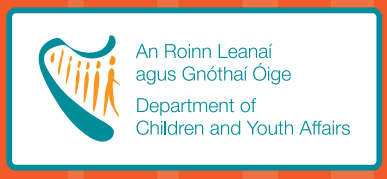

YOUTH WORK:

A SYSTEMATIC MAP OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

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A SYSTEMATIC MAP OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

JUNE 2013

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

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There were no conflicts of interest in the writing of this report.

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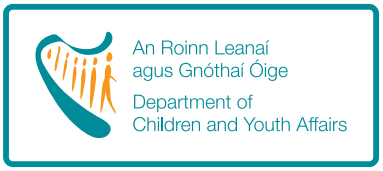

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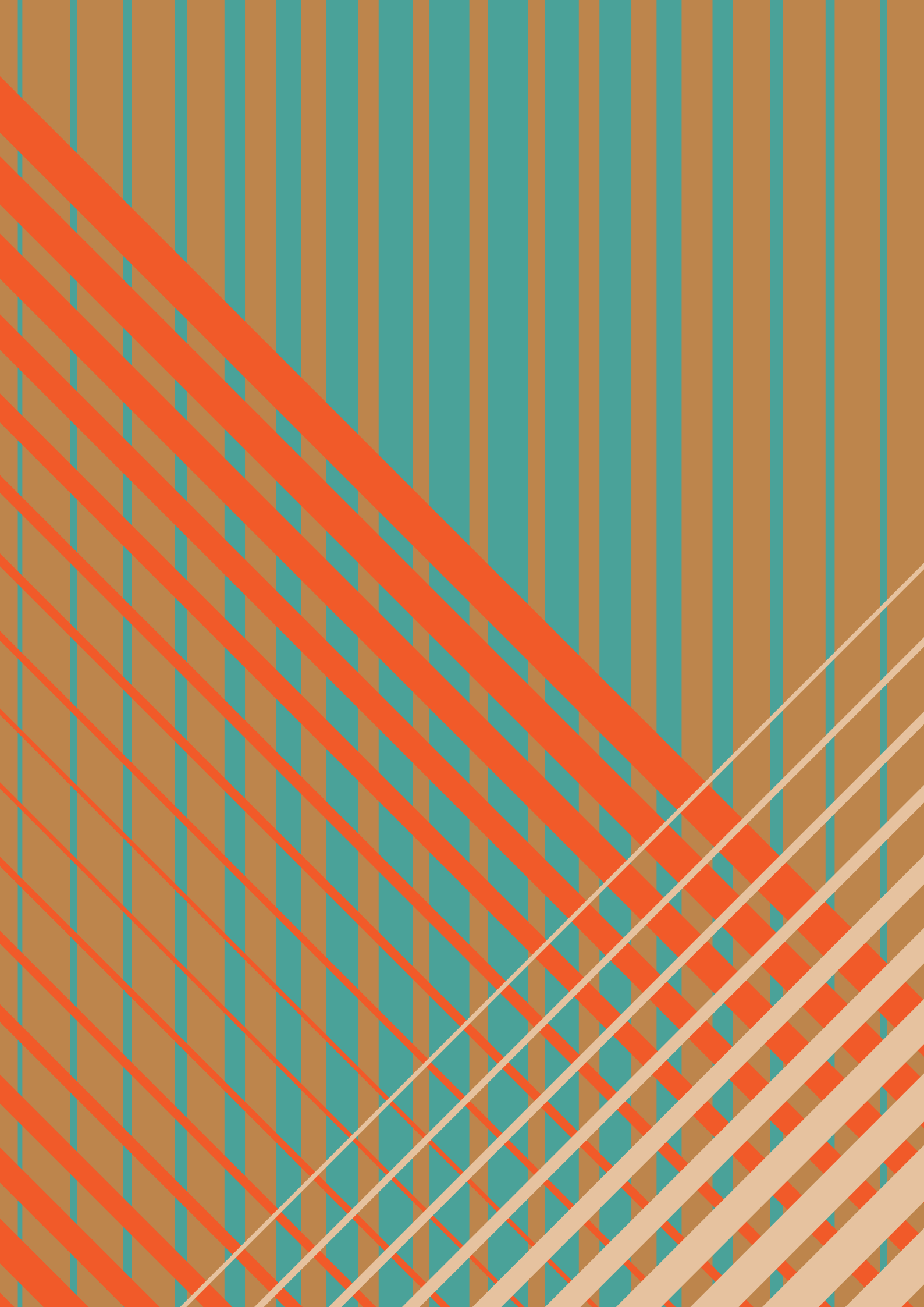

MINISTER'S FOREWORD

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, it is my great pleasure to provide the foreword for this significant publication, *Youth Work: A systematic map of the research literature*. This research, commissioned by the Centre for Effective Services on behalf of my Department, was produced by the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) at the Institute of Education in London.

In bringing together the international research on the impact of youth work activities, the map provides evidence of a diverse and rich sector, in which youth work is delivered in a wide range of settings and under an array of themes in different countries. Notwithstanding this diversity, the research reveals a common core of purposes, programmes and practices. The report's findings provide a valuable insight into the approaches and practices that are likely to lead to improved outcomes for young people. This timely report will add to a growing body of evidence in Ireland and internationally about how effective youth work can lead to positive outcomes for young people, with wider social and economic benefits.

These findings will inform my Department in developing its policy objectives for young people and in supporting quality-based and outcomes-focused youth work and related provision. As the first report to synthesise the international evidence base in relation to the impact of youth work, it should also prove to be a unique and valuable resource for researchers, policy-makers and practitioners alike to guide and inform the content, delivery and assessment of youth work, while contributing to broader policy domains and ultimately improving outcomes for young people.

I would like to thank the Institute of Education, London, for their work on this report and also the members of the Expert Reference Group and the National Youth Work Advisory Committee sub-group who commented on drafts of this report. Finally, I would like to commend the Centre for Effective Services who managed this research project and who, in collaboration with my Department, directly informed this report.

Frances Fitzgerald, TD
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

In 2011, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs commenced preparation for the development of a youth policy framework to accommodate identified areas and issues pertinent to young people within the 10-24 age range that fall within, and which are related to, the remit of the Department.

To support the development of the Youth Policy Framework, the Centre for Effective Services commissioned the Institute of Education (IoE), University of London, to complete an international literature review to identify optimum outcomes for young people in the areas of youth work.

The starting point was to recognise the lack of research relating specifically to youth work and outcomes, and the need to know about leading thinking and emerging trends in this area of work. In particular, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs was keen to understand how such work could contribute to positive outcomes for young people, in what ways these outcomes might converge and in what ways they differ, and how these outcomes could be measured and assessed effectively.

While there is a high level of research activity in areas such as prevention science and work with children, and some attention has been given to the effectiveness of specific support initiatives in place for young people, the same level of attention has not been placed on developmental activities in youth work. Whatever the reasons for this lack of attention in research studies, however, the scale, scope and depth of these activities are significant and they are central to youth provision. The fact that young people engage in youth work of their own volition, and actively seek out and inform the development of such work based on their interests and needs, is a central dynamic in how youth work works. The aim of this review, however, was to move beyond the 'if' and 'what', to the 'why' it works.

The starting aim of the review, therefore, was to track down relevant information from theory, policy, practice and research, and to distil out key findings or learning points that have relevance to the development of the Youth Policy Framework in Ireland. The review was not to be limited to desk-based or empirical research, or evaluations. It would also refer to and draw from appropriate 'grey' literature since the aim was to define the core concepts, to identify examples and emerging trends, and to contain sufficient studies that can usefully inform the Department in this policy development.

It was also recognised from the outset that the conclusions of the review would need to be synthesised in a way that can inform policy and practical action. Although the focus was to be on those areas for which the Department has responsibility, the findings are intended to guide and inform work with young people in broader policy domains, such as health, education (formal), justice, employment, social protection and sport. Because of its groundbreaking nature, it was intended that the review would also inform interested parties in other sectors and in other jurisdictions.

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National Assessor of Youth Work
Department of Children and Youth Affairs

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Project Specialist
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth work: A systematic map of the research literature

This is the first systematic international map of youth work research. It provides a unique resource for investigating the content of youth work, how it is delivered and the terms in which it is assessed, both in formal evaluations of its impact and by children and young people themselves. It provides a valuable basis for developing an evidence-informed approach to policy and practice.

Key findings

- The map identified 175 studies that provide empirical research evidence on the impact of youth work, 93 of which are evaluations of impact, on the lives of children and young people aged 10-24 years.
- The map can be used immediately to find individual studies for policy-makers or practitioners to appraise for their quality and relevance for particular decisions. It can also be used as a basis for further appraisal and synthesis to provide more specific implications for policy or practice.
- The ethos of youth work in Ireland, which emphasizes participation, empowerment and personal and social development, is shared by much of the international research literature.
- The ways in which the research literature describes the aims of youth work can be categorised as follows: personal and social development; social change; education and career; safety and well-being; and contribution to society.
- Youth work attempts to achieve these aims by providing a broad range of activities. Overall, the activities described in the studies can be categorised as follows: leisure and recreation; arts, drama, music; sports and physical activities; volunteer and service; social action; and informal learning.
- The studies show that a range of human and social capital outcomes were measured within all 7 activity domains and that youth work is attempting to make an ambitious contribution to improving outcomes for young people. These outcomes can be categorised as follows: relationship with others; sense of self; community and society; health and well-being; values and beliefs; and formal education and training.
- Of the studies evaluating impact, 73% reported which theory informed their activities, including how they thought youth work might be expected to produce its intended outcomes. Of these studies, a further 25% represented 17 different theoretical perspectives, from 'prevention science' to 'experiential learning'. The theories can be grouped under the following headings: Not stated (25); positive youth development (32); socio-ecological model (8); empowerment (5); developmental assets (5); other, e.g. social capital, experiential education (25).
- A wide range of designs have been used to study the impact of youth work, with many collecting children and young people's 'views' of impact through interviews and focus groups as part of case study and single group design methodologies. Most reports were either case study (32%) or cross-sectional designs (15%), with both of these approaches collecting data at one point in time (e.g. after participating in youth work activities).
- Very few studies collected data both before and after allocating participants to youth work and comparison programmes, either randomly (9%) or non-randomly (9%). 33 non-systematic and 3 systematic reviews relevant to youth work were also identified.

- In addition to evaluations of impact, a significant proportion of studies were also interested in investigating the factors contributing to the successful delivery of youth work activities, including views on engagement and participation, particularly from the perspectives of children and young people. There are also a number of studies concerned with the testing and development of evaluative methods, particularly those addressing the validity and reliability of personal development measurement tools.
- Overall, the map highlights the commitment being made to generating evidence that is relevant to youth work policy and practitioners.

What are the implications?

For the evidence available for policy decision-making

- This map has collated studies that can provide important evidence to underpin policy decisions. It can be used immediately to find individual studies for policy-makers or practitioners to appraise their quality and relevance for particular decisions.
- It can also be used as a basis for further appraisal and synthesis to provide more specific implications for policy or practice, such as examining the contribution of and what difference youth work can make, to whom, including effectiveness, and whether those effects are lasting over time.
- From the evaluations, there is probably sufficient evidence to address in more depth:
  - young people's perceptions of youth work;
  - which activities are, if any, associated with what outcomes;
  - the processes involved in the delivery of youth work;
  - the barriers and enablers in participating in youth work;
  - the efficacy of specific activities and approaches.

For types of data

- Qualitative data based on self-assessments are vital to inform practice and to provide children and young people with a voice that can be heard. However, this type of data needs to complement quantitative analysis that can provide an 'estimate of effects'.
- Currently, very little of the literature can offer 'high-end' research evidence about impact from a non-USA perspective. This is because studies of youth work activities with a control group are rare.
- A further consideration is the extent to which conducting further systematic reviews would provide more rigorous and/or provide a new and/or 'better' understanding of any given area relevant to the effectiveness and delivery of youth work activities. However, even with these caveats, useful insights, based on the potential questions presented, could be ascertained from exploring the literature in this map in further detail.

For types of literature

- Grey literature and websites could also provide additional studies and may be important for finding studies of groups of children and young people who were under-represented in the studies found through electronic searching.

For future primary research

Judgements made about the quality and relevance of studies conducted in future systematic reviews will provide greater insight into future areas for primary research. However, currently it appears likely that further primary research would be valuable in the following areas:

- specific investigations of youth work activities and programmes within an Irish context;
- greater exploration of the fidelity to the youth work process;
- evaluations that consult with and/or include young people as research partners.

For evaluating cost-effectiveness

- Both future primary studies and further appraisal of the evidence collated in this map would be valuable for further examining the difference youth work can make in terms of cost and cost-effectiveness.

Conclusion

Overall, youth work requires 'better evidence' to underpin its design and delivery. This can be achieved not only by choosing appropriate study designs for assessing the impact and delivery of youth work, but also by extending the participatory ethos of youth work to include children, young people and their families and communities in the design and conduct of youth work research.

Background

The Youth Affairs Unit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) is working in partnership with the Centre for Effective Services (CES) to enhance linkages with evidence-informed practice to ensure that youth work and related practice provision in Ireland is of high quality and is focused on achieving optimal outcomes for young people. This report, from the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) at the Institute of Education in London, was commissioned by CES on behalf of the DCYA. The report is part of a wider project seeking to develop an evidence-informed 'Youth Policy Framework' that will support the delivery of high-quality youth services of benefit to children and young people in Ireland.

Why is this mapping exercise important?

The map identifies international research literature seeking to provide evidence on the impact that youth work activities have on children and young people. It is international in scope and its terms of reference provide an inclusive definition of youth work to enable learning from one jurisdiction to another. It describes the current state of the literature in a way that identifies where the research is stronger or weaker, and provides access to a body of knowledge in particular areas of the research for policy-makers to base future decisions on.

The map can be used as a basis for further appraisal and synthesis to provide more specific implications for policy or practice. Accessing the international research literature can help establish what can be achieved with children and young people in the Irish context, for both 'open access' provision and for services that aim to support specific groups of young people.

About the research

Research in relation to youth work has developed significantly in the last 15 years, particularly in the USA and to a lesser extent in the United Kingdom. The searching for this map was based on a way of working with young people (e.g. participative, dialogical and empowering), rather than a particular 'type' of youth work activity (e.g. involvement in community services, creative arts or specific leisure pursuits), so the search terms used reflect the 'process' and 'approach' taken rather than known activities that could be defined in advance.

The criteria for inclusion in the map were broad, with no limit placed on the type of participant, geographical location, date of publication or methodological design. The study was also interested in a broad range of outcomes. Despite attempts to be inclusive, the review was limited to English language databases and studies written in English. It is important to acknowledge that while the map reflects the concentration of research, it does not represent the wide range of youth work activities available to young people in Ireland or elsewhere.

INTRODUCTION

Type of review

The review described in this report is a systematic map of research evidence. A systematic map is defined as '*a classification and description that aims primarily to illustrate the kinds of studies that exist*' (EPPI-Centre, 2007). The map does not aim to provide an answer to a specific policy and/or practice question typically found in systematic reviews. Instead, the aim is to answer a question about the scope, nature and content of empirical research that has been carried out on a particular topic. This means that the question is broad and the findings are presented in the form of a descriptive analysis of the research literature in the field, without critical appraisal of studies. This mapping exercise followed standardised systematic review processes of systematic searching, application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, and coding (*see Part II of report for details*).

Scope of report

This map was commissioned by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to inform the future development of youth work policy and practice in Ireland.

It is the first map of its kind charting international youth work research written in the English language and it has a number of strengths. It is international in scope and its terms of reference provide an inclusive definition of youth work to enable learning from one jurisdiction to another. It describes the current state of the literature in a way that identifies where the research is stronger or weaker, and provides access to a body of knowledge in particular areas of the research. Although great care was taken in seeking studies, it is possible that other studies exist. Nevertheless, it provides for the first time a categorisation to define the international youth work research field and provides a basis for future research in this area.

Structure of report

The report is divided into two parts: **Part I** focuses on the **findings of the systematic map**, with only very brief information given on the methods. **Part II** describes the **systematic methods** in more detail. Some readers may, however, prefer to focus on parts of the report only. For example:

Part I: Chapter 3 contains:

> **Section 3.1** provides an overview of the evidence base. It describes when and where the research was conducted, which studies were included, their study design and how the data were collected.
> **Sections 3.2 — 3.4** describes the different types of youth work activities and how researchers set about measuring subsequent changes in children and young people.
> **Section 3.5** provides a description of studies that evaluated the delivery of youth work activities and collected the views of young people and professionals.

Part I: Chapter 4 presents the conclusions, strengths and limitations of this systematic map of youth work, together with the implications for policy, practice and research, including gaps in the literature.

PART I:
BACKGROUND AND FINDINGS OF THE SYSTEMATIC MAP OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1 Aims and rationale

Identifying an evidence base for the youth work sector is critical in developing and contributing to a more informed understanding of the value and relevance of youth work for children and young people. This report was commissioned by the Centre for Effective Services (CES) on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) as part of a wider project seeking to develop an evidence-informed 'Youth Policy Framework' that will support the delivery of high-quality youth services of benefit to children and young people in Ireland.

The original brief sought to answer important questions regarding 'what works' best in youth work and 'how' it might work. However, during the initial discussions between the review team and commissioners, it became apparent that there was uncertainty regarding what was known about the nature and extent of the youth work evidence and whether there would be sufficient studies of particular quality and/or relevance which could be synthesised to answer questions of effectiveness. Therefore, as a first step, the work was refocused to generate a 'systematic map' of research literature relevant to youth work, before deciding on whether to embark on one or more systematic reviews in this area.

The aim of a systematic map is to identify and describe the research literature on a broad topic area, which can then be analysed in-depth or more superficially depending on the requirements of individual research projects. It provides an overview of the research literature, which can then be used by policy-makers, practitioners and researchers to understand the nature of the research and gaps in the literature and to judge whether any specific policy and practice questions could be answered by conducting a more in-depth review of studies.

The primary objective of this systematic map is to systematically and transparently gather and describe the available research evidence on youth work provision, and to identify gaps and future research, including evidence syntheses, which can usefully inform the development of youth policy in Ireland. It is important to highlight that although only 'empirical' studies were included, setting a reporting quality threshold (*see Chapter 2 for more details*), the map does not provide statements about the strength of the evidence available since studies were not appraised for their quality. However, it brings together the evidence in the area of youth work and provides a way to locate relevant research. As such, the map provides a tool for policy-makers, practitioners and academics interested in interrogating and developing the evidence base further.

1.1.1 Systematic map questions

Both systematic reviews and systematic maps are guided by research questions. The scope of this systematic map was defined by the following broad question:

1) What is the empirical research evidence on the impact of youth work on the lives of children and young people aged 10-24 years?

By searching systematically for studies that fall within the scope of this question, we were able to identify a wide range of research literature relevant to youth work. We were also able to find studies which attempt to answer the following sub-questions set out in the original brief by CES and the DCYA.

1a) What is the contribution of youth work to the lives of young people?

We focused on identifying research that provides evidence on the extent to which youth work improves the lives of young people. In addition to research on the 'effectiveness' of youth work, other types of studies were also identified, such as investigations into the accessibility, acceptability and overall experience of participating in youth work provision.

1b) What activities are associated with outcomes for young people?

We were interested in describing the different types of youth work activities, the range of outcomes measured and the ways in which the studies described or considered the relationship between the two, through an analysis of the information provided in each of the studies. However, we do not attempt to draw conclusions about causality or report the results of individual studies.

