of these will capture the development of these competencies at the start, mid-point and end of the project to capture change experienced:

- Job orientation and searching skills
- Motivation and autonomy
- Wellness
- Communication Skills
- Professionalism

It will be important to build a profile of the Youth Advisory Board, featuring their individual profiles, their input into the project and case studies to showcase what has been gained through their involvement. Such case studies should focus on capturing the impact that their involvement in the Advisory Board has had, especially capturing what has changed in themselves but also capturing what they have helped change. Essentially, each young person needs to be able to clearly see the benefits of being involved.

Over the lifetime of the YEC project, partners will be committed to building the capabilities of young people so that there is a clear link between their engagement and their own personal development, in terms of both cognitive, social and emotional capabilities. Therefore, from the outset, the facilitator will be responsible for the ongoing welfare and wellbeing of the group.

Building Capabilities of young people: a bridge between personal and positional change

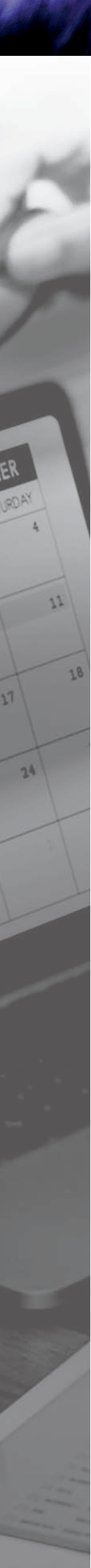
Through the Advisory Boards, there should be a focus on building capabilities so that every young person engaged feels they have progressed.

Within this context, a plethora of evidence suggests that all young people need to develop both cognitive, social and emotional capabilities to help them achieve the outcomes that they, and others, value both in their lives right now, and for their future.²

A consistent core set of social and emotional capabilities that are of value to young people were identified in the Young Foundation's 'A Framework of outcomes for young people as shown in diagram (1) below:



² Young Foundation: youngfoundation.org A Framework of outcomes for young people (Bethia McNeil, Neil Reeder and Julia Rich) July 2012



Communication: explaining; expressing; presenting; listening; questioning; using different ways of communicating.

Confidence & Agency: self-reliance; self-efficacy; self-belief; ability to shape your own life and the world around you.

Planning & Problem Solving: negotiating resources; setting and achieving goals; decision-making; re-searching; analysing; critical thinking; challenging; evaluating.

Relationships & Leadership: motivating others; valuing and contributing to team-working; establishing positive relationships; interpreting others; managing conflict.

Creativity: imagining alternative ways of doing things; applying learning in a new context; enterprising; innovating; remaining open to new ideas.

Resilience & Determination: self-discipline; self-management; self-motivated; having a sense of purpose; self-controlled.

Managing Feelings: reviewing; self-awareness; self-regulating; self-accepting.

Within the context of the YEC project, individual partners will need to consider how the planned activities can help develop one or more of the above outcomes so that each young person engaged can map their 'journey of change'.

CASE STUDIES

ADVISORY YOUTH BOARD MEMBER INTERVIEW

Background

Ana is a member of the advisory youth board organised and facilitated by Ballymun Job Centre who are based in an economically and socially deprived area on the outskirts of Dublin, Ireland. She is originally from Romania but moved to Dublin in 2013. Ana trained in psychology but her qualification is not recognised in Ireland. She worked in McDonalds for a number of years before taking part in Ballymun Job Centre's JP Morgan funded INVEST programme which is a nine month course focusing on an introduction to the world of tech with a work experience element. Ana is actively looking for work in IT or administration and is finding it difficult due to her lack of work experience in this area and also having fewer options as many businesses have not yet brought staff back on site due to the pandemic.

Interviews

1. What have you learned about yourself from participating in the Advisory Group? What did you like best about the module that you assisted to develop?

One of the things I learned was that I can participate with useful information based on my experience over the years. There are infinite examples that one can relate when it comes to someone else's story. This was also what I liked best, the fact that we may come from different backgrounds, but the essence is the same, and as human beings, we are all dealing with the same issues in one way or another.

2. What motivates you to continue to be an active participant on the advisory panel? What do you see as the value in being involved in the advisory panel?

My motivation comes from the fact that we might be able to change the relationship between employers and employees. There is a gap that needs to be filled and I believe a lot of it comes from misunderstanding each other's needs. The value stems from making the process more transparent and understanding that there are no perfect candidates, and people should be given a chance.

3. What barriers or challenges if any did you experience by being involved in the Advisory Group and how were these overcome?

