THE CENTRE FOR YOUTH IMPACT

# Asking good questions: a framework to support evaluation

Prepared for the Young Brent Foundation and its members

January 2018

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# Asking good questions: a framework to support evaluation

## About this framework

This framework has been developed for the Young Brent Foundation and its members by the Centre for Youth Impact. The framework starts from the position that we should all want to understand the change that is created through our work with young people, and why and how it happens. This is much more detailed than asking 'does it work?'. Specifically, it is more powerful than saying 'we know it works; we just need to demonstrate it'.

'Does it work?' is actually a collection of other questions, all bundled up together, all of which matter for different reasons. It also matters that we ask good questions about our work collectively as well as individually. We should want to know the impact of our own provision, *and* the impact of all our work together on the lives of young people in Brent.

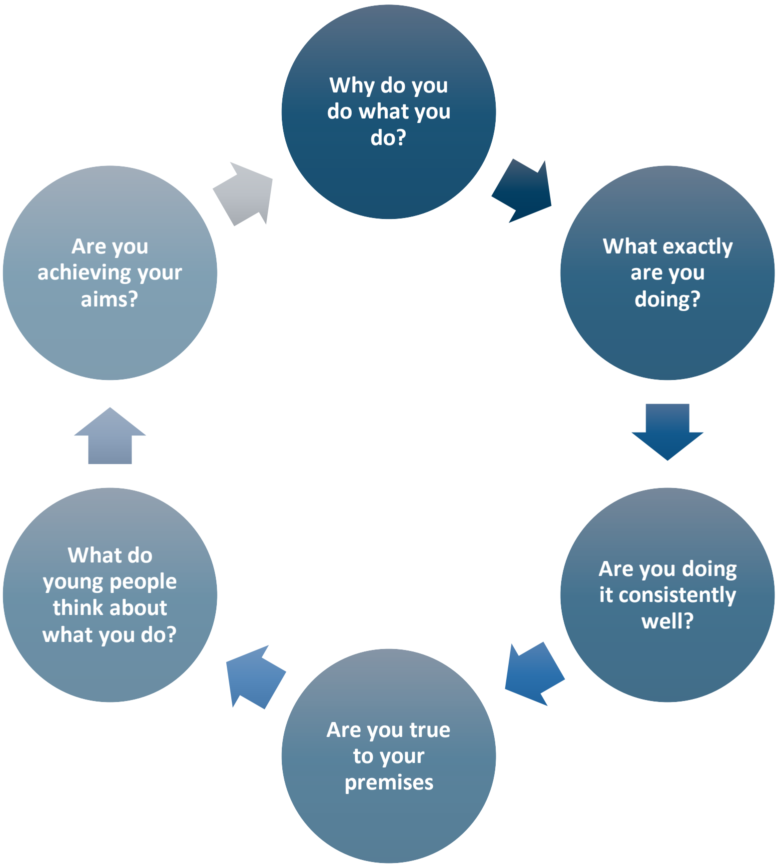
The framework sets out six questions that will help you to understand the impact of your work with and for young people. The framework is designed to support whole organisations in thinking about their impact, and the evaluation of individual programmes. You will be able to use this tool as a compass to guide your evaluation, and a checklist of the important areas you need to think about. Following these six questions, you will be able to explore the key factors in what you do, and the right measures to account for how and to what extent it creates or contributes to change for young people. The framework aims to help you reflect on your approach to evaluation, and explore how to improve it. It also explains why it is not enough just to gather data on one part of your provision – participation, for example, or outcomes. You need to build a bigger picture.

This framework is designed to be used by practitioners, and to produce information that will help you in your work. It is important to acknowledge that there is often limited time and capacity to devote to this area of work. The six questions set out in the framework are designed to be integrated in to your day-to-day practice, providing you with an approach that enables you to learn as you go, improve your work and prove your impact. This is not to say that it won't take time in the beginning to think about these questions – but it is mainly time that is required, not external consultancy, expertise or funding.

You don't need to be an expert in evaluation or impact measurement to use this framework. We have tried to use clear and accessible language throughout. If you want to start by checking your understanding of some of the key terms in evaluation and impact measurement, you can look at this useful glossary from Clinks. http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/Evaluation glossaryfinalv2.pdf

We are in the process of testing this approach with a number of organisations and based on this work we are likely to refine this framework over the coming months.   If you have any thoughts or reflections on the report's contents please email hello@youthimpact.uk.

