

**Volunteer Group Leaders' Guide to**  
**National Quality**  
**Standards**  
**for Volunteer-led**  
**Youth Groups**



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The National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups are the result of much consultation and input from a large number of youth groups, organisations and agencies. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs would like to thank all those involved in developing these Standards. A list of those involved is included on page 10.

## Minister's Foreword

I am delighted to provide the foreword to the *National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups*. The development of these standards for volunteer-led youth groups follows the successful implementation of the National Quality Standards for staff-led youth work, and represents my Department's ongoing commitment to ensuring and enhancing standards of youth provision.

The range and level of youth activities provided by youth organisations and groups which are led by volunteers is a clear indication of the strength and vibrancy of both effort and engagement in this area. Youth groups provide a vast array of activities throughout the country for young people of all backgrounds, interests and abilities. These groups are led by committed volunteers and comprise young people who engage, develop and progress as a result of their involvement in youth activities. The establishment of standards in this area will ensure that this good work can be evidenced and further developed. These standards should structure and support volunteer-led provision so that work in this area will continue to thrive and be relevant and responsive to the young people who engage in the activities of these groups.

The overall aim of the standards is to help improve the quality of the programmes and activities for young people and the way in which they are provided. In addition, through the standards, young people will be encouraged and supported to have a say in the planning, design and delivery of their group's programmes and to become more involved in the running of their group.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the young people, volunteers, youth organisations and VEC Youth/Liaison Officers who informed the development of these standards. I know that these standards will be of significant benefit to the range of youth groups in Ireland and is yet another indication of the strength of the youth sector going forward.

**Frances Fitzgerald, T.D.**  
*Minister for Children and Youth Affairs*



**PART 1**

# General Statement of Purpose (what Youth Groups do)

The purpose of a youth group is to provide a safe, supportive and enjoyable environment where young people voluntarily participate and progress in a range of activities that are recreational and developmental/educational.

# National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups

Specific statement of purpose  
(what *our* youth group does, why it does it and who it is for):

## Core Principles

### Young person-centred

#### Standard 1

**Programmes (activities), practices** (how you work and how the group operates) and **people** (young people, volunteer leaders, etc) ensure and promote the voluntary participation, inclusion and voice of young people.

#### Indicators of achievement:

1. Young people are actively involved in the running of the group.
2. Young people are actively involved in the design and delivery of activities.
3. Young people are actively involved in the planning and evaluation of activities.
4. Activities are accessible and inclusive.

### Safety and well-being

#### Standard 2

**Programmes (activities), practices** (how you work and how the group operates) and **people** (young people, volunteer leaders, etc) ensure and promote the safety, support and well-being of young people.

#### Indicators of achievement:

1. Appropriate insurance cover in place.
2. Health and Safety procedures in place.
3. Child Protection Policy and procedures in place.

### Developmental/Educational

#### Standard 3

**Programmes (activities), practices** (how you work and how the group operates) and **people** (young people, volunteer leaders, etc) ensure and promote the development, achievement and progression of young people.

#### Indicators of achievement:

1. Young people's needs and interests are recognised and responded to.
2. Young people's abilities and potential are developed.
3. Young people's participation and achievement are recognised.
4. Support and training is provided for volunteer leaders.

## Introduction

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) supports over 1,600 volunteer-led youth groups. These include youth activity and youth work groups, which provide a wide range of recreational and developmental programmes and activities for young people. The DCYA is committed to supporting these groups in providing the best possible opportunities for young people to develop and progress, and views the introduction of these National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups as an important step in assuring quality in youth group settings.

In 2011, the DCYA introduced a set of standards for staff-led youth work projects and services: these were called the National Quality Standards Framework (NQS) for youth work. These standards are helping to ensure the provision and ongoing development of quality youth work opportunities for young people.

As a natural progression to the NQS, the DCYA has now developed a set of National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups, aimed at local youth groups and clubs. These have been developed and refined in consultation with young people, volunteers, youth organisations, the National Youth Work Advisory Committee, the Irish Vocational Education Association and VEC Youth/Liaison Officers. They present an opportunity for youth groups to demonstrate their commitment to best practice and to the delivery of quality programmes and activities, which meet the needs and expectations of their young members.

As well as being a benchmark for progress, the National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups provide a fundamental building block on which practice can be developed on an ongoing basis. They are intended as a 'living document' that will evolve over time and be reviewed and informed by the process as the national quality standards are implemented in clubs and groups across the country.