The biggest one was finding the courage to speak about the real issues, but when you see so many other people having the same obstacles, it all becomes relatable and you realise you are not alone. Being honest and bringing such matters to attention have had a great impact in overcoming such challenges.

4. Can you tell us how you have applied the learning from any of the modules developed in terms of your own: Motivation, Job Seeking, Career Choices, Skills Development, Further Training, Life Choices, Personal Development

By identifying and understanding my needs, likes and dislikes, putting myself in imaginary situations and monitoring my thoughts. Standing my ground and being true to myself through the process, by refusing to be something I'm not just for the sake of acceptance or results. At the end of the day one must

feel comfortable with oneself and the choices one makes. I believe it's better to fail and try again by being yourself, rather than succeed based on a lie. After all, the only person you're hurting is yourself.

5. Have you noticed any positive feedback from what you have learned, for example, during an internship or at a job interview?

Eventually, yes. But when working for others, they have a certain standard they want one to uphold, and most of the time this comes from unrealistic expectations the employer places upon a candidate. That is why I believe it's important to be honest and speak up when the reality doesn't match the fantasy. Standing one's ground and speaking up when something doesn't work shows respect both towards oneself and one's employer.

6. What do you hope to achieve by continuing to participate in the Advisory Group?

I am hoping that young people who are entering employment can identify easily unrealistic expectations placed upon themselves, gain the confidence they need to ask questions and keep their integrity, and at the same time I am hoping that employers will realise that some of their requests are outrageous, that sometimes too much pressure does not mean growth and that an algorithm does not know better than meeting the person face to face.

Conclusions

From being a member of the advisory board, Ana appears to have grown her belief in herself and that her life experiences are valuable. This has supported and developed her motivation to contribute and given her confidence to speak out about how she feels. Her case study highlights an important aspect of the YEC project, bringing young people and employers together to work co-operatively and hopefully to then better understand each other. Anna has spoken passionately about her feelings in relation to employer / young people relationships and there is a sense that she feels heard in this. In the board meetings she also has the benefit of hearing the employers' point of view.

CASE STUDIES

ENGAGING AND RETAINING EMPLOYERS

Overviews

- i) The Ballymun Job Centre (BJC) is a voluntary organisation with charitable status, it has a proven track record of providing quality and innovative employment, guidance and training services since 1986 within the community of Ballymun, Dublin, Ireland.
- ii) The Advisory Group within BJC consisted of 8-10 employers/youth workers/trainers. The Advisory Group was established through existing links that the BJC had with a network of employers and local services, and met 3-4 times per year initially in the BJC premises and after this online. The meetings were facilitated by two members of the BJC YEC project team, one representative of the BJC Management Team and a guidance staff member. The employers in our group were a mixture of employers with a strong tradition of employing young people as well as those that recruit for experienced positions/high skilled specialist jobs.

Effective Practice Approach

The BJC used a range of different effective practice approaches to engage and retain employers.

- **Inclusive, friendly learning space:** The BJC aims to create a relaxed space when hosting these meetings that is defined by the target group. There are refreshments available, comfortable chairs, there is no technology/devices needed to attend the meeting, seating is placed in a circular arrangement and there are no assigned seats. There is colour in the room and documents are printed in colour where possible. The atmosphere is warm and welcoming, participants are greeted at reception and accompanied down to the room so as to reduce social anxiety of entering group space.
- **Joint practice development (JPD):** The BJC operationalises this concept developed by Fielding, particularly in the employer/youth worker groups. This means BJC will often have materials and discussion prompts ready in advance of a meeting in order to stimulate discussion and once this discussion is established, employers and youth workers begin an exchange of knowledge. It becomes JPD at the point where the varying disciplines share techniques that they use in working with young people, and critique what works well and what has not worked well in their organisation. At this point staff members from BJC let the conversation direct itself, but take notes and record all information. Clarity and further development is often sought on points from previous meetings ensuring there is a steady flow of continuity on idea development from one meeting to the next.
- **Recruitment through established networks:** The BJC is a community centred organisation that is centrally located within the area of Ballymun. Throughout years of EU projects, the BJC has developed a long standing network of partnerships that it utilises for recruitment for the Advisory Groups. Using tried and tested partnerships, in conjunction with reaching out to new organisations has ensured a level of consistency in attendance at meetings.