The six key questions in the model are:




## Context: How to use this framework

None of the questions in this framework will evaluate your work on their own. They connect to one another to build a bigger picture, even though each is really important in its own right. This guide sets out the six questions, and you can choose to work through them in two different ways:

You can start with the first question in the cycle (why do you do what you do?), and take stock of where you are at in relation to this question by working through the suggested tools. You can then continue to work systematically through each question. This is a process you can undertake with your team over a period of time.

You may already have some evaluation and impact measurement foundations in place in your programme or organisation. A quick review of the questions and some of the approaches to answering them will give you an insight into which areas to focus on first in order to strengthen your approach.

Overall, this framework recognises that there are a range of methods that will help you measure and understand the impact of your programme or organisation, but these methods are connected to different questions about your work (for example *whether*, *how* or *why* a programme has an impact on young people), and can't be considered in isolation.

Different areas of the framework will be more or less important depending on a few factors:

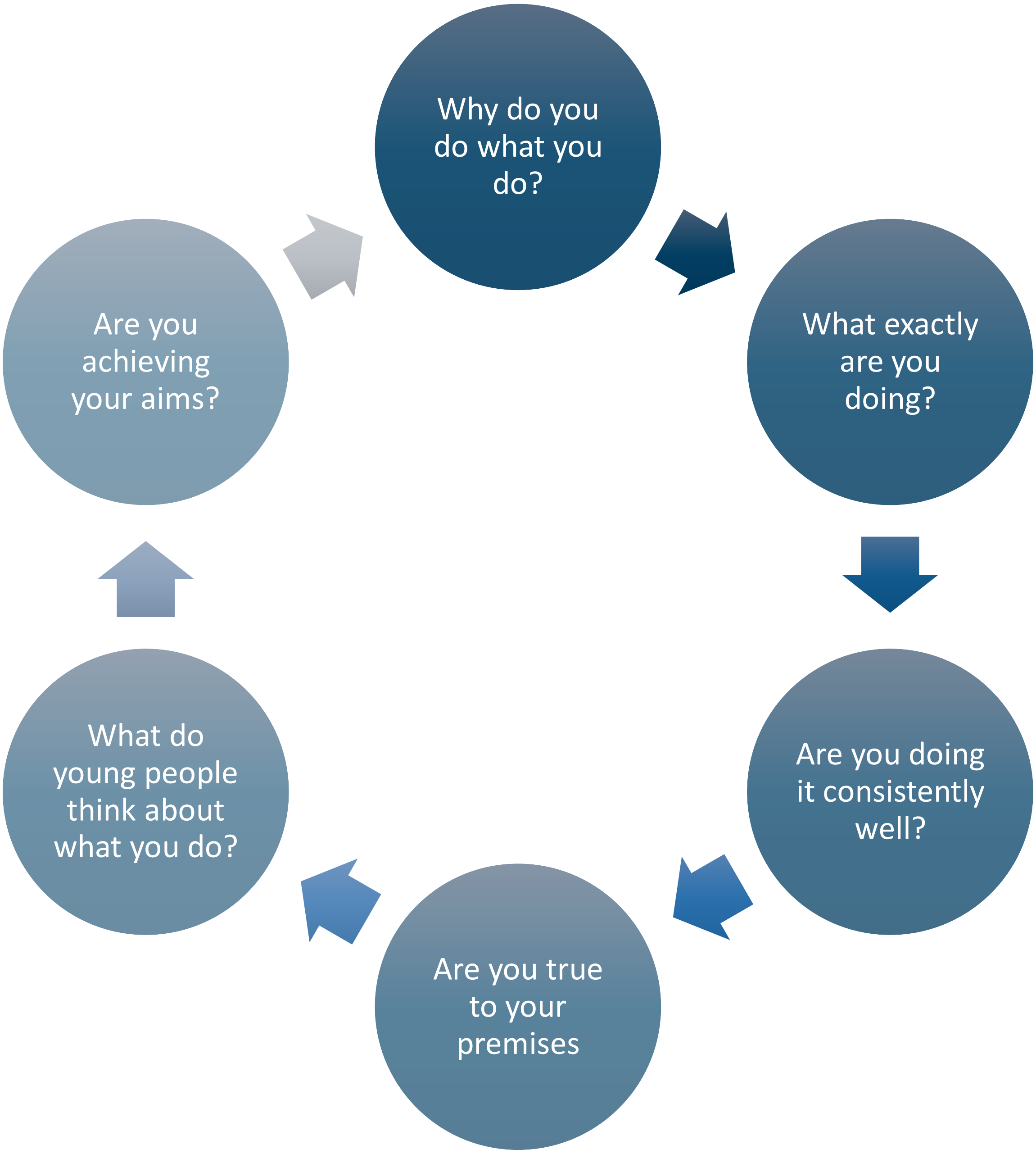
- What is the overarching question that you are trying to focus on? (e.g. is it understanding the need for your provision, checking whether you're reaching the young people you are most focused on, or measuring overall impact?).
- Do you have any objectives to fulfil by focusing on impact and evaluation? (e.g. accountability, organisational learning, securing funding).
- What existing evaluation insight and knowledge do you already have? What do you already do to evaluate your work?

