



THE CENTRE
FOR YOUTH
IMPACT

Part of YMCA George Williams College

Quality Practice Tool (QPT) Technical Guide

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The Quality Practice Tool

Technical Guide

Introduction

The Quality Practice Tool (QPT) was adapted from QTurn’s Teacher Practices Instrument specifically for the UK context, in collaboration with QTurn. The QPT is a rating measure designed to assess the quality of staff or volunteer (referred to throughout this guide as ‘practitioner’) practices in youth provision settings. The QPT will support you in reflective practice, and to build a quality-focused organisational culture, develop improvement goals, and identify practitioner training needs. The QPT is intended to focus on quality at provision-level – that is, the quality of programmes, projects, or individual sessions, as experienced by young people – rather than the skills or performance of individual staff members.

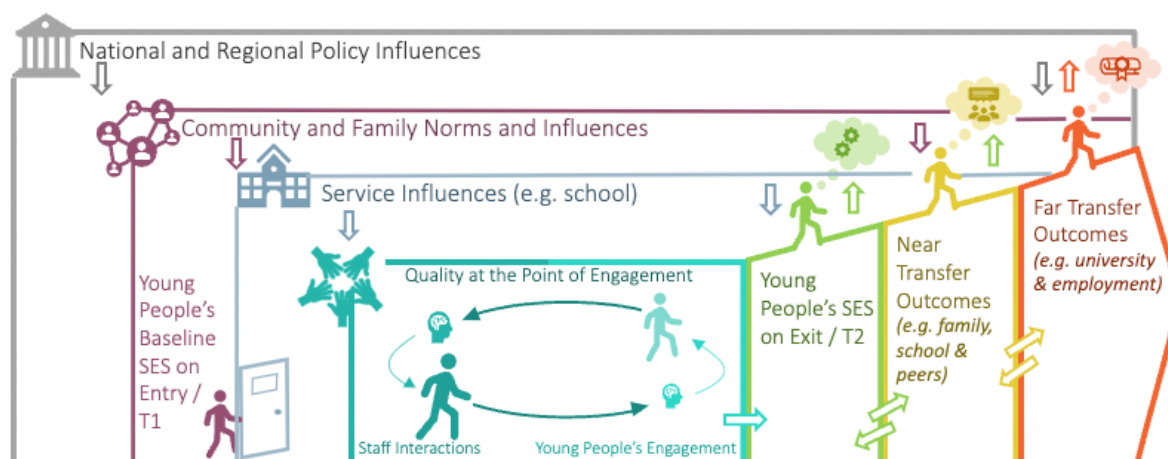
Young people’s socio-emotional development in context

The QPT is based on our [Framework of Outcomes for Young People 3.0](#), which sets out how informal and non-formal youth provision contributes to improvements in socio-emotional outcomes for young people. The Outcomes Framework 3.0 includes a theory of change that details how quality youth provision can lead to socio-emotional skill development for young people (see Figure 1, below). In summary:

- High-quality staff practices and content offered at the point of engagement (where adults and young people meet and interact) are likely to lead to higher levels of youth engagement during each session or activity.
- Young people bring with them a set of experiences and beliefs about themselves and the world around them, shaped by the contexts in which they are living and learning. These ‘pre-existing’ socio-emotional skills affect how young people initially engage with youth provision.
- Over time and multiple interactions, the combination of high-quality staff practices and young people’s engagement promotes the growth of socio-emotional skills.

- With sufficient participation in, and intensity of exposure to, high-quality settings, the effects of socio-emotional skill development will transfer to other settings.
- This includes the ‘near transfer’ of socio-emotional skills to family, school, and peers and the ‘far transfer’ of socio-emotional skills to subsequent life course events or experiences, such as early adulthood health, education, and employment. Young people continue to further apply and develop their socio-emotional skills in these settings.
- Improvement in socio-emotional skills is linked to longer-term impacts, including an improved ability to cope with the transition into adulthood and long-term improvements in mental and physical health, educational attainment, sustainable employment, finances, secure housing, positive relationships and personal safety.