Additional practices included:

- At the end of each meeting, agreeing the date for the next one so it was booked in everyone's calendar well in advance
- Time management – keeping the meetings short (usually about 1.5 hours) and on track, or when they knew they would be longer, offering a working lunch
- Sending out any reading materials or information to be reviewed in the meeting in advance, asking for questions or feedback before the meeting to support good use of time in the meetings
- Youth workers sharing their stories and experience of the challenges that young people face and how they are overcome
- Allowing time for networking where possible
- Having clear tasks for the employer group helped to keep them engaged
- Giving the employers a broader perspective on the work that BJC do, eg introducing them to colleagues on other projects, to encourage both an understanding of and a buy-in to the organisation

Impact Results

The initial stages of recruitment were not so easy as employers are often sceptical about joining voluntary boards. BJC made contact with a lot of employers to try to get them involved in the project. The first meeting was a real success with a group of 12 employers/youth workers and a very productive meeting. The employers were very willing to commit to attending meetings, and generally, if they couldn't attend, it was because something had come up for them at very short notice. BJC recruited employers from a range of different industries, there were some who had experience working with the YEC target group and others that had no experience recruiting young people presenting with the challenges that some young people faced. This made for a stimulating environment with a variety of opinions and understandings. Feedback from the group was generally very positive.

Conclusions

Engaging busy, time short employers in a voluntary project can be challenging. It is important that they have a clear sense of purpose in what they are doing, as well as feeling that this is meaningful and productive. Efforts to make the meeting as easy as possible to attend, as well as enjoyable, are important.

CASE STUDIES

ADVISORY YOUTH BOARD MEMBER

Background

Megan is a member of the advisory youth board organised and facilitated by Ballymun Job Centre who are based in an economically and socially deprived area on the outskirts of Dublin, Ireland. Aged 22, Megan lives locally. She completed a Fetac level 5 course in business administration and is currently looking for work in this area. Megan was doing voluntary work as a receptionist/administrator with Ballymun Job Centre to gain some work experience, however, this had to stop when the pandemic hit. Megan is actively looking for a job as an administrator but is finding it difficult due to her lack of work experience and many businesses still having staff working from home as per national COVID 19 guidelines.

Interviews

In Megan's words:

From participating in the advisory group I have learned that I am more capable of social interaction than I previously thought. I was able to get conversations going and take part in them in minutes. The part of the module I liked best was taking part in the opinion sharing process with the other members of the group because not only did I feel included but I also got to hear and consider the others' opinions. I am motivated to be an active participant by knowing that I am helping to create and improve future YEC Erasmus+ projects but am also motivated by the chance it's given me to develop my soft skills. I see value in the panel in the fact that I am aware of how my own and the group's contributions will be used and that I understand the vitality of getting young people's opinions in a project aimed at improving their lives.

The main barrier for me when I first took part in the panel was the need to become comfortable sharing my opinion with strangers. This was a meaningful challenge to me as I am highly self-conscious. I got over my anxieties by remaining calm and just being myself while making sure to listen to others without seeming too passive and speaking up whenever I felt the need to.

I have become more motivated not just to apply for jobs but also to live life and develop a work-life balance. I am trying to develop myself further in all areas of development, especially the ones I recognised that I need to develop more during the workshops. Even with the pandemic, I still haven't given up looking for jobs. I recently managed to land a three-month administrative position with An Post, which has given me some great experience in office administration. I plan to take this with me to my next office admin job with the PCERS and from there on keep growing.

When I was at An Post my colleagues observed that I was never afraid to ask them for help if I was struggling in my job. I attribute this skill to what I learned in my YEC Erasmus+ sessions as my experiences talking with the other members helped get me used to the idea of stepping outside of my comfort zone.

I hope that by continuing to participate in the group I will further develop the skills we previously touched on and become more confident in work and life. I would also like to base my future development on feedback from recent YEC projects to develop new skills based on what has been observed by our projects.

Conclusions

Being a part of the advisory board has obviously developed both Megan's communication skills and also her confidence around interacting with others. This particularly applies to communicating with people she doesn't know which has already supported her within a work environment, adding to her professionalism within the world of work. She also appears to have grown a sense of her own value, believing that she has something to offer, which in turn has increased her motivation.

CASE STUDIES

DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY COMPETENCES

Background

Four of the partners of the YEC project organised and ran Advisory Board sessions with employers and young people. They used a number of different methods and tools within the meetings, varying the content and supporting the development of skills and competencies useful in the world of work.