1c) What methods are employed in assessing youth work activities?

It is important to consider the different ways in which youth work activities are being investigated and to consider if there is a concentration of 'types of research' being conducted in addition to identifying gaps in the evidence base. The methodological approaches employed are described, in terms of study design and data collection methods used across studies, in addition to a commentary on the strengths and limits of each.

1.2 Definitional and conceptual issues

This section outlines and defines the key concepts used in this systematic map, including what we mean by (i) 'youth work', (ii) 'children and young people' and (iii) 'outcomes for children and young people'. Systematic maps require explicit definitions in order that the limits of the map are made clear and to enable the development of a coherent search strategy and inclusion criteria. The following definitions draw on the wider literature and information provided by CES, with input from the DCYA, to ensure the report is directly informed and guided by definitions that are used in the Irish context.

1.2.1 Youth work in Ireland

There is no internationally agreed definition of 'youth work' or explicit criteria regarding how it differs, for example, from youth development or youth support services for children and young people. Neither are the characterisations or types of activities found in youth work unique to it. Rather, youth work activities come under an umbrella of different terms. For example, they can be 'named' programmes or they may fall under generic concepts such as out-of-school time, positive activities for young people, after-school or youth clubs. Despite the lack of easily applied definitions of what youth work is, or what it might look like in practice, we have outlined some of the 'core' characteristics of youth work that can be used to search and identify studies to include in this systematic map (*see Section 1.2.2*).

In Ireland, the youth work sector has a long-standing history of working in the non-formal educational sector, providing personal and social development opportunities for children and young people. A young person is defined under the 2001 Youth Work Act as someone under the age of 25. The Act provides the following definition of youth work (p. 7):

> 'Youth work means a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is — a. complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and b. provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.'

The Irish National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007 offers further insight into the activities and processes involved in youth work (Department of Education and Science, 2003, p. 13):

> 'Youth work's primary concern is with the education of young people in non-formal settings, and education is by definition a planned, purposeful and conscious process (whereas "learning" may or may not be planned and purposeful, and may or may not be conscious). The actual methods adopted by youth workers or activities engaged in by young people vary widely, and include:
>
> - recreational and sporting activities, indoor/outdoor pursuits, uniformed and non-uniformed;
> - creative, artistic and cultural or language-based programmes and activities;
> - spiritual development programmes and activities;
> - programmes designed with specific groups of young people in mind (e.g. young women or men, young people with disabilities, young Travellers or young people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual);
> - issue-based activities (related to, for example, justice and social awareness, the environment, development education);
> - activities and programmes concerned with welfare and well-being (health promotion, relationships and sexuality, stress management); and
> - intercultural and international awareness activities and exchanges.
>
> Despite the apparent diversity, however, all of these various methods and activities are distinguished by a focus on **process**: on the ongoing educational cycle of experience, observation, reflection and action, and — essential for this to happen — on the active and critical **participation** of children and young people. The successful facilitation of this process clearly requires substantial experience and a high degree of skill on the part of those responsible, the "educators", whether paid or volunteer.'

1.2.2 Core characteristics of youth work

Youth work

The terms of reference for this review included the following description of the 'process' of youth work (CES, 2011). Youth work:

- intends to build mutually trustful and respectful relationships with and between young people, into which they normally enter by choice;
- occurs mainly in informal community-based settings, but not exclusively;
- works through purposeful practices tailored to the interests and concerns, needs, rights and responsibilities of young people, giving priority to how they identify and understand these;
- seeks to build personal and social competencies and capacities;
- favours active, experiential and collective learning over didactic and individualised forms, or predetermined curricula;
- encourages young people to participate voluntarily where they are supported to work with adults in partnership;

- provides opportunities that are developmental, educative, challenging, supportive and creative, and are intended and designed to extend young people's power over their own lives and within their wider society;
- seeks to enable young people to clarify and embrace key features of their individual and collective identities in relation to class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and disability;
- supports young people as they deal with difficulties, threats and risks which may impact in damaging ways on them, in their communities and wider society.

Youth development

As stated, we were interested in youth work and its related practices, defining this as activities for young people which adopt the process outlined above. Many of these processes could potentially be found in services that take a 'youth development' approach. In order to be inclusive regarding the type of activities we were interested in, we applied a complementary definition found in the literature (e.g. Hamilton, 2004, pp. 1-4), which conceptualises 'youth development' as:

1. **A natural process**, e.g. the growing capacity of a young person to understand and act on the environment.
2. **A set of principles**, e.g. a philosophy or approach emphasizing active support for the growing capacity of young people by individuals, organisations and institutions, especially at the community level.
3. **A set of practices**, e.g. a range of practices that applies the principles (Number 2) to a planned set of practices, or activities, that foster the developmental process (Number 1) in children and young people.

These descriptions regarding how youth work provision seeks to 'work with' (as opposed to 'on') children and young people informed our decision to search for studies based on the 'process of delivering' youth work activities and/or the 'approach to supporting' children and young people (*see Chapter 2 and Appendix 2 for further details*).

Not all of the characteristics described above were present in the studies, but they were used to inform our overall understanding of youth work and to guide the inclusion of studies (*see Section 5.3 for further details of the inclusion criteria*). Although there were differences across studies, the core principles underlying their approaches were (i) the promotion of young people's personal and social development; and (ii) the understanding that the involvement of young people in youth work activities was on a voluntary basis.

1.2.3 Youth work: Aims, activities and outcomes

Anticipating a variety of youth work provision, and as stated in Section 1.1, we were interested in describing the aims, activities and outcomes identified in studies. We understood these to be distinct from each other in the following ways:

i. **Youth work aims** refer to the stated intentions of what the work is trying to achieve. These included ideas about what youth work providers understood as the reason and purpose for participating in youth work activities, e.g. to empower children and young people, or to provide them with opportunities to engage in their local community.
ii. **Youth work activities** are specifically concerned with the opportunities and experiences that are designed to lead to the stated aims and objectives, e.g. opportunities to take part in social activities, volunteering, creative arts, etc.
iii. **Outcomes** are broadly defined as the results of activities that enhance the lives of children and young people, e.g. personal development (social, emotional, cognitive) or changes in local circumstances or systems.

1.2.4 Types of studies

We were interested in identifying different types of studies and did not exclude any based on methodological design. We expected to identify studies which:

1. **EVALUATED**
   - **the effectiveness** of different types of youth work activity by measuring outcomes in a variety of dimensions, and which might ask questions such as:
     - Does 'youth work' work'? In other words, do children and young people benefit in the way youth service providers hope they will?
     - Are children and young people able to apply the benefits they have gained from youth work?
     - If so, does it make a difference to their lives, now and/or in the future?
   - **service delivery/implementation,** by gathering evidence on the effective delivery of interventions;
   - **levels of acceptability and/or accessibility** of youth work provision from the perspectives of children and young people and/or other participants;
   - **costs and cost-effectiveness** of the delivery of youth work provision.

2. **TESTED AND DEVELOPED evaluation methods**, e.g. studies that attempt to investigate how to measure the effectiveness of youth work or studies concerned with the design of youth work research projects.

3. **INVESTIGATED other types of questions:** We also anticipated research studies that did not fall into these categories, but which we would include in the map as part of the evidence base.

1.2.5 Population

The primary population of interest for this systematic map are **children and young people**, aged 10-24, who are actively engaged in youth work activities. We expected that the samples included would represent a range of different socio-economic, racially diverse backgrounds, varying age groups, sexualities, have a different gender focus and may also include those with physical or learning disabilities. In addition to children and young people, we were also interested in studies that collected data from the perspective of **professionals**; these are often found in process evaluations that monitor and/or ask staff about their experiences of managing and running youth work projects.

1.2.6 Geographical location

We were interested in identifying studies conducted internationally. However, attention and focus was placed on identifying studies more relevant to 'high-income' countries (i.e. those countries classified by the World Bank as earnings gross national income (GNI) of more than $12,276 per capita[1]). This is based on an understanding that professional youth work activities are more likely, although not exclusively, to be delivered in countries with developed welfare systems, whereby the majority of the population's basic needs (e.g. for food, housing, health and education) are already being met.

1.2.7 Youth work settings

Similar to geographical location, we did not place a restriction on the type of youth work settings we were interested in. Our general guide was that youth work can take place anywhere, including locations in the community (e.g. youth centres, youth clubs,

[1] Further details of how countries are classified according to income can be found at: http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications/country-and-lending-groups

libraries, sports centres) in addition to more 'formal' educational settings (e.g. schools and colleges). We were also interested in 'detached' youth work, which does not have a specific location but rather attempts to meet and contact young people wherever they might be, which could be 'on the street' or in temporary or permanent accommodation (e.g. youth hostels, their own home, hospital and/or young offenders' institutions).

1.2.8 Implications for identifying and including studies

These concepts and definitions informed the way in which the studies were identified. Firstly, the definition of youth work was kept deliberately broad to enable a more accommodating lens through which to identify a wide range of studies relevant to answering the systematic map questions. The search focused on processes and approaches to working with young people, rather than on defining specific aims, activities or 'named' programmes, and studies that took a primarily 'preventive' approach were excluded (*see Section 5.3 and Appendix 2 for further details*). Secondly, because we were interested in a broad range of study types, outcomes and youth work settings, we did not apply search strings for these concepts, but left them open and screened accordingly.

The bias towards high-income countries is reflected in the search strategy, with more emphasis being placed on databases and websites with a 'developed' country focus compared to databases that may reflect research literature found in less developed countries. Although every effort was made to achieve the broadest search strategy possible in terms of geographical location, the search elicited studies in particular countries where research is most active (e.g. the USA). In addition, the report only included studies written in English and as such has a particular focus on orientations and methods of youth work that are written about using this language.

1.3 Context

1.3.1 Policy and service provision

Ireland

In Ireland, the DCYA is currently developing an overarching Children and Young People's Strategy 2012-2017, which will include a Youth Policy Framework (YPF). Youth policy developments at European level during Ireland's Presidency of the EU Council of Youth Ministers in 2013, along with the experience of youth service providers, experts and young people themselves, will also inform Ireland's national policy for young people. Building on the previous National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007, it is envisaged that the forthcoming policy in the area of youth will aim to enhance the development, participation and support of young people, to provide greater coordination and coherence in youth policy and provision, and to ensure such provision is both quality- and outcomes-based.

1.3.2 Systematic reviews

There are several systematic reviews in the field of youth work and youth development. For example, a recent review on *The Impact of Youth Work for Young People* for the Health Council of New Zealand and the Ministry of Youth Development (Fouché *et al,* 2010) reports that they did not find any quantitative studies which met their criteria and conclude that there is a limited evidence base in this area. However, reviews that broaden their criteria are likely to be more successful in identifying and finding studies which can be synthesised. For example, a recent review by Adamson *et al* (2011) on *Increasing the engagement of young people in positive activities*, conducted in the UK on behalf the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO),

found that there is an evidence base, primarily in the USA, that is able to identify the social and economic barriers to engagement and participation in out-of-school activities for young people. Although the authors are cautious about the extent to which the evidence from the USA can be generalised to the UK and other European countries, they consider that learning can be gained if limitations about the different contexts are kept in mind.

It is possible to find a more readily accessible evidence base that takes a preventive approach. For example, there are numerous reviews on the effectiveness of programmes that targeted a range of existing problem behaviours associated with young people. Two reviews, Dennison (2004) and Harden (2007), that looked for effective programmes tackling a single issue (in this case, reducing teenage pregnancy) concluded that programmes which take a positive approach to youth development activities were more successful than other types of programmes. However, when looking more broadly, the UK review by Schulman and Davies (2007), which set out to explicate the 'why', 'what', 'where' and 'how' of youth development, found that without standardised outcome measures of a positive outcomes framework, the evidence base remains inconclusive as to whether participating in programmes that take a 'positive view' are more effective than any other type of youth programme.

Targeted youth support

Similarly, evidence that is relevant and complementary to this report are two reviews commissioned by the UK Government (1997-2011) on 'targeted youth support' initiatives specifically aimed at vulnerable young people, with the aim of ensuring that agencies work together to meet young people's needs.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, now the Department for Education) developed a policy framework on providing *Targeted youth support* (DCSF, 2008a) and issued further guidance on *Next steps* (DCSF, 2009a). The overall aim of the targeted youth support (TYS) framework was to ensure that the needs of vulnerable young people were identified and met through interagency working. The specific aims included the 'early identification' of young people and the use of the Common Assessment Framework[2] to meet the needs of vulnerable young people in universal settings. The approach also emphasized the personalisation of services, delivered in community settings, offered across different transition points, ensuring that services are both accessible and acceptable to young people.

The two reviews of TYS differed: the first was a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of effective early interventions for youth at risk of future poor outcomes (Thomas *et al*, 2008a), conducted by the EPPI-Centre in 2008 and drawing on systematic review-level evidence, and the second was a systematic review of primary evidence commissioned by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) on the uptake, impact, and barriers and facilitators of effective TYS services (O'Mara *et al*, 2010).

The REA (Thomas *et al*, 2008a) identified systematic reviews evaluating the effectiveness of interventions in the following outcome domains:

- youth offending and anti-social behaviour;
- drug/alcohol misuse;
- teen pregnancy and poor sexual health;
- poor outcomes for teenage parents and their children;
- not in education, employment or training (NEET) and low attainment;
- mental health;
- youth homelessness.

[2] The Common Assessment Framework can be found at: https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/CAF-Practitioner-Guide.pdf

The REA was also interested in identifying the risk factors addressed by interventions, which the authors found could be categorised into the five main areas of family, school, community, peers and individuals.

The majority of interventions identified and addressed risk factors at the individual and family levels, rather than at the school and community levels. The authors found that 'individual and peer risk factors were targeted by interventions and by systematic reviews which aimed to change individual behaviour or attitudes through personal skills training, cognitive interventions or family management interventions (*ibid*, p. 55). Family-level factors also featured highly and were targeted through family management and parenting programmes, foster care and independent living programmes. The authors also found that 'hardly, if ever, were all known risk factors addressed by the included reviews' (*ibid, p. 6*).

The research review by O'Mara *et al* (2010), which synthesises primary studies, found that TYS interventions can reduce teenage pregnancies, emotional and behavioural problems (including delinquency/offending, school exclusion and truancy) and promote positive behaviour. They also found that unintended consequences could be achieved, such as gains in young people's confidence and sense of autonomy. As expected by the authors, much of the evidence was identified from outside the UK, with only 'anecdotal evidence on the barriers to the uptake of services' (*ibid*, p. 10), but that many of the TYS initiatives that were successful could be attributed to high levels of staff training and ongoing workforce support. Again, however, despite the bias towards studies from North America, key learning was drawn.

It appears that there is both an established and growing evidence base relevant to informing policy and practice on the provision of targeted services aimed at young people who may be 'at risk' and thus need additional support. While we consider this to be a necessary and important contribution to improving our understanding on what works for young people 'in need', we must also continue developing and synthesising knowledge about the impact of open access services on positive outcomes for all children and young people.

2. SYSTEMATIC MAP METHODS

How we identified and described studies to produce a 'map' of research relevant to youth work is described here briefly and in further detail in Part II of this report.

2.1 Who was involved in the systematic map?

The systematic map was conducted by the EPPI-Centre, with input from the Centre for Effective Services (CES) and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in Ireland. Policy-makers and practitioners from Ireland and the UK were also invited to comment on the interim report and to provide further input into the analysis and presentation of the research evidence.

2.2 How did we decide which studies to include?

We included studies of children and young people aged 10-24, professionals working with young people, or parents of young people engaged in youth work activities. Studies needed to focus on positive futures for young people, rather than treatment or reform of young people. We were interested in both the effectiveness of youth work programmes, evaluations of their delivery processes and methodological studies on how to measure positive outcomes for youth. They could have been published at any time, but their design had to include a clear description of the method used and some form of data collection. Opinion or 'think pieces', journalistic articles and other commentaries relevant to youth work were excluded.

2.3 How did we find the studies?

Having chosen the types of studies we were seeking, we developed a search strategy to find as many as possible. Searching electronic databases requires search terms chosen to match the systematic map question and criteria for including studies. Terms and synonyms included those directly relevant to youth work in Ireland and broader terms to accommodate international youth work. These included generic descriptions such as 'youth work', 'youth development, 'youth clubs', as well as youth work approaches and practices, e.g. 'youth opportunities', 'empowerment', 'positive activities'. The full list of search terms is provided in Appendix 2.

We searched the following 10 databases:

- Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)
- International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)
- Social Services Abstracts (SSA)
- Education Research Information Center (ERIC)
- Australian Education Index (AEI)
- Cochrane Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL)
- PsychInfo
- EconLit
- Child Data Rev
- Campbell Collaboration

We also looked through the contents pages of key youth work journals, searched relevant websites (e.g. DfE, youth and policy, C4EO), contacted key authors and scanned the reference lists of systematic reviews for potentially relevant references.

Studies were managed during the review using the EPPI-Centre's online review software, EPPI-Reviewer 4.0 (Thomas *et al*, 2010).

2.4 How did we describe and group the studies to inform the findings?

We 'coded' studies with standardised terms to describe youth work and how it had been investigated. We applied a 'coding tool' consisting of a set of predetermined questions developed specifically for this systematic map, but also drawing on coding tools used in previous systematic maps and reviews. We discussed a pilot version with CES and the DCYA before devising the final tool. Answers to most of the questions were left 'open' since it was not possible to know what type of information could be captured in advance. For example, the range of aims, activities and outcomes of youth work that might be reported in the literature could not be predicted. This resulted in a number of unique and disparate 'descriptive terms' used in the literature. We grouped the terms into generic 'types' of youth work aims, activities and outcomes, to be used for descriptive analysis. For quality assurance purposes, a sample of studies was also coded independently by two reviewers, with differences discussed and resolved. This ensured consistency in the application of the coding tool throughout this part of the research process.

3. FINDINGS

This systematic map presents research evidence about youth service provision for children and young people aged 10-24 years. It includes 175 separate studies, reported in 214 documents. The number of citations, abstracts and full reports we inspected to find these relevant studies can be found in Chapter 2. This chapter is organised as follows:

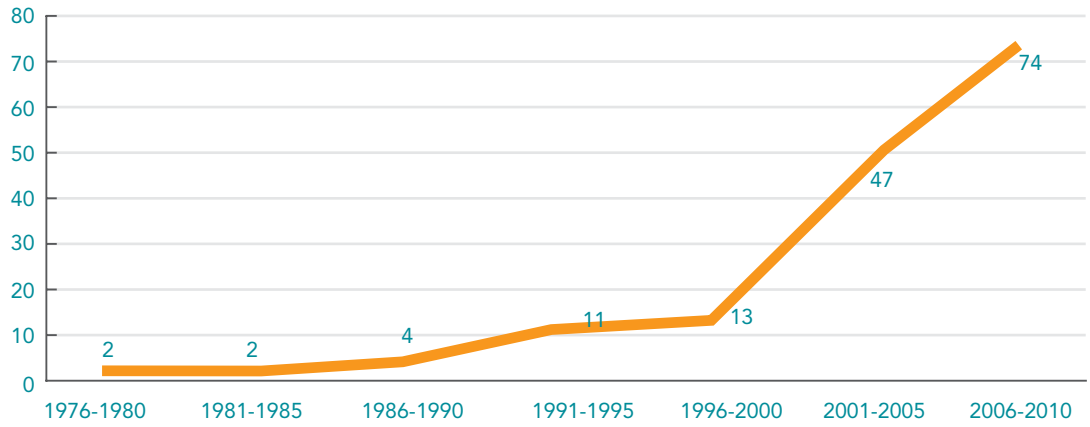
Section 3.1 provides an overview of the evidence base. It describes when and where the research was conducted, which studies were included, their study design and how the data were collected.
Sections 3.2 — 3.4 describes the different types of youth work activities and how researchers set about measuring subsequent changes in children and young people.
Section 3.5 describes studies that evaluated the delivery of youth work activities and collected the views of young people and professionals.