Figure 1: Young People’s Socio-emotional Skills in Context Model



About the QPT

The QPT is simultaneously a tool, a measure and a framework that can be used for self-reflection, peer-assessment, or external observation to assess practice at the ‘point of engagement’ (i.e., the setting and moment where young people and practitioners meet and interact). The QPT does not measure or focus on organisational quality, such as commitment to training or staff ratio, even though these are also important influences. There are other tools and frameworks that already exist to explore features of organisational quality¹.

The QPT focuses on what the practitioner is saying and doing to promote skill growth. Although the other measures in the College’s [measurement system](#) focus specifically on socio-emotional skills, the quality practices defined in the QPT support all forms of skill growth in provision for young people aged approximately

¹ <https://www.nya.org.uk/quality/quality-mark/>

8 to 25. The tool identifies 20 aspects of observable practices, which are divided into four domains: warmth, responsiveness, scaffolding, and awareness.

According to our young person's socio-emotional skill development in context model, the highest-quality staff practices are generated by integrating knowledge about *warmth, responsiveness, scaffolding, and awareness* into practice that both meets the young person where they're at, and challenges them to extend their emerging skills in any content area (e.g. coding, art, social action), including socio-emotional skill development. Developing young people's socio-emotional skills will ultimately contribute to the National Occupational Standard YW18 ('engage with young people to promote their emotional wellbeing and mental health'). The QPT can be used to assess the quality of delivery of any area of practice and complements the National Youth Agency Youth Work Curriculum and Quality Mark.

How and When to Use

The QPT is designed for use in 'low stakes accountability' cultures and contexts. This is a much more effective environment for practitioners to reflect on practice development. This means setting up forums where practitioners can talk about their practice without the risk of penalty (whether actual or feared; material or emotional) if they discuss something they feel they failed at or that went wrong. You may have an organisational culture where this happens naturally in a staff meeting, or you may need someone who has impartiality and skill in this area to facilitate a discussion. We need to create climates where practitioners can fail safely in order to build learning from experience. Whilst some of our measures could be used in a performance management approach, we caution against this, knowing that the measures most effectively lead to improvement where practitioners are on-board and engaged as learners and co-creators of future success. This is how low stakes accountability comes to life.

The QPT should be used to assess the quality of staff and volunteer practices at the *point of engagement* (that is, the setting and moment when adults and young people interact). The tool may be used as a self-reflection ("to what extent did I..."), as a peer assessment tool ("to what extent did my colleague..."), as a line management tool ("to what extent are my staff...."), or as an external observational tool ("to what extent did this practitioner..."). The items and rating scales are the same across these four modes of use.

The QPT is primarily intended to assess the quality of practice in a particular programme, project or activity session, *rather than* the performance or skills of a particular practitioner. This is because most young people will participate in provision that is facilitated or supported by more than one practitioner, and so their experience of quality practice is in effect the combination of all practitioners' practices that are demonstrated within a particular setting at a given time. Understanding quality at the programme or session level is important if you wish to use the data from the QPT alongside data about changes in young people's

socio-emotional skills (via the POT and YPS) as it is the programme or session that we hope has developed young people's socio-emotional skills, rather than one practitioner within it. The focus on quality at a programme or session level means engaging all the practitioners involved in the use of the QPT. This supports collective reflective practice, and can identify potential to learn from and coach one another. The exception here is obviously one to one settings, like mentoring or tutoring, where the practice of the individual practitioner is extremely important.

