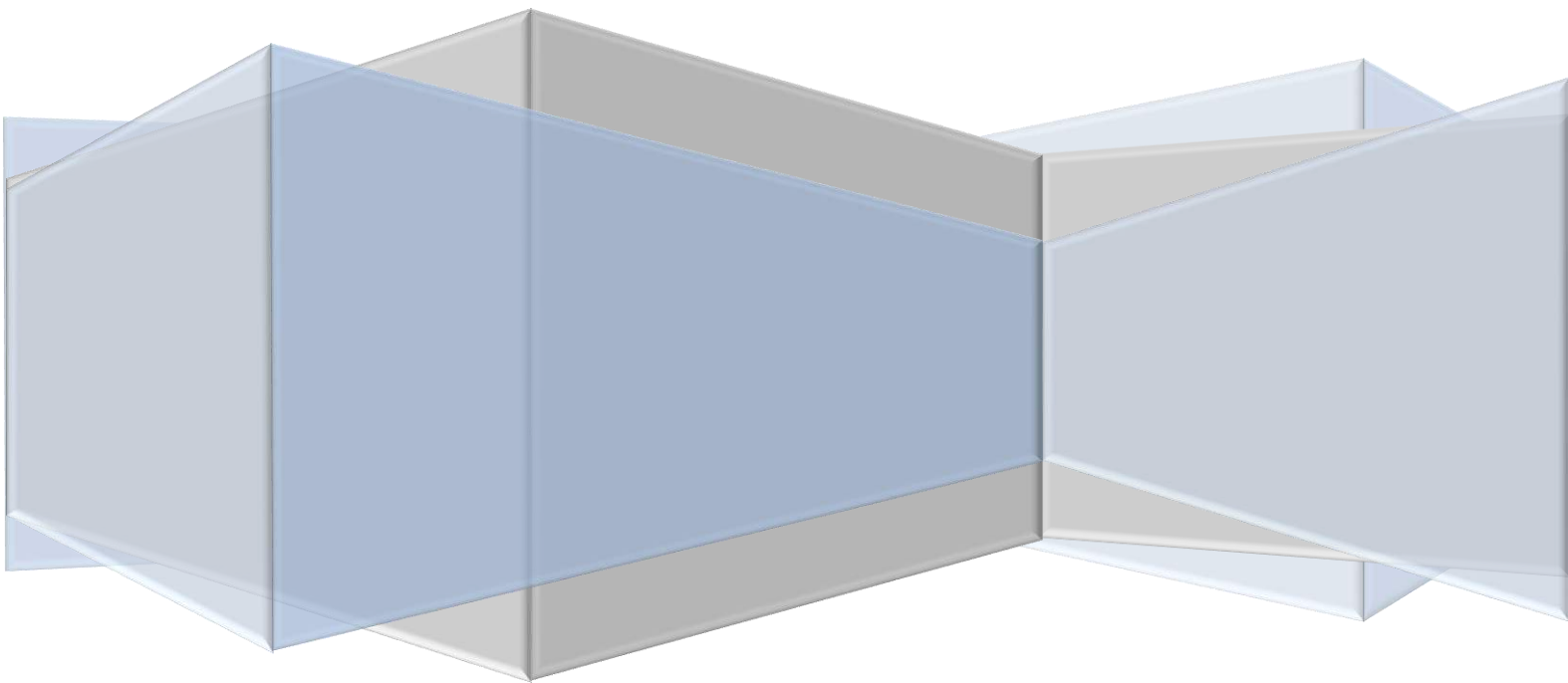




# Social and digital media in youth work in Northern Ireland



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**We gratefully acknowledge all those who took time to respond to the surveys, to contribute to the case studies, and to participate in the focus groups. Thanks are also due to those organisations and individuals who promoted the online surveys.**



The Screenagers International Research Project is a collaborative study focussing on the use of ICT, digital and social media in youth work. It is a partnership between agencies in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Finland, Austria and Denmark.



**Erasmus+**

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## Executive Summary

This research examined the current use and impact of social and digital media as a tool to deliver youth work practice, the challenges perceived by youth workers, their uptake of training, and views on support needs both within their organisations and strategically across the sector. Fieldwork was conducted between June and September 2015, and comprised:

- **Two online surveys** of youth workers, which generated **169** responses (75 responses to a survey of full-time provision, and 94 to a shorter survey aimed at those working in part-time settings of less than 20 hours per week)
- A total of **28** youth workers, from voluntary and statutory sectors took part in 4 **focus groups**
- **Four** in-depth **case studies** of practice drawn from the voluntary settings. Case studies also included feedback from young people.

### Extent and purposes of using social media in youth work

**Survey** 80% of respondents from full time and 68% from part time settings had used social media in their work with young people. Those from full time provision who had not used social media (20%) were almost exclusively from statutory settings. Respondents from full time voluntary sector settings were more likely to use multiple social media tools, with the most favoured being Facebook (67%) YouTube (60%) and Twitter (44%). Respondents from part time provision most commonly used Facebook (56%) but were less likely to use multiple tools. Key purposes for using social media were for 'general communication with young people' and 'promotion of youth group activities'.

**Focus groups** Participants described the developmental value of using social media in youth work, including: as a medium to support campaigning and citizenship, to enable young people to build and sustain peer relationships which had developed during programmes, and to support interaction and mutual understanding between young people from different communities or contexts.

Many focus group participants from the statutory sector voiced frustration about the policy (stemming from Safeguarding) which blocks their access to social media, with a strong feeling that this policy limits the opportunities to reach out and engage with young people. The potential for the sector to more proactively support young people in online safety was also highlighted.

### Extent and purposes of using digital media in youth work

**Survey** 89% of respondents from full time, and 55% from part time settings had used some form of digital media in their youth work. Those from full time were more likely to have used a variety (52% film-making, 42% digital photography, 23% music making, 19% animation, 17% digital booklets/creative writing, 15% graphic design, and fewer numbers using gaming, coding, digital comics, app creation or website design). Those from the part time sector had mainly used digital photography (35%), or film-making (19%)

**Focus groups** Participants described using digital media for a range purposes, including: to support issue-based projects; to support self advocacy, citizenship and campaigning ; as a basis for group work (especially with communities of interest and marginalised young people); to provide opportunities for creativity and self-expression; and to support digital literacy and skills development

Film-making was the most frequently mentioned form of digital media. This medium was felt to be highly congruent with youth work values and processes, a good vehicle to support young people to explore social issues, and particularly effective with a range of groups of young people, including LGBT, rural, and young people with either physical or learning disabilities.

### Value and contribution of social and digital media to youth work outcomes

**Survey** The vast majority of respondents rated ICT as either 'fairly' or 'highly' effective in enabling young people's personal development (confidence building, empathy etc), improved health and well-being, young people's participation and advocacy, positive relationship with others/respecting difference, citizenship (eg social action, volunteering etc), life and thinking skills, (eg creativity,

problem-solving etc), as well as enhancing digital literacy/ICT skills. Respondents also highlighted the value of ICT in supporting young people's employability.

**Focus groups** Many participants highlighted the fun dimension of digital media and described how ICT-based projects had enthused and engaged young people who may ordinarily be reluctant to get involved in group-based projects. Participants described the versatility of social and digital media, and compatibility with youth work curricular themes and principles. Examples were given of how ICT had enhanced group work and team building, had involved young people in planning and decision making, offered opportunities for experiential learning, had supported a focus for issue based work, and provided a means to harness young people's interests. Many participants referred to technology as a 'vehicle', 'tool' or 'enabler' for effective youth work, rather than an end in itself. The value was less about building technical skills, and more about providing a new approach to deliver traditional youth work.

## Challenges

**Survey** Asked why ICT may not be fully developed in their youth work, the most common responses were: concern about child protection and online safety, prohibitive costs, difficulty keeping up with the pace of change, insufficient infrastructure, and insufficient time.

**Focus groups** Participants identified key blockages as: restricted wifi/social media access, lack of guidance, low level skills, and risk-averse mind-sets. The main enablers identified in focus groups were: resources, commitment, workforce development and practice support.

## Training

**Survey** 37% of those from full time, and 18% from part time had received some form of training in digital/social media during the past two years. 95% from full time and 64% from part time indicated that future ICT training would be useful to them. Those from full time settings were asked to evaluate their own expertise in various aspects of ICT. The area where respondents rated their expertise most positively was in ensuring online safety. Areas where they felt relatively unskilled included the use of digital games in youth work and copyright issues.

**Focus groups** Participants suggested that training should be regular and available to a wide range of workers and volunteers. They emphasised the need for hands-on, interactive and practical training.

## Recommendations

**Survey** 86% of all respondents anticipated that their use of ICT in youth work would increase over the coming three years, and 80% agreed that the internet should be used more in youth work. The majority of respondents indicated the following would be useful to support ICT within their organisations: Specific funding stream to support digital initiatives, improved IT infrastructure, guidance on professional ethics in the use of social media, professional development opportunities, sharing of good practice, access to taster sessions and a directory of training providers.

**Focus groups** Participants in the focus groups were asked what strategic actions they felt are needed at a service-wide level to support the development of digital and social media in youth work. The responses centred around the need for:

- **A policy directive to support this approach to youth work, with high level commitment to an ICT strategy involving the Department of Education, the Education Authority NI, and voluntary sector**
- **A youth service strategy for ICT, supported by sustained investment and based on need**
- **Relaxation of the restrictions on social media within the statutory sector, and a proactive approach by the youth service to address eSafety (in line with the Marshall report, 2014)**
- **Access to a resource hub, leading to a fuller demonstration of the value of ICT as a tool for creativity and participation within youth work pedagogy**
- **Development of partnerships and opportunities for collaboration, at both organisational and sector-wide levels, academia and private sector, and also at North/South and EU levels**
- **Organisational policy and/or sectoral guidance on the use of social media in particular**
- **Opportunities for continuous professional development**

## Background to the research

The impetus for this research came from the North South ICT group - a consortium of interested individuals from across the voluntary, statutory, academic and tech sectors. The group has evolved from an initial partnership between the National Youth Council of Ireland and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland, with a shared concern to promote the value of ICT as a learning tool in youth work and to influence both policy and practice. In 2013 the group produced a Strategy Development paper outlining the need for focused work in this area. The paper is reproduced at Appendix 1.

In 2014 the North South ICT group, alongside European partners, facilitated a highly successful 'Screenagers International' seminar. The event invited youth service staff, from north and south, to showcase their own practice, exchange knowledge, ideas and concerns, and learn about innovative ICT approaches from their international counterparts (for more information, see [www.youth.ie/screenagers\\_international](http://www.youth.ie/screenagers_international)).

Following the success of the seminar, the group secured ERASMUS+ funding in early 2015 for comparative research studies across five European countries, aiming to explore the extent, value and development of the use of ICT as a tool in youth work. Research partners within this project were the Youth Council NI, Verke (Finland), Cyberhus (Denmark) and wienXtra (Austria), with the National Youth Council of Ireland as lead partner.

A planning seminar was hosted in Belfast in March 2015 by the Youth Council NI, at which the five partners agreed to focus the project on the following:

### CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the extent of the use of i) social media and ii) digital media in youth work?
2. What types of digital media are used in youth work, and for what purposes?
3. What is the value / contribution of the use of social and / or digital media in youth work for young people, and for youth work practice?
4. What are the challenges of the use of social and / or digital media in youth work and how can these challenges be overcome?
5. Is there training available to the youth work sector, and what supports are required to enable youth workers to apply social and digital media as a tool in their youth work?

## Research outcomes for Northern Ireland

The intended end-use of the research findings will vary within each of the five participating countries, depending on their gaps in knowledge and youth work context. Within Northern Ireland, the project aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Examine the existing use of ICT and evaluate its contribution to effective youth work
- Listen to practitioners and organisations views and identify areas for workforce development
- Create an assessment of need which will inform policy, planning and resource allocation

## Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted between June and September 2015, and comprised:

### Online surveys of youth workers

A draft questionnaire was piloted with youth workers in May 2015. Based on feedback from the pilot the decision was made to conduct two separate surveys :

- i) a 28-item questionnaire aimed at youth workers in full time provision (defined for the purposes of this study as 20+ hours per week). This target population included voluntary and statutory youth centres, outreach and area workers, and those working in a 20+ hour capacity within regional voluntary organisations, and:
- ii) an abridged 20-item questionnaire for youth workers (paid or voluntary) working in settings of less than 20 hours per week (referred to for the purposes of this report as 'part time'). This target population included voluntary and statutory part time youth centres, local clubs or groups, uniformed units, and other projects or activities which engage young people for less than 20 hours per week.

The surveys were promoted via a number of youth sector websites, email contacts, e-bulletins, and an article in the Curriculum Development Newsletter. In total there were **169 responses to the online surveys** (75 from 20+ hour provision, and 94 from part time provision). Findings from the two surveys have been presented separately to show any variation between full and part time youth work settings.

### Focus groups with youth workers

To supplement data from the online surveys, four focus groups were held with youth workers attending an ICT-themed event at the Belfast Science Park in June 2015. Participants in the focus groups came from both statutory and voluntary settings. The focus group questions are provided at Appendix 5.

In total **28 youth workers took part in the focus groups**, which lasted for an hour and which were audio-recorded.

### Case studies of practice

Four case studies were produced to provide more in-depth illustrations of front line practice. The case studies were selected from 14 regional voluntary youth organisations funded by YCNI, and were chosen to highlight the range and breadth of ICT as a tool for youth work. The case studies were initially drafted by youth workers, using a template supplied by YCNI. These were followed up with telephone or one-to-one interviews with the youth workers, focussing on the outcomes for young people. To provide a young person's perspective, feedback was gained from 12 young project participants which captured details on the outcomes and impact of participating in ICT projects.