As you start to think about your approach to evaluation, it is important to ask yourself: 'How does the context shape what I'm doing and what evidence do others want from my work?'

You may find it helpful to map this out:

- Who is interested in my work? (funders, young people, parents/carers, local community leaders, you and your staff etc.).
- What do they want to know about my work? (do young people enjoy it? What outcomes do young people achieve? How much does it cost? How do you work with local partners? etc.).
- What type of evidence are they interested in? (the voices of young people, outcome data, participation data, value for money etc.).
- What is important about the context in which I work that shapes how I evaluate? (multiple funders, volunteer staff base, young people with English as a second or other language etc.).

**How does the context shape what you're doing? What evidence do others want from your work?**




**Leadership**

**Values**

**Systems**

## Supporting evaluation with appropriate leadership, values and systems

### Leadership

Leaders (and not just CEOs!) need to demonstrate a commitment to evaluation that sits at the heart of the organisation and its operations, and is not just driven by external requirements from funders or other stakeholders.

It is an essential leadership trait in the youth sector to reflect on the different aspects of evaluation and incorporate them in day-to-day decision making. An area that is particularly important and often missing in the youth sector is the focus on evidence and impact at the design stage – when you are thinking about and planning new provision, for example as part of a funding application. Leaders in the sector need to ensure the foundations of all programmes and services are rooted in evidence about what creates the most positive change for young people. Remember that evidence is not just other people's research – it can also be practice-based evidence (that is, what you've learned from your previous work).

This commitment to evaluation needs to be shown not just by leaders, but shared across the team of staff and volunteers.

### Values

Organisational values help teams make decisions and shape *how things are done*, as well as the activities detailed on an annual or strategic plan. It's important that there is agreement on values across the team, and it helps when an organisation's approach and commitment to learning and evaluation is part of this value set.

If there is an organisational commitment to evaluation, you are more likely to find:

- Embedded evaluation that 'goes with the grain' of delivery, rather than feeling like a distraction or a burden.
- Evaluation as part of continuous improvement and learning, rather than a demand from outside the organisation that needs to be complied with.

Overall, incorporating evaluation into your organisation's values means that you are constantly learning in order to achieve better outcomes for young people, not just doing some of these processes because a funder or someone else has told you to do so.

### Systems

Systems need to be in place to help you collect, manage and analyse good data on every question in this framework. 'Data' just means 'things we know' that we gather for reference or for analysis. Data collection does not have to be daunting. The first step of data collection involves your deciding what 'measures' you would like to track.

We define a good measure as a marker that is:

- Actionable: it produces information on which you regularly act.
- Feasible to collect: it is straightforward and fits comfortably into your everyday work without disrupting it.
- Productive: it generates information that you find useful within your programmes and which isn't handed on to someone else without it informing your work first.
- Comparative: it helps you to compare what you do to what others do, establishing good benchmarks for high quality work with young people.

When it comes to systems for data collection, less is more for the majority of programmes supporting young people. Unless you have a healthy budget and good support, it will be much better to focus on a small number of key measures that are fully integrated into your delivery and you can monitor systematically. Most importantly, the measure should give you valuable information in relation to the question *you're* trying to answer.

Examples of measures include:

- Tracking the numbers of young people who drop out of your programme before the end.
- Following up to see how many young people sustain their engagement in their next destination (learning or work, for example).
- Monitoring how much exercise young people (as an examples of an intended outcome) take on a regular basis.
- Recording young people's perceptions of their connections to their community.
- Checking that your whole team is taking a consistent approach to equality and diversity.

We will now move on to look at the six questions in the framework in more detail.

## Question 1: Why do you do what you do?

### What is the question about?

This question is about your rationale: the core set of principles and priorities that are the foundation of your programme or your organisation. This is often referred to as a Theory of Change, and it is a useful first step in your evidence cycle. This two minute video from the Social Investment Business is a really good introduction to Theory of Change. Remember that the term 'Theory of Change' refers to not just the output (usually a diagram and narrative) but also the process of completing it.