The QPT can be used at any time that is convenient and meaningful to the youth provider. For example, it can be completed once, in the middle of a programme or project, to get a general idea about the quality of practice within provision. It can also be completed twice: for example, once at the beginning of a project, to inform improvement goals and training priorities, and once at the end of a project to assess improvements in quality. It can also be completed multiple times across a project for both of these purposes, as well as to gain detailed information about how and when staff and volunteer practices are improving (e.g. to assess the value of a mid-programme professional development training session). The timing of the QPT process should be determined by the goals of the organisation (e.g. continuous quality improvement, programme evaluation, or both). The QPT can also be used on an ongoing basis as a framework for reflection, supervision and coaching.

The QPT can be used to assess the quality of provision for young people aged approximately 8 to 25. It works well for practice with young people aged 8 to 9 (who are in the process of developing their basic regulation skills) and also for practice with older young people aged 11 and older (who are in the process of developing their full range of socio-emotional skills, including the advanced regulation skills associated with focusing awareness on complex emotions and abstract task or identity content).

The QPT can be used within the context of any type of provision in sessions, including sessions with a socio-emotional skill development focus, and should take up a minimum of an hour's observation and 45 minutes write up. Practitioners involved in one to one provision, such as mentoring, can complete the QPT through reflecting on their recent sessions. Spending more time (e.g., in small groups of practitioners using a self-assessment process) can yield deeper insights into current practices and the steps necessary to develop and refine future practices. There are three response options for each item, where "1" is the lowest score, "3" is the middle score, and "5" is the highest score.

The Rating Tool

The QPT has 20 items, each of which identifies and defines an element of high-quality practice that is observable in a youth provision setting.

The 20 items are divided into four areas of practice, each of which link to an element of the neuroperson model featured in our Outcomes Framework 3.0.

These are:

- Area 1 – Warmth (Signalling to Broaden and Build Schemas),
- Area 2 – Responsiveness (Recovery from Narrow and Constrain Schemas),
- Area 3 – Scaffolding (Gateway to Complex Skills; e.g. the six domains of socio-emotional skills),
- Area 4 – Awareness (Gateway to Intentional Agency).

Area 1 is about practitioners signalling warmth to the young person, which activates their ‘broaden and build schemas’. This may initially be a conscious practice, but over time is likely to become automatic. Area two focuses on practices that support young people to recover from activated ‘narrow and constrain schemas’ that are influencing how they think, feel, and behave. Area three is about calibrating the complexity of the curriculum or provision content so that it matches the skill level of each young person. The practices in area four are focused on the development of awareness through reflection, which is key to young people developing intentional agency in their lives. To learn more about these schema states, refer to the [Outcomes Framework 3.0](#).

In order to complete the QPT, a ‘session’ should be observed (or reflected on by the practitioner who facilitates or leads it). We would encourage all practitioners involved in a programme, project or session to have the opportunity to be the observer, and be observed. What is considered to be a ‘session’ will depend on setting and context. It may be the provision offered on a particular night of the week (for example, under 14s’ youth club night), or a session with a particular group (like the ongoing young carers’ drop-in group) or a specific session within a project or programme (like week three of a street dance course).

Where the session is being observed, detailed notes (in the form of anecdotal evidence) about what occurs in that session should be recorded while they are occurring, and the 20 items then scored after the session by reference to the anecdotal record. When all practitioners have both observed, and been observed, a ‘moderation meeting’ can be held to reflect on the scores across the different observations, and agree on what this means for the organisation or service, and its improvement goals.

Where the QPT is being completed as a self-reflection tool, the practitioner should add notes about their recent practice against each item, and score it.

The response options for each of the 20 items are:

5 = full implementation – all aspects of practice are present, for all young people

3 = partial implementation – some aspects of practice present and/or only for some young people

1 = low implementation – no or few aspects of practice present, for few or no young people

The use of a scale with 1, 3 and 5 ratings rather than a 1, 2 and 3 is to enable a clear distinction in the range of total scores.

Some of the items may not be observable in every session. There is a note in each of these items to indicate it should only be scored if it was possible to observe.