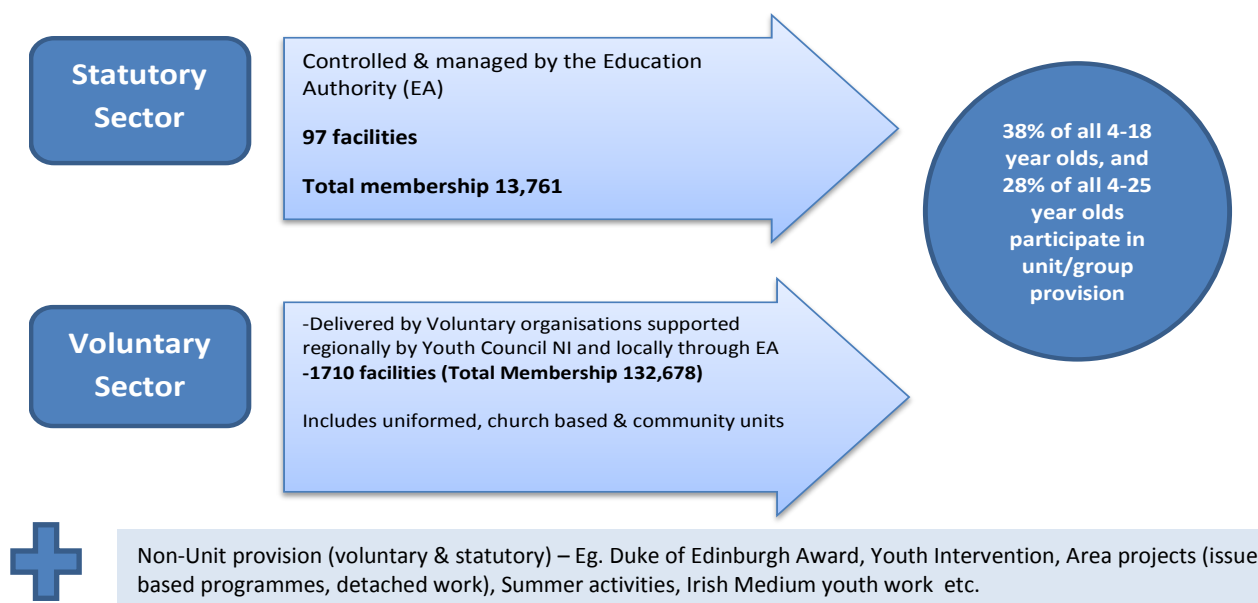
### Dissemination of findings

This report presents the research findings pertaining to Northern Ireland. A synthesis of the findings from all five participating countries is available on the Screenagers website.

It is important to highlight that the research looked specifically at the use of ICT as a learning medium for work with young people, and so does not make any reference to the use of ICT as a managerial or administrative tool.

## Youth service structure and membership

The Youth Service in Northern Ireland comprises a statutory sector and a much larger voluntary sector. There are over 1800 registered youth service providers, supported by a workforce of 23,510, of whom over 90% are volunteers. Uniformed groups (eg. Scouts, Girls Brigade etc.) make up over 50% of the total number of youth groups.



(Diagram adapted from Northern Ireland Assembly Briefing paper, NIAR 905-14, January 2015)

Whilst government Departments such as Health, Justice and Employment, provide some funding to youth services, the main funder for the sector is the Department of Education (DE). This is reflective of the distinctly educational purpose and process of youth work in NI (see Appendix 4 for more information on the youth work curriculum and expected outcomes). In 2013 DE introduced a new policy for the sector entitled 'Priorities for Youth', which closely aligns youth work with education priorities. The policy also places greater emphasis on the targeting of services for young people in need of additional support, and identifies a priority age range as 11-18 (although the wider age range of 4-25 remains) The **strategic aims of youth work** within education are identified in the policy as :

- *To contribute to raising standards for all and closing the performance gap between the highest and lowest achieving young people by providing access to enjoyable, non-formal learning opportunities that help them to develop enhanced social and cognitive skills and overcome barriers to learning, and*
- *To continue to improve the non-formal learning environment by creating inclusive, participative settings in which the voice and influence of young people are championed, supported and evident in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmes.*

The composition of youth groups which are registered with the Education Authority is as follows:

		Count of groups	Membership totals	Percent of Membership
<b>Statutory</b>	Statutory (Controlled)	97	13,761	9.4%
	<b>Voluntary</b>			
	Church based (vol)	328	30,880	21.1%
	Community (vol)	373	44,707	30.5%
	Uniformed	979	55,402	37.8%
	Other	32	1689	1.2%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,809</b>	<b>146,439</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

(YCNI, 2014)

## The context of ICT in education

### Formal education

ICT is a crucial feature of formal education in Northern Ireland, whether this be as a taught subject, as a mandatory theme of the revised curriculum, or as a pedagogic tool (eg virtual learning environments). There has been significant investment by the Department of Education (DE) in a regional project called **Classroom 2000** (commonly referred to as **C2K**) to support ICT infrastructure and related teaching practice. Since 2000 over half a billion pounds has been invested in C2K (excluding investment from schools themselves). Grant-aided schools receive a core entitlement (based on pupil numbers) which includes hardware, connectivity to secure central services with access to email and internet, access to services to support the school curriculum and the professional development of teachers, software and services to support administrative and management needs, connection of schools' networks into a single Education Network across Northern Ireland, a wide range of tools to facilitate the development of on-line teaching and learning, and full service support to schools through a central help desk. (Source: C2K Business Plan)

### Non formal education

Several voluntary youth organisations (including WIMPS, Bytes, Wheelworks, Headliners and others) have pioneered the innovative use of social and digital media in youth work in NI over the past two decades, and many others are now embedding ICT within their youth work programmes and communication strategies. Some regions within the statutory youth work sector have also developed excellent support services, including provision of IT facilities and delivery of sessions in film production, photography, music, animation and creative publishing etc.

However despite this rapid growth in the use of ICT within parts of the youth work sector, the lynchpins of policy support and financial investment enjoyed by schools have not been matched in the youth work sector, resulting in uneven and inconsistent practice across the service as a whole. As briefly described below, there have been a number of opportunities over the past 10-15 years to promote and develop the use of ICT in a more strategic and sustainable way across non formal education. However, these have largely failed to deliver sector-wide progression.

The youth work curriculum, **Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice**, was produced in 1997 and subsequently updated in 2003. This identifies personal and social development as the central objective of youth work in Northern Ireland, and affirms the core principles and values for youth work (see Appendix 4). The curriculum document lists Information Technology as one of thirteen potential 'Programme areas' which can support young people's development. Over the years, curricular guidance materials have been produced and disseminated for several of these Programme areas, but there have been no centrally developed materials to support IT as a vehicle to deliver youth work.

In 2002 the **Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)** conducted a survey of ICT provision in the youth service, although the results and recommendations were never formally published. The findings pointed to limitations in ICT provision and connectivity within the youth work sector, coupled with variable levels of skills and commitment among practitioners. The (unpublished) recommendations affirmed the potential value of ICT to youth work and identified a need for staff development in the skills, methods and philosophy of using ICT as a tool for the personal development of young people.

Following wide-scale consultation within the sector DE published a **‘Strategy for the delivery of youth work, 2005-2008’** which aimed to increase the effectiveness of youth work through regional objectives and targets. The strategy acknowledged *‘the potential value of IT within the youth service’* and included a specific objective *‘To ensure that adequate resources are available to implement an Information and Communications Technology Strategy for the youth service’*. However this objective was not achieved.

DE introduced a new policy for the youth service in 2013. **‘Priorities for youth: Improving young people’s lives through youth work’**, which was again informed by extensive consultation within the sector. Among the recorded responses to the consultation was the demand for an ICT strategy for the youth sector, and resources to build an adequate IT infrastructure. However the reference to ICT in the finalised Priorities for Youth policy is concerned with IT infrastructure in relation to management information systems, rather than technology as a learning medium.

The issue of **eSafety**, including responses to cyber-bullying and online exploitation, is an area of increasing concern within educational services. Findings from an expert-led inquiry (the Marshall Report) into child sexual exploitation in NI were presented to Ministers in 2014. In 2015 DE published an Education Action Plan in response to the report, which included provision of eSafety advice and guidance to teachers, and an eSafety zone within the C2k Exchange. In terms of cyber-bullying, there is a current debate as to whether this could be incorporated within forthcoming anti-bullying legislation. School pupils who gave evidence to the NI Assembly Education Committee voiced a particular concern about the extent of cyber-bullying, and the lasting damage to young people.

### Some facts and figures about young people and social/digital media

- A survey of 745 teenagers (age 15-16) from across NI found that a third spend 4+ hours per day online, with social networking being the most popular online activity, followed by watching videos and accessing information. 99% have at least one computer at home, 96% a mobile phone, 78% a games console, and 64% a tablet <sup>1</sup>
- Northern Ireland has the highest availability of fibre broadband services in the UK, and 95% of homes are served by Next Generation Networks (compared to 78% for the UK) <sup>2</sup>
- A survey of 11 year olds from across Northern Ireland found 13% had been bullied through text messages or online <sup>3</sup>
- Compared to other EU countries, the UK ranks 11<sup>th</sup> out of 25 for child digital literacy and e-safety skills <sup>4</sup>
- Across the UK young people aged 16-25 are likely to spend more time online than watching television <sup>5</sup>
- Young people are overwhelmingly positive about technology and the internet, with 75% stating they ‘could not live without the internet’ <sup>6</sup>
- 85% of 15-16 year olds in the UK have social networking profiles, with Facebook being the most popular. 37% have a media sharing platform (such as Instagram, Flickr) <sup>7</sup>
- A survey of ‘online adults’ (aged 16+) in NI found that Facebook and YouTube are equally used (65%) followed by WhatsApp (40%) and Twitter (33%). There is increasing use of photo-based communications such as Pinterest (26%), Snapchat(14%) and Instagram (12%) <sup>8</sup>
- An annual survey which tracks children and young people’s media behaviour in the UK found that ownership of tablet computers had increased by 50% within the past year <sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> NCB, 2015 <sup>2</sup> Ofcom, 2014 <sup>3</sup> Kids life and times, 2013 <sup>4</sup> Livingstone, 2011 <sup>5</sup> Ofcom, 2014

<sup>6</sup> YouthNet UK, 2011 <sup>7</sup> Mascheroni and Olafsson, 2013 <sup>8</sup> Ofcom, 2015 <sup>9</sup> Childwise, 2016

## Survey findings

Two online surveys were conducted – a 28-item questionnaire aimed at youth workers in full time provision (which has been defined for the purposes of this study as 20+ hours per week), and a shorter version for youth workers (paid or voluntary) working in settings of less than 20 hours per week (defined for the purposes of this study as ‘part time’).

Altogether there were **169 responses to the online surveys** (75 respondents from 20+ hour provision, and 94 from part time provision). Findings from the two surveys have been presented separately to show any variation between full and part time youth work settings. Some crosstabulations have also been included at the end of this chapter to show variation in responses between voluntary and statutory youth work provision.

Without access to a full list of email contacts, dissemination of the survey invitation relied on existing networks, websites and ‘snowball sampling’ - the consequence being that accurate response rates cannot be calculated. An estimated 20-30% of practitioners within full time settings funded either through EA or YCNI participated in the survey, with a considerably lower participation rate from those working in part time settings. It must also be recognised that youth workers who use ICT and/or have an interest in ICT may have been more inclined to complete the survey than those who do not, so creating bias in the responses and an overestimate of the extent of ICT use in youth work. Whilst this does not nullify all survey findings, this element of potential bias must be acknowledged.

**Table 1: A profile of the full-time sector respondents N=75**

Background variables		Percent of sample (%)
<b>Youth work setting</b>	Regional voluntary organisation	<b>43%</b>
	Local statutory service	<b>29%</b>
	Local voluntary service	<b>28%</b>
<b>Role</b>	Outreach/area worker	<b>35%</b>
	Centre based worker	<b>27%</b>
	Other	<b>38%</b>
<b>Position</b>	A paid full-time employee	<b>84%</b>
	A paid part-time employee	<b>14%</b>
	Volunteer	<b>2%</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	<b>47%</b>
	Female	<b>53%</b>

**Table 2: A profile of the part-time sector respondents N=94**

Background variables		Percent of sample (%)
<b>Youth work setting</b>	Uniformed youth group	<b>67%</b>
	Non-uniformed youth group	<b>33%</b>
<b>Sector</b>	Voluntary sector	<b>90%</b>
	Statutory sector	<b>10%</b>
<b>Position</b>	A paid employee	<b>20%</b>
	A volunteer	<b>80%</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	<b>49%</b>
	Female	<b>51%</b>

## Access to ICT equipment

Respondents were asked whether they had been provided with ICT equipment (either on a shared or own-use basis) by their employer/organisation. As indicated in Table 4, most of those in full time settings were provided with a mobile phone and computer/laptop for their own use, whereas access to games consoles, digital camera and digital video recorders in full time provision tended to be on a shared basis.

Respondents from part time settings (see Table 3) were less likely to have access to ICT equipment, although 42% had access to a laptop, and 34% to a digital camera (the survey of part-time did not ask whether access was on a shared or own-use basis).

### Q. Which of the following digital media tools are provided for youth work purposes by your employer/organisation?

	Full time %	Part time %
Mobile phone	79	28
Tablet	50	21
Laptop computer	81	42
Desktop computer	81	28
Games console	52	18
Digital camera	81	34
Digital video recorder	61	11

### Status of equipment provided – for shared or own-use [ full time ]

	Not provided %	Shared use %	Own use %
Mobile phone	21	10	69
Tablet	50	26	24
Laptop computer	19	34	46
Desktop computer	19	29	52
Games console	48	46	5
Digital camera	9	70	21
Digital video recorder	39	44	17

## EXTENT AND PURPOSE OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN YOUTH WORK

- ✓ 80% of respondents in full-time settings used some form of social media in their youth work compared to 68% of those in part-time settings.

Table 5 shows the various social media tools used in youth work over the last year. Facebook and YouTube are by far the most widely used, followed by Twitter to a lesser extent. One fifth of respondents from the full-time sector did not use any form of social media in their youth work - all but two of these respondents were full-time youth workers employed within the statutory sector. The survey of part-time provision shows a considerably more limited use of social media, with under a fifth of all respondents not using any application other than Facebook.