A good Theory of Change will help you answer the following questions:

- What are the aims of your programme? What do you hope that young people will have achieved/gained by the end of your programme? How can you best describe success?
- Who do you work with? What are the key criteria that describe your beneficiary group best? Descriptions might include age, socio-economic criteria, background, postcode of residence, gender, specific risk factors or particular capabilities and assets.
- Why do you work with this group in particular? You may have a specific insight into a given group and/or an identified need that you can articulate here.
- How does your approach support this group? What is it about your way of working that develops your insight and meets your identified need? (and remember that 'need' isn't necessarily a deficit – a 'need' might be somewhere safe and welcoming to spend time with friends).
- What change does your organisation want to make in the sector? What gaps does it aim to fill?

Alongside the Theory of Change, you will also want to think about need and demand (what do you know about what young people locally need and what they want?), learning from other peers in your sector (who's doing what locally, and what are the gaps?) and benchmarking your organisation in this context (thinking about the bigger picture, what is your organisation's mission and vision?). This will explain how your Theory of Change relates to other programmes in your area of work. It will also clarify the support you provide to young people compared to other organisations.

### How does it apply?

This question enables you to provide the rationale for your work. It communicates information about your approach, explaining why you think your programme or organisation will have a positive impact on young people's lives. It enables stakeholders to understand the thinking behind your work. It is also a useful process for teams to work through together. It will highlight any assumptions that you're making about your work and any differences of opinion.

This question is helpful to communicate your work to stakeholders, including young people. It will enable you to explain the way you work, and therefore how you differ from other providers, or indeed how you work together to achieve the same aim.

Bringing together your Theory of Change with sector benchmarking enables you to share information about the environment in which you operate and how you fit in with other services. Clarity in this area will provide further background to your rationale for existence (e.g. you may be filling in a gap in services that nobody is considering, or your approach to youth work is different from other organisations trying to support young people).

### How is it put into practice?

Theory of Change is a well recognised process that can provide a starting point for evaluation in the social sector. As a result, there are lots of resources you can use to create your Theory of Change or revisit any work you already have in this area.

Your Theory of Change should be informed by three things:

- The best available evidence from the sector (see Question 2 in this framework for more detail in this area).
- Your experience and expertise.
- Feedback from young people (see Question 5 in this framework).

If you are in an initial design phase, you may find that the balance between these three is initially geared towards your existing experience, but it is important to draw on existing evidence too. This balance may shift over time - it may be that as you develop your work your expertise and evidence becomes better than previous evidence.

When it comes to benchmarking, you can carry out a market analysis, also referred to as systems mapping. The objective of this piece of work is to understand who is working for similar outcomes locally and how your organisation's Theory of Change fits in with the overall ecosystem. Once you have identified the different players, you can decide whether there are any organisations you can partner with, learn from or align your activities with.

NPC has produced an easy to use guide on how to produce a Theory of Change: http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/creating-your-theory-of-change/

## Question 2: What exactly are you doing?

### What is the question about?

This question helps you reflect on the existing theories and evidence for the work that you are doing. The theory and evidence for the work you're doing can be big picture (for example, the evidence for how and why youth work is effective at engaging with young people who are not attending school regularly) or more focused (for example, why drama is a good approach to helping young people to reflect on their hopes and fears). There are also very specific bits of evidence that are important in certain types of work, such as the importance of maintaining a mentoring relationship over the long term.

There are different types of evidence that can help you understand the 'theoretical underpinnings' for your Theory of Change, and learn from work or approaches that have already been tested.

It is important to understand that not all evidence is the same, and has different value for different things. You need to decide which type of evidence is sufficiently rigorous (high quality) or most relevant to your work. You will need to consider the **methods** used for gathering the evidence (summarising other people's research, for example, or long term research directly with young people) and the **context** in which the evidence was gathered. For example, a project that is evaluated in a different country or working with a different age group may not be directly applicable to your work.

Once you have reviewed the evidence base, you need to be clear about how it applies to your organisation or programmes, and how it influences the work that you do. For example, if the evidence suggests that mentoring relationships need to be sustained for a year in order to make a real difference in young people's lives, how are you supporting this in your work?

Using existing evidence will also help you determine the outcomes that you hope to achieve with and for young people. Outcomes can be long term (a sustained job, for example), medium term (learning a new skill, for example) or short term (developing trust, for example). You should work with young people to understand the outcomes that matter to them, and also think carefully about what your work can reasonably achieve. A one-off careers awareness session is unlikely to lead to a sustained job, for example, but it might develop a young person's understanding of options available to them locally, and help them to feel more confident to seek them out.

