



Youth Employability Competences (YEC)

Final Evaluation Report

January 2022



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Section 1: Introduction

Young people are often encouraged to develop the technical skills needed to enter the labour market, but competencies on how to conduct themselves in the workplace, as well as create opportunities for employment mobility can be neglected, despite disadvantaged young people having few opportunities to be exposed to these key skills.

The Youth Employability Competences' (YEC) project seeks to address this need through providing guidance and materials and raising awareness of the employability competency gaps among disadvantaged youths by applying a comprehensive approach that includes all relevant stakeholders such as youth workers and employers, but also policy makers and institutions with connection to young people.

The YEC project was developed to help young people identify key gaps in employability competences and address these through youth worker led training modules. The targeted young people were marginalised through facing obstacles to progression in the labour market due to, social, cultural, economic or education challenges and in the age range 18-30 years.

The YEC project had four main objectives:

- Increase the employability of young people
- Increase the validation of young people's employability competences
- Increase the engagement of young people, promoting their empowerment, and engaging employers in competency tool development
- Increase the focus on employability among young people and youth workers/practitioners and promoting quality youth work

The YEC project commenced in Quarter 1 2019 with the kick-off meeting in London. It was designed on the basis of a July 2021 completion timeframe however with the onset of Covid-19, it was extended to November 2021. As the lead partner, Ballymun Job Centre (BJC) sought expressions of interest from external evaluators to conduct a specific evaluation of engagement of young people and stakeholders throughout the project lifetime, and their impact on project outputs. Business Improvement Solutions (BIS) were commissioned in June 2019 to undertake the external evaluation of the YEC programme.

1.1 Methodology

This evaluation of the YEC project is positioned within the overall Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework of the project. This framework sets out the key methods and processes of the YEC project, including success factors and the means by which the factors will be quantified and assessed.

It provides clarity on the interface between the internal and external evaluation approaches. The external evaluator worked alongside Intellectual Output (IO1) to establish the impact of the methodology developed and used to involve young people and employers.

The terms of reference for this evaluation stipulated that the external evaluator would provide an objective assessment of the impact on engaging young people and key stakeholders such as employers in the development process for new training and tools. The remit and measurement criteria used was agreed in conjunction with the evaluator and project partnership.

The evaluation was designed around a four-stage methodology.

- Information exchange, agreement on the evaluation framework and processes to be applied during the evaluation and review of all available project data. This included the review of all internal evaluation data from the Advisory Groups (AG)¹.
- Consultation with staff in Ballymun Job Centre (BJC), Turku, STRIM, Ciofs-fp and Rinova, on the work undertaken by the Advisory Boards and how this contributed to the development and design of Intellectual Outputs (IO's) 2,3 & 4.
- Face to face engagement with the Ballymun Job Centre (BJC) Youth Employer, Youth Worker and Youth Advisory Groups (YAG's). Remote consultation with the YAG's in Poland, Finland & Italy was facilitated by the respective partners.
- Interim and Final Evaluation Reports with analysis on, the extent to which project objectives were met, overall impact for all material stakeholders including associated learnings and recommendations.

¹ Analysis of qualitative feedback from stakeholders and partners engaged by the YEC partners via evaluation processes is embedded into the activities that are undertaken in relation to each of the Intellectual Outputs of the project. This was collated on a dedicated Dropbox which was accessible to the external evaluator

1.2 Partnership

This section provides an overview of each of the partner organisations

Ballymun Job Centre: Ireland - Lead Partner

Ballymun Job Centre (BJC) is a community-based non-profit making organisation, with 30 staff, who provides services to local unemployed people in North Dublin. The BJC operates within a local context providing education, training and employment supports to local people who are disadvantaged within the labour market. The BJC use a client centred approach to tackle unemployment by addressing the barriers and needs presented by the clients. Many of whom have multiple barriers to employment including low education attainment, basic skills deficits, long term unemployment, low self-esteem, dependency on welfare, involvement in antisocial behaviour, addictions, criminal histories, early school leaving, disabilities, and mental health difficulties.

City of Turku: Finland

As a bilingual city, Turku offers education in both Finnish and Swedish. The purpose of the integration is to offer children and young people an uninterrupted learning path, from nursery to the upper secondary level as well as diverse education services in adult education. City of Turku Education Division is responsible for early childhood education, basic education, general upper secondary education, vocational education, and adult education in Turku. The city has a total of 59,000 children and students. The city's education services provide learners of all ages with the means to develop as individuals based on their own strengths and goals.

CIOFS-FP: Italy

CIOFS-FP is a non-profit organization founded in 1986, whose main area of activity is Vocational Training. CIOFS-FP operates in 11 Italian regions and is active in vocational training, guidance, certification of skills, social inclusion, employability promotion and job integration as well as equal opportunities through the implementation of educational activities and research, workshops, cross-border trade, development and implementation of projects and services. It has considerable experience in the development and management of national and European projects, the main beneficiaries are youths, people who have dropped out of education, women, the unemployed, the NEETs, migrants, Roma people and other minorities.