**Q. Over the past year, have you used any of the following social media tools in your work with young people?**

<b>Table 5</b>	Full-time (%)	Part-time (%)
Facebook	67	60
YouTube	60	18
Twitter	44	14
Skype	21	1
E-Learning	20	7
WhatsApp	19	8
Blogs	15	3
Other video sharing service	15	not asked
Instagram	15	4
Online discussion forum	13	2
Online games	13	1
Snapchat	9	3
Members page on website	8	not asked
Tumblr	5	0
Thunderclap	1	0

An open-ended question asked respondents to identify any other forms of social media they use. Responses were: Google Docs (1), Soundcloud (1) Google hangouts (1), Flickr (3), Slideshare (1) Oovoo (1) Vider (1)

**Purposes for social media**

Table 6 shows the purposes for which youth workers engage young people through social media. According to these results the most common purposes were for 'communication' and 'promotion of youth work activities' which applied to just over 60% of all respondents in the full-time sector. Furthermore, a significant proportion (approaching half of all respondents) use social media for the 'recruitment of young people' and for 'training and education purposes'. These results show a contrast with the much more limited application of social media in the part-time sector, particularly in regard to lobbying/campaigning and recruitment of young people.

**Q. For what purposes do you use social media in your youth work?**

<b>Table 6</b>	Full-time (%)	Part-time (%)
General communication with young people	60	67
Online Counselling	0	not asked
Lobbying / campaigning	32	7
Recruitment of young people	49	20
Training / education	42	not asked
Promotion of youth group activities	61	53
Bringing young people together in a virtual space	19	10

## THE USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN YOUTH WORK

- ✓ 89% of respondents from full time and 55% from part time provision had used some form of digital media in their youth work.

Table 7 lists the use of digital media in youth work programmes and compares their use between respondents from full-time and part-time provision. Film-making and digital photography are among the most frequently occurring uses of digital media in youth work programmes among respondents from the full-time sector. There are however other specialised uses of digital media, such as animation, graphic design and creative writing in which just under a fifth of full-time respondents involved in their youth work programmes. In contrast, digital photography is the only activity carried out by a significant proportion of youth work practitioners in the part-time sector (with a small amount of digital film and music production), and close to half the part-time respondents (45%) did not use digital media at all in their youth work programmes. It is therefore clear that the use of digital media points to a much higher level of development within full-time provision.

**Q. Over the past year, have you used any of the following digital media activities within your youth work programmes?**

	Full-time (%)	Part-time (%)
<b>Table 7</b>		
Film making	52	19
Digital music making	23	11
Digital photography	42	35
Digital animation	19	5
Graphic design	15	7
Gaming	14	7
Games design	1	4
Creative writing/digital booklets	17	6
Coding / programming	10	2
Website design	13	9

### Time spent on the use of social/digital media

Table 8 shows the time commitment given to the use of social and digital media within the full-time sector (part-time groups were not asked this question). The responses indicate that the use of ICT was not usually a major feature of weekly activities, with half of respondents using social and digital media for, on average, two or less hours per week, and a further quarter spending 3-5 hours.

**Q. On average, how many hours per week (excluding preparatory time) does your group/project spend using social/digital media or the internet for youth work purposes? [full time only]**

	Count	Percent (%)
<b>Table 8</b>		
None	9	12
1-2 hours	28	38
3-5 hours	18	25
6-10 hours	16	22
Over 15 hours	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>

### Use of external specialist support

Within the youth service there are some specialist voluntary organisations, as well as expert staff from the statutory sector, which can help to deliver ICT-based youth work within local groups. Survey respondents who indicated that they had used ICT in programmes were asked whether they had relied on in-house knowledge, whether they had used external facilitators, or a combination of both. The responses shown in Table 9 indicate that those from part time settings are less likely to have accessed external support.

#### Q. How have digital/social media tools been delivered in your youth work?

	Fulltime %	Part time %
Delivered using in-house expertise	54	79
Delivered by an external organisation or specialist	7	5
A combination of the above	39	16

### EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL / DIGITAL MEDIA IN SUPPORTING YOUTH WORK OUTCOMES

Based on their own experiences, respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of the use of ICT in supporting youth work outcomes by using a Likert scale ranging from “Highly effective” to “Very Ineffective”. Figure 1 shows the responses from the survey of the full-time sector. Generally, respondents had a favourable experience of the effectiveness of digital and social media across key youth work outcomes although there was some considerable variation. Social and digital media was rated as highly effective by 43% in terms of supporting citizenship, life and thinking skills and participation and advocacy. Although only 19% regarded it as highly effective in supporting improved health and well-being outcomes, almost half of the cohort still rated it as fairly effective.

**Figure 1: In your experience, how effective is digital/social media in supporting the following youth work outcomes FULL TIME (%)**

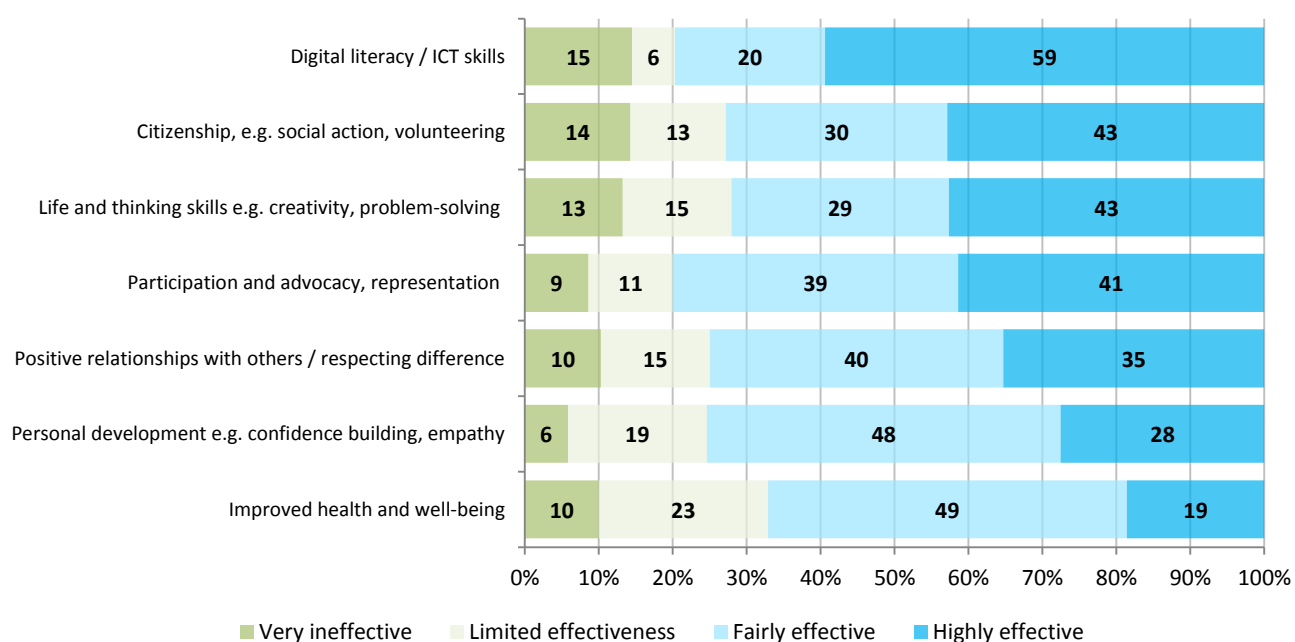


Table 10 compares the responses between the two surveys in terms of the perceived effectiveness of social and digital media in supporting youth work outcomes. The two responses for ‘fairly effective’ and ‘highly effective’ have been combined for this analysis. The comparison must be treated with some caution as between 30-40% of respondents from the part-time sector indicated ‘unsure’ or ‘N/A’ to these questions, and such responses have been factored out.

**Q. In your experience, how effective is digital/social media in supporting the following youth work outcomes?**

	Full-time	Part-time
<b>Table 10</b> % who indicated ‘fairly’ or ‘highly’ effective		
Personal development e.g. confidence building, empathy	76	62
Improved health and well-being	68	42
Participation and advocacy, representation etc	80	72
Positive relationships with others / respecting difference	75	63
Life and thinking skills e.g. creativity, problem-solving etc	72	77
Citizenship, e.g. social action, volunteering	73	65
Digital literacy / ICT skills	79	79

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to specify additional outcomes of ICT. The wide range of comments are summarised in Appendix ...

**Organisational policy for social media**

As shown in Table 11, 71% of respondents from the full-time sector had a policy for the use of social media, compared to 53% of part time. Significant minorities from both sectors were unsure whether their organisation had developed a social media policy

**Q. Has your organisation developed a policy for the use of social media in youth work?**

<b>Table 11</b>	Full-time (%)	Part-time (%)
Yes	71	53
No	15	30
Don't know	14	17

**TRAINING**

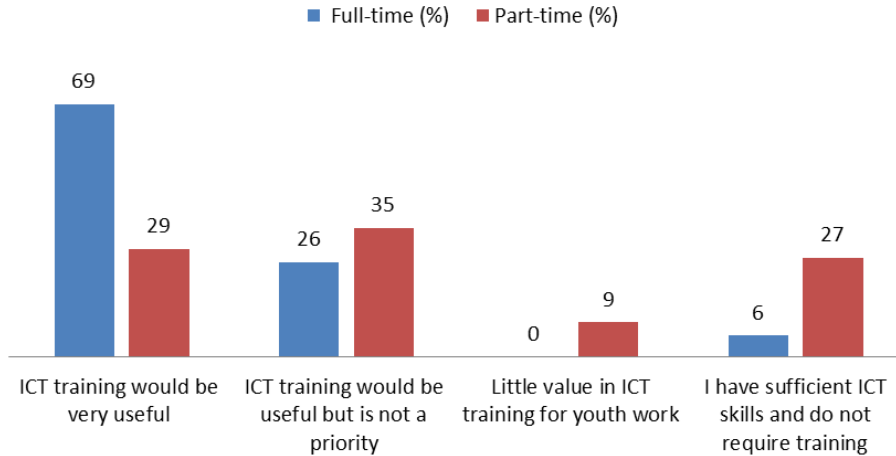
Respondents were asked whether they had received training in digital/social media during the past two years (see Table 12). Levels of training appear to be low, particularly within the part-time sector where less of a fifth of all respondents have not taken any work-related training in social and digital media over the last two years. Of those who did undertake training, the vast majority had received only one session and 10% had two training sessions.

**Q. During the past two years, have you undertaken training in digital/social media during your working hours?**

<b>Table 12</b>	Full time %	Part time %
ICT Training in past 2 years?		
Yes	37	18
No	63	82

Respondents were asked about their need for further training. The results (shown in Figure 2) show marked differences in perceptions between the full-time and part-time sectors. The vast majority of respondents from full time settings attached greater value to further training, whereas over one-third of part-time sector respondents saw little or no value in further training. This may be a reflection of the more limited scope and restricted practice of social and digital media in part time settings.

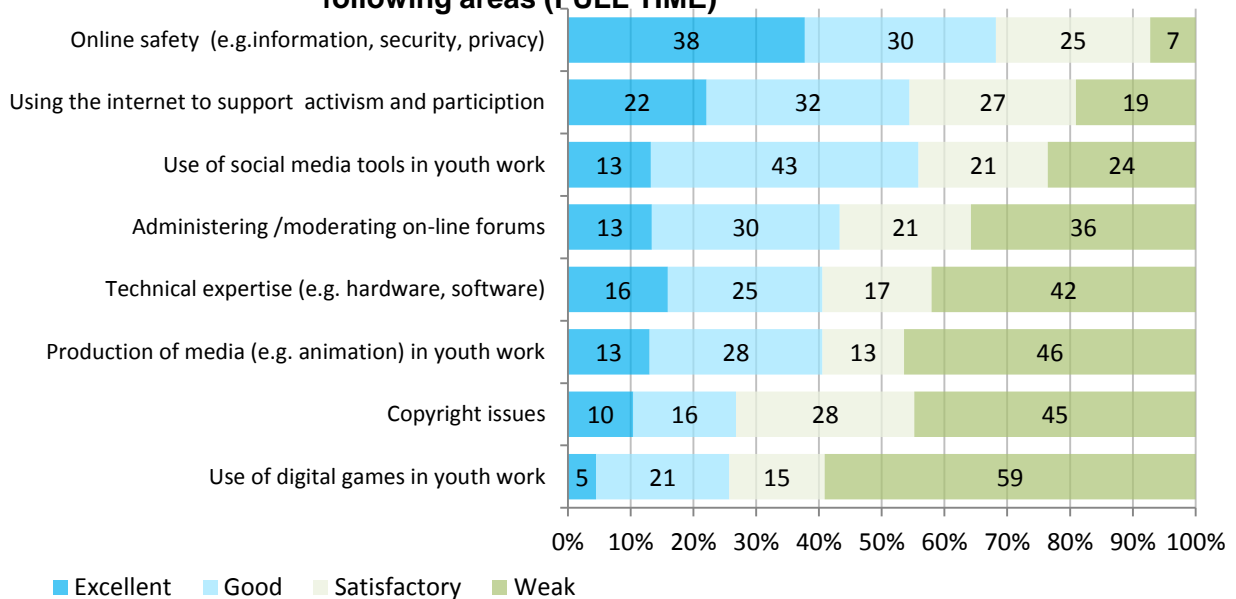
**Figure 2: Further training in ICT**



**Evaluation of professional expertise**

Respondents to the survey of the full-time sector were asked to evaluate their professional expertise in various aspects of ICT in their youth work practice. The area where respondents rated their expertise most positively was in ensuring online safety (68% rated as excellent or good) and using social media tools in youth work was rated positively by well over half of respondents (although only 13% perceived their practice to be excellent). Using the internet to support activism and participation was another area of proficiency with over a fifth rating their practice as excellent, and a further third rated as good. Areas of self-evaluated weakness included copyright issues, technical expertise (hardware and software) and a very clear need for support in the production of media (such as animation, video and music) and using digital games in youth work.