Competencies

- Discussions linked to the project supported and developed the understanding of both employers and young people as to which competences are important and expected in the labour market and how these can be developed outside of the job market.
- Employers and young people connecting and exchanging experiences allowed the young people to learn which attitudes and approaches are valued by the employers and how job seekers can prove them. It also helped them understand what are the “deal breakers” in the employment process and why soft skills are equally important in a given position as hard skills and knowledge. These interactions also helped the young people to practice interacting in a more formal / professional way with adults that they do not know.
- Discussion around competencies helped the young people to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, with group discussions supporting ideas for enhancement where necessary.
- More generally during the meetings participants were encouraged to express their opinions which they reported helped build motivation, confidence, a sense of worth and communication skills. Facilitators noted increased levels of independence and autonomy amongst participants as the project progressed. Working on activities in a group supported their skills in working with others.
- Facilitators also noted an improved ability of members to articulate what they felt were the needs of young people in relation to employability competences
- Members of the youth advisory board were given a written reference and paragraph to include in their CV outlining their involvement in the project which they listed under voluntary work experience. Participants reported that this was hugely beneficial to them and they used their experiences as a point of conversation at job interviews.
- Wellness including physical and mental health was openly discussed within the group, initially in relation to the world of work but then broadening to include other life situations
- Using the modules of the project as discussion topics meant that some of the less well explored competencies such as work place discrimination were greater understood.

CASE STUDIES

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE LOCAL EMPLOYABILITY ENVIRONMENT

Four of the partners of the YEC project organised and ran both employer and youth Advisory Board sessions. As part of these, participants were encouraged to reflect on the local context and take into account of the local employability / youth work environment.

- Experienced members of the Stakeholders Advisory Board shared their experiences and opinions about the local labor market – the challenges, specific features and foreseen future changes.
- Joint discussions (young people and employers) about the local labour market, focusing on skills needed, realistic expectations, local challenges. Opinions were often quite different amongst young people and employers.
- In meetings there were entrepreneurs and tutors who had experience of offering apprenticeships and internships locally and used this knowledge to inform others.
- One group always used the local context as the starting point of any discussions within the advisory board.
- One advisory board worked together to complete a local community report describing their community in terms of demographics, history, local services. This was followed by a discussion into what the social and economic issues the groups felt that the local area was faced with, focusing both on the challenges but also on any positive solutions that have worked in the past locally or could be used in the future.

CASE STUDIES

METHODS USED FOR ORGANISING AND IMPLEMENTING ADVISORY BOARDS

Background

Four of the partners of the YEC project organised and ran both employer and youth Advisory Board sessions. They used a number of different methods to set up and run the groups to encourage retention of participants and participation during the meetings.

Methods Used

- Ensuring that participants were genuinely interested in the themes of the project before they were recruited and subsequently linking back activities / discussions to participants' life situations and interests
- Whilst the group was forming using name games, team building activities and icebreakers to build trust and connections within the group and to give the sessions an element of fun
- Basing meetings on group discussions about given topics or project results
- Using prepared group works (especially for the young persons' board), including those that developed their competencies
- Simulations and role play within the group
- Space for young people to reflect on their participation within the group and how this has grown their competencies / skills
- Using ideas from the Methodological guide to support the process
- Ensuring that the sessions were interactive and as participant led as possible
- Ensuring that the group knew that any feedback they gave was taken forward, considered and had an impact
- Using a non-formal learning approach
- Using the participatory appraisal method which enables participants to identify their own priorities and their own decisions
- Breaking the larger group into smaller break out groups or pairs to build confidence and participation
- Recapping regularly throughout the meeting and checking understanding
- Holding the space well through good time management, clear structures and planned agendas when needed and taking notes at each meeting which then went out to participants. These notes were then reviewed at the following meeting to ensure consistency and as a memory jogger for participants.

CASE STUDIES

A YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER – SELF PROMOTION IN THE TIME OF SOCIAL MEDIAS

Background

William is a member of the advisory youth board organised and facilitated by CIOFS who are based in Imola. William lives in Imola but is originally from Eastern Europe. His family of origin abandoned him and he grew up in an orphanage until he was 4 years old when he was adopted by an Italian family. William felt that his adopted family doubted his abilities. When choosing high school he expressed a desire to attend hairdressing school, which is his great passion, however his parents forbid this and enrolled him in a professional institute. When he rebelled, his family gave him the option of doing as they said or else leaving. After being rejected, social services found William a place to live, and supported him by organising various internships to gain work experience. However, problems soon emerged with William failing to complete any of the internships, often abandoning them after a few days, citing a different reason each time. The service then decided to suspend the internships and place William on a training course on transversal skills. As part of this programme, with 7 other young people of different ages and completely different life experiences, but who all have difficulty finding and keeping a job, William is a member of Ciofs Youth Advisory Board.