We have provided examples of the 20 practices in the tool below. The examples are drawn from a wide field of practice and will not all be relevant to your setting. It would be useful for your team to identify a relevant example of each one in your own context.

The QPT Rating Form

A: Basic information

Name of the programme/project/session:	
Date of observation:	
Length of observation:	
Name of observer:	

B: How are you using this tool?

Self-reflection	Peer-assessment	Line manager observation	External observation

C: Practice Observations

Area 1 – WARMTH		1	3	5
1	Warm welcome Practitioner tone, body language, and words convey a warm greeting to each young person during their entry into the provision space or setting including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity (meet at door or equivalent, stand close or sit with) • Smiling facial expression, warm tone used with a positive verbal greeting • Eye contact, and guidance about what to do next (can be to whole group at end of entry) such as “go ahead and take a seat”, “the activities we’ve got on today are...”, or “help yourself to a drink and a snack before we get going”. 			

		For younger young people (or any young people who are distressed), the greeting may include consoling or reassurance.			
	Evidence				
2	Acknowledge and adjust	Practitioners acknowledge and validate young people's tone, body language, and words in both informal interactions and structured activities. e.g. adjust activity plans (including the topic of discussions) based on young people's emotional needs, energy, and focus; practitioners encourage creativity and highlight choices.			
	Evidence:				
3	Emotion management	Practitioners use calm tone and body language during moments of emotionally-charged expression or interaction. e.g. adults appropriately challenge resistant young people without harsh tone and move toward young people to engage warmly.			
	Evidence:				
Area 2 – RESPONSIVENESS					
4	Promote focus	Practitioners promote and enable young people's focus as appropriate in the session or interaction. e.g. music turned down; "let's have five minutes of quiet time to help us get this done", "let's meet in the café for a brew and chat", "run around to get warm for two mins then let's huddle in a circle".			
	Evidence:				
5	Promote accountability	Practitioners encourage young people to authentically engage during both informal interactions and structured activities; and/or practitioners support young people to notice and understand the impact of their behaviour. e.g. practitioners point out when young people are breaking group agreements or established ground rules, or using violent/sexual language or inappropriate gestures.			
	Evidence:				
6	Restore balance after conflict	For incidences of conflict, bullying, or exclusion/bias (e.g. on the basis of ability, religion, culture, race/ethnicity, class, gender, appearance, or sexual orientation), practitioners guide young people towards a resolution in that moment. e.g. apology, conflict resolution steps, discuss group agreements.			

		<p>For young people who use negative self-talk, staff <i>redirect</i> to more appreciative language. e.g. “yes, she is good at art but so are you, look what you’ve done”.</p> <p><i>[Do not score if bias, social conflict, etc. did not occur and are therefore Not Observed]</i></p>			
	Evidence:				
7	Response to emotional upset	<p>Young people experiencing emotional distress (e.g. agitated, worried, panic, grief or anger) are provided one of three options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A private space or other basic support (e.g. tactile object); • A one to one with a trusted adult in a different space if possible (e.g. hallway, quiet space or other room); or • A group process session with trusted peers/adult and ground rules. <p>Option includes supports for understanding emotion causes/effects, constructive handling of behaviour, focusing awareness on present moment sensations and feelings. <i>[Do not score if emotional upset did not occur and is therefore Not Observed]</i></p>			
	Evidence:				
Area 3 – SCAFFOLDING					
8	Explain steps	<p>Practitioners break down activities and processes into simpler steps that are explained to the young people, <i>both</i> before they begin and during the activity.</p> <p>e.g. breaking down a team challenge into parts, steps in making a poster set out verbally, visually or in written format.</p>			
	Evidence:				
9	Provide models	<p>Practitioners provide ‘models’ for the young people, <i>both</i> before they begin and during the activity</p> <p>e.g. a mind map, demonstration of mixing music.</p>			
	Evidence:				
10	Link to experience	<p>Practitioners ask young people to discuss connections between activities and the young people’s prior experience.</p> <p>e.g. “who has played dodge ball before?”, “how many people played?”, “what were the rules, how did it go?”.</p>			