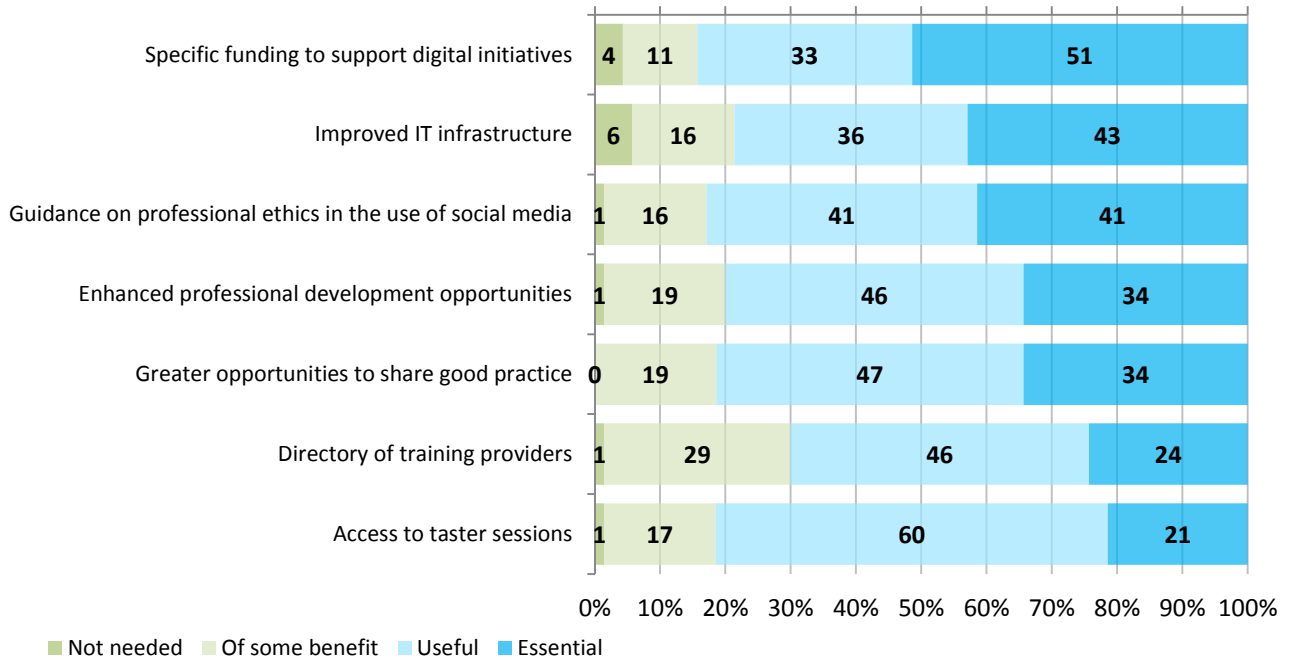
**Figure 3: How would you evaluate your professional expertise in the following areas (FULL TIME)**



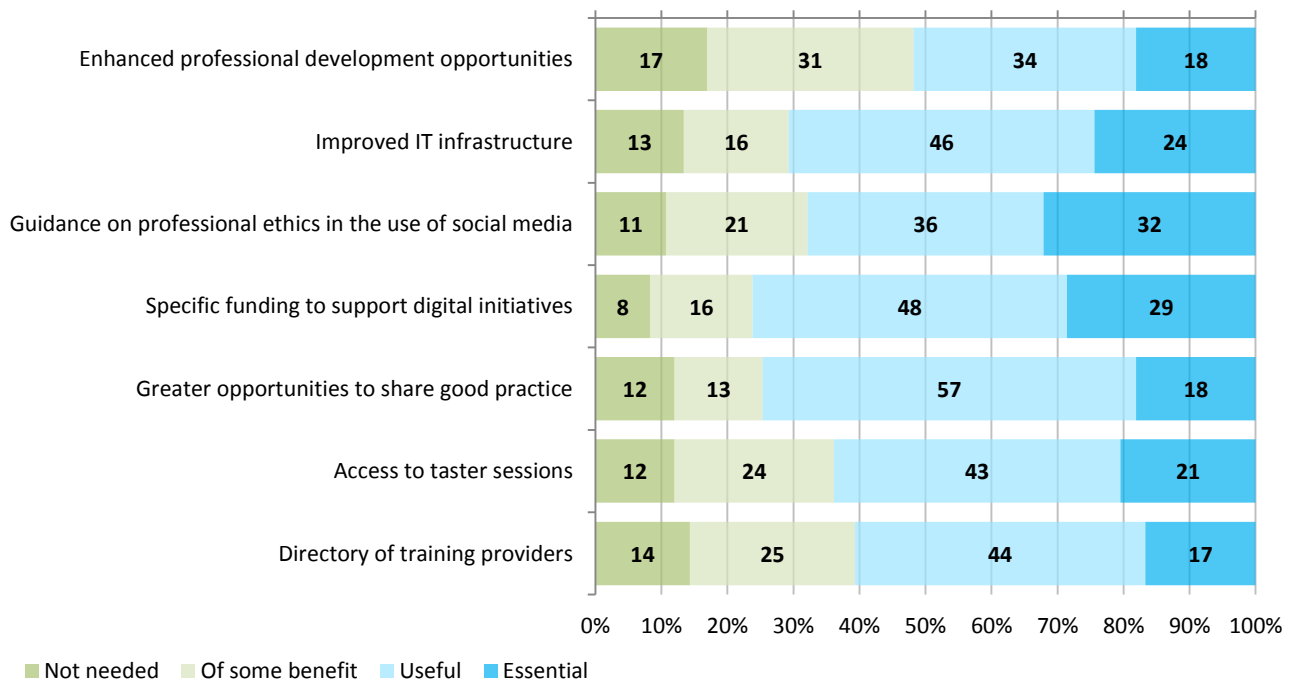
## SUPPORTS NEEDED FOR THE USE OF SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Survey respondents were asked whether various items would be useful in supporting ICT within their organisation. The results are presented in Figures 4 and 5 below and indicate a wide range of supports needed, particularly among those in full time settings

**Figure 4: Supports needed for ICT in youth work (FULL TIME) %**



**Figure 5: Supports needed for ICT in youth work (PART TIME)%**



## BARRIERS TO THE USE OF SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA IN YOUTH WORK

Based on their own youth work, respondents were asked indicate which barriers they faced to developing social and digital media. Responses are presented in Table 13.

The overwhelming majority of respondents strongly refuted any lack of interest on the part of young people (no respondents agreed that this was a barrier). Similarly, the age of young people they worked with, and doubts about the value of ICT to their youth work practice, were not viewed as barriers. Rather, concern about child protection, a lack of infrastructure, prohibitive costs and a lack of time within working hours (including being able to keep up to date on ICT developments) were ranked as barriers. Almost three-quarters of employers were perceived as being supportive, of which the majority rated at the maximum level.

**Table 13:** The statements below refer to possible reasons why the use of digital and social media in youth work may not be fully developed

Please select the statements you feel apply to you in regards to your youth work.

FULL TIME %	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Rating Average
I am concerned about child protection and online safety	20	27	20	24	9	3.3
Prohibitive costs (eg. purchasing hardware and software licences)	19	27	24	20	10	3.2
It is hard to keep up with the pace of change in the ICT sector	11	41	16	19	13	3.2
Insufficient time within my work hours	14	26	23	21	16	3.0
I do not have sufficient infrastructure (eg. internet connection/hardware)	9	32	15	28	17	2.9
I feel I do not have sufficient ICT skills	7	26	17	28	22	2.7
My employer or supervisor has prevented access to some websites/social media	19	16	9	26	31	2.6
My employer or supervisor does not support the use of ICT in my youth work	6	7	14	31	41	2.0
I feel that ICT does not bring added value to my youth work	0	1	11	36	51	1.6
The use of social/digital media is not appropriate to the age group I work with	0	0	10	36	54	1.6
Young people are not interested in ICT in a youth work setting	0	0	10	26	64	1.5

The **Ratings Average** is an indication of the importance placed on each support for social and digital media in youth work derived from averaging responses on the Likert scale, scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

Respondents from part time settings were presented with a slightly shorter list of potential barriers, as shown in Table 14. Although most patterns found in the full-time sector are mirrored in the part-time sector, there are some notable differences. Those from part time settings were more likely to agree or strongly agree that ICT does not bring added value to their work (20% from part time compared to 1% from full time)

**Table 14:** The statements below refer to possible reasons why the use of digital and social media in youth work may not be fully developed

Please select the statements you feel apply to you in regards to your youth work

<b>PART TIME %</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>
Prohibitive costs (eg. purchasing hardware and software licences)	38	35	14	8	2	<b>4.0</b>
I am concerned about child protection and online safety	34	37	10	11	4	<b>3.9</b>
I do not have sufficient infrastructure (eg. internet connection/hardware)	26	42	15	16	7	<b>3.6</b>
I feel that ICT does not bring added value to my youth work	9	11	11	37	12	<b>2.7</b>
My employer or supervisor does not support the use of ICT in my youth work	7	10	9	26	16	<b>2.7</b>
I feel I do not have sufficient ICT skills	6	20	17	39	14	<b>2.6</b>
The use of social/digital media is not appropriate to the age group I work with	9	7	23	40	26	<b>2.3</b>
Young people are not interested in ICT in a youth work setting	6	7	24	35	31	<b>2.2</b>

The **Ratings Average** is an indication of the importance placed on each support for social and digital media in youth work derived from averaging responses on the Likert scale, scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

### Using the internet in youth work

Table 15 relates to the attitude of respondents from full time settings towards the use of the internet in working with young people (the survey of part-time sector did not include these questions). There is overwhelming agreement that more use should be made of the internet in youth work and that young people are skilled in its use. Over half of the respondents however did not think that interacting with young people on the internet had the same value as face-to-face contact.

**Table 15** Please indicate your agreement with the following statements (FULL TIME)

%	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Rating Average
Young people are skilled internet users	39	49	7	6	0	4.2
The internet should be used more in youth work	41	43	14	1	0	4.24
Meeting a young person on the internet is just as valuable as meeting a young person face-to-face	6	24	19	24	28	2.56
The internet is difficult to use in youth group activities	3	13	39	32	13	2.61

The Ratings Average is an indication of the importance placed on each support for social and digital media in youth work derived from averaging responses on the Likert scale, scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

### Future use of social and digital media in youth work

The overwhelming majority of respondents to both surveys anticipate that their use of social and digital media in youth work will increase (see Table 16)

**Q. Thinking of your work with young people over the coming three years, do you think the use of social/ digital media will increase, decrease, or stay the same?**

Table 16	Full-time (%)	Part-time (%)
Increase	86	86
Decrease	1	15
Stay same	13	0

### A comparison of findings between the FT statutory and voluntary sectors

Of the respondents from full-time provision, 29% were based in the statutory sector, and 71% in the voluntary sector (eg voluntary youth clubs or a regional voluntary organisation)

Table 17 Youth work setting		
Full-time sector	Response %	Response Count
Local statutory service	29%	20
Voluntary centre/project including RVYO	71%	48

Some important differences were noted following a comparison of the survey responses of youth work practitioners in the voluntary and statutory sectors within the survey of the full-time sector, although it

is important to bear in mind that the validity of these results may be undermined by small numbers of respondents. From Table 18, it is clear there is a much greater time commitment to social and digital media in voluntary sector settings, with 89% of respondents in the statutory sector spending less than 2 hours per week. Two-thirds of voluntary respondents spent over 3 hours, of which half spent up to 10 hours per week on ICT.

**Table 18** On average, how many hours per week (excluding preparatory time) does your group/project spend using social/digital media or the internet for youth work purposes? (full time sector)

Hours per week spent on social/digital media	Statutory (%)	Voluntary (%)
0-2 hours	89	33
3 + hours	11	67

Although there was more time spent on ICT within the voluntary sector, the statutory sector appears to be better resourced. For example, whereas 47% of statutory respondents have their own tablet, this applies to only 17% of voluntary respondents. Statutory respondents generally tend to have hardware components (games consoles, mobile phones, digital cameras etc) supplied for their own use, as opposed to the shared use which is much more prevalent in the voluntary sector.

Table 19 shows some of the barriers to the use of social and digital media in youth work. This again suggests that the statutory sector is better resourced than the voluntary, with only 15% of the former citing prohibitive costs as an barrier to ICT in their youth work and 16% as citing insufficient infrastructure. Nevertheless, it is also clear that employers in the statutory sector tend to be perceived as less supportive of the use of ICT in youth work.

**Table 19:** The statements below refer to possible reasons why the use of digital and social media in youth work may not be fully developed. Please select the statements you feel apply to you in regards to your youth work.

Barriers to ICT use (%agree with statements – full time sector)	Statutory (%)	Voluntary (%)
Prohibitive costs (eg. purchasing hardware and software licences)	15	56
Insufficient time within my work hours	50	35
I do not have sufficient infrastructure (eg. internet connection/hardware)	16	40
I feel I do not have sufficient ICT skills	53	27
My employer or supervisor does not support the use of ICT in my youth work	40	2

It is also worth noting that respondents in the statutory sector consistently rated their own expertise in social and digital media less positively than their counterparts in the voluntary sector, particularly in technical issues, copyright issues and moderating on-line forums (including internet use generally). Related to this point, 50% of statutory respondents rated 'enhanced professional development opportunities' as essential, compared to 30% of voluntary respondents.

## Focus groups

To supplement data from the online surveys, four focus groups were held with youth workers attending an ICT-themed 'Sharing the learning' event hosted at the Belfast Science Park in June 2015. Participants in the focus groups were youth workers from both statutory and voluntary settings, and from regional and local youth groups. The majority of those attending had personal experience of the use of digital media in their youth work, although distinct differences emerged between voluntary and statutory participants in terms of using social media in youth work. In total 28 youth workers took part in the focus groups, which lasted for an hour and were audio recorded.

### Extent and purposes of using Social media in youth work

Experiences of the use of social media as a youth work tool were markedly different between workers from the voluntary and statutory sectors. All participants from voluntary sector groups reported using a range of social media tools for a variety of purposes. Facebook, YouTube and Twitter were the most commonly mentioned, used primarily for:

- ✓ communication with membership
- ✓ recruitment of young people
- ✓ promotion of events and activities
- ✓ celebration and showcasing young people's achievements
- ✓ keeping parents/community informed about activities

Beyond these communication functions, participants described using social media to support the personal development and social education of young people, most particularly in the areas of citizenship, participation, self advocacy, health awareness, issue based work, diversity/inclusion and campaigning. Some practical examples of the applications of social media included :

- *Use of 'Text Anywhere' service for communication*
- *Use of social media channels to raise awareness of disability*
- *We use Soundcloud for our LGBT work in terms of young people and their stories of coming out*
- *We have our closed Facebook pages, our open youth club pages, project pages, a staff page...*
- *We used a live twitter feed for young people who couldn't attend (a campaign seminar)*
- *Use of YouTube to showcase young people's skills*
- *It's a good way to get live feedback, to get what young are thinking at that time*
- *We only use social media in our work with young people, we don't contact them through any other method, it's only through social media...we don't get a response through any other way*
- *Publicising surveys, showing quotes, celebrating events and posting photographs*

### Use of social media in campaigning and citizenship

Several participants described using social media platforms and/or interactive web forums to support young people's participation, political engagement, engaging in debate about social issues, and lobbying. These examples often involved young people identifying issues of concern or interest to them and taking the lead role in contacting local councillors, non departmental public bodies, and members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Examples were given where this initial social media contact led to face to face meetings with politicians and/or prolonged engagement with local councils.