Overviews

At the beginning of being a part of this group William is very shy and reserved, although attentive and curious. One of the first activities that they are asked to do involves standing up and walking round the room and shaking hands with each participant to introduce themselves. Before this starts William shares that he doesn't want to be touched and the group accept this request without judgement and respect it. William shares afterwards how accepted he felt by their response and that it gave him strength. He says that he would normally try to escape when asked to do something that he doesn't want to, and he is happy that he asked for what he wanted and so could stay in the group.

Over time William opens up more including eventually managing to have physical contact with the other participants. He shares his passion for hairdressing and from this, and with support, manages to complete an internship in a shop selling products for hairdressers. He also enrolls at a professional hairdressing school in his city where he works hard. Sometimes he falls back into his old escape strategy by having prolonged absences but he is supported and offered a course on soft skills.

Within the group there is discussion about what stops the students from being successful. They discuss their lack of patience, inability to manage their working time and establish priorities and their poor relational skills. William finds the sharing amongst the group very interesting and recognizes himself in the experiences recounted by others.

The group also talks about how they can make their resume attractive in the world of work. William takes the lead in reflecting on how they can make their newly won soft skills show through on a CV and from this discussion they realise they are more comfortable sharing themselves on social media.

William shows the group Facebook pages of hairdressing salons, with videos and short presentations by the employees. From here the boys' enthusiasm grew – they decided to create a Facebook page with a link to Instagram with a profile of each of them, that could be a continuously updating CV, including adding videos, photos, video feedback about them from their teachers and employers (eg the salon where William did his internship).

Impact Results

Through the activity of making a Facebook / Instagram CV with support from the Advisory Group William was able to both enhance and show-off various soft skills, from the use of various digital products and technological skills, to communication skills, professionalism and creativity. It shows initiative and an ability to conceive of and then see through to the end of a project. William expressed that he felt he was 'playing at home' on territory known to him (using social media) and consequently he felt more confident and able when preparing his CV.

Themes

The above case study highlights the need of many young people for additional support to develop key life and soft skills that they have not been lucky enough to learn in their early lives. Through a longer-term peer and facilitator support, allowing for set-backs and challenges on the way, William was able to experience feeling good enough to belong as he was, connect with his abilities and aptitudes and to move towards what he wanted. His initiative and leadership when putting together the Facebook page supported his developing confidence and belief in his having something to offer.

Conclusions

A youth work approach has been highly effective for William. Bringing acceptance and understanding, inclusiveness and encouragement of participation have allowed him to slowly engage and bring himself in. Creating a space for dialogue between young people and employers where there is equity and a sense of learning exchange has built confidence and self-belief.

CASE STUDIES

EMBEDDING A YOUTH WORK APPROACH IN THE ADVISORY BOARD

Background

Four of the partners of the YEC project organised and ran both employer and youth Advisory Board sessions. Facilitators were encouraged to embed a youth work approach into the advisory boards.

Embedding a Youth Work Approach

- At the introductory meeting the core values of youth work were outlined to the participants, and all encouraged to hold these in mind
- The advisory group was promoted as a method of empowerment for young people to take a stance on employment issues that affect them and other young people in similar situations to themselves
- Encouraging the view of the facilitators and young people being partners in the learning process, and that the learning was going both ways
- For young people to see clearly how their ideas and suggestions for change were recorded and included in the work of the project
- Implementing non-formal education methods, making clear that there was no obligation on the young people to take part in any activities that they were not comfortable doing
- Facilitators making the effort to check in with the young people throughout the meeting particularly with those that were not as vocal as others
- Facilitators voicing their appreciation of the contribution to the project of the participants
- Facilitators to make efforts to work within the young people's schedules when arranging meetings
- Use of ice breakers and exercises to encourage trust, peer bonding and confidence
- Clear explanations to participants about expectations and goals of the project, giving participants choices around how to structure meetings
- Interactive, participant led discussions
- For merged employer and youth meetings, encouraging young people to take ownership and share their experiences, to be the experts in terms of young people's experience
- To have a number of members on the employers' board who work with young people and consequently who have experience of different ways to support this approach.

CASE STUDIES

ADVISORY YOUTH BOARD MEMBER INTERVIEW

Background

Julita is a member of the Youth advisory board organised by Strim in Krakov, Poland. She is in her early 20s and aspires to be an actress / performer.

Interview

1. What have you learned about yourself from participating in the Advisory Group? What did you like best about the module that you assisted to develop?