Rinova: United Kingdom

Rinova is a social enterprise based in London that specialises in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of cultural, social, and economic development programmes in the areas of, employment, employability, enterprise, community development and social action, the creative industries and cultural learning. Rinova and its leading staff bring some 30 years of experience in the lifelong learning sector in the UK and Europe, and an extensive portfolio of project work in relation to learning design, quality assurance and evaluation.

Rinova is an active participant in the European dimension of its work, having participated in some 20 transnational partnerships and programmes since its formation. It is particularly active in supporting the development and mobility of cultural learning practitioners.

STRIM: Poland

Youth Development and Integration Association STRIM was established in 2001 in Cracow, as a non-governmental organisation, gathering people sensitive for the social issues.

Members of STRIM are active people willing to undertake actions aimed at building open-minded society, interested in youth problems, international education, and culture. STRIM leads a vast number of diverse projects in Poland and beyond its borders, mainly in the field of culture and intercultural education. Aimed at developing awareness, national and European, while not neglecting its regional levels, STRIM initiates and promotes all forms of youth activities by organising trainings, seminars, conferences, public events, meetings, and youth exchanges. STRIM is one of the biggest organisations working with European Solidarity Corps in Poland. STRIM participate in Strategic Partnerships designed to develop and share innovative practices and promote cooperation, peer learning, and exchanges of experiences in the fields of education, training, and youth.

MetropolisNET: Germany

Established in 2009 as EEIG in Berlin, MetropolisNet (MET) is a European network of diverse types of organisations; all of them working in European city contexts. MetropolisNet concentrates its partnership on metropolitan areas dealing with the challenges facing urban regions through information exchange and mediation between practitioners and policy makers to design programmes and develop partnerships for joint policy development. All MET partners are working with different target groups, working in diverse cultural contexts, and using different approaches.

Section 2: YEC Activity Review

This section will summarise YEC activity and progress against the key output areas of the project.

2.1 Intellectual Output 1

The Youth & Employer Advisory Boards Methodology sought to develop and pilot a methodology to create a space for dialogue between young people, employers and the project partners when developing the project tools. The methodology includes a full outline of how to engage young people and relevant stakeholders to increase opportunities for youth empowerment. Partners shaped the recruitment for, and delivery of their Advisory Groups (AG's) based on the IO1 methodological guide. The composition of the AG's reflects the targeting which was based around.

- Young people aged 18-30 with one or more of the following barriers: economic obstacles, health problems, educational difficulties, social obstacles, refugees, or geographical obstacles.
- Young people already in employment in addition to those preparing to enter the labour market.
- Guidance practitioners who work with the above-mentioned client groups were also targeted, along with youth workers, employers, and national stakeholders with a youth work focused agenda.

BJC, Turkey, STRIM and Ciofs-fp² formed Advisory Groups. Many of the young people, youth workers and employers recruited to the Advisory Groups were already involved in the inter-agency model of working deployed by the partner organisations.

“We are regularly in touch with young people, youth workers and employers hosting young trainees in internships and work experiences. For this reason, involving employers and youth was straightforward and the YEC helped to strengthen these existing relationships.” Partner

While partners welcomed employers and young people to the Advisory Groups, they were also keen to ensure that new people were recruited. Social media and relevant websites were used to, inform, and invite participation from Young People. Candidates filled in a short application form where they shared their motivation and aspirations for participation.

² Rinova had responsibility for internal evaluation



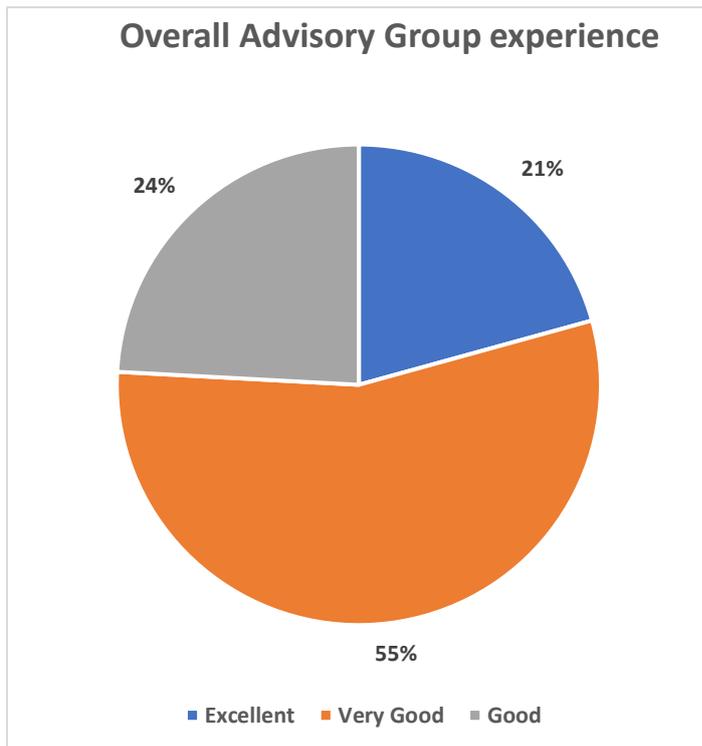
The project was promoted by partners as an opportunity to reflect on and develop skills needed in the labour market and find out about international Erasmus+ projects and the opportunities that they offer. The young people were recruited based on their interest in developing employability competencies and being on work experience or actively looking for employment.