There are many outcomes frameworks that can help you map different outcome areas, and which pull together some of the research for the importance of these outcomes in the lives of young people. The Catalyst Framework of Outcomes for Young People is widely used in the youth sector, and the NPC Jet Framework is really helpful for organisations that support young people with employability.

### How does it apply?

There are many uses for evidence at different stages of the evaluation cycle. The first one relates to your Theory of Change, which needs to incorporate some evidence about what is effective in supporting young people, and why. This is referred to as a 'narrative', which sits alongside a Theory of Change. It is a short write up of the relevant research that backs up your programme.

Even when your Theory of Change is agreed (with your team, young people and stakeholders, for example), you can continue to use evidence to design new programmes or refine your existing one. You can also add to the evidence base in your sector by sharing your findings with other groups. We would encourage all youth organisations to share their Theories of Change and narratives openly.

It is important for your team to understand the basic evidence principles on which your work is built. Involving staff and volunteers in this area can help make sure programmes are delivered according to the way in which you believe you are most likely to have the best possible impact.

### How is it put into practice?

Accessing the research evidence and theory behind what you are doing can be done regardless of the scale of your organisation, as there are a lot of freely available resources in this area. Membership bodies, professional associations and larger organisations in your field of work are good places to start, as they may have published evidence reports that give an insight into what is effective in your sector.

Outcomes frameworks, such as the ones noted above, have drawn together a range of relevant research. The Early Intervention Foundation's Social and Emotional Learning Review is also useful.

Much of the evidence you need will sit within your own organisation (previous internal evaluations of your own work, feedback from young people, and professional wisdom) but there is also masses available online. This is often referred to as 'grey literature': it's not commercially or academically published, but it's still really useful.

A simple way to begin the process is posing yourself a question at every step of your Theory of Change. For each step, try to complete the sentence "we do this because...". This is also a good way to write your narrative.

It is important to keep up to date with the research base in your area of work. When new information emerges, you may want to integrate it in to your programmes, as it may provide suggestions about how to do more effective work.

## Question 3: Are you doing it consistently well?

### What is the question about?

Asking yourself this question is about consistently considering the quality of the work that you do and whether your delivery can create the expected impact you outlined in your Theory of Change. In some cases, this may be about following good practice available about what quality looks like in your sector.

This question may be particularly important if you work across multiple sites or run different programmes, as you need to ensure that all the young people you work with get the best experience that you can provide. It is often the case that projects being delivered in multiple sites/settings are delivered in quite different ways, and this makes evaluation really difficult. It also makes it hard to understand why things are done differently, and in what way they differ.

As part of this stage of the framework, you will be answering the following key questions:

- What do we know about what 'good quality' looks like in our work?
- Is our delivery of a consistent quality (even when it is tailored to suit an individual's needs)?
- Are all our staff trained to deliver our programmes effectively?
- Do we have sufficient capacity to sustain quality across all our work?
- Do frontline staff and volunteers have appropriate support to do their jobs well and to the best of their ability?
- Can we make changes to our programmes when we need to in order to constantly maintain and increase our quality (for instance can we accommodate a rise in demand? Can we learn from our peers and adapt our approaches? Can we adopt new technologies)?
- Can we meaningfully compare ourselves to other programmes and learn from them?

These questions should be asked regularly and the answers shared openly with staff and stakeholders to allow for continual learning and improvement.

### How does it apply?

This stage of the framework is all about quality assurance and improvement. You will want to work in this area to establish a clear set of expectations for your programme delivery that is shared and understood by all key stakeholders, and upheld by everyone working in the organisation. This will enable you to ensure that you are giving young people access to the best quality programmes that you can. It is not just about setting a 'standard' and then feeling satisfied that you have met it; it is also about having a plan to continuously review and increase quality.

It is also important to think about how quality relates to your systems and processes (e.g. referral, safeguarding and health and safety), your setting (e.g. welcoming and friendly) and your engagement with young people (e.g. respectful and asset-based).

Quality assurance can also be very important when reflecting on training and support provided to staff (and volunteers), as you will need to make sure your team is able to deliver your work in the way you collectively wish. This may be integrated with staff performance management and learning plans.