3.1 Overview of the literature

3.1.1 Year of publication

There is a growing literature of research addressing youth work. Figure 3.1 shows the average rate of study publication per year. There was a sharp increase in studies being published in this area from 2001-2005 (n=47) and 43% of studies included from 1976 were published between 2006 and 2010 (n=74).

Figure 3.1: Rate of study publication*

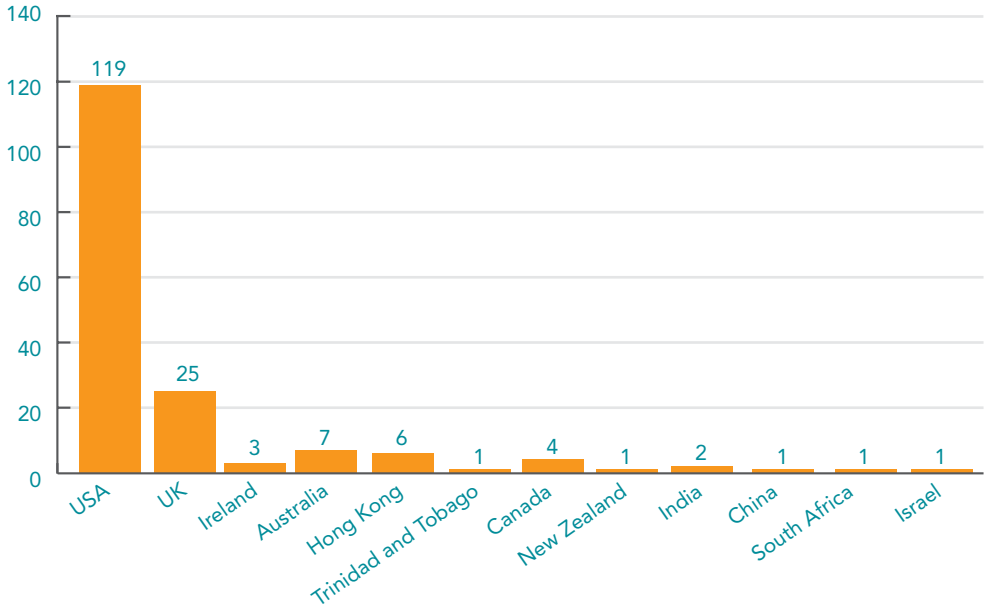


* Mutually exclusive

3.1.2 Geographical location

Although there is a significant literature on youth work in the UK (14%, 25 studies) and the Republic of Ireland (1.8%, 3 studies), a larger literature is available from the USA (69%, 119 studies), with additional studies from other English-speaking developed countries, including Australia (7), Canada (4) and New Zealand (1) (*see Figure 3.2*). Five of the 6 studies from Hong Kong were about the same youth work programme. This geographical spread may reflect the choice of databases and journals searched, most being US- or UK-based. In addition, reports were only included if written in English.

Figure 3.2: Spread of studies by country*



* Mutually exclusive

3.1.3 Who was studied

The majority of studies offered programmes to children and young people across two age bands: 10-14 and 15-17 (n=60). Very few studies were designed to span children and young people from the ages of 10-21 and over (n=7). Similarly, very few studies only focused on young adults aged over 18 (n=2) or over 21 (n=4). Most of the 10 studies that only included populations of over 21 year-olds were studies with 'peer' youth workers that specified their age. Studies that included adult participants were much less likely to provide details on age.

Most programmes were open to all children rather than for particular groups, and so suited the ethos of much youth work. However, some were directed at particular groups, either as pilot programmes or because funding was available for those groups, for example, children or young people who were considered to be 'at risk' either as individuals (n=10) or because of the community in which they lived (n=16). We did not include studies if their sole focus was on efforts to treat or reform 'risky' behaviour.

Only 11% (n=20) of studies focused on youth work for particular population groups (*see Table 3.1*). Programmes that were solely for females were targeted on a community (n=3), family (n=2) or school (n=1) level, not for risk at an individual level. Programmes focusing on young people from black and minority ethnic groups or indigenous populations were mostly delivered in their community (n=5). Only one study concerned young people in foster care.

Table 3.1: Youth work services directed at particular children and young people*

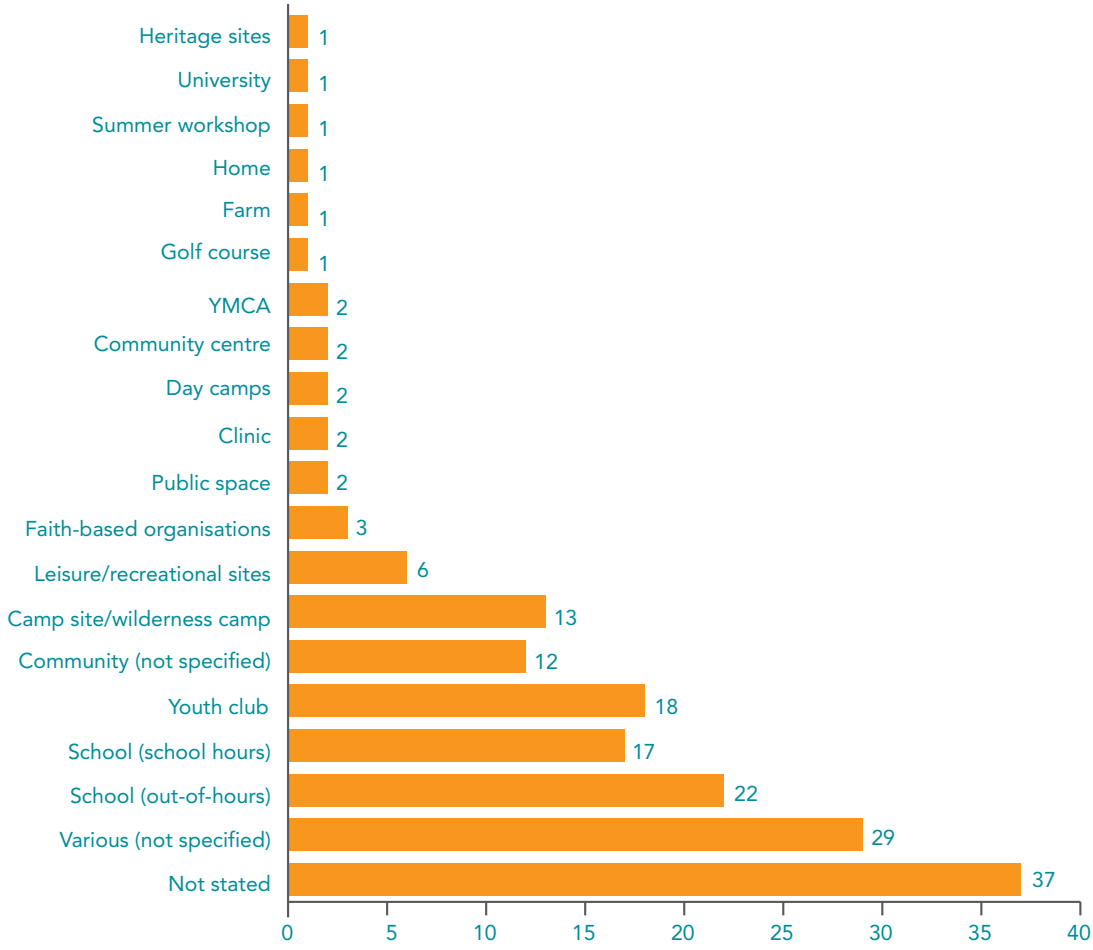
Population characteristics	Setting of targeting				
	Individual	Community	School	Family	Income
Mixed population (e.g. boys and girls)	10	16	1	1	2
Girls only	0	3	1	2	0
Black and ethnic minority	1	5	0	0	0
Children and young people in foster care	1	0	0	0	0

* Not mutually exclusive

3.1.4 Where they were studied

Youth work activities were delivered in a wide range of settings (*see Figure 3.3*). However, the literature was not always consistent in its reporting, with 37 studies failing to provide this level of detail and a further 29 studies indicating 'various' locations but not explicitly where. Of the remaining studies that did indicate location, the majority were delivered in the context of school, both out-of-hours (n=22) and during teaching hours (n=17). While many youth work activities were delivered through youth clubs (n=18), others were described as simply occurring 'in the community' (n=12). A significant number of physical activities were delivered on camp sites or outdoors (n=13) or in leisure sites (n=6). Other places included faith-based organisations (n=3) and Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA, n=2).

Figure 3.3: Settings for youth work activities*

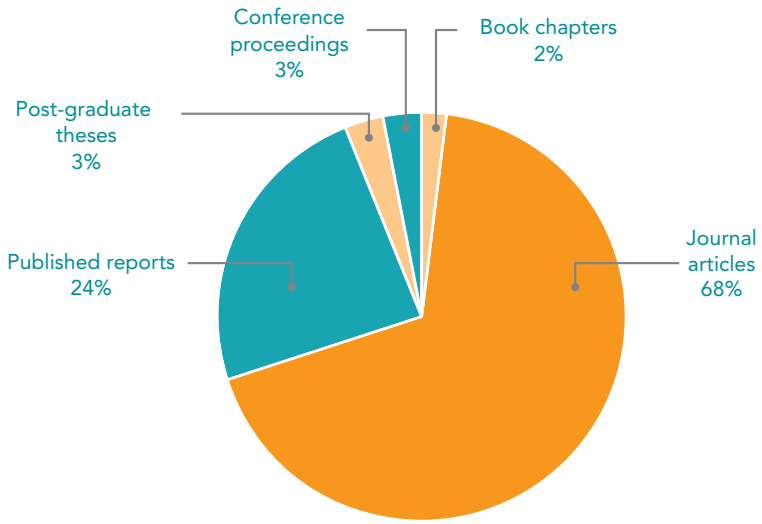


* Not mutually exclusive

3.1.5 Where the research was published

As shown in Figure 3.4, the overwhelming majority of studies were published as peer-reviewed journal articles (68%, n=118). A smaller proportion of studies were also published reports (24%, n=42), with the remaining 8% split between post-graduate theses (3%, n=5), conference proceedings (3%, n=5) and book chapters (2%, n=3).

Figure 3.4: Breakdown of study by publication type*

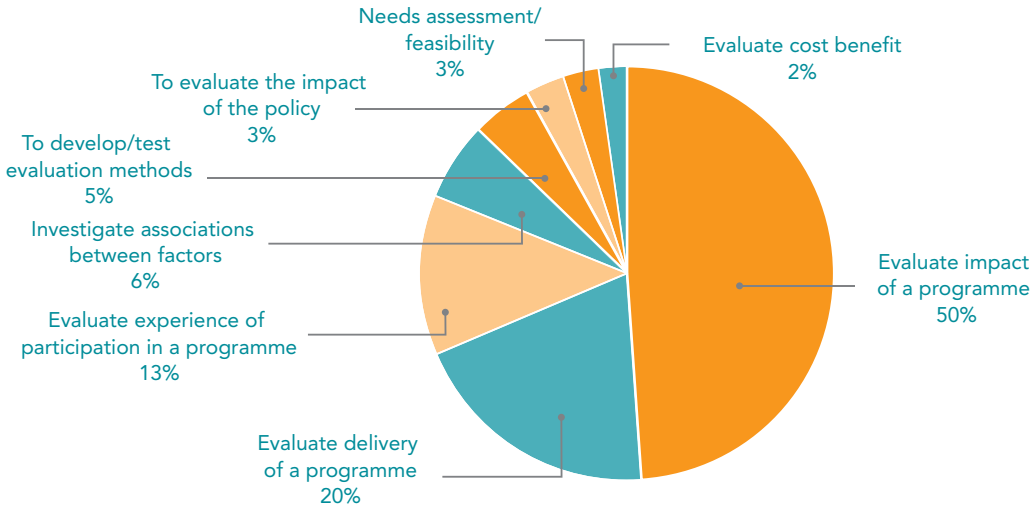


* Mutually exclusive

3.1.6 Types of studies

Half of the studies aimed to evaluate the impact of youth work programmes (50%, n=93) (*see Figure 3.5*). Studies also evaluated the process of delivering programmes (20%, n=40), the experience of participating in youth work programmes to find out how to improve service delivery (13%, n=25) or conducted a cost-benefit analysis (2%, n=4). A smaller number of studies were also interested in conducting research to inform the development of youth work initiatives by carrying out needs assessments or feasibility studies (3%, n=6). Some studies (6%) also explored 'associations', i.e. the relationship between factors, such as whether increased participation lead to an increase in particular outcomes. Further details of the types of research studies can be found in later sections of this chapter.

Figure 3.5: Aims of the study*



* Not mutually exclusive

3.1.7 High-income country evidence

Most of the studies (n=93) addressed the impact of youth work activities and most of these (n=68) were conducted in the USA (*see Table 3.2*). The smaller number of studies investigating different methodological approaches for researching youth work activities and studies of programme development were also from the USA. The three studies investigating the impact of youth work policy in a particular geographical area were from the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Most of the studies from the UK were also impact evaluations (n=15) or studies evaluating the delivery of (n=7) or experience of participating in (n=5) youth work activities.

Table 3.2: Types of study, by high-income countries*

Types of study	Country							
	USA	UK	Ireland	Australia	Hong Kong	Trinidad & Tobago	Canada	NZ
Evaluations of impact	68	15	1	4	2	0	2	1
Evaluations of delivery/ implementation	26	7	3	1	2	1	0	0
Evaluating experience of participating	18	5	0	1	0	0	1	0
Cost-benefit studies	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Studies testing/ developing methods	9	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Evaluation of policy impact	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Investigation of association between factors	7	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Needs assessment/ feasibility studies	4	1	0	0	1	0	0	0

* Not mutually exclusive

3.1.8 Middle and lower income country evidence

Very few studies included in the map came from middle-income countries (MIC) or low-income countries (LIC). Most of these studies evaluated the impact of a programme or intervention (*see Table 3.3*). In fact, the two studies in the LIC category involved immersing young people from high-income countries in the cultures of low-income countries, rather than being a study about participants from low-income countries and therefore may be misleading. The lack of studies in this area may be a result of the English language bias of the search strategy and inclusion criteria for this systematic map.

Table 3.3: Types of study, by middle- and low-income countries*

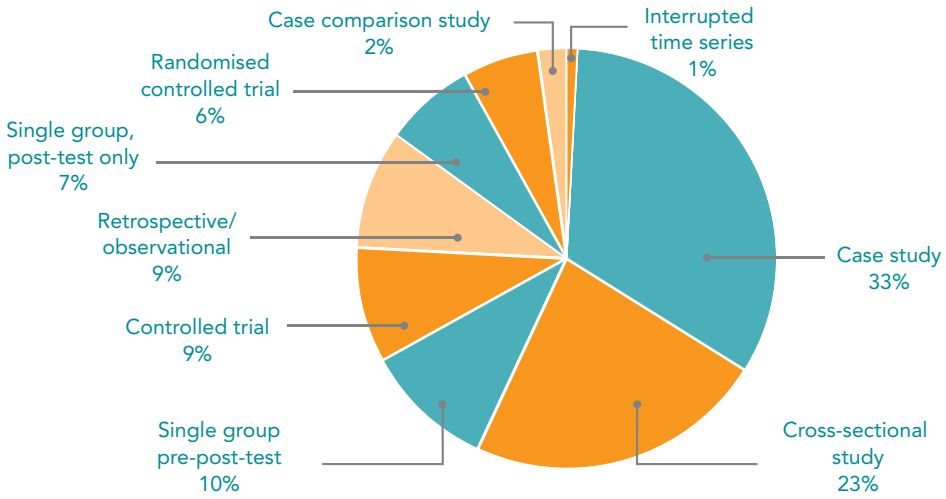
Types of study	Country			
	India MIC	China MIC	South Africa MIC	Various
Evaluations of impact	2	1	0	2
Evaluations of delivery/implementation	0	0	0	0
Evaluating experience of participating	0	0	0	0
Cost-benefit studies	0	0	0	0
Studies testing/developing methods	0	0	0	0
Evaluation of policy impact	0	0	0	0
Investigation of association between factors	0	0	0	0
Needs assessment/feasibility studies	0	0	0	0

* Not mutually exclusive

3.1.9 Study designs

Most reports were either case studies (33%, n=57) or cross-sectional designs (23%, n=26), with both of these approaches collecting data at one point in time (e.g. after participating in youth work activities) (*see Figure 3.6*). Very few studies collected data both before and after allocating participants to youth work and comparison programmes, either randomly (6%, n=10) or non-randomly (9%, n=16). In addition to primary studies, 33 non-systematic and 3 systematic reviews relevant to youth work were also identified.

Figure 3.6: Study design*

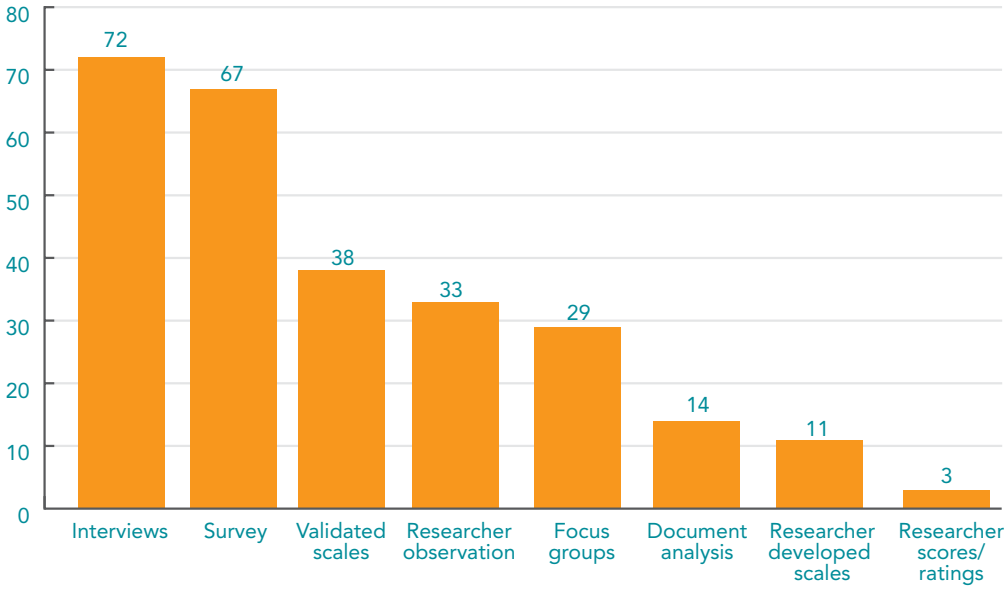


* Not mutually exclusive

3.1.10 Data collection methods

As Figure 3.7 shows, most studies captured data on working with young people through interviews, either as individuals (41%, n=72) or in focus groups (17%, n=29). Surveys were also common using closed questions (38%, n=67) and/or validated scales (21%, n=38). Researchers also observed young people and activities (19%, n=33) or analysed documents (8%, n=14). A number of studies also used more than one method to collect data, for example, using both interviews and surveys.