Participation in the project only confirmed for me that it was a good decision to participate in it. :) What I liked the most about the module was the practical applications and examples.

2. What motivates you to continue to be an active participant on the advisory panel? What do you see as the value in being involved in the advisory panel?

I am interested in becoming a leader in the future and conducting training on the developed modules and their implementation. Moreover, I am interested in the subject of the project and I look forward to comparing the final conclusions with other representatives from other countries. I feel motivated because I know that my opinion counts and is taken into account. I feel respected and taken seriously. I am glad that thanks to my participation in the Advisory Group I have met interesting people and had the opportunity to work with them and take part in training.

3. What barriers or challenges if any did you experience by being involved in the Advisory Group and how were these overcome?

We did not encounter any significant barriers, at most, during the development of the module, we could discuss and share our thoughts and insights with each other and it was a very motivating challenge. The very work on the module was an interesting challenge to collect all our thoughts into one whole. The only barriers that made work difficult were too rare meetings, but as a group we decided to meet more often so that our work would not disappear and everyone could still feel an active part of the project. Sometimes it was difficult to work when during the project some people disappeared without a word and there was no such continuity of work and group. We then had to recruit new members and introduce them to the project anew. Sometimes working on a module was quite tedious because of how it was developed, but we dealt with it by simplifying it and discussing it together.

4. Can you tell us how you have applied the learning from any of the modules developed in terms of your own?

Motivation - I can more consciously and openly express what motivates me- continuous development and new challenges are important to me

Job Seeking - when looking for a job, I know what is important to me: a good atmosphere at work, good earnings, a clear career and development path, work life-balance and people who surround me

Career Choices - I can more consciously and openly express what goals I want to achieve, which way to go and how to develop my career, what do I expect from the employer and working conditions

Skills Development - I can more consciously and openly express what goals I want to achieve, which way to go and how to develop myself

Life Choices - I can more consciously and openly express my needs and desires

Personal Development - I can more consciously and openly express what goals I want to achieve, which way to go and how to develop myself

5. What do you hope to achieve by continuing to participate in the Advisory Group?

As I wrote before, I would like to become a leader in the future and conduct training on modules and continue to meet new people and exchange my thoughts and opinions with them.

CASE STUDIES

SUPPORTING MOTIVATION

Overview

Turku Vocational Institute is a multi-disciplinary provider of upper secondary level vocational education and training. They are the largest VET training centre in South-Western Finland and one of the largest in the country.

Most of the young people involved in the YEC youth advisory board are studying to eventually work in the care industry, some of them hoping to become nurses. Because of work experience commitments and young people moving on from the courses, there were a number of changes in the participants during the project. Because they were students there was often a lot of focus on how their studying prepared them for the world of work. They were keen to discuss the soft skills the project had identified as important to be success in work (professionalism, motivation, autonomy, wellness, job orientation and searching skills, communication and perceived and actual discrimination). They also identified that these skills were also important in either enabling or prevent them for attending and participating in the YEC project advisory boards. They felt that motivation was one the most important themes, because without it, it is much harder to make and keep commitments and to learn from the experience.

Effective Practice Approach

After discussion at a board meeting about ways to support motivation within the group the young people decided to focus on two things:

1. To give peer support to each other in relation to the project and also their studies. They felt that it was easier to open up to a peer than to others about their challenges relating to commitment and motivation, and that they felt more understood by their fellow board members.
2. To develop an activity that would give additional focus and direction within the group as well as supporting the members in developing their soft skills. To this end, members of the board developed a questionnaire asking what individuals generally felt motivated or demotivated them in life and particularly around their studies. They interviewed their fellow students using the questionnaire and at a later board meeting two of them presented the results and led a group discussion on the topic.

The young people also suggested that getting an extra student credit for taking part in the project and the advisory board would support their commitment. This was taken to the principal of the school who agreed it if their attendance was regular.

Impact Results

Peer support and learning gave a number of positive results. The young people developed a number of soft skills including problem solving, working in teams and communication skills, as well as, as they had hoped, supporting their motivation. The board members fed back that they felt, through their discussions, that they understood and had better experienced the focus of the YEC project.

The process of creating a questionnaire, interviewing peers and analysing the results enabled development of a number of core competencies including professionalism, wellness, communication skills and analysis / reflection.

Themes

Young people often struggle with motivation and commitment. They are encouraged to do things in life that they haven't necessarily chosen or feel clear about why they are doing them. They often have not developed habits of discipline. The advisory board gave the students a chance to really reflect on issues around motivation and to start to understand and then practice ways that they could support themselves to stay motivated.