### How is it put into practice?

There are some well-respected quality assurance frameworks in the youth sector, such as Ambition Quality and the London Youth Quality Mark. There are also some frameworks for quality delivery in particular types of work with young people, such as Hear by Right, which supports youth participation, Delivering With and Delivering Well for child and adolescent mental health services, and One to One Support, a quality framework for mentoring and similar programmes.

You may also want to produce your own brief quality framework. You can divide up the areas of your provision as above, into systems and processes, setting, and engagement with young people. You can then work with staff, volunteers and young people to think about what good quality looks like under each of the headings. It might be something quite small, but which has a big impact, like using open instead of closed questions when talking to young people, or changing the lighting in a room.

There are different ways of checking that you are effectively meeting your 'quality standards'. These include:

- **Audits**: This is something that can be done by young people, peers or external experts who interact with your services.
- **Critical friends**: This involves finding a trusted advisor (it could be a peer or a trustee) that can help you establish quality indicators and explore how you meet them.
- **Observation**: Observation can be built into your organisational practice, so that your team observe one another's work on a regular basis. Alternatively, other youth organisations in the sector may be particularly well placed to help in this area, as they will have relevant expertise and skills.
- **External accreditation:** Some quality assurance frameworks are externally accredited or awarded, providing a structure for you to work through on a regular basis.

## Question 4: Are you true to your premises?

### What is the question about?

Asking yourself this question is about taking your core principles seriously. It's about checking that you are really working hard to implement those founding principles, engaging those you feel best placed to help, supporting them with programmes designed appropriately, and by doing so giving yourself and the young people the best possible chance of achieving your shared aims. It's about answering the following key questions:

- Are we consistently engaging the group(s) we set out to help?
- Does our delivery match our design? How do we know?
- Have we made any adaptations/changes to our work? Are they appropriate?
- Have we designed programmes that support these groups?
- Have we designed programmes that effectively build on our insights and meet our identified needs and demands?
- Can we meaningfully compare ourselves to other programmes and learn from them?

These questions should be asked regularly and the answers shared openly to allow for continual learning and improvement.

### How does it apply?

This stage of the framework is giving you an insight into whether you are fulfilling the core principles set out in your Theory of Change, your organisation's vision/mission statement, and your quality standards. This stage of the framework is important because organisations can sometimes change inadvertently (e.g. if new trustees introduce changes to operations, or if a new funding contract introduces changes to delivery like making a programme shorter or extending the eligibility).

It is natural for an organisation to change over time, but this stage in the framework enables you to manage change purposefully, ensuring you intended it in the first place. It also helps you to learn from that change – what happens when a 12 week programme becomes a 10 week programme, for example? Does it really matter? Or what are the implications for a project for 14-16 year olds starting to work with 10-14 year olds too? Reflecting on these changes will help you to understand the impact of the change for young people, and whether it is a change for the better.

You will want to focus on this question if the organisation has been through a period of significant change (e.g. significant expansion of services through new contracts, or restructure due to funding difficulties), or if you are about to plan for future change (e.g. if you are bringing together a new strategy or long-term business plan).

Work in this area will also be important if you want to bring about service improvements but you don't know where to start - ensuring that you are delivering against your set of core principles set out in your Theory of Change will be one of the first things you will want to check.

### How is it put into practice?

Checking that you are being faithful to your intentions calls for two things:

- Firstly, that everyone is clear on what your intentions are: staff and volunteers, trustees, young people, and any other relevant stakeholders.
- Secondly, a plan to check regularly that everyone is sticking to these intentions.

Your Theory of Change, mission/vision statement and quality standards are all really important in setting out your intentions. You can add to this with a table that sets out what is core and what is flexible in your work. 'Core' refers to the aspects of your work that should not be changed – this should be based on a belief that if they were changed, your work would not achieve the change you hope it will with and for young people. 'Flexible' refers to the things that can be changed, and perhaps *should* be in order to meet the needs and interests of individual young people.

A core and flexible framework might look like this:

| **Core** | **Flexible** |
|---|---|
| 12 weekly sessions | One to one sessions can happen wherever a young person feels most at ease |
| At least three one to one sessions with young people | Groups can vary in size |
| Young people participating have all had experience of being looked after | Sessions might use different 'vehicles' to explore the core set of issues (e.g. sport, drama, art, film and TV) |
| Sessions should cover core set of issues co-developed with young people in advance | Young people might be supported to keep a video diary of their participation in the project |

Checking on how closely you stick to your intentions can happen as part of supervision or staff reflection, and alongside the processes for checking on quality.