Figure 3.7: Methods of data collection used in studies*



* Not mutually exclusive

3.1.11 Summary of the evidence base

As mentioned in Chapter 2, only citations meeting predetermined criteria could be included in the map, all of which had to meet quality thresholds for the reporting of methods used and the collection of some form of data. This resulted in a total of 175 studies investigating youth work activities published between 1976 and 2011, although there was a greater proliferation of studies being published after 2000. The findings indicate that there is a long-standing history of conducting research in the field of youth work.

Studies fell mainly into two groups: those asking questions about 'what works' (e.g. evaluations of impact) and those investigating 'how it works' (e.g. evaluations of how youth work activities have been delivered, factors affecting that delivery and/or the process of taking part in youth work activities from the perspectives of participants). Very few evaluation studies reported costs or cost-effectiveness. The dominance of both types of evaluations conducted in the USA reflects, to some extent, the type of funding available for youth work provision and the investment made in generating and making an evidence base more publicly available.

Because searching for studies beyond publication in journals was limited, we found very few book chapters and unpublished reports. There may be many other useful studies that can contribute to our understanding of youth work, conducted in the UK and Ireland, such as unpublished reports held by local governments or individual youth services.

The diversity of research is demonstrated in the range of study designs that have been reported in the literature and their approach to data collection. Over half of the studies evaluating impact were case studies, cross-sectional or single-group design, with fewer numbers of controlled and randomised controlled trials. The majority of studies collected data using self-report measures through interviews, focus groups or surveys. Studies evaluating delivery mechanisms and potential factors influencing impact were more likely to use qualitative methods, particularly those studies interested in the views of children and young people.

There was often no clear indication regarding exactly where the youth work activities took place, with studies either not reporting this information or indicating that there were 'various' locations. However, many youth work activity settings appeared to be defined by their relationship to formal educational settings, by describing their location as 'after school' or 'during school' hours or determined by the practical requirements of the youth work activity, such as sports taking place in leisure facilities or outdoors.

Overall, the mapping exercise illustrated that, to date, most studies, are from the USA and they aimed to evaluate the impact of youth work activities with young people between the ages of 10-17 in a variety of youth work settings.

3.2 Theories, aims and activities of youth work

This section provides details of the 93 evaluation studies that investigated the impact on the lives of children and young people. 'Impact evaluation' has been defined as studies that aim to systematically assess outcomes. For this report, outcomes are considered to be any data/findings measured 'after' youth work and seen as a direct result of children and young people's participation in youth work. The aims, activities and outcomes identified in studies have been grouped and described.

It is worth noting that the numbers of studies reported within each group are not mutually exclusive, i.e. studies will be 'counted' more than once. This reflects the multiple nature and richness of youth work, which often has several aims, includes a range of activities and seeks to achieve a broad spectrum of outcomes.

3.2.1 Theoretical approaches

Youth work has always been concerned with understanding the core components that children and young people require to support them as they become healthy and 'thriving' adults in society, and in identifying the key social and environmental conditions that are required to support that process. A useful way to understand the role of theory is to consider how it might usefully inform the approach taken to the delivery of youth work activities and any aims those approaches might be seeking to achieve. As Kellogg (2000, cited in Lewis-Charp *et al*, 2003, p. 168) notes:

> 'A theory of change or logic model articulates the vision, program concepts, and dreams of an organization. It lets a variety of internal and external stakeholders try an idea on for size and to understand, theoretically, how the program functions. The purpose of a theory of change, then, is to provide key audiences with a road map to describe the interconnection between a program's mission and assumptions, program strategies, and desired outcomes.'

We were interested in documenting if studies that evaluated impact reported any theoretical approaches underpinning the youth work activities delivered.

3.2.2 Examples of theories underpinning youth work

Just over a quarter of the studies evaluating impact (27%) did not include detail of any particular theoretical approach. However, the remaining 73% did report which theory informed their activities, including how they thought youth work might be expected to produce its intended outcomes. Of these studies, a further 25% represented 17 different theoretical perspectives, from 'prevention science' to 'experiential learning'.

The full list of theories is provided in Table A1.4 (*see Appendix 1*), with a summary of most common approaches described below (*see Table 3.4*).

Table 3.4: Commonly cited theoretical approaches

Underlying theories	No. of studies
Not stated	25
Positive youth development	32
Socio-ecological model	8
Empowerment	5
Developmental assets	5
Other (e.g. social capital, experiential education, service learning pedagogy, relational theory, critical consciousness)	25

Positive youth development

The most identifiable group of studies was informed by 'positive youth development' theory (e.g. Lerner, 1999). This theory asserts that for young people to meet developmental targets, they need to be engaged in activities delivered in settings that are safe, supportive and foster meaningful relationships. This approach is considered to be vital to ensuring successful personal and social outcomes, and is considered secondary to the type of activities delivered. Thus, the argument is that, potentially, theories of positive youth development could underpin a range of different youth work activities and still be considered effective in producing desired outcomes. For example, the Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programs (PATHS) took a holistic approach designed 'according to 15 constructs conducive to positive adolescent development' (Law and Shek, 2011, p. 3). This included the 'promotion of bonding, cultivation of resilience'

(p. 3) and the promotion of a range of social, cognitive emotional, behavioural and moral competencies, including 'provision of recognition for positive behaviour, opportunities for pro-social involvement, and promotion of pro-social norms' (p. 3). PATHS was delivered 'interactively' (rather than didactically) through a wide variety of youth-related activities. It also addressed 'adolescent developmental issues, such as drug issues, sexuality, and financial management' through the project to reflect the 'real-life experiences of Hong Kong adolescents' (p. 3). The extent to which the adoption of a 'positive youth development' approach determines the success or failure of outcomes continues to be investigated through studies that evaluate this aspect of youth development programmes (e.g. Schulman and Davies, 2007).

Socio-ecological model

The socio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, cited in Atkiss *et al,* 2010) has been applied to a number of health promotion and social care domains, including youth work practice. This approach has been developed across a range of disciplines (e.g. sociology, psychology, education and health) and contends that to achieve youth outcomes programmes need to address a combination of individual and environmental factors. Similar to positive youth development (*see above*), this approach also believes that the practice of youth work needs to reflect and address the dynamic relationship that young people have with others, as well as the wider context of their lives, if it is to be successful. The study by Berg *et al* (2009) evaluates a youth work programme that 'utilizes ecological modelling and critical analysis' (p. 346). Young people are encouraged to 'use an ecological framework to explore their "multiple selves" in different socio-geographic contexts'. They 'also engage in critical analysis of socio-historical antecedents, power analysis and an examination of policies, laws, organisations and cultural practices that affect their lives and that they wish to understand and alter'. They are also supported to 'learn to negotiate with one another, and to engage with other community partners in making decisions and taking action at multiple levels, that reflect the needs of their community'. The process reinforces group cohesive and community connectedness and results in positive individual-level developmental outcomes. These pathways are interactive and iterative.

Empowerment

The theory behind youth activities taking an empowerment approach is that the way to improve outcomes for young people is for them to develop a greater understanding of power and control in their lives, socially, politically and economically. This is said to be achievable by supporting young people to be consciously and critically engaged with society through a variety of youth work activities (e.g. Zimmerman *et al*, 2011). These ideas were translated into practice by the Youth Empowerment Solutions for Peaceful Communities (YES) project, which supports young people to engage in their community by 'providing them with training in citizenship and character development, and rewards and sustains their participation by offering opportunities for supervised recreation and summer projects' (*ibid*, p. 429). The YES project also works closely with the community 'assisting neighbourhood organisations and youth to plan and carry out community development projects' (p. 429). Young people are empowered by developing 'skills for communicating with adults and expressing themselves with confidence', with participation giving them 'real decision-making power' (p. 432).

3.2.3 Variation in the use of theory in youth work

In addition to the three main categories outlined above, there was a wide range of 'theories' informing the delivery, design and overall approach of youth work activities. The use of theory, how it was applied and the extent to which it was linked to the aims and outcomes

of youth work differed considerably across each of the studies. What this points to is the very different systems of thought that youth service providers can, and do, draw upon to inform their work. For example, ideas come from 'prevention science', 'system world views', 'critical pedagogies' and 'service learning pedagogy', to name a few.

Although a number of different theoretical labels have been used and applied in the literature, what could prove useful is a deeper exploration regarding the extent to which these theories complement or do actually vary from each other in practice. The definitions provided in Section 3.2.2 already indicate some 'cross over', such as the importance of building relationships and the link this has to 'positive development'. Potentially many common theoretical ideas regarding how 'change' occurs are being applied across a range of different youth work activities.

In addition, it would also be useful to know if youth work services that are better able to articulate which aspects of their youth work provision lead to intended outcomes (e.g. have explicit logic models/theories of change) are, in fact, more or less successful than those services that do not specify or if they do, do so in a limited way.

3.2.4 Aims of youth work

The research literature described the aims of youth work activities in a number of different ways (*see Table A1.1 in Appendix 1 for full list of aims identified*). Through discussion with CES and the DCYA, we grouped individual aims into the following 5 types:

- personal and social development (n=71);
- social change (n=28);
- education and career (n=24);
- safety and well-being (n=26);
- contribution to society (n=20).

It is important to note that a number of different classifications could have been generated of equal merit (*see Section 5.5 for further details regarding the methods to generate the groups*) and that many studies had multiple aims and will therefore appear in more than one category.

Given the general assumption that one of the key purposes of youth work is to enhance the **personal and social development** of young people (Devlin and Gunning, 2009), it is not surprising to find that over three-quarters of the studies (76%, n=71) report this as their primary aim. This theme was often considered to be an 'underlying' principle of many studies. For example, the evaluation of youth work in England, commissioned by the former DfES, states that: 'There is widespread consensus that youth work's core purpose is the personal and social development of young people, provided through informal education. Linked to this, its purpose is increasingly framed in terms of its contribution to social inclusion [and] the development of social capital' (Merton, 2004, p. 5).

In addition to personal and social development, a further 30% (n=28) of studies also aimed to facilitate the skills young people require to **influence change in their social worlds**. This included the empowerment of girls and young women (n=5) or youth from ethnic and cultural minorities (n=5). Many studies indicated an implicit link between those young people who successfully 'cultivate both empowerment and a sense of community as being more likely to develop skills necessary to becoming healthy, productive adults' (Lakin and Mahoney, 2006, p. 517). Investing in young people as competent individuals, who can create 'positive community change', was also seen as an attempt to move away from negative stereotypes of youth as 'risky' and only requiring prevention-based services, to a more positive attitude towards what young people can offer society (Abdullah *et al*, 2003).

Just under a quarter of the studies (n=24) reported had an **educational and/or career** focus. The majority of studies (n=14) considered the overall aims of youth work to be 'a form of education' in itself (Devlin and Gunning, 2009). A subset of studies also focused on formal education by attempting to improve school engagement and developing career goals (n=4) in addition to supporting young people to access employment and training opportunities (n=5).

Although the overall aim of studies focused on positive approaches to working with young people, some studies (28%, n=26) were also concerned with **safety and well-being** and ensuring young people stayed out of 'harm'. This included preventing children and young people from potential engagement in crime (n=5), the use of substances (n=4) or from getting pregnant before the age of 18 (n=2). Four studies also focused on 'protective' measures and the role of youth work in providing young people with a 'safe environment'. In addition, 8 studies also stated they had an interest in promoting health and well-being. However, this was rarely their primary aim, with the majority concerned with personal and social development more broadly.

Complementing ideas of young people as potential 'change agents', youth work also aimed to provide young people with opportunities to make a **contribution to society**. 21% of studies (n=20) considered the wider benefits of young people's increased engagement in their local community. The idea behind these aims was to promote in young people a greater sense of connection with their community (Kegler *et al*, 2005), including civic responsibility.

3.2.5 Youth work activities

Youth work attempts to achieve its aims by providing a broad range of activities. The number and breadth of these were far-reaching (*see Table A1.2 in Appendix 1 for full list*). Therefore, similar to the aims, in consultation with CES and the DCYA, we grouped the individual activities into 7 'overarching' types, as listed below. Again, studies will be represented across all types and counted twice.

- leisure and recreation (n=39);
- arts, drama, music (n=28);
- volunteer and service (n=26);
- sports (n=25);
- informal learning (n=22);
- social action (n=15);
- work (n=7).

The most common type of activities involved participating in **leisure and recreational** pursuits (42%, n=39). These included engagement in general leisure activities (n=8), field trips or the cinema (n=3). In addition, studies provided opportunities for young people to socialise, such as social clubs (n=4) or simply places to 'hang out with friends' (n=1), as well as facilitating group discussions and involvement in cultural programmes (n=7) or cross-cultural dialogues (n=3).

Over a quarter of studies (30%, n=28) also provided young people with the chance to explore their creativity through **arts and crafts** (n=18), **music** (n=7), **dance** (n=5), **drama** (n=6) or through the use of **new media** (n=5). For example, the study by Wright *et al* (2006, pp. 638-39) described a Canadian arts project that 'focused on theatre, but that also included visual arts (mask-making, set design, and painting) and media arts (digital filming and editing)'. The sessions also focused on exploring self-expression, emphasizing fun and developing positive group dynamics along with the acquisition of performance skills.

Activities grouped under **volunteer and service** refer to those where young people get involved in some form of community-orientated activity. The most common type were 'service projects' (n=14), which often involved young people taking part in the delivery of a neighbourhood or other local service or community action/development project. This could be part of a large-scale project such as 'The Neighbourhood Support Fund Programme' delivered in the UK, which aimed to engage young people in projects run by local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations (Davies and Docking, 2004), as well as more informal engagement in 'community activities' (n=12).

Youth work programmes also included a range of **sports and physical activities** (n=13), such as football, basketball and gym training, as well as physical, outdoor pursuits (n=5) and outbound activities, such as 'wilderness' adventures (n=4) or camping (n=7). Sports activities were often part of structured after-school activities, which also included other components such as life skills, promoting healthy lifestyles or encouraging communities to come together (Wicks *et al*, 2007). Outward-bound activities included rock climbing, kayaking (Sandford *et al*, 2010) and yachting (Loynes *et al*, 2010), as well as opportunities to go on expeditions (Sheldon *et al*, 2009).

Many of the studies were interested in supporting young people's **informal learning** (n=22). Activities grouped in this theme were often linked to educational settings, such as after-school academic clubs (n=3) or supporting young people with their homework and providing tutoring (n=5). They could also be run alongside formal education, such as experiential learning groups (Lee and Yim, 2004) or learning about gender or race issues through group discussions or cultural programmes (such as the 'Young Empowered Sisters' (YES) Program by Thomas *et al*, 2008b).

A smaller number of studies were concerned with **social action** (n=15), i.e. encouraging young people to engage in the community through action planning (n=10) and/or action campaigns (n=6), as well as getting involved in environmental projects (n=3). For example, one study by White (2010) took a novel approach whereby, as part of a youth development project, young people were trained in action planning to enable them to conduct participatory evaluation projects using 'community issues forums' as a form of social action. Action planning in this context was considered 'to lead to life skills development in planning and organising, decision-making, critical thinking and problem-solving' (*ibid*, p. 62). Studies of action campaigns were focused at both the school and community level, with environmental projects focusing on issues such as sustainable development in China (Johnson *et al*, 2007) and India (Gowda *et al*, 1991).

A small proportion of studies related to **work** (n=7). This included training and employment opportunities (n=5), including paid work (n=1). For example, the study by Scales *et al* (2005) described a school-business partnership that enabled young people to gain experience of the arena of work.

3.2.6 How activities relate to the aims

We were interested in exploring any relationship that might exist between the aims of youth work and their corresponding activities. Although attempting to achieve the aims of youth work can be found across the wide range of activities, it is possible to identify where the concentration of research activity exists (*see Table 3.5*).

The most coherent body of literature addresses the personal and social development of young people through all of the identified activities, but was least common in those that focused on work. Some of the youth work featured in the literature aims to provide young people with opportunities to contribute to society or to be part of societal change.

As would be expected, this was largely seen as achievable through volunteering or service-giving, as well as part of social action and the creative arts, but was much less common through other forms of activities, such as leisure or sports.

Again, educational and career aims were most likely to be achieved through informal learning and work opportunities. Although not absent from the other domains, they did not feature as strongly. Meanwhile, attempts to ensure the safety and well-being of young people included leisure and recreation, arts, drama and music, sports and informal learning activities.

Table 3.5: Aims and activities*

Aims	Practices						
	Leisure and recreation	Volunteer and service	Arts, drama, music	Sport and physical activities	Social action	Work	Informal learning
Personal and social development	X	X	X	X	X		X
Education and career						X	X
Contribution to society		X	X		X		
Societal change		X	X		X		
Safety and well-being	X		X	X			X

* Not mutually exclusive

3.3 Outcomes measured in youth work

3.3.1 What outcomes have been measured?

Similar to the aims and activities of youth work, outcomes were equally ambitious and wide-ranging. At their broadest level, they fall within the domains of human and social capital, e.g. young people's capacity to engage in meaningful relationships with others, themselves and wider society. Individual measures have been identified across all 93 evaluation studies and have been grouped into 6 overarching themes in Table 3.6 (*see the full list of outcomes in Table A1.3 in Appendix 1*).

The literature indicates that three-quarters of youth work activities subject to evaluation are interested in whether they impact children and young people's **relationship with others** (n=66), placing equal emphasis on positive relationships with peers (n=15) and adults (n=14). Similar attention was also given to improving children and young people's pro-social skills (n=11), leadership (n=11) and decision-making skills (n=9). Nine studies focused specifically on measuring whether young people were more empowered in their relationships as they moved into adulthood, particularly young women (n=3).

Studies were equally concerned with improving children and young people's **sense of self** (n=64), measuring their overall personal development (n=22) as well as self-esteem (n=18), confidence levels (n=17) and the extent to which they believe in their own abilities (self-efficacy, n=10). Studies were also concerned with how young people see themselves in relation to their identity (n=10) and character (n=5).

Other measures of impacts included those related to young people's relationship with **their local community and society** (n=36), such as young people's levels of civic engagement and whether their bonds to their community were stronger (n=10) as a result of participation in youth activities.

A further 36 studies were also concerned with the **health and well-being** of children and young people. They wanted to know if participating in youth work activities could have a positive impact on substance misuse (n=7) or whether young people were diverted from engaging in criminal activities (n=6) or 'risky' behaviours more generally. Evidence was also gathered on whether youth work participation improved the ability to make healthy choices (n=5) or improved general mental health (n=4).

A quarter of the studies evaluated the extent to which participating in youth work activities impacted children and young people's **values and beliefs** (n=31). Individually, this included measuring their aspirations for their future (n=11), values (n=10) and/or their positive attitudes to diversity (n=9).

Some studies also measured improvements in **formal education and training** (n=27). This included both academic achievement (n=15) and whether bonds to school were strengthened (n=5) or career aspirations and/or prospects had improved (n=4).

Table 3.6: Outcomes identified from studies evaluating effectiveness*

Outcomes	Examples of common individual measures	No. of studies
Relationship with others	Positive peer relationships; positive relationships with adults; pro-social skills; leadership skills; decision-making skills; empowerment	66
Sense of self	Personal development; self-esteem; confidence; self-efficacy; identity; character	64
Community and society	Civic engagement; strengthen bonds to community; partnership working; develop new social interests	36
Health and well-being	Reduced alcohol/substance misuse; diversion from crime; prevention of risky behaviours; making healthy choices; general mental health	36
Values and beliefs	Future aspirations; values; positive diversity attitudes	30
Formal education and training	Academic achievement; strengthen bonds to school	27

* Not mutually exclusive

3.3.2 Is there a relationship between activities and outcomes?

We were interested in the possible impact of youth work activities on children and young people, i.e. the outcomes of youth work (*see Table 3.7*). We found clusters of studies that assessed particular youth work activities in terms of particular outcomes. For example, 12 studies that investigated volunteer and service projects also measured outcomes relevant to community and society. (Similar to the individual typologies, categories are not mutually exclusive but represent the concentration of research activity in particular areas.) Overall, we found that outcomes were measured across the full range of activities, with leisure and recreation being the most dominant, followed by the creative arts. Although very few studies included work-based activities, they still aimed to measure a wide variety of outcomes, attesting to the ambitious nature of youth work, which seeks to improve the social and personal development of young people through a variety of means.