Youth workers highlighted the immediacy of social media in supporting young people having a voice, and suggested that the visibility and accessibility of social media has served to 'narrow the gap' between young people and those in positions of power.

*Young people can contact MLAs (Members of the Local Assembly)*

*Anytime we're running a campaign we use a hashtag*

### **Use of social media to build and sustain relationships**

Several participants described the value of social media in maintaining the relationships which had developed during youth work programmes

*(social media allows)... a lot more interaction with young people...a lot of them are living in isolated rural communities and don't always have access to community halls or club halls, so being on-line gives them more opportunity to communicate*

*Workshops only go on for so long, and the worry is that you leave young people back in their house...Facebook lets them continue friendships on-line*

### **Use of social media to foster mutual understanding**

Several participants specifically referred to the value of social media in breaking down barriers between young people and supporting a greater understanding of difference (this is particularly pertinent in the post-conflict context of Northern Ireland, where youth work continues to play an important role in reconciliation and community relations)

*In our project we worked with young people from different communities, I'm not saying it (ICT) solved all the problems, but it allowed a common language, to talk together, do together, there were no barriers to it*

*For our work with young people it has opened up so many avenues to connect young people locally, nationally and internationally. We had an event on Friday night and we had young people from Zambia, young people from Kosova, young people from Larne, young people from Cork...all logging in....That to me is amazing, young people can see what each other is like and can learn from each other...it can break down barriers*

### **Social media in the statutory youth work sector**

An issue which dominated all focus group discussion related to social media in statutory youth work settings. The widespread and often daily use of social media by voluntary sector participants contrasted sharply with those from statutory youth groups who are largely excluded from using social media, other than e-mail. Several participants highlighted that the source of these restrictions lay in the overarching policy within the statutory Education Authority, and not specifically with youth service management or youth service policy.

*The management above me are all positive about implementing ICT...management are arguing the case and it's important to note that's happening, it's not everyone above saying 'no'*

However there was a strong sense that a rigid implementation of Safeguarding and Child protection policies in the statutory sector was proving counter-productive in a youth work context and that it failed to address the reality of young people's social media use.

*Whether we access it (social media) or not, it's what young people are used to...we need to be able to support and challenge their behaviour, not ignore it*

*This is their everyday life, it's the environment they are existing in...we need to address it. We're operating outside of the circle in which young people exist*

In all focus groups there was consensus that the use of social media is the norm for young people

*A lot of young people tell us "our online life is our life", it's not like they have an offline life and an online life, this is their life*

*'The culture today IS social media'*

In this context, many participants from the statutory sector expressed frustration that blocked access to social media was limiting their opportunities to reach out and engage with young people, failing to reflect young people's lifestyles, reducing the opportunity to support and educate young people in their responsible use of the internet, and ultimately there was a fear that it could make youth work appear inaccessible or outdated in the eyes of young people

*Because we don't have a social media policy, we can't educate the kids how to look after themselves*

*The youth club is becoming less and less about the physical building and more about how we communicate*

*It's at that stage now that you're more unusual if you're not doing it (social media) than if you are*

It was suggested that, given a fundamental premise of youth work is to 'start where young people are at' the use of social media should be an essential and everyday tool for the youth worker.

*Youth work ultimately is relational, and social media is relational...so we're cutting off a part of the way we can further relate to young people*

*The value is that you are going to where young people are, if you don't do it (social media) then you're missing out on interaction with the young people you're working with. By not communicating with young people where they are, you're missing out*

## Extent and purposes of using digital media in youth work

Participants described using a wide range of digital media within their youth work, including coding, podcasts, photography, music, film and animation. Digital media was primarily used :

- ✓ To support issue-based projects
- ✓ To support self advocacy, citizenship and campaigning
- ✓ As a basis for groupwork, especially with communities of interest and marginalised young people
- ✓ To provide opportunities for creativity and self-expression
- ✓ To support digital literacy and skills development

Some practical examples of the applications of digital media included :

- *Raising awareness of issues through use of storyboards in digital comic books*
- *Digital music making projects, young people work together to create playlists and learn DJ skills*
- *Using film, podcasting, photography and animation in a way which involves young people in decision-making and raises confidence*
- *Video-production on issues which impact young people, for example 'Stop the Bully' campaign*
- *We use film to explore sexuality and relationships*
- *Comic Life software... they take photos and create the narrative story about an issue, it can be real life or fictional*
- *We used technology to help develop community relations between urban and rural young people*
- *We use comic software to interact with young people under 11 for community relations work*

## Digital media for self-expression and advocacy

Regardless of the type of digital media used, one of the most frequently mentioned purposes was to support groups of young people to explore, articulate and present issues of concern to them.

*We use a range of media to give young people a voice to raise issues that affect them, especially looking at issues of personal development and where young people are at. We use media to get young people's voices out there*

*In terms of advocacy and youth participation, digital media allows young people to have a voice and to make decisions...it can add amazing value to young people having a voice, and to their whole creativity*

*With digital media, young people are involved in the entire creative process*

## Digital Film-making

Although participants described using a variety of digital media, film-making was the most frequently mentioned, and was described as particularly popular with young people. Participants highlighted the versatility of this form of media which they felt lends itself perfectly to the youth work process. Examples were given of how the filmmaking process - from initial planning stages, scriptwriting, filming, to production and promotion - enabled young people to develop their team-working skills, their creativity, and to take an active role in decision making. The film-making process and end-product combined to give young people a powerful sense of achievement. Several participants highlighted that the use of digital film making was also particularly valuable in working inclusively and in enabling marginalised young people or those from communities of interest to identify and work on issues which impacted them.

*It's an output that young people have produced, a sense of achievement, it's about raising their confidence. They make a video about an issue and then showcase it online to the wider public and at events, it can be LGBT issues, mental health, disability*

One participant described how creative film production allowed LGBT young people to express their views without the pressure of identifying themselves.

*We've used digital media for advocacy with young people, especially young people who don't necessarily want to be identified, but their stories are really powerful, so there's a creative way of making a video without showing their face but getting their story across to people...it's a very effective tool to give them a voice*

Completed films were often uploaded onto YouTube channels and/or shown at conferences and celebratory events. Several participants noted that this dissemination provided opportunity for less confident young people to articulate their views

*It helps give them a voice because it helps them present something that, if they were to stand and verbally present, the message would be lost. And they can spend time developing and putting together a really professional sounding message of what they wanted to say, so I think it's an excellent forum to allow that*

*We would use it..for really shy children who would never dream of getting on a stage and talking about something..we hit the play button and the kids sit under the big screen and it works really well*

*Technology is an enabler, it can allow people to do things they didn't think they were able to do*

## Digital media supporting social inclusion

Many participants described the effectiveness of digital media in supporting inclusive youth work with young people with disabilities, LGBT, young parents and those from isolated rural communities. Those working with young people with learning disabilities also highlighted the accessibility of new forms of technology, and the importance of supporting young people to develop digital skills

*We educate them (young people with learning disabilities) to use digital tools and develop their literacy skills. If they're not educated to use those tools then they're excluded from our now digital society*

*We've found that a lot of technology nowadays is made with less depth, so its more accessible, especially things like i phones and tablets, are more accessible for people with a learning disability because there's more simple steps, easier to follow.*

## **The value and contribution of the use of social/digital media in youth work**

Many participants reiterated the opinion that, as technology is engrained in the everyday lives of young people, the use of ICT should also be embedded in the delivery of youth work. When asked about the distinctive value of social/digital media in youth work, participants identified the following :

- Technology is effective as a vehicle to help young people express themselves
- A new way of reaching out to and engaging young people, especially those that are hardest to reach
- A vehicle to explore and increase understanding of a whole range of issues, and to refresh the ways of exploring longstanding issues, eg. drugs
- A mechanism for youth workers and young people together to promote the value and impact of youth work
- Digital media allows young people to take control, they can take the lead, own the process, and learn at their own pace and interest level
- ICT empowers young people, they can express themselves and their issues
- ICT can be gender neutral, and creates inclusiveness
- Social media has age restrictions, but digital media is suitable for all ages
- Social media provides an immediate platform to young people to challenge politically
- ICT is an incentive for young people to become involved
- Digital media provides a process for youth work projects
- ICT helps to bring about a sense of belonging, and to develop creativity
- Allows young people to present their voice in a professional way
- Encourages the development of skills but with a sense of fun which is motivational
- Young people are comfortable using an ICT platform
- ICT has been an enabler that has given many young people the opportunity to experience new things and increase their skills
- It is a common language for all young people
- ICT has helped drive attendance and attract new members
- Social media has offered the opportunity to harness and build on the skills and talents of young people allowing them to play a key role in creating and maintaining an online community

## **ICT and young people's motivation**

Many participants described how the young people they work with are enthused by projects based on social/digital media, that multimedia was seen by young people as a 'fun' way to work on issues and projects, and that ICT-based projects could motivate and engage young people who would ordinarily be reluctant to take part in groupwork or express a view.

*Young people are so well used to technology, if you give them opportunities young people just run away with it*

*There's a sense of fun with multimedia, and that's what they love about it...the work that's involved to make something very positive about them, that sense of achievement...and there's a lot of fun in making it*

*Social media is fun, and it's free*

*Anyone can get involved if they're given the right tool...it doesn't matter if they're male or female, it can be quite inclusive and creates a real energy*

## Compatibility with the youth work curriculum

Many participants referred to technology as a 'tool', 'vehicle' or 'enabler' for effective youth work, rather than an end in itself. Learning to use media was seen as the pull or attraction for young people, but participants suggested that the value was less about building technical skills and more about providing a new approach to deliver traditional youth work.

Participants highlighted the versatility of social and digital media, and the synergy with the curricular themes and principles (see Appendix 4). Examples were given of how ICT had been used to support groupwork and team building, how it was used to involve young people in planning and decision making, in offering experiential learning, as a focus for issue based work, and a means to harness young people's interests. The value of social and digital media was viewed, first and foremost therefore, as a mechanism which supports established youth work values, processes and curricular principles.

*Youth work values are what's most important, and then we build the technology around that*

*Its less about building technical skills and more about being a tool to express themselves, and it's really vital for that....as a youth worker I see a success story when people who really struggle in a group, or struggle to be part of a project, suddenly find they can really get engaged with it*

*It's the innovative nature of it that young people can tap into, that they're not sitting in a room talking, but they can actually put across their learning and development through digital media, it can be as interactive as they want it to be. Someone who doesn't like to be in front of the camera can be behind the camera, and can be learning different skills*

*It's a great carrot to engage young people, young people are attracted to participate more because they're involved in the process. Also it adds value to their lives and helps their confidence and self esteem, but also having that sense of a finished product at the end, that sense of achievement...And also for staff involved, it allows staff to engage more with young people because there's a whole process involved. If you look at it in a holistic sense, especially for issue-based projects and using digital media as the vehicle, it brings the two together, so it adds value to the youth work aspect of personal development*

## Reservations about ICT in youth work

Although the vast majority of comments were positive, it was noted that a small number of participants in the focus groups (and online surveys) felt that ICT could be intrusive or a 'distraction' in a youth work context and/or that young people had enough access to technology in their school and home lives. The message was that ICT offers a powerful tool for youth workers, but it is the way in which this tool is used which will determine its effectiveness in supporting youth work.

Concern was also expressed about the provision of hardware to youth centres without ensuring sufficient training, or with overly restrictive web filters. The appropriateness of using social media in youth work with younger children was noted given that social networking sites such as Facebook have a minimum age limit of 13. It was also suggested that using online tools for young people to record their learning achievements could be perceived as bureaucratic and not contributing to positive outcomes. The comment was also made that, whilst additional investment would help to develop the use of ICT, this should not be drawn from mainstream youth service funding.

## Challenges and solutions

When asked about blockages and enablers to ICT in youth work, there was a high level of consistency across the four focus groups. The main enablers which were identified were: resources, commitment, workforce development and practice support. Conversely, the list of blockages included restricted access, lack of guidance, low level skills, and risk-averse mindsets. The responses are summarised below

ENABLERS	BLOCKAGES
Commitment and positive attitudes about the use of social and digital media, including having a 'champion' to promote its value as a youth work tool	The concerns with safeguarding, child protection and minimising organisational risk are too rigid, eg blocked access to wifi, blocks on social media and filtered websites create a huge barrier to the potential use of ICT as a youth work tool
Sustained and strategic investment : a capital budget for ICT which includes staff training in digital media: ring-fenced funds for ICT to encourage organisations to embrace the potential of this approach to youth work	No consistency in policies, or an absence of policies – no guidelines, lack of direction or development at sectoral level
Opportunities for skills development, knowledge transfer : access to ongoing training	Lack of knowledge and expertise, reluctance to embrace ICT, fear factor
IT infrastructure – physical resources and well maintained, fit for purpose equipment (although not necessarily ICT suites – huge potential in use of portable devices )	Use of different systems across the sector means software may not transfer to other organisations
Willingness of staff, including volunteers, to engage	Risk-averse mindsets, which can be at senior level, among some practitioners, and/or parental fears about social media
Having access to experts who are 'IT savvy' both within organisations and across the sector	Over-reliance on experts or key people within organisations – lack of skills transfer
Freedom to take measured risks	A culture of mistrust – suspicion about social media and an expectation that it will be misused by either practitioners or young people. A potential demonising of young people in terms of their social media usage
Opportunities for collaboration to make best use of existing skills and resources across sectors and organisations : potential for joint projects, sharing of skills, signposting among organisations, learning from each other	A 'head in the sand' attitude which fails to recognise young people's realities and avoids the need to support young people in e-safety
Guidelines in the use of social media (although a single policy may not suit such a diverse sector). Guidelines which give staff clear boundaries – need to have a safe environment to ensure workers and young people are protected from potential harm	Lack of proactivity in the formal education sector to address and educate young people about online behaviour
Access to free software	Expensive equipment

## Strategic actions on a sector-wide basis

Participants were asked what strategic actions they felt would be needed at a service-wide level to support the development of digital and social media in youth work.