In addition to utilising existing networks to drive recruitment, e-mail campaigns and networking targeted at organisations active in the labour market, education and youth work were the most common and successful methods of recruiting employers and youth professionals. Partners were keen to have input from private sector organisations who initially struggled to see a value in participating. However, partners invested considerable time in communicating the benefits in terms of future recruitment and corporate social responsibility which gradually convinced corporate organisations of the potential.

In Year 1 of the project, the partners facilitated separate employer and youth advisory boards though in some cases both groups were brought together to great effect to discuss Intellectual Outputs.

“The decision to bring both groups together to discuss the mindfulness module was courageous and inspirational as the young people really thrived in this environment. Being listened to and having their voice heard was so empowering and the employers particularly those in the private sector got an insight into the challenges faced by young people accessing the labour market which they were not aware of.” BJC AG member

With the onset of Covid-19 in March 2020, the immediate priority for employers and professionals was their core business. This inhibited their participation in the AG's and YEC partners were acutely aware of the need to give all stakeholders the time and space to transition. By the summer 2020, all AG meetings were on-line and increasingly due to reduced numbers the groups were being merged. The on-line mode of delivery continued to the end of the Project in November 2021 and included Transnational Partner meeting 4 and the final conference.



In excess of twenty-five Advisory Group meetings (Employers, Youth and both combined) were facilitated over the lifespan of the project. Figure 1 illustrates feedback from the evaluations of the group meetings presenting a positive overall experience for AG participants. The groups were interactive and through using the youth work approach facilitators encouraged ownership among the young people. Facilitators observed evidence of skill development in many of the youth groups, particularly in confidence and communication skill

Figure 1: Advisory Group Experience

2.2 Intellectual Output (IO) 2

IO2 was the development of a full suite of employability training modules which were piloted with young people in Ireland, Poland, Italy, Finland, United Kingdom and Germany in 2021. These modules were designed to improve the employability of young people and enhance the skills of youth workers and practitioners who piloted them. The modules are outlined below and includes the partners responsible for their creation and development.

- BJC – Wellness
- Rinova – Motivation and Autonomy
- Met Net – Perceived or Actual Discrimination
- Met Net – The Gap Between Expectations and Reality
- Strim – Communication
- Turku – Professionalism
- Ciofs – Job Searching & Orientation Skills

The content of each module reflected significant investment by the respective partner organisation and through their own internal expertise and input from AG members and stakeholders, it represents current best practice in each area. The interaction and engagement between the young people and the employers in the design and development of the modules epitomised what the YEC was designed to do.

Through the World Café technique, young people, educator trainers, tutors and stakeholders from different European countries have participated in a proactive way in IO2. Collaborating together on methodologies, techniques, strengths, and weaknesses of each training module, in order to integrate it and make it more effective in terms of informal, non-formal and experiential learning, to bring out, recognize and acquire the skills necessary to obtain and keep a job.

2.3 Intellectual Output (IO) 3

This IO provided for a comprehensive master training course on employability competences resulting in a quality assured exploitation of the tools developed. Due to the Covid-19 crisis, the Master training course did not proceed as originally scheduled in September 2020. Rather in February 2021, youth workers and trainers from Poland, Ireland, Finland, and Italy took part in our one-week training course “Train the Trainer, a passport for employment”, during which they explored the training modules. This train the trainer course had a specific focus on youth workers and guidance practitioners engaging with young people who are seeking employment, as the role of youth worker represents a vital resource for many young people when seeking appropriate training and interventions with employability.

The technique used in the training was the Theatre of Oppressed, which was developed by the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal during the 1950-60s and is an arsenal of theatre techniques and games that seeks to motivate people, restore true dialogue, and create space for participants to rehearse taking action. Those youth workers and trainers proceeded to pilot the project modules with young people in their country and collected their feedback. This meant that partners essentially became the Master trainers, and all pilot training was completed by Autumn 2021 and was delivered to more than 90 young people.

2.4 Intellectual Output (IO) 4

IO4, the Competency validation guide is a tool for young people and youth workers that will help them navigate between different validation systems dedicated to soft skills and competences, such as Youth Employability. This guide is a response to the need of young people developing and validating their skills who often stumble on a major barrier in the lack of opportunities to showcase these skills in an accredited setting.