Table 3.7: Youth work activities and outcomes*

Types of outcomes	Types of youth work activities						
	Leisure and recreation	Arts, drama, music	Volunteer and service	Sport and physical activities	Informal learning	Social action	Work
Relationship with others	29	22	20	17	18	12	6
Sense of self	26	16	18	16	17	10	5
Community and society	16	9	12	8	10	9	1
Health and well-being	14	12	7	7	13	4	4
Values and beliefs	13	10	11	12	8	4	2
Formal education and training	5	6	4	6	8	2	1

* Not mutually exclusive

3.3.3 How have outcomes been measured?

Evaluations of youth activities employed a diverse range of study designs across all outcomes types. They utilised both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (*see Table 3.8*). The most common type of methodological approach were 'case studies' (n=24), which either interviewed (n=15), surveyed (n=7) or ran focus groups (n=4) with children and young people to investigate their perception of impact. Cross-sectional studies (n=8), which collect data at one point in time, took a similar approach to case studies, using similar methods.

The remaining studies employed 'experimental' designs, i.e. they aimed to test the impact of youth work activities. These included both single group studies that collected 'after' (n=11) and 'before and after data' (n=18). 26 trials were identified, of which 10 randomly allocated participants to the intervention or control groups, while the remaining 16 studies devised controlled groups using other methods. The majority of the trials used validated scales or survey instruments.

Table 3.8: Methods of evaluations*

Study design	Methods of data collection				
	In-depth interviews	Surveys	Focus groups	Validated scales	Researcher scales
Case study (n=24)	15	7	4	0	0
Single group pre-post-test (n=18)	8	10	0	6	0
Controlled trials (n=16)	4	6	2	7	1
Single group, post-test (n=12)	7	5	2	1	0
Randomised controlled trials (n=10)	2	7	1	5	1
Retrospective study (n=6)	0	5	1	2	0
Case comparison study (n=4)	1	4	1	0	0
Interrupted time series (n=2)	0	2	0	1	0

* Not mutually exclusive

3.3.4 Types of studies, activities and outcomes measured

This section provides further details of the most common types of study designs employed to evaluate the impact of youth work activities, starting with those study designs considered to be most reliable in providing evidence of effectiveness (e.g. experimental designs using randomisation). Definitions of each study design and examples from the literature are given to illustrate the kind of research being undertaken. All the examples were conducted after 2001 and between them include a range of theoretical approaches, activities and outcomes.

Randomised controlled trials

In this design, participants are randomly allocated to one or more groups that either (i) participate in youth work activities/programmes (intervention group), or (ii) participate in different types of youth work (comparison group), and/or (iii) include a group that does not engage in youth work activities at all (control group). They are assessed before (baseline data) and after participating in youth work, either at one time (e.g. 1-3 months after) or at additional follow-up periods (e.g. 6, 12 and 18 months) to assess if the outcomes effects were lasting. The idea is that initial randomisation evens out differences between participants in the two groups. Finally, the difference in different outcomes measured 'after' participation in youth work activities is used to give an indication of which of the two youth work activities contributed to greater improvements in outcomes.

We identified 10 randomised controlled trials (RCTs) published between 1996 and 2010, all of which were conducted outside of Europe (e.g. USA, Hong Kong, New Zealand). Studies focused on measuring outcomes related to 'sense of self' and 'relationship with others' via 3 activity domains — leisure and recreation, the creative arts and informal learning (*see Table 3.9*). For example, the study by Apsler *et al* (2006) evaluated a 'student assistance program' (SAP) that took a 'positive youth development' approach. Through the use of informal group discussions and a socially supportive space, young people were encouraged to develop meaningful and trusted relationships with SAP counsellors and their peers, and to develop critical thinking skills that would improve their decision-making skills, including making informed choices about the use of substances. The authors were able to compare two cohorts, aged 11, from 6 schools in 2 US communities. One group was randomly assigned to intervention and the other to control conditions. Outcomes measured included self-efficacy and relationships with adults, and both groups were tested 1.5 years later using equation modelling to identify if there were significant intervention effects.

Lakin and Mahoney (2006) conducted a RCT and a process evaluation of a school-based community service programme for urban adolescents in the USA. Taking a positive youth development approach that emphasized the importance of young people being in an environment that fosters both autonomy and relatedness, the authors produced 'effect' sizes to assess whether taking part in community service activities increased young people's self-reported self-efficacy and intention to be involved in future community action, compared to those who had not been involved in similar activities.

Both examples provide some insight into the type of data that is being generated by RCTs. They focus on a narrow range of activities and outcomes. Exploring the evidence base for outcomes that fall within the other domains would need to draw on other study types, such as controlled trials and single group 'before and after' studies.

Table 3.9: Randomised controlled trials, youth work activities and outcomes*

Outcomes	Activities						
	Leisure and recreation (n=4)	Arts, drama, music (n=3)	Informal learning (n=3)	Volunteer and service (n=2)	Sport and physical activities (n=1)	Social action (n=1)	Work (n=0)
Sense of self	3	3	3	2	1	1	0
Relationship with others	3	3	2	0	0	1	0
Community and society	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
Health and well-being	1	2	3	2	1	0	0
Values and beliefs	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Formal education and training	1	1	2	2	1	0	0

* Not mutually exclusive

Controlled trials

Similar to RCTs, controlled trials also compare two or more groups but they do not allocate participants (individuals, groups, youth clubs) randomly. In some cases, participants as comparisons are chosen on the basis of whether they 'match' each other on essential characteristics that are believed or known to have a potential impact on outcomes (e.g. age, class, race, urban/rural geographical area, vulnerable groups). Matched comparison groups can be selected before participants engage in youth work activities (prospective studies) or afterwards (retrospective studies). The focus of research activity for the 16 controlled trials identified varied somewhat from the RCTs. Although the majority of controlled trials have still been conducted in the USA, 3 were also conducted in Canada, the UK and Palestine. Studies were spread across types of outcomes and activities (*see Table 3.10*), with informal learning and volunteering/service featuring as prominently as leisure and recreation and the creative arts. Two examples are provided below.

A controlled trial conducted in Palestine by Loughry *et al* (2006) evaluated the effectiveness of a youth-centred programme involving recreational and cultural activities on children and young people's sense of self, relationships with parents and their values and beliefs (e.g. future aspirations). The authors compared groups of young people from the West Bank and from Gaza using validated scales, such as the Child Behaviour Checklist (Achenbach, 2001), the Parental Support Scale (Khamis, 2000) and the Hopefulness Scale: Youth Version (Doucette and Bickman, 2000), before and 12 months after participation in the programme.

A USA controlled trial by Fegley *et al* (2006) was interested in whether youth work activities could influence values and beliefs, in particular if they could 'foster critical consciousnesses' in children and young people. The authors compared two groups: one that learnt to play chess and the other that participated in a community service project. They also conducted 'critical thinking focus groups' at the start and after a 5-week period to assess the level of critical thinking of each group, which included the following individual measures: the exploration of personal behaviours, self-efficacy, group efficacy and stereotypes.

Table 3.10: Controlled trials, youth work activities and outcomes*

Outcomes	Activities						
	Informal learning	Volunteer and service	Leisure and recreation	Arts, drama, music	Sport and physical activities	Work	Social action
Relationship with others	6	6	5	5	2	2	2
Sense of self	5	4	5	4	3	1	2
Community and society	4	1	2	1	1	0	2
Health and well-being	4	2	2	3	1	2	1
Formal education and training	4	1	1	2	0	0	1
Values and beliefs	3	2	1	2	3	1	1

* Not mutually exclusive

Single group designs

Single group designs are studies where only one group of participants (e.g. young people attending a youth club) are tested on outcome(s) of interest. These study designs fall into two distinct categories: (i) Single group pre-post-test (n=18), whereby the same 'test' is administered before and after participating in youth work activities being evaluated, with the impact being the difference between the pre- and post-test scores of the participants; and (ii) single group post-test studies (n=12), where outcomes are only measured after participation. When combined, this group of studies dominates evaluations of youth work activities.

Sports-based programmes, in addition to leisure and recreation, were featured in the studies using a pre-post-test design, while none of the evaluations included work-based activities (*see Table 3.11*). In addition to reporting outcomes on 'relationship with others', more single group design studies also featured outcomes on young people's values and beliefs, with very few measuring health and well-being compared to controlled trials. Studies spanned from 1981 to 2011, but were mostly conducted from 2001 onwards, and included studies from the UK (n=3), Australia, (n=2) and India (n=1), in addition to North America.

The study by Astbury and Knight (2003) evaluated a 'network' of youth services taking an empowerment approach and delivered in a number of different sites across the UK. Youth work consisted of a range of leisure and recreation and outdoor activities, including sport. A wide range of outcomes were investigated. These included 'relationships with others' (e.g. improved family relations, new friends, better communication, sense of self, feeling calmer, ability to think more or self-esteem), an assessment of young people's values and beliefs (e.g. having a greater sense of the future), education and career goals (e.g. ability to find a job or engage in training) and health and well-being (e.g. improved fitness or limiting the use of substances such as alcohol/drugs). Young people were interviewed before and one week after participation. Further data were also collected from the original sample, 10 weeks after, and a subset of that sample was consulted a year later. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods of analysis were used to explore the effects of participating in youth work activities.

Table 3.11: Pre-post-test study designs*

Outcomes	Activities						
	Sport and physical activities	Leisure and recreation	Arts, drama, music	Informal learning	Social action	Volunteer and service	Work
Relationship with others	7	6	5	5	3	2	0
Values and beliefs	5	3	3	2	0	0	0
Community and society	3	3	1	2	1	1	0
Formal education and training	2	0	2	2	0	0	0
Health and well-being	1	1	2	2	0	0	0

* Not mutually exclusive

Post-test only designs were a common feature of studies evaluating participation in volunteer and service activities (n=5), while leisure and the creative arts did not feature as prominently (*see Table 3.12*). Again, 'relationship with others' and 'sense of self' were the most popular outcomes reported, along with values and beliefs. Studies were also concentrated in the post-2001 publication period, with nearly as many studies conducted in the USA (n=6) as in the UK (n=5) and one from China.

Table 3.12: Post-test study designs*

Outcomes	Activities						
	Volunteer and service	Social action	Informal learning	Sport and physical activities	Leisure and recreation	Arts, drama, music	Work
Relationship with others	5	3	3	3	2	1	0
Sense of self	5	2	2	2	1	0	0
Values and beliefs	5	2	1	1	3	2	0
Community and society	4	2	1	1	1	0	0
Health and well-being	2	2	2	1	1	1	0
Formal education and training	1	1	0	1	0	0	0

* Not mutually exclusive

Johnson *et al* (2007) evaluated 'Roots and Shoots', an environmental action, service learning and youth development programme for young people in China. Taking a 'discovery-orientated' approach, young people, in conjunction with programme coordinators, were asked to organise and take part in three volunteer and service projects that promote animal welfare, the community or the environment. Activities included waste management (e.g. recycling), planting trees, taking children with disabilities to the zoo or getting involved in animal conservation projects. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to capture young people's perceptions of participation in activities. Evaluators used open-ended interviews to ask young people about their sense of self (e.g. self-efficacy, leadership, decision-making) and their relationship with others (e.g. positive social bonds, teamwork), and they used content analysis methods to organise these themes into broader categories (e.g. 'social competencies'). Self-report surveys were used, again to investigate young people's relationships with others and also their values and beliefs, and capture any gains made in formal education and learning (e.g. school performance). Analysis involved calculating frequencies and percentages to determine impact. The authors do reflect on the limitations of the study, particularly the lack of pre- and post-test data.

Case studies

Most case studies are defined by their focus of enquiry, for example, investigations into a particular youth club, sports programme or conservation project. The 'focus of enquiry' can be investigated using qualitative and/or quantitative methods of data collection, with more than one 'type of case' being investigated, for example, similar types of youth clubs, delivered in different geographical locations to create multiple 'case studies' within a singular research project. The aim of the case study may be descriptive or explanatory. In most instances, case studies are considered to retain 'context', maintaining detail and richness of the 'case' under investigation.

It was found that 24 case studies were conducted across a range of different types of youth work activities, particularly leisure and recreation and the creative arts (*see Table 3.13*). Although the majority were conducted in the USA (n=14), half of the UK evaluation studies (n=7) were case studies. They collected data on all outcomes, with relationships with others, sense of self, community and society being the most common.

The Heritage Lottery Fund (2003) funded the Young Roots grant programme, targeted at youth organisations to support the engagement of young people in heritage projects in their free time. Projects ranged from working with a Traveller community to celebrate its heritage to researching local mining heritage by interviewing older people in the community and, from this work, broadcasting a radio programme. An independent evaluation of 69 Young Roots projects was conducted, including 4 projects which were studied as in-depth case studies. The evaluators held 4 focus groups with 40 young people, in addition to conducting telephone interviews with project staff, community representatives and stakeholders. The aim of the evaluation was to understand the achievement and challenges, and to 'learn lessons' to inform future practice. In terms of impact on young people, they wanted to know if organising and running heritage projects would improve young people's sense of self (e.g. confidence, self-esteem, sense of pride), as well as build relationships with others (e.g. peers) and with their local community.

Table 3.13: Case studies*

Outcomes	Activities						
	Leisure and recreation	Arts, drama, music	Social action	Volunteer and service	Sport and physical activities	Work	Informal learning
Relationship with others	6	4	4	3	2	1	0
Sense of self	6	3	3	3	1	2	2
Community and society	6	4	3	3	1	1	1
Health and well-being	4	3	1	0	1	0	1
Values and beliefs	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
Formal education and training	1	0	0	0	1	0	0

* Not mutually exclusive

3.3.5 Reflections on study designs used to measure impact

The most common form of enquiry about youth work activities is through the use of **case study** methodology *(see Table 3.14)*. Case study evaluations, using one or more qualitative methods, have been used to investigate youth work to answer important practical and policy-relevant questions (e.g. Devlin and Gunning, 2009). They are also useful in providing valuable information to individual youth work programmes and providers, to inform improvements about the way particular youth work activities are being delivered. However, for evaluative purposes, similar to **single group post-test studies**,

certain methodological issues need to be kept in mind. Namely, that without determining a 'starting point' (such as what young people's relationships were like before, or how confident young people were previous to participation in youth work activities), it is difficult to ascertain whether youth work activities have an impact on particular outcomes. Although useful in gathering data, particularly with novel activities or in under-researched geographical areas to gain an understanding about what is happening on the ground, their role in providing data on 'what works' is limited.

Another common form of evaluation of youth work activities is the use of **single group pre-post-test design**, which collects data at more than one point in time. In pre-post-test studies, evaluators ask young people to complete the same survey or take part in a similar interview in order to assess the 'starting point' to generate a 'baseline' from which any changes can be compared. This is easier to do if there are clear ideas about what kinds of outcomes youth work activities are attempting to achieve. However, without a control group, any changes observed cannot be attributed exclusively to youth work activities.

For example, improvements may in part be attributed to gains made in personal and social development that happened to occur over time, i.e. increased confidence or greater satisfaction in relationships may be a consequence of general life experience and young people transitioning to adulthood. Changes may also be attributed to improvements that simply result from involvement in 'activities' regardless of the actual type of activity. They may also be a consequence of engaging in the research process, for example, giving young people the opportunity to reflect on their 'sense of self' or 'values and beliefs'. Participants may also be aware of what types of response evaluators desire or provide responses based on what is generally considered to be more socially acceptable, such as having leadership skills or increasing self-esteem. These kinds of methodological limitations lead to recommendations to introduce a control or comparison group. Nevertheless, a single group pre-post-test study design is valuable for monitoring established services.

A number of studies employed a **'controlled' group design**. As stated, this can allow for observed differences between groups to be attributed to participation in particular types of youth work activities (e.g. after-school clubs compared to outward-bound programme) or to a 'control group' (i.e. a group of young people who did not participate in any type of youth work activity). In some cases, young people were selected randomly; however, many studies created 'equivalent' groups whose outcomes can be compared. Although it is often difficult to get an 'exact' match of young people to compare to, the differences will need to be taken into account when conducting statistical analysis. With this design, the rigour of randomising participants is lost and the use of equivalent groups difficult to ascertain, but it may be favourable to denying young people access to youth work services or making them wait for a particular amount of time, as is often the case in RCTs.

Although not discussed in detail, it is also worth mentioning the small number of studies that used **time series designs**. Rather than using a control group, these studies collect data at specific 'time' points and analyse the trends, sometimes on more than 'one wave' of participants (e.g. Lerner *et al*, 2005). Using this approach, the 'impact' (or not) of youth work activities can be observed over time by analysing patterns, including measuring intensity and breadth of young people's involvement in youth work activities. In this type of study, children and young people can continue to access youth work provision and decide at what point, if any, they want to participate in the research.

Table 3.14: Common research designs used in measuring outcomes

Study design	Summary
Case study (n=24)	Rich, context-specific detail about youth work, but limited evaluative design.
Single group, post-test (n=11)	Outcome data useful for improving individual youth work activities, but limited design.
Single group pre-post-test (n=18)	Outcome data useful for measuring impact, but difficult to ascertain if sole cause is youth work.
Controlled trial (n=16)	Can compare outcomes between different types of youth work activities; useful evaluative design.
Randomised controlled trial (n=10)	Similar to controlled trials, with randomisation increasing the likelihood that observed effects are due to participation in youth work activities.
Time series (n=2)	Can collect data over a long period of time without the need for a 'control group'.

3.4 Developing and testing evaluation methods

Evaluating the impact of activities relevant to youth work requires reliable measures that can be applied and are appropriate to the lived experience of children and young people. In addition to the 93 studies on impact, 10 studies also explored methodological issues related to these concerns. Studies fell into two distinct groups: those exploring (n=7) and/or testing (n=7) ways of measuring outcomes. All studies were interested in how high-quality measurement can inform and improve evaluations of effective youth work activities within a strengths-based model. The types of measurement tools being investigated ranged from the specific (e.g. measurements scales of belonging or emotional and positive social interaction skills) to more general personal and social development indexes measuring a range of indicators (e.g. self-esteem, social skills, etc).

Two studies were also interested in collecting qualitative primary data to inform and develop a more in-depth, 'conceptual' understanding of what youth work, youth development and youth support activities would look like in practice. A range of data analytical techniques were employed. These included exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, depending on whether measurement tools were being developed or tested. Studies of 'concepts' used qualitative data analysis techniques, using interview or survey data. Two examples are provided below.

Furlong *et al* (2007) conducted two analyses to investigate how well the 'behavioural and emotional rating scale' (BERS) captures young people's strengths-based outcomes. The first part of the study was interested in exploring the main concepts the scale attempted to measure. They identified these as (i) the management of emotions and positive social interaction skills, and (ii) engagement in the important social contexts of family and school. The second part of the study confirmed that the tool went some way in being able to measure these aspects, but that further exploration was needed to gain a better understanding of what 'strengths-based' traits might mean and what they might 'look' like in the context of young people's lives.