### A high level commitment to an ICT strategy, and policy directive to support this approach to youth work

The need for a clear policy directive to support ICT, for high-level commitment and/or a youth service 'champion' for ICT was identified in many of the focus groups. Conversely, the absence of any reference to ICT within 'Priorities for Youth' seen to inhibit sector-wide progress

*The challenge is how ICT is going to be integrated when it's hardly mentioned in policy*

*The potential for youth work to be more effective is in IT, but I don't think there are the resources or the commitment from the Education Authority or from government to fund it*

*We need an ICT champion for youth work*

There was also a sense that social/digital media should be recognised as a fundamental part of young people's lives, and that the sector must respond to this reality

*We need an awareness of the importance of ICT, that it isn't going to go away, this isn't a passing fad. I think sometimes our policymakers, our high management, believe that if we don't do anything then next year it'll be something different*

*The youth service needs to move with the times*

### A youth service strategy for ICT, supported by sustained investment

A policy commitment was seen as a prerequisite to the development of a sector-wide ICT strategy, which would provide the vision, direction and sustained investment to develop both social and digital media in youth work. Whilst several participants reflected that short-term project funding had allowed them to introduce ICT into their programmes, the need for longer term investment to sustain this was highlighted. Many participants also suggested that a coherent strategy should address all key barriers in this area, including funding, workforce development and infrastructure

*There isn't a silver bullet...we need to take this in the round, we need the people with the skills, we need the staff to co-ordinate the volunteers, we need equipment to deliver it...there's no one bit of it which would solve it all*

*They (policymakers) need to see the importance of investing in it*

In the context of the implementation of Priorities for Youth, it was suggested that a commitment to an ICT strategy for youth work should be included in the Regional Youth Development Plan.

In terms of investment in infrastructure, several participants noted that this did not necessarily equate to IT suites or expensive software. Instead, participants identified the potential to use portable devices and young people's own smart phones, free apps and downloads, and to make greater use of shared facilities.

### Relaxation of the restrictions on social media within the statutory sector, and a proactive approach by the youth service to address eSafety.

Many participants perceived a widening gap within the youth service, in which the relative autonomy in the voluntary sector had allowed innovative use of ICT compared to slower progress within the statutory sector. Participants strongly felt that the barriers to social media and internet access faced by the statutory sector should be relaxed.

*The Education Authority needs to play catch up...the voluntary sector will push on and take the risks (we need)...a policy that allows you. That sees ICT as an opportunity*

In light of concerns about safeguarding and child protection, there was also a strong sense that the service as a whole should play a more proactive role in educating young people about eSafety and responsible use of the internet (this proposal is relevant to a supporting recommendation from the Marshall report (2014) which was published following the Marshall inquiry into child sexual exploitation).

*The danger is more if we don't get involved than if we do*

*Schools aren't doing enough to educate young people about online activities...the fact they're not doing much around it is putting pressure on the youth sector, that they are potentially the only people speaking to young people about this...yes, there are risks, but the risks are lower than what you can gain from it*

*People blame the technology, not the people. What's needed are educational programmes in terms of how you behave appropriately online, for young people and staff*

### Access to a resource hub leading to a fuller demonstration of the value of ICT as a tool for creativity and participation within youth work

Whilst there are already a number of trainers and technical staff who support social/digital media in the youth sector, it was suggested that there should also be a central resource which would be accessible to both the voluntary and statutory sector. This would facilitate practice development and promote the value of social/digital media in youth work.

*Because ICT changes so fast and it's hard to keep up, and because every time you write a policy within a year something new has come out, there needs to be a strategic hub who are constantly addressing new and emerging ICT, they would be progressive in terms of how we as a youth service embrace ICT, as opposed to just keeping up, how we embrace it and use it as part of our work*

*We need to share practice, publish case studies, constantly promote the value of ICT in youth work and demonstrate the impact on young people*

### Development of partnerships and opportunities for collaboration, at both organisational and sector-wide levels and beyond

Participants felt that high levels of expertise already exist within some voluntary sector organisations and among statutory sector IT personnel, and that there were huge opportunities to share expertise and facilities through collaborative projects and partnerships. It was suggested that joint working could extend beyond voluntary/statutory partnerships, to tap into the knowledge and expertise within academia and the tech industry.

It was felt that a resource hub could facilitate this, but in practical terms there could also be a specific funding stream to support consortia and collaborations.

### Organisational policy and/or sectoral guidance the use of social media in particular

Some participants identified a need for sectoral guidelines to support the use of social media, although others from the voluntary sector noted that their organisation had already developed ICT policies to guide staff, and felt that a single sector-wide policy would be neither necessary nor appropriate. Others suggested that a code of practice or guidance on the development of social media policies would be useful, and that practitioners need clarity on the professional boundaries for social media

*We need a good policy around it, red amber and green in terms of things that you cannot do, things that you can do, and things that you need to make a professional judgement about*

*I don't think child protection should stop it, if it's done right. The difficulty is, because there's a lack of policy on it, then people go and do it themselves, and that's where they're falling down, because they're doing it wrong. What we need is a strategic way...someone to say, this is how you do it safely, this is how you do it within the guidelines, but there's an absence of that at the minute. It's never been allowed to develop*

### Opportunities for continuous professional development

Given the rapid pace of technological change, participants felt that regular, accessible and flexible training was essential for staff and volunteers. It was felt that workforce development should be practical and *'something you can immediately make use of'*

Participants suggested that the design of ICT training should include creative and interactive courses, symposiums, and a focus on hands-on learning. In terms of who should avail of training, it was felt that there tends to be a dependency on expert individuals within organisations, whereas wider training should *bring all staff up to speed with ICT*

One participant suggested that ICT should be offered as a distinct module in professional youth work qualifications, whilst another suggested there is scope to learn from other organisations who have delivered ICT training to the voluntary and community sectors (eg NICVA)

<b>Organisation</b>	Mencap in Northern Ireland
<b>Project name</b>	IT's Politics Project
<b>Website</b>	www.mencap.org.uk
<b>Social media links</b>	@Mencap_NI Mencap in Northern Ireland (facebook)



<b>Project target group</b>
The participants were young people with a learning disability, aged between 16 and 25 living in Northern Ireland. A total of 24 young people were engaged, 17 living in Belfast and 7 living in Omagh, county Tyrone.

<b>Aims(s)</b>
The aim of the project was to use ICT, social media and peer led workshops to encourage young people with a learning disability to become actively involved in their community by helping them understand their opportunities, rights and responsibilities as citizens and to become actively engaged in political life. The project also supported young people with a learning disability to understand their right to vote, engage in politics and talk about the issues that are important to them.

<b>Activities, programmes and services</b>
<p>The project was delivered primarily through a combination of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Workshops on topics such as e-safety, social media, rights and responsibilities, voting, the role of politicians and having your voice heard.</li> <li>- Online information and guidance to provide young people with a learning disability with the skills, information and confidence to become actively and safely engaged in the political process.</li> <li>- Completion of an OCNNI level 3 module on E-Safety delivered by the LiveNet project.</li> <li>- Setting-up of a twitter account @ITspoliticsproj for the participants to use and interact with each other and politicians.</li> <li>- Celebration and husting event in the run up to the 2015 general election with 4 candidates. The Belfast group created a video invite encouraging other young people with a learning disability to come along to the event.</li> </ul>

<b>Outputs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 24 young people successful completed a series of workshops</li> <li>- 17 Young people received an OCN Level 3 module in E-Safety</li> <li>- Over 70 people attended the two celebration events</li> <li>- 100% said they know more about being safe online</li> <li>- 100% said they think ICT is important and useful</li> <li>- 100% have more confidence about using social media to have their voice heard</li> <li>- 90% said they know more about their rights, after completing the project.</li> <li>- 86% know who makes important decisions for Northern Ireland, after completing the project</li> <li>- 75% indicated they would vote in an election, after completing the project.</li> </ul>

### Outcomes

Young people enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people and develop/widen positive peer relationships.

Young people developed their thinking, life and work skills, e.g. communication, planning and creativity and gained confidence and skills in using digital and social media

<http://youtu.be/j2zqcebhOoo>

Young people increased their participation by taking on a representative role in their through communication with politicians and other adults and, in doing so, increased their understanding of the importance of having their voice heard in politics.

Young people's knowledge, understanding and capacity for active citizenship was enhanced through their increased awareness of decision-making in Northern Ireland and many indicated they were more likely to vote in an election.

### Staff training

- Staff and volunteers involved in the project used a range of new ICT equipment throughout the project.
- There was a growth in confidence in using ICT and social media by staff within the project,
- There was also a greater awareness of the benefits and challenges of using ICT in Mencap's youth work with learning disabled young people in Northern Ireland.

### Critical learning

To ensure that the young people have as much ownership of the project and can feed into the structure of the project as much as possible. The more input they have, the more they re-invested in the project.

### Enablers

1	Effective support and assistance for all of the young people with a learning disability taking part in the project.
2	Making the activities as fun and interactive as possible and introducing them to new technology.

### Hindrance / Blockage

1	WiFi availability or speed in certain areas and venues was a barrier
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<b>Organisation</b>	YouthLink
<b>Project name</b>	Step out App
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.youthlink.org.uk">www.youthlink.org.uk</a>
<b>Social media links</b>	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/youthlinkni">www.facebook.com/youthlinkni</a>
	<a href="http://www.twitter.com/youthlinkni">www.twitter.com/youthlinkni</a>



#### Project target group

The project was aimed at young people aged 16-24 both male and female, engaged in the Apprentices for Peace programme. Participants were primarily from across the greater Belfast area but also included some young people from the border regions. 11 young adults took part.

#### Aims(s)

To produce a Community Relations mobile app to inform young people of the variety of activities available to them and to encourage them to attend events and experiences outside of their normal cultural tradition.

#### Activities, programmes and services

- Engage young people in the design of the app
- Young people involved in the content creation for the app (ongoing)
- Engaging a suitable mobile app creation service
- Young people from the initial group to pilot the use of the app
- Project launch (June 2015) of the app and encourage wider use

#### Outputs

An app which is integrated with Youth Link NI's website, which supports groups and individuals to engage in community relations activities.

The outputs are ongoing as app has been piloted with a group of young people who are developing and evolving it for the best possible use.

The app is available free for download from iTunes and Google App Store - just search Youth Link.

### Outcomes

Through the development of the app, for example, deciding on its key features and prioritising its content, young people developed a range of thinking, life and works skills including communication, planning, decision-making, problem solving and creativity.

Through participation in the project participants were able to build on the positive peer relationships initiated in the Apprentices for Peace programme. For example, deciding on the app content provided the opportunity to talk more openly about and explore their own experience and perception of others from a different faith and/or community background. Through this process they identified the need to ensure the app was balanced across both of the main Northern Ireland traditions. Building on the learning gained in the Apprentices for Peace programme the young people in the Step out App project demonstrated their respect for difference by recognising the need to ensure the app was inclusive of other faith and cultural communities in Northern Ireland society.

By demonstrating their respect for difference the young people also illustrated their enhanced empathy with and ability to advocate on behalf of others that were not represented in their project group.

### Staff training

Staff now feel more confident in the use of ICT and app technology and will be able to update the app on an ongoing basis. Working with the app production company (Sugar Rush Creative) we developed a straightforward web site to make it easy for staff to update the app. Using this web site we can add new challenges, new users, and remove any inappropriate content that users may have uploaded.

### Critical learning

Engaging with the right creative team and sharing the vision effectively is essential

### Enablers

1	Willingness of staff to participate and innovate
2	Willingness of young people to get behind the idea

### Hindrance / Blockage

1	Time – it was a lot of information to put together
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<b>Organisation</b>	The Boys' Brigade
<b>Project name</b>	BB Code Academy
<b>Website</b>	www.bbni.co.uk



### Project target group

70 participants between the ages of 14 to 18 from BB Companies situated in particular areas that were identified as economically deprived.

### Aims(s)

The specific course aims were:

- To introduce young people to basic web design and development
- To introduce participants to the architecture and dependencies involved with web development
- To introduce good coding practices
- To introduce web development principles

### Activities, programmes and services

- Development of a bespoke training course with the School of Computing and Mathematics and the Computer Science Research Institute at Ulster University (UU)
- 'Hands-on' training delivered over 4-8 sessions (either weekly or over a residential weekend)
- Courses focussed on "hands-on" learning as facilitated by equipment supplied by UU
- Practical sessions to introduce and develop ideas and techniques
- Access to extra online materials provided to further develop ideas and techniques shared during the practical and onsite sessions

### Outputs

70 young people took part in 7 courses in Antrim, Ballynure, Belfast, Dungiven, Larne, Lisburn and a central course that attracted participants from throughout Northern Ireland.

Each received a certificate of participation with those successful receiving a Level 3, 5-credit CPPD computing module through the submission of an assignment completed during the course and validated by Ulster University (UU).

A celebration event hosted by Ulster University took place for participants to be presented with their certificates.

Volunteer tutors delivered these courses after attending weekend training sessions.

### Outcomes

The project has resulted in positive outcomes for the young men who increased thinking, life and work skills, including their communication and problem solving skills.

Many benefited from the informal learning environment and the opportunity for peer learning resulted in more positive peer relationships and enhanced relationships with the Training Officers and Company Leaders.

The project has created pathways for young people into employment, education and training with participants learning new skills in web design, web communication and in online research. In the words of one participant;

*“Through this course, I learnt more about the theory side of computing, how coding works and benefitted from the guidance of our course tutor. I have now left school and have taken the decision to study computing at University and have also got a part time job in Curry’s [PC World] in the Knowhow Section.”*

### Staff training

Eighteen Boys’ Brigade Training Officers completed training provided by UU academics and then rolled out a website design and development course to Boys’ Brigade Companies. Having ‘trained trainers’ to deliver this course, it provided a new confidence regarding the use of ICT within the organisation and provided a new youth work programme not previously offered by The Boys’ Brigade.

### Critical learning

The young people understand that the skills they are learning through these courses in The Boys’ Brigade are transferable; and in addition, they recognise the value of these skills in helping them both within their organisation, but also in their education or chosen career paths.

### Enablers

1	The value of having volunteers trained as tutors, by professionals from UU, who were then able to deliver the course in their local BB Company.
2	The ability to deliver the course (including equipment) in each Company’s location.