Peer support is a positive way to encourage this motivation. It can engender a sense of belonging and feeling connected and can be a positive experience for both the receiver and the supporter. In fact, a mutual two-way support allows people to experience both being resourceful and having something of value to offer, as well as practising asking for help, being realistic about where they are at and be proactive around their wellness needs. As students with common goals, empathy and camaraderie are developed

Employer Advisory Board Engagement: Facilitating lifelong learning

The Employer Advisory Board will provide a platform to engage local employers to address what they feel are the employability competencies needed by young people and to address two key issues in order to establish common ground:

- Allowing exchange of learning and insight between young people and employers, and
- Providing employers with an opportunity to express the gaps they are witnessing in young people's employability skills.

Recruitment: Employers and Employer Representatives

- The Board will be made up of carefully selected professionals and will operate with a strong purpose, a set of shared values and commitment to achieving set goals. This will be achieved by:
- Planning and defining the reasons for forming a board of employer advisers, as this will ensure that the right people for the job are secured.
- The right employer advisory board will be a collection of professionals from wide-ranging business sectors and backgrounds and will bring a myriad of experience and different viewpoints. This should include those employed as Youth Workers as a representative of employers providing youth-focused services.
- It might be wise to balance employers that are recognised as youth-friendly with those who are not so that diverse opinions and different perspectives are brought to the board.
- A small group of employers may prove to be more effective and easier to coordinate.
- Establish clear expectations in terms of role, responsibilities and the commitment that they will need to make.
- Ideally, there should be clear benefits to be gained from taking part.

As with the Youth Advisory Board, the Employer Board will be facilitated, which will enable and encourage discussion. In both cases, if the Board makes a decision, it is important to ensure that the owner of the action or advice given needs to be responded to and taken on board.

See the **Ten Top Tips** for Engaging Employers Annex (2)

Case Studies

Reflection, Reporting and Review

Over the lifetime of the project, it is essential that sufficient time is allocated for reflection, feedback and impact evaluation. With this in mind, two approaches will be implemented by Rinova, as follows:

- After each Advisory Group meeting there will be three processes:

1. A reflection on the group itself

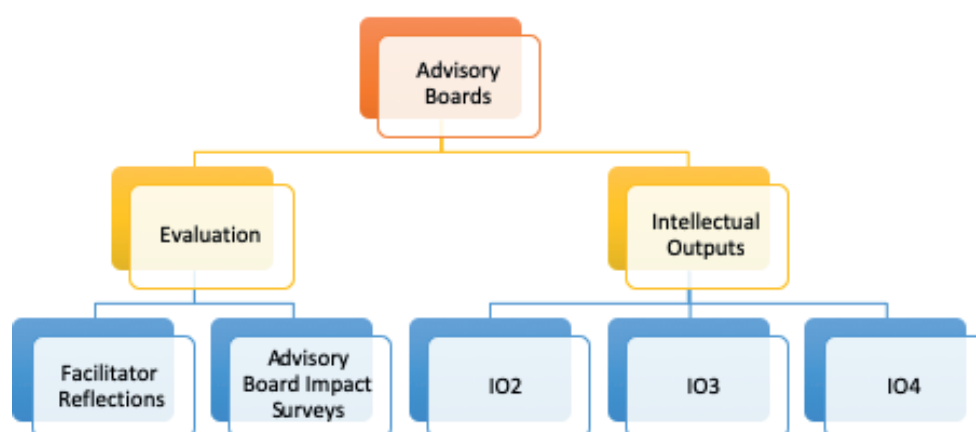
- The facilitator to fill out a short report (from a template) about how the dynamics of the group went – how people related, any issues etc.
- They then send the report to Rinova and this is followed by a short discussion between Rinova and the partner/facilitator about that particular group/session (using the report as a starting point).
- Rinova then updates the report with notes from the discussion and sends it to the facilitator to agree and update on the dropbox
- Rinova to collate these partner reports from the quarter and to write a short report re: common issues, sharing of best practice etc and send this report out to the partners before their next quarter meetings.