The study by Miller *et al* (2009) conducted a different kind of investigation, whereby the authors set up a 'Community Youth Mapping' project and trained young people to be co-researchers to identify what types of opportunities and supports facilitate positive youth development and find out what types of data young people (also known as 'youth mappers') were able to collect using a variety of methods and technology. The youth mappers gathered data from their peers using interviews and focus groups. They also mapped the resources key informants identified as helping them to facilitate their development (e.g. people, places and activities), including the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) and Geographical Information System (GIS) technology to map locations

of these resources. The analysis of this data was used to gain a better understanding of the underlying concepts of 'positive youth development' from the perspectives of young people and where that 'development' might take place (e.g. schools, home, youth clubs). The findings were also used to inform the development of youth community projects in Australia. The study also reflected on the methodological issues involved in using a 'collaborative action research' approach with young people and how this can benefit our understanding of positive youth development.

Although not many methodological studies were identified in this systematic map (n=10), they do indicate that there is a growing interest in how best to develop and test the validity and reliability of tools that attempt to measure non-risk-related outcomes. Park and Peterson (cited in Shek, 2010) argue that before such tools can be developed, a vital step is to understand and identify what personal and development outcomes are for children and young people, taking into consideration their social and cultural background. One way of finding that out is through conceptual studies, such as that by Miller *et al* (2009) which asked young people directly. Once this data is gathered, further exploration into the relationships between different dimensions (e.g. the impact of relationships with others on sense of self or vice versa) can also take place.

3.5 Studies exploring the association between factors and outcomes

Another way in which researchers are investigating youth work is to explore the relationship between factors, e.g. participation, quality of youth work relationship with young people and whether they can 'predict' or are 'associated' with improvements in outcomes for children and young people. Studies have examined both individual and multiple youth work activities on individual and/or multiple outcomes, generating a range of different study findings.

We identified studies that were interested in investigating the relationships between participating in youth work activities (including how much and how widely) and whether this led to an increase in particular social and developmental outcomes (n=6) and/or decreased anti-social attitudes and behaviour (n=2). Other studies explored whether there was a relationship between perceptions of a caring youth work environment or if the presence of a caring youth–staff relationship increased pro-social behaviour and/or attitudes (n=2), or if greater 'social integration' and more 'social meaning' in activities would show greater improvement in their social and emotional well-being (n=1).

For example, a Canadian study by Busseri and Rose-Krasnor (2010) investigated whether it was possible to differentiate between young people's involvement *versus* non-involvement in youth work activities, or the intensity of their involvement in youth work activities, in terms of 'multiple' and/or 'singular' outcome effects. The authors argue that a multivariate approach is required, in which multiple activities and aggregate outcome scores are integrated to be able to answer the following questions: (1) is breadth of participation a better predictor of academic success than (2) aggregate levels of intensity of participation? or is the critical issue whether youth are involved *versus* not involved in any activity at all? If so, (3) which individual activities (if any) have unique associations with the outcomes of interest? The authors introduce the use of a 'latent composite variable (LCV) model (Bollen and Lennox, 1991), which allows all three questions to be answered. They sampled young people using surveys, and through the application of this LCV approach they found that breadth of involvement was uniquely and positively associated with multiple outcomes of successful development, compared to individual activities alone. They concluded that the LCV model is a useful methodological approach for addressing multiple research questions.

We found the majority of studies analysed data using regression techniques (n=6: i.e. multiple n=4, linear n=1, or hierarchical n=1) or through methods of statistical modelling (n=5: i.e. structural equation n=3, linear n=1, or logistic regression n=1). Again, the aim of these studies was to identify the predictive power of participation or relationships on outcomes for young people to further understand what contributes to the greater success of youth work activities. In many cases, the studies collected data on either factors or outcomes using validated (n=5) and/or research designed scales (n=3), while others used surveys and questionnaires (n=6).

For example, the study by Anderson-Butcher *et al* (2004) used structural equation modelling to examine the relationship between youth–staff relationships and the values and beliefs of young people participating in after-school clubs. The authors' survey of young people found a positive association between these two factors. Although cautious in their interpretations, the authors state that it was unclear whether these results arise from individual factors inherent in young people or through having the opportunity to develop a relationship with staff; they argue that it is important to be able to establish any links between the features of youth work activities (e.g. structure, caring relationships, feeling part of a group) and their relationship with outcomes.

It appears that research is becoming increasingly more interested not just in the 'impact' of youth work activities, but also in identifying which youth work factors (e.g. participation, relationships or individual factors) contribute to improvement in outcomes, including how best those 'associations' can be methodologically determined.

3.6 Delivery and experience of youth work activities

3.6.1 Overview of studies

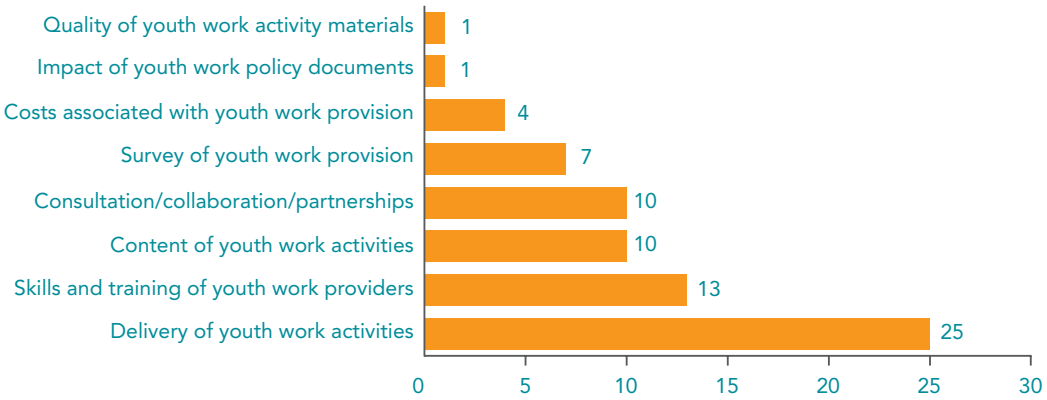
As previously outlined in Section 3.1.6, a range of study types, in addition to evaluations of impact, were identified. These included studies evaluating the mechanisms involved in delivering (n=40) and/or the accessibility, acceptability or experience of youth work activities (n=25). This subset of studies was conducted in both high- and middle-income countries and published between 1995 and 2011. The main approach to data collection was qualitative, with the use of either interviews (n=30), researcher observation (n=15) or focus groups (n=11). Some quantitative methods were used, such as questionnaires or surveys (n=13).

Studies focused on youth work activities that sought to improve the personal and social development of children and young people (n=21), to provide educational and career (n=16) opportunities or to focus on social change (n=14). Other aims featured, but were not as prominent, such as safety and well-being (n=10) or contribution to society (n=9). Similar to evaluations of impact, more studies investigated leisure and recreational pursuits (n=15) and arts, drama and music (n=15) than any other types of activity. Sports (n=13) and volunteer and service (n=10) were also represented, with social action (n=5) and work-based activities (n=1) featuring less.

3.6.2 Delivery of youth work activities

As Figure 3.8 shows, the majority of studies were concerned with overall delivery of youth work activities (n=25), while other studies focused on specific aspects relevant to improving the quality of youth work provision, such as the skills and training of youth work providers (n=13) or collecting data on the types of youth work activities being delivered (n=13). Other studies surveyed types of youth work provision in particular geographical areas (n=7). Ten studies were also interested in the extent to which programmes collaborated effectively or worked in partnership with other agencies and/or the local community.

Figure 3.8: Focus of studies evaluating the delivery of youth work activity

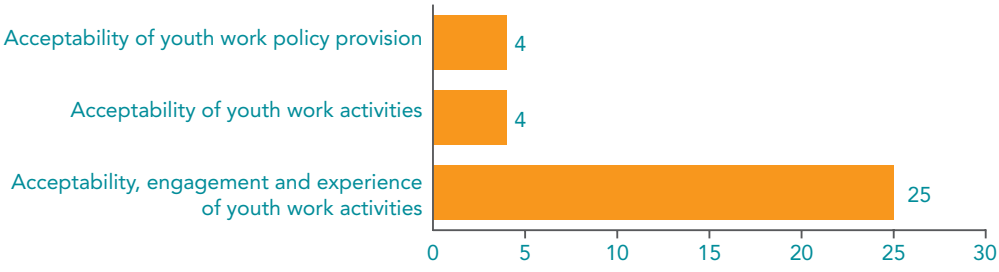


Russell *et al* (2005 and 2009) evaluated 'Out-of-School Time' (OST) programmes one and 3 years after being commissioned by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Alongside measuring academic and social development outcomes, evaluators also wanted to know whether programmes performed on specific measures of implementation quality. First, they identified programme 'reach', finding that over 600 after-school activities were currently available, an increase of 111 programmes from the first year. They also found that the number of children and young people enrolled in programmes grew from over 50,000 to over 80,000 during that time. Overall, programme activities remained varied (e.g. leisure, sports, community service, life skills activities), with the types of activities being aligned to age, with more secondary/high schools offering career and work activities compared to primary and middle schools. Evaluators were also interested in the extent to which children and young people were exposed to and participated in new experiences, and whether staff created warm and friendly environments that would facilitate the development of positive relationships. They also collected information about staff patterns, building capacity and partnership working with schools and parents as key factors in the effective delivery of after-school activities.

3.6.3 Accessibility, acceptability and experience of youth work activities

Studies were also interested in what people thought about youth work activities (n=25) from the perspective of children and young people (n=21) and/or professionals (n=7) (*see Figure 3.9*). Only a limited number of studies were concerned with the views of parents (n=3) or members of the community (n=1), indicating a gap in the literature. Studies were particularly interested in whether children and young people found youth work provision 'acceptable' to them and if not, why not. Much more focus was given to identifying how easy it was for them to access youth services (n=4). Three studies (2 from England and 1 from Ireland) also asked professionals what they thought about current youth work policy. Two examples are provided below.

Figure 3.9: Accessibility, acceptability and experience of youth work activities



A USA study by Fredericks *et al* (2010) explored young people's experience of Boys and Girls Clubs. These clubs provide opportunities to take part in various activities such as leisure and recreation, creative arts, informal learning and sport. The aim of the study was to understand the reasons young people wanted to participate in these clubs. For example, whether it was because they wanted to take part in enjoyable activities, to have opportunities to be with friends or to receive additional help with homework. They also wanted to know what young people's perceptions were of staff, peers and activities, and to assess whether clubs were delivered in a way that supported their needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy. The authors conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews, which were analysed using a combination of induction, deduction and verification techniques to develop codes and higher order themes.

The study by Perkins *et al* (2007) explores what makes youth programmes more accessible and acceptable to Black/African American, Latino, Arab or Chaldean young people. The authors conducted 'brainstorming' sessions with participants to facilitate in-depth discussions about the reasons why they may or may not participate. Themes derived from categorical analysis included the role of youth programmes for providing safe spaces, learning new skills and providing opportunities to take part in activities.

3.6.4 What can we learn from studies investigating the delivery and experience of youth work activities?

As discussed, many of the studies included in this report are interested in understanding how to improve the quality of service provision by investigating 'how' youth work activities are being delivered. For example, as outlined in Section 3.2.1, youth work 'programmes' may have a strong theoretical grounding (e.g. in ideas about 'empowerment') and expect to achieve outcomes in line with that ethos; however, if the design and delivery do not provide opportunities for young people to 'be empowered' or are not of a certain quality, those outcomes may be more difficult to achieve. Thus, exploring the extent to which youth work services adhere to their intended aim(s) or by identifying whether a single or a combination of mechanisms is more important than others (e.g. quality of staff–peer relationships, appropriate setting, adequate funding, strong management, etc) can be of benefit to understanding, in more detail, the nature of youth work practice and what factors can contribute to successful delivery and outcomes.

In addition, valuable insight can be gained from exploring with children and young people what might hinder or motivate them to participate, what the quality of their experiences are and what they would like to receive in addition to, or instead of, what is currently available. This kind of information can be used to improve individual and youth work services overall. It can also demonstrate the value of participation in youth work activities. Furthermore, it is also useful to know from practitioners what detracts or supports them in their ability to provide high-quality youth work services. For example, factors such as the type and quality of training required, ongoing professional support, overall working conditions, financial reimbursement and career structure — all these may be factors that contribute to the success or failure of delivering sustainable, suitable and appropriate youth work.

As stated, the most common method for collecting data is through interviews and focus groups to gather a more context-specific understanding of the benefit of youth work to participants and to explore ways to improve its delivery. Although many of the studies collected data directly from children and young people and youth work professionals, not many were concerned with parents or community members, which could also offer a more comprehensive understanding of the value of youth work in wider society.

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Summary of the main findings

This systematic map has identified an expanding international research literature seeking to provide evidence on the impact that youth work activities have on children and young people. Research has developed significantly in the last 15 years, particularly in the USA. A large proportion of the American studies are aligned with supporting the individual social and personal development of children and young people.

Overall, we found that studies described a broad range of youth work activities. These were grouped into 7 domains: leisure and recreation; arts, drama, music; sports and physical activities; volunteer and service; social action; informal learning; and work. A range of human and social capital outcomes were measured within the activity domains, particularly in leisure and recreation and in volunteering and delivering of community services. A wide range of study designs were used, with many studies collecting children and young people's 'views' of impact through interviews and focus groups as part of case study and single group design methodologies.

In addition to evaluations of impact, a significant proportion of studies were also interested in investigating the factors contributing to the successful delivery of youth work activities, including views on engagement and participation, particularly from the perspectives of children and young people. There were also a number of studies concerned with the testing and development of evaluative methods, particularly those addressing the validity and reliability of personal development measurement tools.

4.2 Strengths and limitations

This is the first systematic international map of youth work research. It provides a unique resource for investigating the content of youth work, how it is delivered and the terms in which it is assessed, both in formal evaluations of its impact and by children and young people themselves. It provides a valuable basis for developing an evidence-informed approach to policy and practice in the field of youth work and its related practices.

The methods used in generating this systematic map followed the standard procedure of conducting systematic reviews developed at the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre). It benefited from user involvement in the form of a consultation with CES and the DCYA, and with professionals working in the field and/or academics. However, there has not been sufficient time to appropriately engage with other potential users of the systematic map, such as children and young people, families and the wider community.

To locate relevant research studies on the impact of youth work on the lives of children and young people aged 10-24 years, we conducted a systematic search of electronic databases in social science, psychology and education and key websites to identify published and unpublished research. This approach was supplemented by contacting authors and checking the references of systematic reviews.

The study inclusion criteria were broad, with no limit placed on the type of participant, geographical location, date of publication or methodological design. We were also interested in a broad range of outcomes. Despite attempts to be inclusive, the review was limited to English-language databases and studies written in English. This is evident in the lack of studies from a wider Europe, as well as non-OECD countries.

The searching was designed to be sensitive and exhaustive. Because we were interested in a wide range of youth work activities that reflected a way of working with young people to further our understanding of the contribution of youth work in the lives of young people (rather than a particular 'type' of youth work activity, such as involvement in community services, creative arts or specific leisure pursuits), the search terms used reflected the 'process' and 'approach' taken, rather than known activities that could be defined in advance. This increases the likelihood that the search may have missed some studies. Thus, any further systematic reviews should be supplemented with additional focused searching to update any specific section of the map for in-depth review and synthesis.

Additional searching would also be needed to identify studies that have been published since the original searches were undertaken in late 2011 and extra effort should be made to locate full reports that could not be found in the time available for this map. This would include, in particular, the grey literature and websites, which could provide additional studies and may be important for finding studies of groups of children and young people who were under-represented in the studies found through electronic searching.

Although we are able to describe the different types of youth work activities and the range of outcomes measured, including the methods used to assess those outcomes, it was not possible to ascertain causality, to answer the second subquestion, i.e. to specify which youth activities were associated with particular outcomes. This would require a more in-depth analysis and appraisal of the research literature. Despite this limitation, as stated, the map can be used as a starting point to identify studies that could consider this and other policy and practice-related questions (*see Section 4.5 on 'Implications for policy and practice'*).

4.3 Is the research relevant to youth work in Ireland?

We found that the ethos of youth work in Ireland, which emphasizes collaboration, empowerment and personal and social development, is also shared by much of the international research literature across a range of different types of youth work activities, including youth provision which falls under the umbrella of 'positive youth development'. This becomes apparent not from the terms employed in evaluations, particularly those conducted in the USA (e.g. 'out-of-school time', '4-H clubs'), but from closer inspection of the theoretical approaches, aims and activities of youth work.

A recent survey of youth work provision in Ireland conducted by Powell *et al* (2010, p. 58) found that 'it is almost impossible to provide a universally accepted definition of youth work that encompasses a broad, yet specific enough understanding of it'. Nevertheless, as with the international evaluation literature, 'social and personal development' was considered to be the core element, in addition to 'social education' and 'empowerment of marginalised young people'. Activities also fell within similar domains, although in Ireland there was more emphasis on sports and outdoor pursuits, and less on social action. The

authors also found that the majority of youth provision is 'open' and accessible to all young people aged 11-15. Similar to our findings, they indicated that it was not always possible to identify in which settings youth work activities were taking place, spanning community/ voluntary and local authority sites (e.g. schools, community and leisure centres).

So far, we have been able to provide an overview of the aims and activities of youth work and youth development identified in the international research literature. This reflects the concentration of research that has been conducted in these areas and although there are similarities with provision in Ireland, it is not an indication of the wide range of youth work activities available to young people. For example, the survey by Powell *et al* (2010) identified a total of 2,566 youth groups in operation in Ireland, the majority of which may not have been subject to standardised external evaluation and are therefore not represented in this report.

Similarly, in the UK there is no nationally agreed definition of what constitutes a youth club/project/service, making it difficult to ascertain exact figures. However, despite this, it is often estimated that there are just over 11,000 youth clubs and/or services providing youth work activities in England (Clubs for Young People, 2009). Again, the majority of these will not have been researched for evaluative purposes, but are very much aiming to support the personal and social development of children and young people. This is not to mention the breadth of international youth provision, as in Europe, that has either yet to be researched and/or is not identified as part of this research (*see Section 4.5.2 for 'Gaps in primary research evidence'*) and which may also be relevant to the Irish context.

4.4 Which activities and outcomes are of interest to youth work?

Studies evaluating 'impact' indicate that a variety of youth work services are attempting to make an ambitious contribution to improving outcomes for young people. In particular, they are concerned with improving children and young people's 'sense of self', their 'values and beliefs', as well as enhancing their 'relationships with others' and increasing their engagement in society and the potential to effect social change. Where studies have sought to assess impact, they have done so in terms very similar to the focus of many youth work activities delivered in Ireland, e.g. assessing young people's personal and social development and links with the wider community (Devlin and Gunning, 2009). From this, we conclude that much of the international research literature is particularly relevant to Irish youth work, with its focus on young people's 'sense of self' and the development of their personal, social and emotional skills, such as confidence and self-esteem, through educational, developmental, recreational and volunteer activities.

There appears to be a general consensus that participation in youth work activities is mostly beneficial to children and young people, with very little assessment of whether participation was fun and enjoyable, or discussion of any potential harm that could arise (e.g. disempowering, reducing confidence, self-esteem, experiences of bullying, etc). Although there is an increasing pressure to calculate the value of youth work in terms of its costs and benefits (McNeil *et al*, 2010), very few studies provide evidence that could address this issue.