The final YEC competency validation guide handbook focuses on six different validation systems. The first two: European Qualification System and ECVET are already widely implemented in the EU and help to understand the level of education (including: development of skills) that was achieved by the young person. These systems are accredited by the Member States and are comparable throughout the EU and many other partner countries.

Two other validation systems Youthpass and Europass are not based on external accreditation by any state or institution. Instead, they are designed to help young people reflect on the skills they have developed during an educational initiative or project and recognise the progress made. This is especially valuable for young people who are not aware that they have some specific skills (i.e., communication, organisational, leadership-related etc.) and can be used while preparing for a job interview.

The last two systems, Understanding My Journey and Open Badges, are for self-learning. They help a young person map specific skills that they want to develop and guide them through their educational journey. They propose a specific order of learning and help to map progress and achievement. This is especially valuable for these young people who recognise that there are some competencies that they could develop and are looking for a tool to do so.

The validation of so-called “Key Competencies” that includes soft skills, is one of the priorities of the Council of the European Union according to its recommendations on Lifelong Learning released in May 2018. Through the handbook developed in IO4, young people will be able to produce certification or accreditation necessary for them to prove that they have other skills that are necessary for the job, while employers can also use the validation guide to verify the experience.



2.5 Dissemination



There is a clear dissemination strategy in place to share tools with young people, employment, and youth work professionals across all partner countries and more widely throughout Europe. The YEC project has its own logo and branding, three Newsletters and two videos were designed and used by partners as part of their dissemination activities such as sharing on social media and circulation to networks and contacts. The project

website [YEC Intellectual Outputs – Youth Employability Competences \(yecproject.eu\)](http://yecproject.eu) is live and contains downloadable versions of each of the four IO's and a range of case studies highlighting, Advisory Boards, Youth Work environment, Employability Competencies, Peer Learning, and individual participant stories.

All dissemination has been devised in line with overall project objectives. It is a core belief of the YEC partnership that awareness and buy in to the YEC outputs are essential for creating sustainable outcomes for communities and organisations who are seeking to support young people to move towards employment. The dissemination strategy has achieved the following objectives.

- Raised awareness of the importance of employability competency development and validation
- Showcased the work of the YEC project
- Extended the impact of YEC's work by enabling the wider community to benefit from the tools produced
- Raised the profile of the partner organisations and promoted their work in meeting the objectives of Erasmus
- Expanded and strengthened partner networks by engaging existing and new networks, stakeholders, and target groups



YEC
Youth
Employability
Competences

NEWSLETTER



Figure 2: YEC Newsletter 3 May 2021

Section 3: Stakeholder Outcomes

The external evaluator attended the third transnational meeting (TNM) in Dublin in March 2020 and facilitated discussion and agreement on the external evaluation framework which is illustrated in section 3.1. This discussion reflected on feedback below from the national agency on the first progress activity report.

“The impact to date has been described in terms of outputs, such as the opportunities provided to young people to be heard, as well as an increased awareness and understanding of the identified employability competences. The report has not clearly described what the impact of this is, the organisation could consider how they could track the outcomes into impacts through the evaluation process.”

“The report identifies the value of the Employer/Youth worker advisory group meetings as an opportunity for networking, as well as providing an increased awareness of the skill gaps of young people in terms of the identified competences. For future reports the organisation could consider what impact this has had on the project and the stakeholders involved.”

In developing the framework, we have segmented outcomes, indicators, and impact, while recognising that impact is the long-term effect of an outcome³ and evidencing such longer-term change in the duration of the project will be challenging. For example, the longer-term impact of improved employability might be upward social mobility in terms of future income, attitudes, and aspirations.

However, while the evidence for such longer-term impact may not present over the duration of YEC, the framework did provide the impetus for partners and the external evaluator to consider the immediate and more short-term change. It also challenged partner organisations to think about the outcomes and impact for their organisation as a result of participation in the project which will assist in their internal business planning.

This framework was then tested through the data collection with stakeholders described in the subsequent sections of this report with a focus on outcomes. Questionnaire were circulated to members of the BJC Youth Advisory Group for the interim and final evaluation reports (Appendix 1) with 14 completed responses in total. Semi-structured interviews using a similar consultation framework to the questionnaire were held with young people participating in AGs in Italy, Poland & Finland for the Interim Report. Focus Groups were facilitated with Ciofs and Ballymun Job Centre Advisory Groups in late 2021.