### Hindrance / Blockage

1	The only blockage or hindrance encountered was the limited finance for hardware that would have allowed more training courses to take place and subsequently more participants to have benefitted.
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<b>Organisation</b>	YMCA Ireland
<b>Project name</b>	<b>Drama and Digital Media</b>
<b>Website</b>	www.ymca-ireland.net



### Project target group

The principal target group was young adults interested in undertaking a leadership project in Larne YMCA. In turn, this group of five young adults recruited a group of ten young people with mixed abilities, aged between 8-17 years old, and “on the edge of the youth centre”, to take part in the Drama and Digital Media project (i.e. the piece of work through which the young adults would develop their leadership skills).

### Aims(s)

Using drama and digital media as the vehicle:

- To support a group of young adults to develop their leadership skills.
- To enable young people to develop skills in, and express themselves through, new media and technology.
- To assist a wider group of children and young people to reflect on and respond to a BBC TV documentary entitled “I Love Larne”.
- To integrate digital media into the organisation’s youth participation programme and ensure the technical support was in-house so the skills were available for the future.

### Activities, programmes and services

- Recruited peer leaders - who in turn recruited a group of 10 young people
- Exercises and activities to reach agreement on the goals of the project and reach consensus on ‘describing life in Larne’.
- Visits to places of interest in the town.
- Drama workshops to develop scripts, etc.
- Training in video techniques, video editing and production (ongoing element of the project)
- Launch of the video is currently being planned with the young people (Nov 2015).

### Outputs

- Engagement of 2 staff, 5 young leaders and 10 young people
- Delivery of drama course
- Introduction to video techniques
- Production of 5 minute DVD reflecting the life of a young person in Larne

### Outcomes

The project resulted in positive outcomes for both the young adult leaders and the group of young people they recruited to participate in leadership training project.

For example the young adult leaders enhanced their personal capabilities and described being more self-aware in the sense of knowing what they “can do and can’t”, self-confident and resilient in so much as being willing to try other projects and “make suggestions to [the workers] about things” they could try.

Also, the young adult leaders demonstrated development in their thinking, life and work skills including decision-making, planning and communication.

For the young people recruited by the young leaders, the project contributed to their increased participation and the production of the DVD provided a vehicle for them to communicate and share their feelings and opinions with other young people and adults in the youth club and wider community.

The project engaged young people with learning difficulties as well as young people from a range of backgrounds across and around the town of Larne and through their involvement all the participants (and staff) enhanced and increased their ability to work with others and develop positive peer relationships.

### Staff

No specific training was provided for staff but workers, like the participants, have become more “tech savvy”, having gained practical knowledge, skills and experience through the project.

The appetite of the youth work team for future work of this type is evident and we hope further development will take place in in next year's youth work programme.

### Critical learning

Careful planning of work in technology is required or the participants can get frustrated by long technical delays.

### Enablers

1	Engage the end users (young people/leaders/ volunteers) from the start
2	A challenge in Community Relations work is to help participants to reflect on learning. The use of video has proved useful in this area and has promoted extra conversation and dialogue.

### Hindrance / Blockage

1	Long projects which required extended commitment need to be realistic around young people's schooling and family demands
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## Summary

Although this study is relatively small-scale, it has revealed many positive features about ICT in youth work. These include a strong assertion by youth workers (paid and voluntary) that social and digital media can play a relevant and useful role within youth work activities, an anticipation that their own use of ICT in youth work will increase over the coming years, and a clear demonstration that, when used appropriately, ICT contributes to a broad range of developmental outcomes for young people, including self-expression, creativity, active citizenship, social inclusion, digital literacy, employability, and community relations.

Youth workers generally viewed the use of ICT as highly compatible with the values and processes which underpin youth work in Northern Ireland, and with the core themes and principles of the youth work curriculum. Participants in the focus groups expressed the view that ICT brings a distinctive, added value to traditional youth work methods, and that it offers a powerful tool which can enthuse and connect young people, including those who may ordinarily be reluctant to take part in group activities.

At the same time, the study found a wide range of inhibiting factors, both at organisational and sector-wide level, which leave many workers feeling unsupported, unskilled and unable to maximise the value of ICT in their practice.

At an organisational level, the vast majority of survey respondents felt they would benefit from further training in a wide range of areas. There was also support for access to a funding stream to support digital initiatives, improved IT infrastructure, guidance on professional ethics in the use of social media, professional development opportunities, sharing of good practice, and, to a lesser extent, access to taster sessions and a directory of training providers.

Participants in the focus groups offered their thoughts on what strategic steps need to be taken to support development of digital and social media across the service. These centred around the need for:

- A policy directive to support this approach to youth work, with high level commitment to an ICT strategy involving the Department of Education, the Education Authority NI, and the voluntary sector
- A youth service strategy for ICT, supported by sustained investment and based on need
- Relaxation of the restrictions on social media within the statutory sector, and a proactive approach by the youth service to address eSafety (in line with the Marshall report, 2014)
- Access to a resource hub, leading to a fuller demonstration of the value of ICT as a tool for creativity and participation within youth work pedagogy
- Development of partnerships and opportunities for collaboration, at both organisational and sector-wide levels, academia and private sector, and also at North/South and EU levels
- Organisational policy and/or sectoral guidance on the use of social media in particular
- Opportunities for continuous professional development

## Appendix 1 North South Strategy Development paper (2013) YCNI - NYCI

### Introduction

The following paper has been developed to assist discussion around the issue of effective ICT use within the Youth Sector in Ireland. It seeks to outline the context of the discussion, show the connections to wider learning and provide a direction for building a coherent strategy.

### Summary

The Youth Sector north and south, with some noteworthy exceptions, has failed to harness the potential of ICT as a tool for learning and communication in any substantial way. The challenges of a risk averse attitude and worker capacity need to be met and ICT embraced as an effective tool for personal development and youth engagement. The absence of a coherent policy which could provide planned development and practical guidelines, can be overcome if prioritised at this time of change within the sector.

This requires the building of a strategy endorsed by the two government departments and constructed through consultation with youth workers and young people in harmony with the formal education sector and EU Youth policy. The strategy needs to accept ICT as a distinct learning medium in non-formal education and as an ever changing communication tool which provides a fresh approach to interaction and participation by young people. In addition it needs to pay attention to the issues of 'Child Safeguarding', workforce development and an all Ireland approach.

### Background to Discussions

For the purposes of this document we are defining (ICT) Information and Communication Technologies as:

*the use of information in order to meet human need or purpose including reference to the use of contemporary devices, such as the Internet, social media video production including use of any digital media.*

Youth Work throughout Ireland is going through change. These changes are driven by a shift in funder expectations, lifestyle and needs of young people and recent government policy. Combined with this, is the transformation that all society is going through, particularly in the area of communication and technology.

Youth work has never benefited from the resources and central management provided to the schools sector, however the need for effective use of ICT in non-formal education situations has been recognised, in particular by the Education and Training Inspectorate NI. Furthermore several innovative youth projects have evidenced the effectiveness of work in this area.

New opportunities exist to develop this work in a coordinated and cost effective manner which hopefully will give youth workers the opportunity to deliver significant outcomes for young people and assist them to relate more effectively to the world in which young people live.

The last few years have seen increasing cooperation between the youth work sectors in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. There has been sharing of learning around various common challenges, quality assurance, assessment of learning, intercultural work and PEACE 3 development. There are specialist resources (IT companies, Media and IT training agencies) in both parts of the island which if combined could be powerful supports to the non- formal sector. Therefore it seems appropriate for the development of ICT to be a process where shared strategy and shared experience could be a driver for better opportunities for young people throughout the island.

Government policy in both jurisdictions has emphasised the opportunity afforded by ICT for future employment in the island. ICT learning within youth work would complement and enhance initiatives being undertaken in the vocational training sector. Furthermore ICT will enable the Republic of Ireland youth sector to make a significant contribution to the first goal of the National Children's Strategy (RoI 2000) through its ability to give young people a direct voice and contribute to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs high level priority of greater youth participation and opening gateways to more effective and responsive research.

The application of ICT sits well with the draft Priorities for Youth Policy (NI 2012) by providing a pathway to achieving Priorities 2,3 & 4 as laid out in the consultation document. ICT development will be supportive to those not in jobs, training or education (Priority 2) workforce development (Priority 3) and the engagement of young people in dialogue about the future of youth work (Priority 4).

Internationally, youth work practice has demonstrated the use of ICT to be a new and exciting tool for extending youth work. Australia and the USA have demonstrated how ICT in non formal settings can reach young people who have found it difficult to achieve in school settings and shown that social media can reach out to young people not presently engaged in youth organisations particularly in the area of mental well being.

Recently our colleagues in Wales have included ICT as a key part of their proposed youth work strategy stating:

“Online tools can be used to complement existing Youth Services provision, help to reach a wider audience and engage those young people who are unwilling or unable to engage in more traditional ‘centre-based’ activities.” A vision for a new national youth work strategy for Wales 2013–2018: Welsh Government June 2013.

The EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering paper emphasises the need to:

- Make new technologies readily available
- Widen access to creative tools, particularly those involving new technologies

- See more at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0200:FIN:EN:PDF>

These statements summarise the essential elements of how the Youth Sector can maximise ICT benefits by acting as a gateway for young people to be fully participant in the digital age and creatively learn through ICT use.

Formal Education and vocational training have both recognised the benefits of full ICT training and integration with education. The NI curriculum states:

“Information and Communications Technology, across the curriculum, has the potential to transform and enrich pupils’ learning experiences and environments. It can empower pupils, develop self-esteem and promote positive attitudes to learning. Additionally, the creative use of ICT has the potential to improve pupils’ thinking skills, providing them with opportunities to become independent, self-motivated and flexible learners.”

- See more at:

[http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/foundation\\_stage/skills\\_and\\_capabilities/cross\\_curricular\\_skills/ict.asp](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/foundation_stage/skills_and_capabilities/cross_curricular_skills/ict.asp)

Within the Republic the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has this as an ICT vision

Our young people are capable independent learners, able to use ICT confidently, creatively and productively, able to communicate effectively, able to work collaboratively, and to critically evaluate, manage and use information.

- See more at: [http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum\\_and\\_Assessment/ICT/#2](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/ICT/#2)

**Non-formal education north and south has not created a clear statement of how ICT enhances youth work nor has it outlined its role in supporting learning and development. This paper wishes to start that dialogue.**

### ICT as a learning medium

As with many tools in Education, the medium for learning is often the place to learn skills and practical capacity building, while the full intention of the learning may be to reach broader areas of personal development.

This can be seen with activities such as outdoor education where the activity provides a rich and enjoyable experience with learning challenges which develop very practical skills but usually the youth worker’s intention is to reach deeper areas of change such as personal confidence, team and trust building, an appetite for ‘risk and achievement’.

So it is with ICT. Developing the skills of social media communication, web design, video creation and podcasting to name just a few activities, will give important life skills to the individual young people but the impact of the process of learning and the outcomes for the individual go much deeper than just a set of skills, they extend to self confidence, reducing inequality in educational opportunity, offering new avenues of expression, personal moderation and effective communication.

Non-formal education focuses on supporting learning rather than directing it. ICT is particularly suited to this concept as it provides tools which young people can shape themselves to meet their own creative aspirations and through freedom to experiment overcome previous learning failures. According to (Pryor, McMullan, Lutz & John 2001) it has five types of outcomes for young people:

- Technological fluency - the ability to express
- Collaboration - encouragement to work, communicate and collaborate in teams
- Problem solving - achieving the resolution of complex problems
- Planning - the discipline of development, execution and planning of complex projects
- Confidence building - development of self esteem and confidence

### ICT as a communication medium

It can be argued that ICT has another dimension which sets it apart as development tool - It provides a new voice for young people and is therefore critical to the participation agenda of youth work. Although only one dimension of ICT development, the popularity of social media at this time, provides an exciting new opportunity for immediate and direct communication with policy makers, politicians and agencies. This is a highly popular channel within wider society and can be easily utilised by the youth sector.

The rapid development of ICT after the arrival of the internet in the 90s has been superseded by the explosion of communication on social media in 2000s and is integral to the lives of the new generation of 'digital natives'. It is important to note that the communication systems, expectations, peer experience and worldview, native to this generation are very different to most youth work managers' experiences and the responsibility is on policy makers to be pro-active and emigrate to this world.

The implications of these changes are immense. For example:

- the youth work experience can be developed easily beyond the walls of youth centres (eYouth Work)
- the scope and potential for youth led activities is increased considerably and the role of the worker is transformed to a greater facilitator, supporter and enabler than ever before
- the ability to carry out research/polls with young people is greatly enhanced
- Young people previously unattracted by youth services may be engaged in new activities and experience

Organisations active in this area of work emphasise the effectiveness of ICT improving access for young people to employment opportunities, enhancing participation, reducing rural isolation and increasing the individual's entrepreneurial capacity. They see clear evidence of social needs met and personal development demonstrated through increased confidence and improved articulation.

### Challenges

Why has the Youth Sector been so slow to engage in this new opportunity? Why have youth workers not been at the forefront of this development?

It should be stated that many youth workers and youth organisations have tried to develop initiatives in ICT, but four main obstacles have blocked this area of work from reaching its full potential.

1. Risks - With a strong value base of child safeguarding prevailing within the sector, there has been a reluctance to engage in an activity which has been perceived as a major risk area. Many youth work organisations have been slow to adopt ICT as a youth work medium because of the risks of the internet and the dilemmas posed by social media.
2. Resources - IT equipment has a short life and until recently required a high level of resourcing, management and a steep learning curve. Youth Work organisations have been slow to resource training opportunities for staff in this area.
3. Workforce capacity and understanding - Youth workers are caught somewhere between high expectations of practice and high expectations of project management, therefore it is difficult to find the space for innovation and personal learning in a very crowded agenda. The new generation of youth workers are changing this situation as they bring their personal ICT experience into the workplace naturally. This reflects a digital divide in other professions between the generations particularly between practitioners and policy makers.
4. Policy - The lack of clear and coherent policy in this area has created inertia in its development, procurement of equipment, useful dialogue on the issue and a lack of vision for development.

### Opportunities

As educators, youth workers if equipped with a shared IT understanding, freedom to develop in partnership with young people, and a clear learning rationale, can integrate ICT into their practice easily and use the opportunity to great effect across a range of issues including diversity and intercultural work, political education, participation, developing values and beliefs, youth information, personal development and wider educational attainment.