2. Reflection on the main focus/topic of the group

- Facilitator to fill in template re the main focus/topic of the group, e.g. any discussions, outcomes etc. This will then be sent to the partner organisation responsible for the IO that the topic relates to. (the individual partners can choose to create their own template to collect the information they want for their IO, or a standard template can be in place).
- The relevant partner would then collate the information sent into a short report
- This will be shared with partners and would also be fed back to participants at the beginning of the next session (to promote ownership i.e. awareness that their ideas feed into the process)

3. Participant Evaluation

- Participants to individually give feedback from a template devised by Met Net for general evaluation purposes
- Forms to be sent by the facilitator to MetNet
- Met Net to collate and report back to partners



IO2: Training Materials

The aim is to address the need for training in a multitude of employability competencies for young people, with particular focus on the personal, social and learning to learn competency from the Council of The European Union. The Advisory Boards will have a key role in advising the partnership on how to create training programmes to respond to the needs of young people and support them in developing these personal, social and employability competencies.

IO3: Train the Trainer

The aim of the Train the Trainer course is to focus on youth workers and guidance practitioners engaging with young people who are seeking employment. The Advisory Boards will have an important role to play here, engaging with the partnership to assess the appropriateness of the training course created.

IO4: Validation

This aims to provide a guide for local youth workers and practitioners to map the modules from the train the trainer course, or any employability skills training, onto current validation systems under ET 2020. The Advisory Boards will provide insight and expert opinion on how best to present skill validation as a young jobseeker.

10 Top Tips for developing a Youth Advisory Board

1. Have a range of ages, backgrounds and abilities: Aim for at least eight members at each meeting.
2. Create the right atmosphere. Ensure that meetings are friendly. Ask everyone to introduce themselves so new members feel welcome. Provide refreshments and reimburse travel expenses.
3. Set an agenda for each meeting. Have one staff member for facilitating inclusion in agenda creation, planning and running the meeting. Involve everyone early so that actions from previous meetings can be reported on, and important things don't get forgotten about. It is essential that the board members feel included.
4. Listen to everyone's opinion so that they know that their voice is being heard. Ensure that sufficient guidance and training has been provided so that everyone feels confident and able to contribute at the level they feel capable of.
5. Balance fun with getting things done. A social aspect of meetings must be effectively and efficiently planned into the agenda, but not at the expense of getting things done, so the group must be facilitated to agree on outcomes and achievements.
6. Explore and use ideas put forward in a creative way and encourage everyone to work on them as a team – using participatory appraisal or mind-mapping tools for example, so that everyone can share ideas and explore options.
7. Give unique opportunities for board members to gain new skills and experiences by inviting them to employer networking events and or visiting employer premises or meeting people who implement employability strategies or programmes.
8. Use a range of ice-breakers to help the Board have fun and develop relationships.
9. Make sure that at the beginning of every Advisory Board meeting there is time allocated for a Check-in from each of the Board members.
10. Make sure that at the end of every Advisory Board meeting there is time allocated for a Check-out from each of the Board members.

Top Tips for developing an Employer Advisory Board

1. Clearly determine the purpose, values and objectives of your Advisory Board and be sure to engage those that have good local insight.
2. Make sure that you choose the right people by first identifying what skills, knowledge and expertise are needed. Ideally, you want Board members to have strong communication skills, be problem-solvers, influencers who are open-minded.
3. Highlight the benefits to employers of taking part in the advisory board. These could include: increased understanding of needs of potential employees and ways to support them with these; increased knowledge and understanding of generic, transferable employability skills and how to support their development, development of knowledge of skills validation processes, including qualifications, experience of course/curriculum development, experience of development of public relations strategy and materials, a networking experience that supports best practice and builds local connections
4. By setting expectations from the outset, you will more likely to engage the right people and maintain their input.
5. It will be really important to get the most out of the Advisory Board meetings so the venue should be easily accessible, comfortable and free of distractions. Choosing the right facilitator is essential as they will be able to engage key individuals, how to stimulate and draw out conversation. Actions should be agreed upon, circulated and revisited.
6. The Board should be encouraged to be open, honest and frank and should be sufficiently professional in their behaviour to consider diverse opinions, and in some instances, hear things that they might not like. It will be the role of the facilitator to
7. In reality, it may prove challenging to get all of the Advisory Board together on a regular basis. So, be considerate of how individual Board members prefer to communicate and/or the Board can communicate outside of the formal meetings so that they are well informed.
8. Ensuring that Board members are well informed will ensure that they remain committed and excited about the project and by keeping them regularly informed will be of greater value to all involved and primarily to the project.
9. If for any reason, the Board member proves not to be effective, it would be best to carefully and sensitively exit the Board member, with a full written record kept on file.
10. It is important to consider multiple feedback methods so that all Board members can use their time effectively and that (you) don't abuse the time that they have given to the project – be clear about the time that the Board member is being asked to give.
11. Consider ways that you can compensate your Advisory Board. Compensation can include providing food and refreshments.



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