		Practitioners say; “Do you remember...?” or “Have you ever...?”			
	Evidence:				
11	Link to categories	Practitioners refer to more general or abstract categories as regularly as possible to support the young people to build a mental map for new ideas. e.g. a blog is like a diary, a rap is like a poem and type of song combined, rounders is a bit like softball.			
	Evidence:				
12	Emotion vocabulary	Practitioners use terms and concepts related to feelings and emotions. e.g. “you look happy today... are you feeling happy?”.			
	Evidence:				
13	Promote efficacy	Practitioners promote young people’s positive beliefs about their own skills by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verbally attributing young people’s success to their effort, strategy, attention, practice, or persistence (e.g., “It may take some extra practice, but you’re already getting better at it” or “I could see you really focusing on that, and it paid off!”); Providing young people with opportunities to give and receive affirmations and appreciations to self and/or others (e.g. group feedback cards or round of thanks); and/or Encouraging making and learning from mistakes (e.g. “wow, that didn’t quite go how we planned, did it - but at least we tried!” - “what did we learn, what can we do differently next time?”). 			
	Evidence:				
14	Promote teamwork	Young people (can be different young people at different points during the observation/session) are guided toward the following experiences: working towards a shared goal (e.g., organised group projects or games), mentoring another young person (e.g. older helps younger to use equipment), or leading a group activity (e.g. leads icebreaker activity or warm up). <i>[Do not score if teamwork was not relevant (e.g. mentoring or one to one support) and is therefore Not Observed].</i>			
	Evidence:				
15	Promote responsibility	Young people have multiple opportunities to be responsible for collective tasks and projects.			

		e.g. setting up a session, running an icebreaker, making drinks, communicating important information to peers etc..			
	Evidence:				
Area 4 – AWARENESS					
16	Reflect on experience	Practitioners ask young people to use their experience to generate plans, goals, or alternatives as part of activities or discussions. e.g. “what could Fin do right now, what are their options in this situation? Can you think of at least three ideas?”			
	Evidence:				
17	Reflect on provision	Practitioners ask young people to evaluate informal or structured activity content. e.g. show thumbs; take a survey, give feedback.			
	Evidence:				
18	Reflect on diversity of experience	Practitioners encourage young people to reflect on the differences in and between their previous experiences (e.g. “how did you feel when you walked into a room where you didn't know anyone?”) and practitioners provide guidance about how to reflect on diverse experiences with openness (e.g. “we all have different opinions about who is the best football team, and that’s okay!”)			
	Evidence:				
19	Reflect on emotion & behaviour	Practitioners ask young people to discuss causes and effects of emotions and behaviour and how to handle them constructively using either past real experiences or fictional events. e.g. “How could you influence the group without getting angry or walking out?”, “Did you see XXX last night, how did they feel and how could they have handled it better?”. AND/OR practitioners give examples of cause and effect (e.g. “If you do this, this is likely to happen (cause and effect)”; or, “how could we have done that better?” (constructive handling).			
	Evidence:				
20	Reflect on mind-body	Practitioners provide opportunities for young people to bring the focus of awareness to the present moment (e.g. take a deep breath, feel your feet on the floor for a moment). AND/OR Practitioners help young people to discuss or observe quietly their physical sensations and			

		feelings (e.g. “what were you thinking and what was going on in your body just before you threw the chair?”). AND/OR Practitioners guide young people to calm and quiet states during activities (e.g. find a quiet space, soft music, dim lights, sensory/safe space, tactile materials, mats/carpet).			
	Evidence:				

Set Up

Decide as a team how you will conduct the ratings (self-reflection, peer-assessment, line manager assessment, or external observation). Decide which sessions will be observed and when, by whom, and how the results will be used. Results might be treated anonymously or aggregated as a team; individuals might review their ratings in a supervision with a line manager or peer coach; or the team might meet to discuss the results together.