As stated earlier the Youth Sectors North and South are in a state of flux. New ways of managing, resourcing, measuring and collaborating and being developed. ICT provides an opportunity for management and policy makers to build in a spine of training, resourcing and collaborative working which can inject new synergy to the sector throughout Ireland.

Young people are already using this medium to great effect in their personal lives. An effective youth work approach can support their development in this area and correct some of the disadvantages socio-economic differences have imposed.

In practical terms young people can be supported to overcome mobility barriers and engage in active citizenship through greater access to information and direct contact with key individuals. Often the experience of youth workers, is that ICT is an excellent vehicle for 'second chance' educational development.

In recent times the advent of cloud computing, global availability of Wi-Fi and broadband and a fully developed market place have reduced the cost of digital devices to very affordable levels, which are no longer dependent on expensive software and constant high recurrent costs. The resourcing of ICT is no longer a key barrier to its development.

## Recommendations

We propose that policy makers North and South begin developing a parallel approach to this issue with the following goals:

1. The adoption of **ICT practice within Youth Work** settings as a key priority by the Department of Education (NI) and Department of Children and Youth Affairs (RoI)
2. The creation of a **shared vision**, by both jurisdictions, of ICT as part of their Youth Work Programmes.
3. The building of an **overarching strategy**<sup>1</sup> which defines the role of ICT in non formal education, including new guidelines which enable innovation in this area and in particular provide clear guidance on using the internet for positive purposes within a comprehensive child safeguarding plan. The strategy should be developed based on an audit of existing ICT practice and full consultation with practitioners and young people regarding future work. This strategy should involve the following elements:
  - a. The creation of a **workforce development plan** which covers workforce training, sharing of practice, non-traditional collaborations and piloting of initiatives to test out potential areas of development
  - b. The development of plans to pilot work which measures the effectiveness of ICT as a **youth work tool** for personal development, testing values and beliefs and supporting youth participation.
  - c. The piloting of programmes to find innovative ways of developing **new media skills** in non-formal settings.
  - d. The exploration of ICT for eYouth work i.e. youth support programmes delivered via digital media in the areas of well-being, participation and active citizenship.
4. The establishment of a joint **North/South working group** to act as a bridge to promote and support progress, disseminate learning and examine future development. This group should reflect a broad range of stakeholders including young IT developers, the IT industry and key youth work stakeholders.

## Conclusion

This paper has been created to invite conversation around this issue. It calls for action by both the voluntary and statutory stakeholders, creation of new vision, resourcing and training. The first step is to request the urgent development of a practical and comprehensive strategy.

ICT is an effective learning and communication tool for young people, it deserves a better appreciation by policy makers and coordinated support for the benefit of this generation of young people.

ICT Ad Hoc Working Group

September 2013

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<sup>1</sup> Within NI this would serve as part of a regional Youth Development Plan

## Reading List

1. Enabling All Young Australians to Grow up Safe, Happy, Healthy and Resilient: A Collaboration for Young People, Technology and Wellbeing Australasian Psychiatry Jul 1, 2011
2. Reaching the Hard-To-Reach: How Information Communication Technologies Can Reach Young People at Greater Risk of Mental Health Difficulties Australasian Psychiatry >> Version of Record - Jul 1, 2011
3. The Role of Community Technology Centers in Promoting Youth Development Youth Society 2010 42:
4. The Computer Clubhouse :Kafal, Pepler & Chapman 2009 Teachers College Press
5. Generation Gap: How Technology Has Changed How We Talk About Work:Weiss Forbes Technology June 2012
6. Social Software Tools in Open Youth Work : Prinzhakowitsch and Seisenbacher 2013
7. Generation Gap: How Technology Has Changed How We Talk About Work :Scott Weiss Forbes Technology 16/5/2012
8. Online Youth Work and eYouth - A guide to the world of the digital natives : Szekely and Nagy Children and Youth Services Review 2011
9. ICT as cultural capital:The relationship between socioeconomic status and the computer-use profile of young people :Jo Tondeur, Ilse Sinnaeve, Mieke van Houtte and Johan van Braak: New Media Society 2011
10. Priorities for Youth: Dept of Education NI 2012
11. National Children's Strategy: DCYA RoI 2000
12. A vision for a new national youth work strategy for Wales 2013–2018: Welsh Government 2013

## Appendix 2 Contribution of ICT to youth work outcomes: qualitative data from survey

An open-ended question in the survey of youth workers in full time settings sought additional comments about the contribution of ICT to learning outcomes for young people. Responses were overwhelmingly positive and included :

- *It's youth appropriate, not only are we using media that young people are using anyway, but we are also showing them how to use it safely and in ways which can benefit them*
- *It has contributed to their employability skills in general and not just specifically in IT*
- *The use of digital media projects has not only made them notice signs of anti-social behaviour, it has also opened a window into how their community has taken effect on their mental health. Using multimedia / digital media these young people who thought they were simply taking photos to keep them occupied, through their creativity opened a window into sharing and opening up feelings they didn't know they had.*
- *Allows young people to express themselves and their own thoughts through media, then sharing it online through social media. The young people I work with also became more aware of the dangers of social media and try to encourage friends and family to become more aware; they themselves become advocates for safe internet usage*
- *It has provided those in rural communities with a platform to interact with the peers and others within the organisation from isolated areas through the use of social media platforms such as Snapchat and Facebook which not only provide information but also allow the members to respond in a personal way*
- *Too many (outcomes) to mention but it is very powerful tool*
- *Reducing isolation*
- *Raised awareness on staying safe on-line. Team building within a group. Confidence building*
- *Improved participation*
- *General good communication and bonding amongst young people. Leads to better participation in programmes*
- *Develops confidence and improved Literacy and in communicating own needs and views candidly.*
- *Social media helps young people achieve their ICT and helps them look for jobs while also researching topics for personal development and employability.*
- *Self-awareness - how you present to yourselves and others (in particular employers)*
- *Campaigning and lobbying project with young people developed through film making, not only did young people involved learn new media skills, they learned about positive citizenship. They were provided the opportunity to present the film to the wider community, building their confidence and self esteem as well as creating a thirst to become involved in further media projects.*
- *Supporting young people with non-verbal communication to deliver Disability Awareness Training*
- *It was used effectively by the young people lobbying recent cuts by the Department and also an effective communication forum with the young people that we serve*

### Appendix 3 Training received, and further training needs

Survey respondents were asked to identify what ICT training they had received in the past two years, and areas where they would like further training.

- 37% of respondents from full time settings had received training in the past two years. The most common areas of training received were in social media, child exploitation and online protection training (CEOP), and video editing/digital film.
- 18% of respondents from part time settings had received training in the past two years, the most common being CEOP and social media

Training received in past two years Respondents from full time sector	Training received in past two years Respondents from part time sector
Digital Cre8or, in house training	In service training
Video editing for YouTube presentations	Protection of information
<b>Digital film making</b>	Media awareness
Surveys	Scout Association training
Socialnomics	ECDL
PR training using digital media	Facebook
In house training on website	<b>CEOP</b>
<b>Social media training</b>	Website design
How to update website	Surveys
Adobe After Effects	<b>Social media</b>
Camera work, interview skills	Cyber bullying
e-portfolios	Use of internet in youth work, ICT Level 2 OCN
<b>Child exploitation and online protection</b>	Video making
Film making using green screens	
Twitter	
Barnardos online safety	
Media expression	
Diploma Digital marketing	
Child protection	

Internet safety  
 Social media policies  
 Digital photography and photoshop

Respondents were asked to identify what training they would find useful (the most common responses are highlighted in bold)

Areas where further training would be useful – respondents from full time sector	Areas where further training would be useful – respondents from part time sector
Platforms	Digital production of magazines
Forums	Web design
Web design	<b>Digital media</b>
Digital animation	Any training to improve on basic skills
Photoshop	Internet security and safeguarding
Technical expertise, to avoid having to buy this in	Power point presentations
Apple Mac Multi media software, ranging from Adobe programmes to Final Cut	Any ICT training
Copyright and documentary / script writing	Twitter
<b>Social media</b>	Uploading photographs
Any training to improve ICT skills	New social media apps
<b>Creative digital media</b>	Instagram
Using media for activism	Training to access and use scouting website
Use of digital gaming	Assisting young people in use of media
Facebook	
Uploading photos	

## Appendix 4 Youth Work, Curriculum and expected outcomes

### Where does youth work take place in Northern Ireland?

Whilst formal education primarily takes place in schools and colleges, non formal education can take place in a wide range of settings, including purpose built youth centres, detached/outreach/streetwork, outdoor education centres, play groups, church halls, voluntary sector premises, schools, arts and sports venues, young offender centres, community centres, multi-agency projects, as well as cross-border and international locations.

### What makes youth work distinct?

Youth work operates within a range of educational services. Whilst there are clear parallels between both the purpose and intended outcomes of formal education and youth work, there are important characteristics which differentiate youth work:

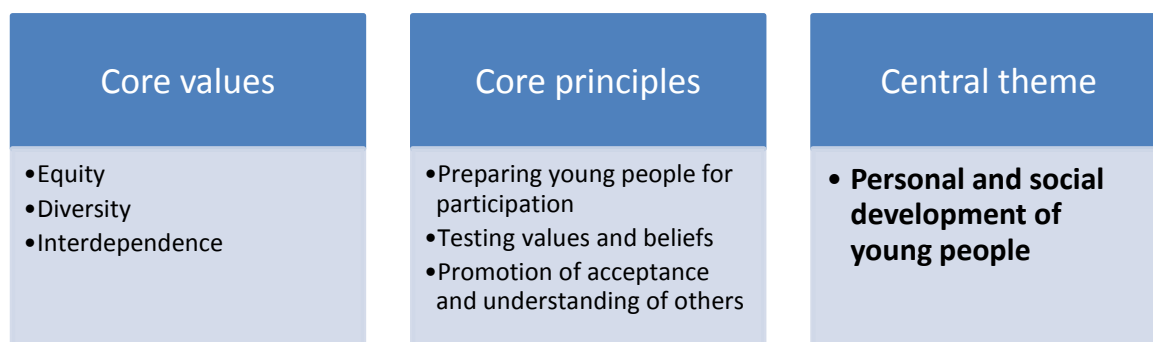
- It is based on the needs of young people
- Young people are central to the planning and delivery of youth work
- Young people choose to be involved (voluntary commitment)
- Youth workers value young people for who they are now
- It is founded on a relational and associational way of working with young people
- It encourages opportunities for positive peer relationships
- Youth Work recognises young people as a partner in the learning process
- Youth work complements formal education, promoting young people's access to learning opportunities which enable them to fulfill their potential

The key criteria of voluntary engagement are that *membership is consensual* and *voluntaristic mechanisms are used to achieve objectives*, meaning youth work tools are *dialogue, bargaining* and *persuasion* instead of enforced compliance.

The educational nature of youth work is characterised by a specific value system and this helps distinguish it from other approaches to learning. As a value-based profession, youth work stresses a commitment to a potentiality rather than a deficiency model of young people.

The Youth Work Curriculum, '**Youth work: a model for effective practice**' was produced in 1997 and subsequently updated in 2003. This identifies personal and social development as the central objective of youth work in Northern Ireland, along with core principles and values.

### Theme, values and principles underpinning A model for effective youth work practice



## Outcomes of youth work

The youth service operates across a continuum of educational interventions, works with age groups from 4 through to 25, is supported by volunteers through to professionally qualified staff, and uses a range of activities and approaches. It is unsurprising therefore that many outcomes of youth work will vary according to the context. It is possible, however, to identify some generic outcomes which are common to all forms of youth work, and the following table lists generic outcomes (in bold) and related indicators (bullet points).

## Framework of Expected outcomes of youth work in Northern Ireland

INDIVIDUAL	GROUP/COMMUNITY/SOCIETY CONTEXT
<p><b>Enhanced Personal Capabilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-awareness</li> <li>• Confidence and self-esteem</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Resilience</li> <li>• Managing feelings</li> </ul> <p><b>Improved Health and Well-being</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfaction with life/self</li> <li>• Awareness of health issues (sexual, physical and/or mental)</li> <li>• Ability to make healthy choices (reduction in risk taking behaviours/ reduced substance misuse)</li> </ul> <p><b>Development of thinking skills, life and work skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision making</li> <li>• Planning and problem solving</li> <li>• Leadership and communication</li> <li>• Creativity</li> </ul>	<p><b>Development of positive relationships with others</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to work with others (teamwork)</li> <li>• Positive peer relationships</li> <li>• Positive relationships with adults</li> <li>• Engagement with others from diverse backgrounds</li> <li>• Respect for difference</li> </ul> <p><b>Increased participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of belonging to community</li> <li>• Communication between young people and adults</li> <li>• Influences others, advocates on behalf of others or takes on a representative role</li> </ul> <p><b>Active citizenship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteering (local and international)</li> <li>• Awareness of local &amp; global issues</li> <li>• Social action</li> <li>• Employment, Education or Training</li> </ul>

## Appendix 5 Focus Group Format & Questions

### A very short round of introductions:

Your name, Job title, Your organisation, self-assessment (1 to 10) of ICT skills

**Q1.** Reflecting on your own work with young people and / or youth organisation, for what purposes do you use :

- social media (eg, communication, interaction, 1x1 contact with young people, etc)
- digital media (eg inclusion, health awareness, campaigning, creativity etc) **10 mins**

**Q2** In your experience, what has been the distinctive value (if any) of the use of social/digital media as a tool to support your work with young people?

**10 mins**

**Q3.** What do you think are the critical factors that **enable** (or would enable) the use of ICT in youth work **and** what are the critical factors, issues or barriers that are a **blockage** to using ICT in your youth work/organisation?

**20 mins**

**Q4.** Thinking about the youth service as a whole, what strategic actions do you think are needed to develop the use of ICT as a tool for youth work?

**10 mins**

**Q5.** From what you have heard in the presentations and our discussions, is there one practical thing or realistic action you can take away from this session that would further enhance the quality of your organisation's use of digital/social media? **5 mins**

Take the final **5 minutes** to agree **one** main point from your table to feedback in the plenary.



The Screenagers International Research Project is a collaborative study focussing on the use of ICT, digital and social media in youth work. It is a partnership between agencies in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Finland, Austria and Denmark.



Erasmus+

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