This map, therefore, provides a valuable resource for investigating the content of youth work, how it is delivered and the terms in which it is assessed, both in formal evaluations of its impact and by children and young people themselves.

4.5 Implications for policy and practice

4.5.1 Evidence available for decision-making

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) is currently in the process of reviewing the policy and provision of services for young people in Ireland. This map has collated studies that can provide important evidence to underpin the Department's policy decisions. It can be used immediately to find individual studies for policy-makers or practitioners to appraise for their quality and relevance for particular decisions. It can also be used as a basis for further appraisal and synthesis to provide more specific implications for policy or practice.

Of the 93 evaluations of impact identified in this map, there is probably sufficient evidence to address the following in-depth review questions:

- Are youth work activities that aim to improve the personal and social development of young people effective?
- Which youth work activities, if any, are more or less effective than others in improving the lives of children and young people?

Based on the findings of the systematic map data, 42 studies (using experimental designs, including controlled trials) could provide a useful answer to these questions. Depending on the type of outcome data reported, it might be possible to combine studies in either a meta-analysis and/or a numerical narrative synthesis exploring variation in the data (e.g. whether there were 'positive' or 'negative' effects, or 'no effect'). However, the extent to which studies are of sufficient quality and homogeneous enough to merit combining would need further exploration.

By broadening our understanding of impact to more than simply an estimate of the size of any effect from youth work practices, it could be possible to draw on qualitative data from case studies, cross-sectional studies and any views collected as part of surveys to answer the following question:

- What are young people's views and perceptions on the impact of engaging in youth work activities?

Synthesis from the 54 process evaluations could also be conducted on:

- the process of delivering youth work activities to understanding the mechanisms that may contribute to effectiveness;
- an exploration of the barriers and facilitators to participating in youth work activities.

Any of the in-depth review topics suggested could be further narrowed to focus on specific types of youth work aims, activities and/or outcomes.

In order to combine results in a synthesis, further methodological issues would need to be taken into consideration, such as the degree of similarity between studies, and judgements about study quality would need to be made. A further consideration is the extent to which conducting further systematic reviews would provide a more rigorous exploration of the evidence base and/or provide a new and/or 'better' understanding of any given area relevant to the effectiveness and delivery of youth work activities. However, even with these caveats, useful insights, based on the potential questions presented, could be ascertained from exploring the literature in further detail. These insights, through the application of research synthesis methods, drawing on a range of different types of evidence, can usefully contribute to an evidence-informed youth work practice that is focused on the provision of high-quality youth services, achieving optimal outcomes and delivered in accessible and acceptable ways to and for young people.

4.5.2 Gaps in primary research evidence

Judgements made about the quality and relevance of studies conducted in future systematic reviews will provide greater insight into future areas for primary research, particularly as the quantity of studies in an area does not equate to robustness in the quality of study design or execution. However, at this stage, it appears likely that further primary research would be valuable in the following areas:

- Specific investigations of youth work activities carried out in Ireland and the UK given the apparent deficit of research.
- Greater exploration of the fidelity to the youth work process.
- Evaluations of 'what works' in terms of cost-effectiveness and what provides best value for money.
- Evaluations that consult with and/or include young people as research partners.

4.6 Implications for research

Although the range of personal and social development outcomes identified in this systematic map of youth work research is critical to informing our understanding about the aspirations of youth work, very little of the current literature can offer 'high end' evidence about impact from a non-USA perspective. This is because studies of youth work activities, with a control group, in Ireland or the UK are rare. It is difficult to obtain 'robust' evidence on the benefits of participation in youth work activities in the Irish/UK context when the majority of the available research evidence continues to be based on self-reports collected as part of case studies or on measures taken after young people experience youth work but not before.

Qualitative data based on self-assessments is vital to inform practice and to provide children and young people with a voice that can be heard. However, this type of data needs to complement quantitative analysis, which can provide an 'estimate of effects'. For example, a meta-analysis of 'after-school programs that seek to enhance the personal and social skills of children and adolescents' by Durlak *et al* (2010) indicated that, compared with comparison groups, participants demonstrated significant increases in their self-perceptions and bonding to school, positive social behaviours, school grades and levels of academic achievement. The authors also found that 'after-school' programmes informed by prior evidence about skill development were more likely to be effective.

Being able to make 'evidence statements' of this kind, from studies conducted in Ireland, would help to establish what can be achieved with children and young people in the Irish context, for both 'open access' youth work provision and for services that aim to support specific groups of young people. In the absence of Irish studies, more may be learnt from other rigorous impact studies in this map that share the ethos and activities of Irish youth work. Future primary studies, together with further appraisal of the evidence collated in this map, would be valuable in determining in greater detail the difference youth work can make, to whom, including the cost-effectiveness and whether the effects are lasting over time.

The research gathered in this systematic map highlights the commitment being made to generating evidence that is relevant to youth work policy and practitioners. In addition, there is a growing awareness regarding what support youth work services need in order to conduct high-quality evaluation research, including taking into consideration the size of that evaluation. It might be more appropriate for some youth work services to conduct smaller scale research projects, utilising qualitative research methods generalisable to a specific geographical location or group of children and young people compared to an evaluation that uses survey methods to evaluate the use and outcomes of youth clubs. For example, many charitable organisations have guidance on conducting evaluations,

such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and Dartington Research in Practice, the latter of which is attempting to bridge the link between rigorous scientific methods and the culture of community participation and engagement found in youth work (Axford, 2008). The Young Foundation work on 'informing investment in youth work' (Moullin *et al*, 2010) also highlights these issues and calls for a more robust evidence base to demonstrate the value of youth work, as well as wider dissemination of the findings.

Engaging with policy-makers and practitioners

Similar to fields of health, social care and education, both primary and secondary youth work research needs to engage with policy and practice to ensure the effective use of its findings and to support the translation of those findings into 'practice-relevant' messages. Success requires the willingness of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners to build collaborative partnerships. There is continued debate on the importance of shared knowledge and decision-making in policy, practice and research, which considers the role of those invested, who have a 'stake' in the decisions being made, and the different competencies stakeholders can bring to such an endeavour (Rees and Oliver, 2012). The participation of practitioners and policy-makers in the production of high-quality research needs to be the long-term aim of evidence-informed youth work practice, built into each stage of the research process. To achieve this requires further investigation into different types of stakeholder and user-engagement models, which are appropriate to youth work, balanced and sufficiently resourced.

Engaging young people

The principle of participation found in youth work could extend to research about its design, delivery and subsequent impact, and about how it is experienced by young people, professionals and family members. Many forms of youth work provision are amenable to research. A first step would be to engage key stakeholders, including children and young people, in discussing what research and evaluation could inform their decisions.

Consulting with children and young people in research is essential to ensure that it is both ethical and relevant to them. Thus, the first step in 'good' evaluative practice would be to engage with those who are intended as the 'topic of enquiry'. Offering user-friendly ways in which children and young people could be involved in discussions about providing data to inform the effectiveness of youth work activities could build on the participatory practices already present in youth work practice, i.e. those which seek to build relationships that are empowering and of benefit to young people. Children and young people could take a leading role in the research and determine which 'outcomes' were of most importance to them. They might also want to consider the implications of being involved in research (either providing data or involved in the design, collection and analysis of the data) in terms of their time, energy and the focus it might take away from other activities, or the skills it may help them develop. They might be more willing participants if they were informed about the use and purpose of the findings, or if they could make use of the systematic collection of data for their own personal benefit, for example, by having a self-assessment of their own self-esteem, values or gain a greater understanding of how they relate to others. The UK Department of Health offers guidance on how to involve children in such work (Kirby, 2004).

Engaging youth work professionals

Many youth service providers are already collecting data for evaluative purposes, either internally or externally. An example from the Irish context is Síolta, the National Quality Standards Framework for youth work in Ireland. However, a challenge exists as to the optimum manner through which to capture the range and levels of evaluations, which could easily be identified and appraised as part of a systematic review. Further input, in

terms of time and money, may be required to support this 'ongoing evaluation' as part of the design and delivery of youth work provision, one that does not detract from the importance of service provision itself. As with engaging young people (*see above*), the collection and analysis of evaluation data could also be more appealing to youth work professionals if they were consulted on the types of data collected, including outcomes that are relevant to them.

Involving the wider community

Although it takes time, involving the wider community (including family members, the volunteer sector and the general public) in the design of robust evaluations can increase their relevance and also raise the profile of the importance of youth work in the wider community. Engaging with policy-makers and academics can also increase the appropriateness and feasibility of any research undertaken, including any contributions they might have when writing up the findings.

Overall, youth work deserves 'better knowledge' to underpin its design and delivery. This can be achieved not only by choosing appropriate study designs for assessing impact and delivery of youth work, but also by extending the participatory ethos of youth work to include children and young people, together with their families and communities, in the design and conduct of youth work research.

PART II:
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE REVIEW

5. REVIEW METHODS

This section of the report describes in detail the methods used to search for, identify and describe studies relevant to this systematic map of the research literature.

5.1 User involvement

Discussions between the CES/DCYA policy team, expert advisory group and the research team at the EPPI-Centre were conducted throughout the research process to ensure the report addressed issues of relevance to policy and practitioners. These discussions focused on the overall scope of the report (including the decision to conduct a systematic map), the nature of the findings presented (including decisions on how to thematically group studies) and the final shaping of the implications.

5.2 Search strategy

A sensitive search strategy using both indexed and free-text terms was developed. Eleven bibliographic databases and 10 websites relevant to youth work, youth development and youth policy were searched (*see Appendix 2*). Key informants and experts were contacted with requests for relevant research. Reference lists of systematic reviews were scanned for relevant reports and further details of the study's search strings are presented in Appendix 2. Studies were managed during the review using the EPPI-Centre's online review software, EPPI-Reviewer, Version 4.0 (Thomas *et al*, 2010).

5.3 Eligibility criteria

Studies were excluded hierarchically for any of the following reasons:

1. **Population**
   - 1.1 Not children and young people aged 10 to 24.
   - 1.2 Not professionals involved in delivering youth activities for children and young people aged 10 to 24.
   - 1.3 Not parents of children and young people involved in youth activities.

2. **Type of publication**
   - 2.1 Not an empirical, primary study.
   - 2.2 Not a methodological study of tools relevant to the scope of the review.

3. **Intervention/Programme/Initiative**
   - 3.1 The focus of the intervention is based on treatment or problem behaviour change of the individual (e.g. motivational interviewing) and based on weaknesses or deficits rather than strengths and assets.
   - 3.2 Is solely school-based.
   - 3.3 Is didactic classroom teaching or training or computer-based learning.

4. **Outcome**
   4.1 Study does not report positive youth outcomes (e.g. the majority of the interventions are focused on 'risk' and/or the prevention of risk behaviours).

5. **Language**
   5.1 The full report is not available in English.

5.4 Screening for eligibility

The inclusion criterion was applied successively to titles and abstracts. Full reports were obtained for those studies that appeared to meet the criteria or where there was insufficient information to be certain. The criterion was piloted on a sample of studies before being applied. An early sample of screening was double-checked by the lead reviewer. The reviewers discussed screening to ensure consistency in the way that studies were being included and excluded.

5.5 Characterising and grouping the studies

Each study was described using a set of questions developed specifically for the review. This built on frameworks used in previous systematic reviews on children and young people conducted in the EPPI-Centre. Studies were coded in two ways. The first was by answering 'closed' questions that would provide generic information across all study types, e.g. publication details, aims, study design and data collection methods. The second was a form of 'open' coding. This meant that descriptive codes specific to each youth work initiative were generated as each study was created for the following youth work fields: aims and purposes, activities, outcomes, participants, setting, providers and programme name. Each study was checked against the previous set of codes; if they did not fit into a pre-existing code, then a new code was created. This resulted in a number of unique and disparate codes, which were then grouped into higher order themes for descriptive analysis.

5.6 Identifying and describing studies: Quality assurance processes

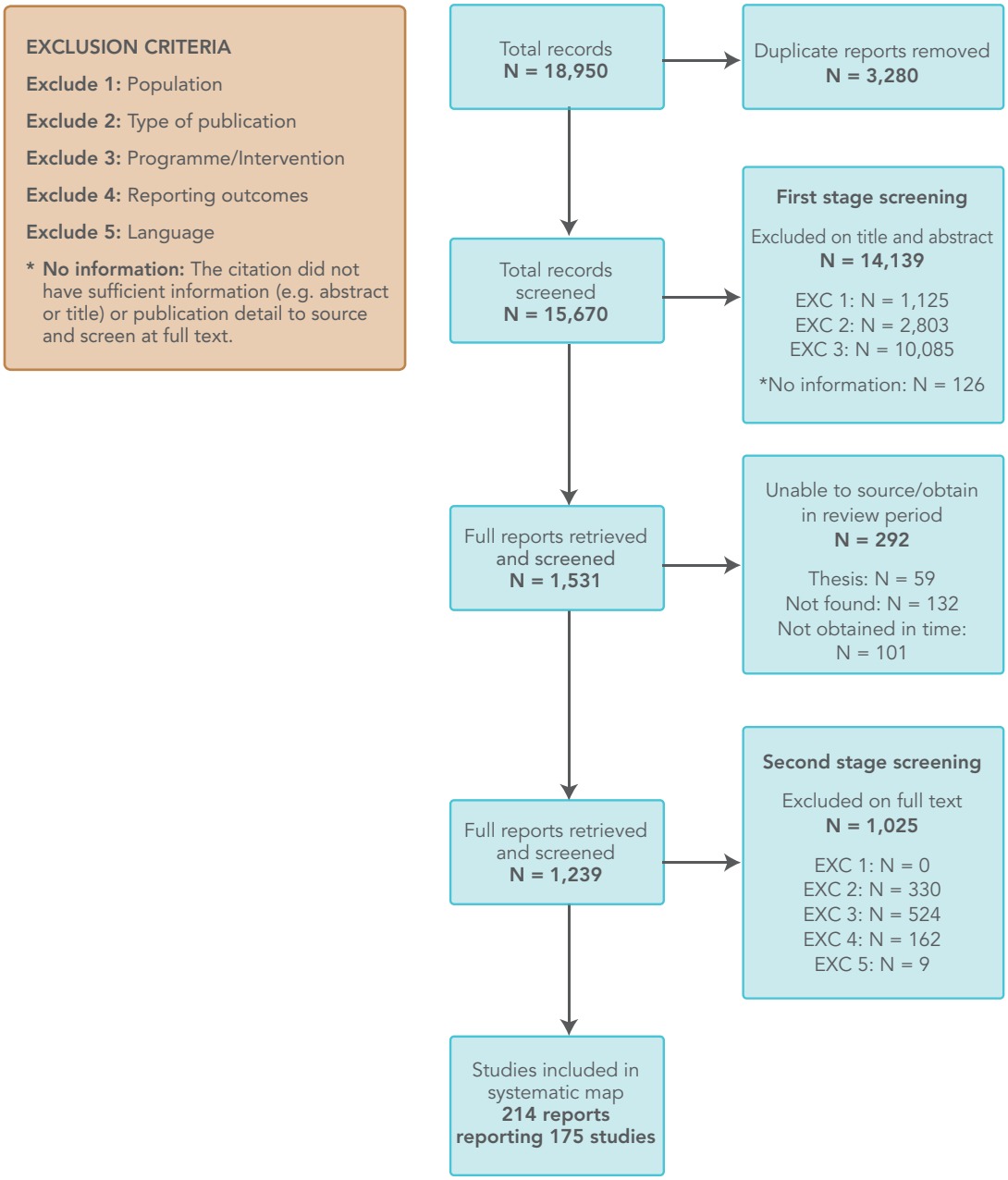
The review was conducted using standard EPPI-Centre procedures for maintaining quality. At the screening stage, an initial sample of titles and abstracts/studies was screened independently by the team members. The results were shared and discussed to ensure consistency of application of the inclusion criteria. The decision for inclusion and exclusion was then made by one assessor, who referred to another whenever they were unsure about the relevance of a given study. At the coding stage, quality assessment processes have been undertaken by two researchers working independently in order to achieve a high level of consistency.

5.7 The flow of studies through the review

In total, 18,950 records were identified from 11 bibliographic databases, plus further handsearching of websites and citation searches (*see Figure 5.1*). 3,280 duplicates were removed, leaving 15,670 studies to be screened for relevance to this review against the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Where it was not possible to be certain of its relevance by the title and/or abstract alone, the full text was obtained. Studies that were obtained for full text screening or for inclusion were obtained via the Institute of Education library, Senate House library or by searching the Google search engine. Studies not available by these means were ordered from the British Library. However, for this map, a large number of

studies (n=292) were unobtainable; many of these citations were international theses, books and book chapters. After applying the exclusion criteria to 1,239 studies screened at full text, 175 studies (described in 214 reports) were included in this systematic review.