³<https://www.google.com/search?q=difference+between+impact+and+outcome&og=Difference+between+impact+&ags=chrome.6.0l2j69i57j0l5.13581j1j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

3.1 Evaluation Framework

Stakeholder	Outcomes- What we think will change for them	Outcome Indicators	Impact
Young People (YP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Improved employability. -Improved opportunities for career progression. -Increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence. -Increased awareness and understanding of employability competencies. -Increased ability to articulate personal development in relation to employability skills. -Enhanced empowerment. -Improved overall health & well-being. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Evidence of YP applying YEC methodology in CVs, applications, and interview. -Number of YP reporting increased employability and success in securing sustained employment. -Number of YP accessing onward progression. -Number of YP utilising YEC skills in the workplace. -Number of YP and practitioners reporting increased employability of young people. -Number of YP reporting enhanced empowerment and improved health & well-being. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Upward Social Mobility. -Defined career pathway. -Enhanced Citizenship & Social Consciousness. -Improved health & well-being. -Form long term relationships.
Youth Workers (YW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased opportunities to engage and work with target group. - Increased openness and willingness to adopt new approaches and youth focused methodologies. - More opportunities to network and share information with other stakeholders on best practices in youth work. - Increased opportunity to contribute and exposure to training package development. -Increased understanding of employability competencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Number of YW using the tools. -Increased facilitated and meaningful dialogue between young people and employers/youth workers. - Youth workers report increased engagement among young people. - Number of youth workers who report change in practice as result of engagement with the project/IOs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Change in Youth Work practice. -Enhanced focus on employability in Youth Work.

Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased openness and willingness to adopt new approaches to access young talent. -Increased awareness of the skill gaps of young people. -Increased understanding of employability competencies and the need to support young people’s employability competence development. - Increased connection with their local communities. - Increased opportunity to contribute and exposure to training package development. - Improved networking opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased capacity of employers to recruit and retain young people. -Improved collaboration and networking. -Greater understanding of employment competencies and how to nurture same. -Number of employers who report change in practice as result of engagement with the project/IOs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Change in practice as a result of the YEC Project. -Competency based approach to recruitment and training. -Increased collaboration with Youth Work organisations.
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased awareness of the skill gaps of young people. -Improved networking opportunities and increased understanding of sharing of information at international level. -Increased funding opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of partner organisations who report change in practice as result of engagement with the project/IOs. - Number of employers who report improved awareness of the skill gaps of young people. - Number of partners reporting improved influence in their sector as a result of the YEC Project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved capacity to operate at European level. - Increased influence in their sector. -Enhanced organizational sustainability.

Table 1. YEC Evaluation Framework

3.2 Young People

This section will explore the feedback evidencing the change for young people with verbatim quotations included for verification. Participant's expectations have been met and, in many cases, exceeded.

"I didn't expect much at first, because I felt like I didn't have enough information about the matter, but ever since with every meeting we had and with the trip to Rome, where I was lucky enough to be selected to attend, seeing so many people dedicated to the project, it has exceeded my expectations."

The positive impact of AG participation in relation to employability was a recurring theme in the responses.

"I feel that from being in this group I have been inspired to continuously develop myself as a person. I would like to start volunteering for my community, even if it's something as simple as helping Tidy Towns pick up rubbish. I feel that what I've learned from this group can help get me get closer to landing a job as I can apply the advice, I've been given to my jobseeking and use my volunteer experience to make my CV look more attractive."

"I've learned a good bit about job interview etiquette from this course such as dress code, dealing with gaps on a CV etc. I've also added my involvement in YEC to my CV profile and used it in two job applications to the HSE and An Post since. I am currently being considered for interviews for these two posts."

The learning has provided a catalyst for renewed job searching during the Covid- 19 lockdown

"Right now, I am using my free time to improve on my job skills such as my touch-typing skill as well as becoming more active on LinkedIn. I also recently did a mock interview exercise at KPMG and the interviewer was very impressed with my performance. I am trying my best to apply everything I've learned from this group to my everyday life."

For those already in employment or work placement, participation provided an impetus for further progression in the workplace and some volunteering.

"This Advisory Group has thought me, how to act and how not to act in the workplace, it has also helped me to expand my network and plan for how I can progress in the workplace. I am also doing some volunteering which came about through my involvement in the Advisory Group."

Acquisition of soft skills such as confidence and self- belief to negate stress and anxiety was also evident

“I've been more confident in my work experience job, when I first started, I was nervous and shy, but as the weeks went on, I became more confident, thanks to joining the advisory group.”

“I had no plan for my future as I had been unemployed for quite some time, and I had lost my confidence and belief. The Advisory Group has given me the tools to get back into the workforce, I have updated my CV and have secured interviews in the coming weeks. I now feel like I have a plan and I feel so much better about myself; I am less anxious and am getting on better with friends and family.”

There was also evidence of the transformational impact for participants

“I had been in and out of jobs since leaving school and I had lost direction, from the first meeting of the Advisory Group, I knew that it would be good for me. I found my confidence and learned more about myself and the small things that make such a big difference to employers such as attitude and body language. While participating in the AG, I also got support on CV development and Job searching. This was life changing as I now have a steady job and am looking forward to the future.”