## Question 5: What do young people think about what you do?

### What is the question about?

This question is about committing to seeking out, listening to and acting on systematic feedback from the young people you are supporting (and maybe some you aren't). It is about measuring and cultivating the conditions that really matter in young people's development and learning.

This stage of the framework is really important in the youth sector, as it reflects our values of youth voice and participation. The vast majority of youth organisations already have well developed processes for empowering young people to share their views and make their voices heard. Understanding what young people think of what you do in an evaluation context is slightly different, and goes beyond youth voice or participation. As well as giving young people regular opportunities to tell you what matters to them and influence decision making, you also need to seek out their feedback in response to particular aspects of your work. So, for example, if a core principle of your work is that you talk to young people with respect, you should ask them if they think you do this. Equally, if you think it is important that young people feel safe and at ease in your setting, you should ask them if this is how they feel. It is also important to check whether they feel it's worth their while giving you feedback – young people are much more likely to invest time in sharing their thoughts honestly if they think that you are listening to and acting on what they say.

Gathering feedback from young people focuses on the things that give life to our practice: attitudes, values, emotions, capabilities and agency.

### How does it apply?

The process for gathering feedback from young people should be systematic (methodical and routine) and consistent (using the same questions so you can see how young people's views change over time). It should be a light touch process that enables young people to give their feedback quickly, easily, and where possible, anonymously.

The design of the feedback process needs to be based on the young people with whom you work. Age, literacy levels, visual and hearing impairments, for example, will all shape your process for gathering feedback.

### How is it put into practice?

You should use your Theory of Change and quality statements to develop feedback questions. You may want to ask questions about:

- Trust and respect.
- Support and challenge.
- Feelings of achievement and progress.
- Enjoyment and fun.
- Accessibility and relevance.

Keep the questions short and simple, and create some with a yes/no answer (did we talk to you with respect today?), some with a scale (to what extent do you feel like you're making progress on your goals?), and some with an open or free text answer (what else would you like us to do?). You could have a set of ten or so questions, and use three or four at a time, changing them regularly.

You should also include one or two questions about whether young people feel listened to, and perceive that their feedback is being acted upon.

Feedback can be gathered on paper (sticky dots on a flip chart, notes in a shoebox), electronically (tablet, online survey or text message) or through voice recording. There will be many other ways to gather feedback too – these are just a few simple ideas.

## Question 6: Are you achieving your aims?

### What is the question about?

This question is specifically about whether or not your work is achieving what you intend it to. In many cases, these aims are expressed as outcomes for young people. Most evaluation plans only focus on outcome measurement, but we think it's important to consider all the other questions in this framework too. This is because attempting to measure outcomes without an insight into what you're doing and why, whether you're delivering in line with your principles and your understanding of high quality, and what young people think about your work, will severely limit the meaning and use of your data. Outcome measurement also tends to be the most resource intensive stage of evaluation, and can be very challenging – sometimes young people don't sustain their engagement with organisations, so it's hard to ask them about change in their lives, and some provision is short term or one-off by design, so measuring outcomes before and after simply doesn't make sense.

Outcome measurement is about gathering information about the *changes* resulting from your activities, and *progress towards* meeting your aims.

Outcomes are always phrased as an increase or decrease in something, so that they refer to a change. Maintaining something (like engagement with a counsellor, or contact with family) is also important, particularly where a situation might have deteriorated without support for the young person. Measuring outcomes is about assessing whether or not this change has been achieved, and looking at the progress towards it.

Outcomes can be for individual young people, for groups, or for the wider community.

Supporting young people inevitably has an end point (even in long-term engagement), either because your programme ends or young people make a conscious decision to move on. This question will help you to identify the part you play in supporting that transition and the positive future that should come with it.

Discussing and negotiating outcomes with young people is critically important. It is also important to think about the scale of change you might expect to see, and how well this is aligned with your work. It is very appealing to think about young people's lives being transformed, but it is more often the case that change happens over time, in a complex and interrelated way, as a series of small steps.

### How does it apply?

Outcome measurement is often required by funders, commissioners and other external stakeholders. Youth organisations can feel like measuring outcomes is the only way they can 'demonstrate' the impact of their work. However, this stage is no more important than any other stage in this framework, and cannot be considered in isolation. Its relative importance is due to the fact that outcomes can only tell you a very small part of the overall story, so they shouldn't take the focus away from other areas of evaluation.

Measuring your outcomes can be used as a check on your Theory of Change (is that what really happened? Does your model stack up?), but also to work out whether your work is having any other unintended effects, whether positive or negative.