Instructions

As you are observing the session/reflecting on your recent practice, please read each item description; think about the extent to which the practice is implemented fully, partially, or not at all; and mark the corresponding box. Add notes on what you are seeing/recall doing in the ‘evidence’ box.

If you want to change any of your ratings, please mark an “X” through the old response and fill in the new one.

Please do not skip any items.

Thank you!

Wrap Up

Anyone who reviews another person’s practice should schedule time to write up their notes and to give the person they observed their ratings and strengths-based feedback.

Conduct a review in whatever way was agreed with the team in the set up.

It would be useful to review:

- Where are the high scores and how can we consistently achieve them?

- Where are there lower scores that we can focus on improving?
- How can we improve the lower scores – what support or training do we need?
- What improvements do we want to see in a year's time?

You may also want to have a consensus scoring or 'moderation' meeting where you all meet to agree the overall score for the programme, project or setting you work in.

Input Choices

There are two ways you can collect and input data with the QPT. These are:

1. Complete the information on a webform within the [data portal](#). This means your data is automatically entered into the portal. This is also where data collected in a paper format are entered into the data portal.
2. Download the PDF form from the [SES Measurement Hub](#), print and use as a paper copy. If you choose this approach you will need to manually transfer the data into either our data portal, or into your own system or spreadsheet.

Which type of data entry works best for you will depend on the preferences of the practitioners and volunteers who work with you and how you might want to access the data.

Interpretation

It is useful to meet with your team to review the data and to work out what it means for their practice. Seeing that the data supports practice development is key to practitioners wanting to use tools, frameworks and measures like the QPT over time.

Data collected with the QPT can be entered into the College's Data Portal. This will enable you to view the quality of delivery across different programmes alongside the outcomes achieved by young people. Area scores can also highlight areas for future training. If the QPT is used at two time points, then the QPT average scores can be used to assess changes in the quality of practice (e.g. by comparing QPT total scores from a baseline assessment to QPT total scores from a follow-up assessment).

Validity

The QPT is currently a pilot tool and has not been validated. It is grounded in the Teacher Practices Instrument (TPI). Although the TPI items and scales are the result of decades of research by the QTurn team, to date, only three rounds of data collection have been completed using the instrument. The inter-rater reliability for

these three rounds of data collection, calculated as the percent perfect agreement between two independent raters, was 70%, 83%, and 74% for an average inter-rater reliability of 75%. Construct validity was assessed by cross-tabulating TPI profiles and School-age and Youth Programme Quality Assessment (a validated quality measure) profiles derived from item and scale data that was aggregated across all three rounds of data collection, for the 26 sites that had complete data on both instruments, prior to separate profile analyses of the TPI and PQA data. The results indicated a statistically significant omnibus relationship between the profile memberships associated with these two instruments ($\chi^2[6, n = 26] = 20.03, p = .003$), with large effect sizes for both the overall (Cramer's $V = .62, p = .003$) and ordinal (Kendall's tau- $b = .50, p < .001$) relations between the TPI and PQA profiles. Most importantly, practitioners with high-quality practice profiles on the PQA were significantly more likely than expected by chance to have high-quality practice profiles on the TPI (ASR = 2.4, one-tailed $p > .01$), with similar predicted relations found for practitioners with moderately-high-quality practice profiles (ASR = 3.2, one-tailed $p > .01$) and the lowest-quality practice profiles for both instruments (ASR = 2.2, $p > .05$). More robust reliability and validity information for the TPI, and corresponding QPT version, is pending the production of more extensive datasets (e.g. including socio-emotional skill growth data). Our version of the tool, the QPT, will also need to be piloted, rolled out, and validated in the UK's non-formal and informal youth provision sector, and the tool will be a pilot until that point in time.