Figure 5.1: Flow of studies through the systematic review



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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Further details of the studies in the report

Table A1.1: Aims of youth work activities

Overall aim	Specific aims identified in studies
Personal and social development (n=71)	• Individual personal development (58) • Relationships (7) • Psycho-social support (7) • Personal empowerment (7) • Skills (7) • Build connections with adults (4) or peers (2) • Leadership (4) • Build resiliency (3) • Self-esteem (3) • Spiritual (n=3) • Personal responsibility (3) • Competence: social (3), emotional (2), behavioural (2) moral (2) • Critical thinking skills (2) • Self-efficacy (2) • Promote bonding (2) • Identity development (2) • Sense of belonging (2) • Encourage self-reflection (2) • Pro-social norms (1) • Support beliefs in the future (1) • Self-expression (1) • Recognise positive behaviour (1) • Provide opportunities for pro-social involvement (1) • Immersion in nature (1)
Social change (n=28)	• Social change (16) • Positive community change (5) • Empowering women and girls (5) • Empowering ethnic and cultural minorities (4) • Become 'global citizens' (2) • Become 'change' agents (1) • Develop collectivist orientation (1) • Promote ethical commitment to the common good (1) • Develop 'critical' consciousness (1)
Education and career (n=24)	• Education (14) • Employment and training (5) • Career development (4) • Education – character (4)
Safety and well-being (n=26)	• Health (8) • Crime and crime prevention (5) • Reduce substance use (4) • Safe environment (3) • Teen pregnancy prevention (2) • Reduce anti-social behaviour (2) • Reduce school exclusions (1) • Improve mental health (1) • Preparation for independent living (1)
Contribution to society (n=20)	• Community/integrating into society (10) • Participation (8) • Civic engagement/citizenship/citizen rights (3) • Intergenerational working (3) • Work ethic/dignity of labour (2) • Instil sense of service (1)

Table A1.2: Types of youth work activities

Activity domains	Types of activities
Leisure and recreation (n=39)	• Group discussion (9) • General activities and leisure (8) • Cultural programmes (7) • Field trips (7) • Leadership activities (5) • Social (club) (4) • 1:1 support, contact, friendship (4) • Cinema (1) • Hanging out with friends (1) • Cultural activities (2) • Cross-cultural dialogues (3) • Spiritual/religious (3) • Heritage projects (1)
Arts, drama, music (n=28)	• Arts and crafts (16) • Music (7) • Drama (6) • Dance (5) • Media (5) • Choir (2) • Photography (2) • Creative writing (1)
Volunteer/service (n=26)	• Service projects (14) • Community activities (12) • Volunteering (2) in low-income countries (1)
Social action (n=15)	• Action planning (10) • Action campaigns (6) • Environmental projects (3) • Civic action (1)
Work (n=7)	• Training and employment opportunities (5) • Car maintenance (1) • Entrepreneurship activities (1) • Paid work (1)
Informal learning (n=22)	• Educational (9) • Homework and tutoring (5) • Academic club (3) • Experiential activities (2) • Psycho educational group meetings (2) • Information provision (1) • Simulated experiences/experiential learning/action learning (1) • Health education (1)
Sports (n=25)	• Sport (13) • Camping (7) • Outdoor pursuits/physical activities (5) • Board games (3) • Wilderness/adventure (4) • Yachting (1)

Table A1.3: Types of outcomes

Outcome domains	Individual outcomes measured in studies
Relationship with others (n=66)	• Positive peer relationships (15) • Positive relationships with adults (14) • Leadership skills (11) • Pro-social skills (11) • Competence (10) • Decision-making skills (9) • Empowerment (9) • Staff–youth relationships (5) • Connections (5) • Communication skills (5) • Strategic thinking/problem-solving (4) • New friends (4) • Support (4) • Coping skills (4) • Teamwork (3) • Supports and opportunities (2) • Intermediary/bridging people/intergenerational relationships (2) • Social capital (2) • Relationships with parents/guardians/foster care (2) • Bonding (2) • New skills (2) • Assertiveness (2) • Initiative (2) • Improved social skills (2) • Social responsibility (2) • Responsibility (2) • Basic skills (2) • Pro-social behaviour (2) • Moral competence (1) • Behavioural competence (1) • Social reasoning (1) • Supportive relationships (1)
Sense of self (n=64)	• Personal development (22) • Self-esteem (18) • Confidence (17) • Self-efficacy (10) • Identity (5) • Character (5) • Caring (4) • Clear and positive identity (3) • Environmental identity (3) • Independence (2) • Motivation (2) • Sense of control over their lives (2) • Perceived locus of control (2) • Empathy (2) • Identity development (1) • Self-in-relation identity (1) • Negative affective regulatory self-efficacy (1) • Positive affective self-regulatory self-efficacy (1) • Resilience (1) • Emotional intelligence/compassion (1) • Self-expression (1) • Social efficacy (1) • Emotional regulation (1) • Self-determination (1) • Self-discipline (1) • Empathic self-efficacy (1) • Positive self-image (1) • Peer self-esteem (1) • Self-concept (1) • Self-perception (1) • Perceived behavioural control (1)

continued

Outcome domains	Individual outcomes measured in studies
Community and society (n=36)	• Civic engagement (11) • Strengthen bonds to community (10) • Partnership working (4) • Contribution (3) • Youth voice (2) • Create community change/ build communities (2) • Connection to nature (2) • Community self-efficacy (1) • Local conditions and services (1) • Positive influences and social integration (1) • Perceived socio-political control (1) • Sense of community (1) • Greater understanding of heritage (1) • Community impacts (1) • Outcomes for communities (1) • Voting behaviour (1) • Intent to be involved in future community action (1) • Nature immersion (1) • Social justice (1) • Multicultural competence (1) • Community service (1) • Young people as model in the community (1)
Health and well-being (n=36)	• Reduced alcohol/substance abuse (7) • Diversion from crime (6) • Prevention of risky behaviours (5) • Anti-social behaviours (4) • Reduce early pregnancy (4) • Make healthy choices (4) • Improved mental health (4) • Improved anger management (3) • Social exclusion (3) • Safety (3) • Stress (2) • Transform risky behaviour (2) • Drugs disapproval (1) • Less violent behaviour (1) • Internalising (depression) (1) • Psychological functioning (1) • Improved fitness (1) • Sexual health (1)
Values and beliefs (n=30)	• Future aspirations (11) • Positive diversity attitudes (9) • Values (9) • Pro-social attitudes (5) • Pro-social norms (3) • Acceptance of body image (2) • Reduction in prejudicial views (2) • Hopefulness (3) • Attitudes towards attractiveness (1) • Beliefs in future (1) • Peer norms (1)
Formal education and training (n=27)	• Educational achievement (15) • Strengthen bonds to school (5) • Career outcomes (4) • Task completion (2) • Pro-social school behaviour (2) • Positive attitudes towards education (1) • Use of technology (1) • Qualifications (1) • Commitment to learning (1) • Graduate from high school (1) • Academic competence (1)

Table A1.4: Underlying theories

Underlying theories	N
Not stated	25
Positive youth development	25
Socio-ecological model	8
Opportunities for youth development	7
Developmental assets	5
Empowerment	5
Social capital	2
Prevention science	2
Experiential education	2
Community youth development	2
Educational philosophy/Service learning pedagogy	2
Relational theory	2
Developmental systems	2
Social development model	2
Problem behaviour	1
Social inoculation	1
Edutainment	1
Systems world view	1
Critical pedagogies	1
Expeditionary learning/Outward bound	1
Interactive theory of learning	1
Theory of planned behaviour	1
Critical consciousness	1

Appendix 2: Search strings

Platform/ Database	Search string	No. of hits	Date
CSA/ASSIA	(DE=(Children or ("Young people") or ("Young adulthood")) or DE=(("Young adults") or adolescence) or TI=(("young man*") or ("young men") or ("young woman*")) or AB=(("young man*") or ("young men") or ("young woman*")) or TI=(("young women") or ("Young adult*") or ("young person*")) or AB=(("young women") or ("Young adult*") or ("young person*")) or TI=(("young people*") or teen* or adolescen*) or AB=(("young people*") or teen* or adolescen*)) and((DE=(("youth work") or ("youth clubs") or ("Child life programmes")) or DE=(("Early Adolescent Helper Program") or ("Opportunity programmes") or ("Outreach programmes")) or DE=(Citizenship or Assets or ("School based")) or DE=(("Strengths models") or ("Civic education") or ("Activity groups")) or DE=(("Activity based") or ("psychosocial development") or ("Experiential approach")) or DE=(("Out of school care") or Empowerment)) or(TI=(("positive youth development") or ("youth development") or ("youth program*")) or AB=(("positive youth development ") or ("youth development") or ("youth program*")) or TI=(("youth club*") or ("youth work") or ("youth opportunit*")) or AB=(("youth club*") or ("youth work") or ("youth opportunit*")) or TI=(("extended school*") or ("civic engagement") or ("positive peer culture")) or AB=(("extended school*") or ("civic engagement") or ("positive peer culture")) or TI=(("informal learning") or "multi-component" or ("multi component")) or AB=(("informal learning") or "multi-component" or ("multi component")) or TI=(multidimensional or multi-dimensional or ("multi dimensional")) or AB=(multidimensional or multi-dimensional or ("multi dimensional")) or TI=(empower* or asset* or thriv*) or AB=(empower* or asset* or thriv*) or TI=(("positive development") or resilienc* or ("positive activity")) or AB=(("positive development") or resilienc* or ("positive activity")) or TI=(("positive activities") or experiential or ("community based")) or AB=(("positive activities") or experiential or ("community based")) or TI="community-based" or AB="community-based"))	3,372	13 October 2011
CSA/IBSS	((DE=("adolescence" or "age groups" or "youth" or "adolescents")) or (TI=(adolescen* or ("young man*") or ("young men")) or TI=(("young woman*") or ("young women") or (Young adult*")) or TI=(("young person*") or ("young people*") or teen*) or AB=(adolescen* or ("young man*") or ("young men")) or AB=(("young woman*") or ("young women") or (Young adult*")) or AB=(("young person*") or ("young people*") or teen*))) and((DE="youth organizations") or((TI=(("positive youth development ") or ("youth development") or ("youth program*")) or TI=(("youth club*") or ("youth work") or ("youth opportunit*")) or TI=(("extended school*") or ("civic engagement") or ("positive peer culture")) or TI=(("informal learning") or multicomponent or ("multi-component ")) or TI=(("multi component") or multidimensional or ("multi-dimensional ")) or TI=(("multi dimensional") or empower* or asset*) or TI=(thriv* or ("positive development") or resilienc*) or TI=(("positive activity") or ("positive activities") or experiential) or TI=(("community based") or "community-based")) or(AB=(("positive youth development ") or ("youth development") or ("youth program*")) or AB=(("youth club*") or ("youth work") or ("youth opportunit*")) or AB=(("extended school*") or ("civic engagement") or "positive peer culture")) or AB=(("informal learning") or multicomponent or ("multi-component ")) or AB=(("multi component") or multidimensional or ("multi-dimensional ")) or AB=(("multi dimensional") or empower* or asset*) or AB=(thriv* or ("positive development") or resilienc*) or AB=(("positive activity") or ("positive activities") or experiential) or AB=(("community based") or "community-based"))))	807	13 October 2011

continued

Platform/ Database	Search string	No. of hits	Date
CSA: SSA and SA	(((TI=((“positive youth development ”) or (“youth development”) or (“youth program*”)) or TI=((“youth club*”) or (“youth work”) or (“youth opportunit*”)) or TI=((“extended school*”) or (“civic engagement”) or (“positive peer culture”)) or TI=((“informal learning”) or multicomponent or (“multi-component ”)) or TI=((“multi component”) or multidimensional or (“multi-dimensional ”)) or TI=((“multi dimensional”) or empower* or asset*) or TI=(thriv* or (“positive development”) or resilienc*) or TI=((“positive activity”) or (“positive activities”) or experiential) or TI=((“community based”) or “community-based”)) or(AB=((“positive youth development ”) or (“youth development”) or (“youth program*”)) or AB=((“youth club*”) or (“youth work”) or (“youth opportunit*”)) or AB=((“extended school*”) or (“civic engagement”) or (“positive peer culture”)) or AB=((“informal learning”) or multicomponent or (“multi-component ”)) or AB=((“multi component”) or multidimensional or (“multi-dimensional”)) or AB=((“multi dimensional”) or empower* or asset*) or AB=(thriv*or (“positive development”) or resilienc*) or AB=((“positive activity”) or (“positive activities”) or experiential) or AB=((“community based”) or “community-based”))) or((DE=(“youth organizations” or “clubs” or “delinquency prevention”)) or(DE=(“adolescent development” or “youth movements” or “youth organizations”)))) and((TI=(adolescen* or (“young man*”) or (“young men”)) or TI=((“young woman*”) or (“young women”) or (Young adult*”)) or TI=((“young person*”) or (“young people*”) or teen*) or AB=(adolescen* or (“young man*”) or (“young men”)) or AB=((“young woman*”) or (“young women”) or (Young adult*”)) or AB=((“young person*”)or (“young people*”) or teen*)) or(DE=(“adolescents” or “age groups” or”childhood” or “young adults”)))	2,843	13 October 2011
CSA/ERIC	((TI=(adolescen* or (“young man*”) or (“young men”)) or TI=((“young woman*”) or (“young women”) or (Young adult*”)) or TI=((“young person*”) or (“young people*”) or teen*) or AB=(adolescen* or (“young man*”) or (“young men”)) or AB=((“young woman*”) or (“young women”) or (Young adult*”)) or AB=((“young person*”) or (“young people*”) or teen*)) or(DE=(“youth” or “adolescents” or “early adolescents” or “late adolescents” or “preadolescents”))) and(((TI=((“positive youth development ”) or (“youth development”) or (“youth program*”)) or TI=((“youth club*”) or (“youth work”) or (“youth opportunit*”)) or TI=((“extended school*”) or (“civic engagement”) or (“positive peer culture”)) or TI=((“informal learning”) or multicomponent or (“multi-component ”)) or TI=((“multi component”) or multidimensional or (“multi-dimensional ”)) or TI=((“multi dimensional”) or empower* or asset*) or TI=(thriv* or (“positive development”) or resilienc*) or TI=((“positive activity”) or (“positive activities”) or experiential) or TI=((“community based”) or “community-based”)) or(AB=((“positive youth development ”) or (“youth development”) or (“youth program*”)) or AB=((“youth club*”) or (“youth work”) or (“youth opportunit*”)) or AB=((“extended school*”) or (“civic engagement”) or (“positive peer culture”)) or AB=((“informal learning”) or multicomponent or (“multi-component ”)) or AB=((“multi component”) or multidimensional or (“multi-dimensional ”)) or AB=((“multi dimensional”) or empower* or asset*) or AB=(thriv* or (“positive development”) or resilienc*) or AB=((“positive activity”) or (“positive activities”) or experiential) or AB=((“community based”) or “community-based”))) or(DE=”community education”))	3,362	13 October 2011

continued

Platform/ Database	Search string	No. of hits	Date
PSYCHINFO	TX "positive youth development" OR TX "youth development" OR TX "youth program?" OR TX "youth club?" OR TX "youth work" OR TX "youth opportunit?" OR TX "positive youth development" OR TX "youth development" OR TX "youth program" OR TX "youth club?" OR TX "youth work" OR TX "youth opportunit?" or TI "extended school" OR TI "civic engagement" OR TI "positive peer culture" OR TI "informal learning" OR TI "empower?" OR TI asset? OR AB "extended school" OR AB "civic engagement" OR AB "positive peer culture" OR AB "informal learning" OR AB empower? OR AB asset*? Or TI multicomponent OR TI multi-component OR TI multidimensional OR TI multi-dimensional OR AB multicomponent OR AB multi-component OR AB multidimensional OR AB multi-dimensional or TI thriv? OR TI "positive development" OR TI "resilienc?" OR TI "positive activity" OR TI "positive activities" OR TI experiential OR AB thriv? OR AB "positive development" OR AB resilienc? OR AB "positive activity" OR AB "positive activities" OR AB experiential AND TI Youth? or AB Youth? OR TX "Young adulthood" or TX "young man" OR TX "young men" OR TX "young woman" OR TX "young women" OR TX adolescen? OR TX "young adult?" OR TX "young person" OR TX "young people" OR TX "teen?"	4,912	14 October 2011
Econlit	Program only: "positive youth development" OR "youth development" OR "youth program?" OR "youth club?" OR "youth work" OR "youth opportunit?"	326	26 October 2011
ChildDataRev	Program only: "positive youth development" OR "youth development" OR "youth program?" OR "youth club?" OR "youth work" OR "youth opportunit?"	1,764	27 October 2011
Campbell	Program only: "positive youth development" OR "youth development" OR "youth program?" OR "youth club?" OR "youth work" OR "youth opportunit?"	30	25 October 2011
Cochrane	Program only: "positive youth development" OR "youth development" OR "youth program?" OR "youth club?" OR "youth work" OR "youth opportunit?"	835	25 October 2011
Journal of Adolescence	Program only: "positive youth development" OR "youth development" OR "youth program?" OR "youth club?" OR "youth work" OR "youth opportunit?"	187	25 October 2011
Other	Websites and manual searching: National Youth Agency, National Youth Council of Ireland, Youth Council Northern Ireland, Department of Education, UK Youth, Google, Google Scholar, C4EO, Scottish Executive, Economic and Social Research Council	87	28 October 2011
Australian Education Index	((TI=(adolescen* or ("young man*") or ("young men")) or TI=(("young woman*") or ("young women") or (Young adult*")) or TI=(("young person*") or ("young people*") or teen*) or AB=(adolescen* or ("young man*") or ("young men")) or AB=(("young woman*") or ("young women") or (Young adult*")) or AB=(("young person*") or ("young people*") or teen*)) or(DE=("youth" or "adolescents" or "early adolescents" or "late adolescents" or "preadolescents"))) and(((TI=(("positive youth development ") or ("youth development") or ("youth program*")) or TI=(("youth club*") or ("youth work") or ("youth opportunit*")) or TI=(("extended school*") or ("civic engagement") or ("positive peer culture")) or TI=(("informal learning") or multicomponent or ("multi-component ")) or TI=(("multi component") or multidimensional or ("multi-dimensional ")) or TI=(("multi dimensional") or empower* or asset*) or TI=(thriv* or ("positive development") or resilienc*) or TI=(("positive activity") or ("positive activities") or experiential) or TI=(("community based") or "community-based")) or(AB=(("positive youth development ") or ("youth development") or ("youth program*")) or AB=(("youth club*") or ("youth work") or ("youth opportunit*")) or AB=(("extended school*") or ("civic engagement") or ("positive peer culture")) or AB=(("informal learning") or multicomponent or ("multi-component ")) or AB=(("multi component") or multidimensional or ("multi-dimensional ")) or AB=(("multi dimensional") or empower* or asset*) or AB=(thriv* or ("positive development") or resilienc*) or AB=(("positive activity") or ("positive activities") or experiential) or AB=(("community based") or "community-based"))) or(DE="community education"))	512	25 October 2011 l

Appendix 3: Coding tools

- **Date of study**
  - 1970-1975
  - 1976-1980
  - 1981-1985
  - 1986-1990
  - 1991-1995
  - 1996-2000
  - 2001-2005
  - 2006-2010
  - 2011-2012

- **Aim of study**
  - Evaluate the impact of an intervention/programme
  - Evaluate the process/implementation of an intervention/programme
  - Evaluate the cost-benefit of an intervention/programme
  - Study of people's views/experiences
  - Methodological study
  - Evaluate policy impact
  - Investigate correlations/associations between factors, e.g. does engagement predict positive youth outcomes?
  - Feasibility study
  - Development of a programme model

- **Study design**
  - Randomised controlled trial:
    - individual
    - cluster
  - Non-randomised control trial: Treatment group and control group tested before intervention and then after to measure and compare change.
  - Interrupted time series: Measures an effect on sample or samples over time, i.e. follows-up more than once after the end of the intervention.
  - Single group, pre-post-test: Measures change in the intervention group only.
  - Single group, post-test only
  - Retrospective/observational: Observational is where the researcher has no control over assignment and the groups are not randomised. Propensity score matching is used to create case-control groups matched on important characteristics from an existing dataset to minimise bias retrospectively.
  - Case study
  - Cross-sectional study (e.g. collecting data at one point in time)
  - Other

- **Data collection methods**
  - QUANT: validated scales
  - QUANT: researcher developed scales
  - QUANT: survey/questionnaire
  - QUANT: researcher scores/ratings
  - QUAL: open-ended question in a survey/questionnaire
  - QUAL: interviews
  - QUAL: focus groups
  - QUAL: researcher observation
  - QUAL: document analysis
  - Other
  - Not clear/stated

- **Intervention/Programme**
  - Aims and purpose
  - Typical activities
  - Intervention outcomes (including views)
  - Intervention practices and process
  - Correlational data/associations
  - Underlying theories
  - Who delivered the intervention?
  - Setting of the intervention:
    - Country
      - High-income country
      - Middle-income country
      - Low-income country
    - Location
  - Participants
    - Not stated, targeted or open access
    - Mixed sample (self-selecting/open access)
    - Mixed sample — mandatory
    - Mixed sample — targeted
    - Targeted: At risk:
      - individual
      - community
      - other
      - school
      - family
      - income
    - Targeted: Females only
    - Targeted: LGBQT
    - Targeted: Males only
    - Targeted: BME/indigenous population
    - Targeted: Youth in foster care
    - Gifted
    - Members of the community
    - Parents
    - Project/programme/intervention providers:
      - teachers/educators
      - mentors
      - management and lead staff
      - youth resident leaders
      - adult resident leaders
      - youth workers
    - Age
      - 10-14
      - 15-17
      - 18-21
      - over 21
      - Not clear
- **Name of programme**

NOTES

The results of this work are available in two formats:

SUMMARY	Explains the purpose of the review and the main messages from the research evidence
REPORT	Includes the background, methods and main findings

These can be downloaded or accessed at:
www.dcya.ie or **www.effectiveservices.org**

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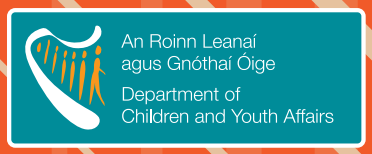

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