Case studies are available at [Case Studies – Youth Employability Competences \(yecproject.eu\)](https://yecproject.eu)

3.3 Youth Workers

A questionnaire was circulated to members of the BJC Youth Work Advisory Group (Appendix 1). Semi-structured interviews using a similar consultation framework to the questionnaire were held with youth workers participating in Finland. This section will explore the feedback from respondents with verbatim quotations included to verify the outcomes accrued.

“Our organisation was asked if we would like to be part of the advisory panel and my manager asked if I would be the representative. I was eager to be a part of this group as it sounded like something that we could implement in our own setting for our families and young people. My expectations were exceeded primarily due to the insights that I have gained in new and innovative approaches to engage young people”

Learning from the Group that will shape and improve professional practice in working with young people was also evident.

“We work with vulnerable families and young people, the benefits for our organisation were learning how we could better facilitate training to our young adults and indeed in some cases the parents of our young people. The training modules content is very suitable to our clients and from being a part of the advisory group alone, it is evident that this would be a very useful training to have.”

“I personally feel that when minds come together for a project like this it automatically empowers you and motivates you to think of the various ways you can help people reach their goals, find and maintain employment even more so now going forward during these uncertain times of Covid-19”.

Knowledge sharing and being exposed to an environment where the voice of the young person is prominent was highlighted.

“The broad range of expertise and of course hearing the voice of the young people/young adults were the big takeaways for me. There was a myriad of knowledge and ideas between those on panel and the atmosphere at the meeting was very enthusiastic. It was really empowering.”

3.4 Employers

A questionnaire was circulated to employers (Appendix 1) This section will explore the feedback from the four responders with verbatim quotations included to verify the outcomes accrued. All of the employers were known to or were already working collaboratively with partner organisations.

“Our target group is those adults over 18 years from diverse backgrounds who wish to engage with literacy programmes or avail of second-chance education to improve general life skills and /or job-seeking opportunities. We network closely with our colleagues in Ballymun Job Centre to ensure broader supports for clients /learners who engage with our services hence involvement in the YEC Advisory Group was of interest to us.”

Employers were clear about what they wanted to achieve through participation. One training provider has already implemented the learning into their programmes.

“To help develop a framework to help break down barriers to employment. Our expectations have been met as all feedback provided at each Advisory group meeting has been taken on board and implemented into the coursework.”

Being part of a European initiative and engaging with other Advisory Boards was a positive and empowering experience for employers.

“I felt a deep sense of contribution to the European-wide community as I had the privilege to meet the other advisory boards from Europe during a trip to Rome in November 2019. It was a brilliant experience where myself, and the rest of the team had the opportunity to offer advice and guidance to the other advisory boards.”

Building relationships and networking which is integral to business development were facilitated through the AG.

“I have had the opportunity to build relationships with the team at Ballymun Job Centre as well and with the other advisory group members. This has resulted in Job Alert expanding our services into course advertising on behalf of the Ballymun Job Centre.”

“Participation provided opportunities for discussion and networking with young people, youth workers and employers regarding development of competences. It is the gap between expectations and reality that was most highlighted in these discussions, and this was addressed in the training module content.”

Sharing knowledge and expertise for the mutual benefit of all was a prominent theme in the responses.

“Personal benefits from participation in the Advisory Group were the opportunity to hear a broader perspective relating to youth competences voiced by young people from the community I work in. In commenting on ppt presentations for the draft modules, I could bring my own teaching experiences from working with adult basic education learners when reading through the content for training sessions.”

“Discussion and networking at Advisory Group meetings have provided the opportunity to reflect on our own practices in relation to teaching and learning to ensure ‘real’ benefits for young adults engaging with our educational courses. This is particularly relevant to those who are studying QQI accredited modules at levels 3 and 4 to improve job-seeking opportunities”.

The focus on building the capacity of the young person through a competency-based approach was heralded as a key part of any learning programme.

“It must be emphasised that in order to successfully complete learning and employability programmes, participants must have developed basic personal competences such as motivation, communication, time-keeping, teamwork and organisation skills. These competences are common to engagement with any form of adult education, training, or job opportunities.”

Respondents also highlighted the professionalism of the meetings.

“Meetings were well organised and facilitated in line with the agenda. Facilitators were well prepared and had completed tasks to ensure the smooth running of the meeting.”

“The meeting environment was relaxed and friendly allowing for each member to contribute opinions and ask questions for clarity while covering agenda items.”

“Apart from the meetings, the YEC newsletters provided very useful and interesting updates on the project and the transnational meetings.”

Section 4: Findings

We have identified a number of key findings based on our analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data made available to this evaluation.

4.1 IO1 Advisory Boards

Recruitment was most successful where partner organisations had existing networks and partnerships in place. Many of the young people, youth workers and employers recruited to the AG's were already involved in the inter-agency model of working deployed by project partners. Digital channels were also used to raise awareness of the recruitment opportunities.