Using the QPT to link to national qualifications and NOS

National Occupational Standards for Youth Work

At a high level, the QPT supports practitioners to achieve National Occupational Standard YW18 *Engage with young people to promote their emotional wellbeing and mental health*. Within each of the four domains in the QPT, there are also specific links to five other National Occupational Standards; for example:

Area of QPT	NOS
Warmth	YW01 Initiate, build and maintain relationships with young people
Responsiveness	YW02 Assist young people to learn and engage with the youth work process
Scaffolding skills	YW11 Plan, prepare and facilitate learning activities with young people
Awareness	YW05 Enable young people to identify, reflect, and use their learning to enhance their future development YW06 Explore the concept of values and beliefs with young people

Using the QPT will also help you to fulfil YW24 *Monitor and evaluate the impact of youth work strategy and delivery*, as it is a tool for monitoring the quality of practices used at the point of engagement, including practices that promote the development of socio-emotional skills.

L3 Diploma Youth Work Practice (Bursary Programme)

Using the QPT as a self-reflective tool you can create evidence of:

A617/9795 Group Work within a Youth Work Setting

3.2 Analyse own leadership styles when working with groups of young people.

6.1 Evaluate own group work skills and leadership style.

6.2 Summarise development actions for improving own groupwork skills.

Using the QPT as a peer-observational tool you can create evidence of:

J/617/9798 AO8 Work-based Practice in Youth Work

1.6 Plan youth work activities using participation and empowerment principles to support young people's own development.

1.8 Develop resources in a format appropriate to the needs and capabilities of young people.

4.4 Review activity with an appropriate observer

4.5 Reflect with an appropriate observer, the positives and negatives of the group

By using the QPT as a self-reflective tool you can create evidence of:

F/617/9797 Reflective Practice in a Youth Work Setting

2.2 Evaluate own areas of strength and potential areas for development.

2.3 Create a development plan with organisational objectives to address own learning and support needs.

FAQs

1. What happens if I don't observe any opportunity for the practitioner to use this practice? *Don't score the item if there was no opportunity for it to be put into practice. This only applies to items 6, 7, 14 and 20. Because scores can be averaged it does not affect the overall score if these are omitted.*
2. Can the QPT be completed digitally? *Yes, we have a version of the tool available online that can be sent to practitioner's email addresses or completed on an iPad or laptop in your setting.*
3. Can the QPT be adapted to align with our specific activities? *The QPT is suitable for sessions or activities involving any kind of provision content.*
4. Do we have to collect QPT data at specified time points? *You can use the QPT whenever suits your organisation, there are no restrictions on its use.*
5. Do all practitioners have to use the QPT in the same way? *No, some practitioners might want to use this tool as a self-reflection whilst others invite a peer-assessment or external observation. Choose the mode of use to suit your team and organisational culture.*
6. Do I have to train to use this tool? *We do have training available to support you to deliver and recognise high-quality practices but this is not mandatory. We strongly encourage teams to discuss the items and examples of each score so there is consensus in your organisation on scoring.*

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About us

YMCA GEORGE WILLIAMS COLLEGE

At YMCA George Williams College, our vision is for a just and equitable society that invests in support for all young people to learn, grow, and explore their relationships with the world around them. Established in 1970, the College works to provide transformational support to practitioners, funders, and policy makers across the sector, to improve the quality and impact of provision and outcomes for children and young people across the UK. This support is characterised by safe spaces, high quality socio-emotional skill development opportunities, and relationships with trusted adults.

As part of its work, the College now hosts three Centres of Expertise. The Centre for Youth Impact at YMCA George Williams College supports organisations to generate and act on evidence of the impact of their provision. Using a robust evidence base, The Centre for Youth Impact designs, tests, and champions shared approaches to quality and impact that facilitate collective insight and learning, consolidating and sharing open access resources, research, and training for all those working in informal and non-formal youth provision.

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