Overall, using the six stages Compass Model of Evidence comprehensively should create a situation in which your outcomes predictably follow from your activities, as per the logic provided by your Theory of Change. At this stage, your outcome monitoring becomes an external check on your programme premises and can be conducted every three to five years if there are no significant changes in your programme or the context in which you operate. It can only evolve to this if your insight into all the other aspects of your programme are deep and consistent.

### How is it put into practice?

There are two ways of monitoring outcomes: from inside the programme (e.g. through tracking the progress that young people make) or from outside the programme or organisation (e.g. through looking at wider changes in society that arise as a result of your programme, or data that is gathered elsewhere, for example by a school or local authority).

The first step you can take towards measuring outcomes is to focus on internal outcomes data. This will be particularly helpful as you collect data so that you can have a benchmark over time, and in time will give you a useful longitudinal (long-term) dataset.

Some programmes are designed to focus on specific outcomes that are identified in advance. The activities and approach of the programme will be designed very specifically to make a difference to these particular outcome areas in young people's lives. These outcomes are usually well-defined 'constructs' (personal characteristics) that are widely understood. Health and education programmes tend to be a good example. In these cases, it can make sense to check whether the intended outcomes have been achieved using a survey or questionnaire at the start, middle and end of the programme. Where there are very clear outcome areas like this, it is usually a good idea to use a questionnaire that has been developed and validated already. This means that it has been rigorously tested as being valid (it measures what it is meant to measure) and reliable (it measures the same thing every time). This means that you can 'aggregate' (gather together and summarise) the data collected through the questionnaire, as young people will be answering exactly the same questions with the same scale. It also means that there will be data from other users of the questionnaire that you can learn from. Examples of questionnaires like this include the Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire, the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire and MTQ48 (that measures 'mental toughness'). Some of these questionnaires are available freely online.

For many youth programmes, attempting this sort of outcome measurement is difficult. This might be because:

- The programme doesn't have pre-defined outcomes, or has different outcomes for different young people.
- Young people take part in the programme in different ways or with a different 'intensity' (some may come once a week, others three times a week, and yet others just once a month, or they come regularly but choose what activities they take part in).
- The outcomes that you and the young people are interested in are complex, and not everyone agrees on what they mean or look like.

In these cases, it can be helpful to use 'distance travelled' tools. These tools are designed to be used in a one to one interaction with young people, to help them reflect on their progress over time. These tools tend to focus on a number of outcomes areas (for example, relationships with my friends, my physical and emotional health, my motivation) and use a numeric scale to help young people think about how they're doing/how things are going in that area of their life. These tools are designed to support reflection and dialogue, and can show the direction of travel – does the young person feel like things are improving in particular areas of their life? You cannot aggregate up the data from these tools. One person's perception will not be the same as another's. You also can't use them to 'calculate' change from the beginning to the end of a programme – the scales are only meaningful in helping young people to reflect on how they feel at that moment in time.

There are a number of resources that gather together outcome measurement tools: the Framework for Outcomes for Young People has a database of measures that you may find useful, and the Education Endowment Foundation recently published a review of validated tools.

It is also worth thinking about whether there are any outcomes that are already measured from outside your programmes. This is for some very good reasons:

- Much of the outcomes data that is useful to youth programmes is already collected by schools, the health service, social services, employers and the criminal justice system.
- Collecting internal outcomes data can be expensive and time-consuming and can distract from frontline delivery.
- Youth organisations can spend a lot of time and resource seeking to 'prove and re-prove' their impact using outcomes data that is gathered elsewhere – it is better to build a solid foundation for the impact of your work, and then monitor the quality and fidelity of your delivery over time.
- Outcomes data is most useful when it is longitudinal and comparative, and this makes it particularly difficult for individual programmes to collect consistently

For some programmes you could use initiatives that outsource high quality outcome data. The Ministry of Justice Datalab and the Education Datalab are good examples of this approach. These can be cheaper, more efficient and reliable than in-house outcomes measures. They are also being explored in employment and healthcare, so this is a route to establishing outcomes data that will be increasingly viable in the sector.

The Centre for Youth Impact is a community of organisations that work together to progress thinking and practice around impact measurement in youth work and services for young people. Our vision is for all young people to have access to high quality programmes and services that improve their life chances, by enabling embedded approaches to impact measurement that directly inform practice. Our work, therefore, is dedicated to three objectives, together with our expanded networks and other organisations from across the youth sector: curating the debate, building the movement and shaping the future.

**Find out more about the Centre for Youth Impact at www.youthimpact.uk and follow us on @YouthImpactUK.**