Despite some difficulties with the recruitment and retention of young people over the three-year period, the feedback from the AG participants indicates that there was good participation, the groups were interactive and through using the youth worker approach facilitators encouraged ownership and participation. The AG's created an effective space for dialogue between young people, employers, youth workers and the project partnership.

Participation from the young people was best during the early stages of the project, it did tend to drop off as the groups became established. Pre March 2020, there were separate employer and youth advisory group meetings, Covid-19 necessitated the merging of the groups in most cases and a pivoting to remote working and on-line delivery.

The value of participation in the AGs for young people has been enhanced by partners providing a reference either written or verbal when they are applying for jobs and the young people see a lot of value in this. This was a request from the young people which was swiftly actioned.

The extent to which IO1 would influence the other IO's was a crucial question in the terms of reference for this evaluation. There was much discussion in the AG's on the training modules (IO2) in the early stages of the project and it is evident that the young person's voice was instrumental in the shaping of IO2 and the subsequent piloting and validation in IO's 3 and 4. It is therefore the view of this evaluation that the methodology designed in IO1 and utilised by the project partnership to engage young people, employers and youth workers enhanced the quality of the tools created for use with young people in IO's 2,3 and 4.

“The most significant achievement for our Advisory Group was its influence on a key final output of the project, the Training Modules. Young people commented on our drafts and shared their suggestions. Two of them took part in a training course in Rome regarding these modules and this was a fantastic learning experience for them” AG member

4.2 IO2 Training Modules

The interaction and engagement between the young people and the employers epitomised what the YEC project sought to do in relation to developing co-produced competencies in the workplace. There was also considerable cross partner learning through each module and the content of each reflects a significant investment by the respective partner organisations. The IO2 process facilitated partners to objectively reflect on what they are delivering for young people and how they are engaging with them.

“Wellness is not a subject that people would associate with a module on employability, it is often taken for granted. Its importance was amplified by the young people and the challenges that they face in accessing the labour market which can often impact their mental health”. Employer

4.3 Partnership Effectiveness

The project has completed all four IO's which is testament to the partnership effectiveness. All partners were committed to and supportive of the project and there is a clear strategic fit between YEC and their boarder organisational objectives. YEC builds on links from previous European Erasmus funded projects such as the Networking for Quality Culture and Assurance (NQCA)

After overcoming the difficulties which initially effected the timescale, (change of staff and availability of advisory groups members), with each TNM, the partnership got stronger with an acute recognition of the roles and responsibilities of each partner and appreciation of their respective specialist areas. The project was resilient to Covid -19, complied with all public health guidelines of the partner countries and transitioned quickly to remote delivery.

In summary, the partnership has been effective with robust systems and processes in place. It has been flexible and responsive in meeting the challenges of Covid - 19 through on-going partner consultation and contingency planning. The YEC partnership has met the key objectives of the project namely.

- Increase employability of Young People (Soft skills, competences, CV development, references)
- Increase validation of Young People's employability competences.
- Increase engagement of young people & employers in competency tool development.
- Increase the focus on employability among Young People and practitioners specialising in youth education, employment & training, and youth work.

4.4 Evaluation Framework

The partnership has co-produced with the external evaluator an evaluation framework which segments outcomes, indicators, and impact. It reflects the feedback from the first progress report from the national agency in relation to tracking outcomes into impacts. Furthermore, it identifies the possible impacts accruing from networking and increased awareness of the skill gaps of young people in terms of the identified competences, for stakeholders. This framework can be used by partners post YEC programme to evaluate employability programmes.

The framework was tested through the data collection with the project stakeholders to identify the outcomes for them which are discussed in Sections 4.5 to 4.8. As a preface to this, we would highlight that increased awareness and knowledge of the importance of employability competences, training opportunities, methods for validation of these skills and the importance of engaging Young People in tool development was an outcome for all stakeholders.

4.5 Outcomes for Young People

The internal and external evaluation data collection (Section 3) has evidenced the following outcomes for young people.

- Improved employability and opportunities for career progression.
- Increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence.
- Increased awareness and understanding of employability competencies.
- Increased ability to articulate personal development in relation to employability skills.
- Enhanced empowerment and improved communication skills
- Improved overall health & well-being.

The attention to developing the soft skills of the young people was integral to the achievement of such positive outcomes. Many participants did not fully understand the concept of soft skills at the outset and there was considerable diversity in the groups. Some were, early school leavers with limited work experience, vulnerable youth, sometimes from a migrant background. By the project end, many had achieved progression in employability through securing employment, work experience, training or gaining qualifications. One participant reflected on the revision of the training modules as an exercise that increased his confidence and belief that he had the competencies to get a job.

4.6 Outcomes for Youth Workers

The internal and external evaluation data collection (Section 3) has evidenced the following outcomes for youth workers.

- Increased opportunities to engage and work with target group.
- Increased openness and willingness to adopt new approaches and youth focused methodologies.
- Increased opportunity to contribute and exposure to training package development.
- Increased understanding of employability competencies.

4.7 Outcomes for Employers

The internal and external evaluation data collection (Section 3) has evidenced the following outcomes for employers.

- Increased awareness of the skill gaps of young people.
- Increased understanding of employability competencies and the need to support young people's employability competence development.
- Increased connection with their local communities.
- Knowledge enhancement through contribution to and exposure to training package development.

4.8 Outcomes for Partner Organisations

The internal and external evaluation data collection (Section 3) has evidenced the following outcomes for Partner Organisations.

- A space for dialogue between young people, employers, and the project partners to enhance inter agency and collaborative working
- The co-design and co-production elements will be integrated into partner organisations systems and processes
- Improved expertise and competence for staff members
- Contribution towards policy development and improved employer engagement practice across each partner organisation
- Training Modules for use by partners and dissemination across their networks which will improve their credibility and influence in the respective professional areas.
- Evidenced based evaluation methodology which can be used for other employment programmes

Section 5: Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for consideration for partners in future similar or equivalent programmes.

5.1 Recruitment of Young People

The evaluation highlights the transitory nature of young people's involvement in groups and forums designed to build their capacity to sustain in training and employment. It is likely that AG membership and attendance would fluctuate in future similar or equivalent programmes. Partners should factor into planning that participants may only attend one or two meetings. Greater involvement of the Young People in the communications strategy, facilitating their input into the branding and optimising their social media reach might attract a broader base of Young People.

We would also support the suggestions tabled at the Dublin TNM on this subject namely

- Asking current and past youth advisory members to recommend relatives or friends.
- Encouraging young people to list their involvement in the board on their CV as voluntary work and coach them on how to discuss their involvement at interviews.
- Partners providing a reference either written or verbal when they are applying for jobs.
- Capturing and recording the reasons why young person dropped out of the AG's and actioning accordingly where possible.
- Integrating within the methodological guide, sections which include focusing on recruitment of employers and retention of young people on the advisory panels.

5.2 Dissemination

We recommend that AG participants should share information on their social media, photos of meetings, newsletters about the project. Partners should explore opportunities for inclusion of IO tools in publications and conferences. The methodological guide and training modules would have great appeal to audiences in the VET and Youth Work sectors across Europe.

Focussing on specific themes and impact could also assist dissemination, one of the potential longer-term impacts of YEC might be its contribution to reduced youth unemployment among hard-to-reach young people. While statistically the numbers involved in YEC will be insignificant in the regional or national figures, the practice and approach if replicated EU wide could have a more significant effect on the statistics. Showcasing such an outcome should be a consideration for dissemination for all partners.

5.3 Evaluation

The evaluation framework provides the template for future evaluation of similar or equivalent programmes. The following approach is recommended to ensure that the value and change proposed in the framework is robustly captured.

- Based on the stakeholder analysis in Section 3.1, each partner organisation should collate a list of contact details for all of their stakeholders and contact same to request their consent to participate in the evaluation. This would assist the external evaluator in the consultation and engagement for the final report.
- Should stakeholders be unwilling to share their contact details with a third party (external evaluator) the partner organisation could share the relevant data collection tools (questionnaires, consultation frameworks) with them to facilitate their input.

The drop off in numbers of the young person advisory group has been referenced, however it is important to recognise that even in the event of a Young Person attending only one AG meeting, there is likely to be an outcome (change) accrued by them through their attendance. Tracking their progression post AG through phone call or e-mail is recommended and would provide valuable data for final evaluation. The key question to pose to participants is, the extent to which their attendance at the advisory group assisted them to progress into employment or training or contributed to change in other aspects of their lives.

5.4 Programme Delivery

We recommend consideration of the following in any future programme.

- If programme is of two years duration or longer, the number of formal Advisory Group meetings should be reduced.
- If programme of between one- and two-year duration, the number of formal Advisory Group meetings should be increased.
- Separate Young Persons group to ensure that their voice is heard with the option to bring groups together to discuss and agree milestone outputs
- Specific topics for discussion at each meeting



Appendix 1: YEC Advisory Group Impact Questionnaire

Please tick your designation below

Young Person

Employer

Youth Worker

Other

Q1 Please tell us about how and why you got involved in the Advisory Group.

Q2 What were your expectations prior to participating in the Advisory Group and to what extent have these expectations been met so far.

Q3 Please describe any personal outcomes or benefits (e.g., contribution to community, empowerment, independence, health & well-being) that you have experienced from participation in the Advisory Group.



Q4 Please describe any professional outcomes or benefits (e.g., employment, skills & learning in professional practice, networking) that you have experienced from participation in the Advisory Group.

Q5 What do you think has worked particularly well in the Advisory Group Meetings.

Q6 Please identify any areas for improvement that you feel should be implemented in future Advisory Group Meetings.