## Who do these National Quality Standards apply to?

The National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups have been developed for youth groups funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) via Vocational Education Committees (VECs). They apply to groups funded under the DCYA's Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and related schemes operating in Dublin and Waterford cities. While all these groups will be required to engage with the national quality standards, youth groups that are not in receipt of funding from the DCYA are also encouraged to use them.

## What are standards?

Standards are simply a set of statements of what should be in place to assist in ensuring quality. These statements outline what level of service can be expected and how services will be provided so as to ensure that they are delivered to an agreed level of quality and that the level is consistent on a national basis.

## Why have standards for youth groups?

The overall aim of these national quality standards is to support volunteer-led youth groups in creating and providing quality, developmental/educational programmes and activities for young people in safe and supportive environments.

The national quality standards aim to:

- improve the quality of the programmes and activities provided;
- improve the way programmes and activities are planned and delivered;
- provide young people with the opportunity to have a say in the development and review of the group and its activities.



## When will the standards take effect?

These national quality standards are being introduced to youth groups in 2013. Information and briefing sessions will be provided locally throughout the year, so that youth groups can become familiar with them and the rationale for introducing them. They will then be implemented with youth groups on a phased and incremental basis throughout 2013 with a view to all youth groups in receipt of funding from the DCYA being engaged in the process from January 2014.

As with the NQSF for staff-led projects and services, the emphasis is on engagement with the standards rather than achieving them immediately. They are, however, considered relevant and practical, and therefore it is expected that many of the groups funded by the DCYA will already be in a position to adhere to them and confirm that they have achieved each of the indicators (*as listed in the 3 Standards on page 1*).

## Who will support youth groups in achieving these standards?

Where a youth group is affiliated to a national youth organisation, the Regional Youth/Development Officer of that organisation will actively support the implementation of these National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups with their respective groups. VEC Youth/Liaison Officers will support implementation with non-affiliated youth groups in their areas and will also provide advice and support for the Regional Youth/Development Officers of national youth organisations where required.

The DCYA has also set up a Quality Standards Training and Resource Development Task Group to ensure the provision of coordinated, relevant and quality training and resources to support these national quality standards and the NQSF for staff-led projects and services. As the work of the Task Group progresses, information on the supports and resources available will be provided to youth groups via the VEC Youth/Liaison Officers and the respective national youth organisations.

## What's involved in these standards?

The National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups consist of the following 4 elements:

- **General statement of purpose (what youth groups do)**  
This outlines what the DCYA expects youth groups and clubs to deliver for young people.
- **Specific statement of purpose (the what, why and who)**  
This is an opportunity for each youth group to state what it does, why it does it and who is it for.
- **The 3 Core Principles that structure and guide youth groups and their activities (see page 1)**
  1. Young person-centred.
  2. Safety and well-being.
  3. Developmental/educational.
- **Standards and Indicators of achievement**  
One standard has been developed to support each of the 3 core principles. Each standard has a number of 'indicators of achievement', which will help youth groups to chart their progress and show their achievement in reaching that standard.

## How do youth groups implement these standards?

1. Groups consider the DCYA's General Statement of Purpose (see *page 1*) of what it expects youth groups to do and then complete their own Specific Statement of Purpose, taking into account their programmes, activities and membership profile.
2. Groups then consider each of the 3 Core Principles and their related standards and indicators of achievement.
3. Using the Annual Plan and Progress Report provided, groups (youth leaders, young people etc) record their position and chart their progress in reaching each of the 3 Standards. A guide to completing the Annual Plan and Progress Report is also provided.
4. Groups submit the completed Annual Plan and Progress Report on an annual basis to their local VEC Youth/Liaison Officer when applying for youth group funding. The annual funding application form will also ask each group to sign a statement that these standards are being implemented within their group.
5. On receipt of the completed Annual Plan and Progress Report, the VEC Youth/Liaison Officer notes and endorses the group's position in relation to each of the standards. The VEC Youth/Liaison Officer may do this in discussion with the group's leaders, the Regional Youth/Development Officer of a national youth organisation or by way of a visit to the group or club.

## Further information

Part 2 of this information booklet contains further guidance for youth groups on the various elements of these National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups and signposts a number of information sources and website addresses which groups might find useful as they engage with the process.

Additional information is available from:

- the Regional Youth/Development Officer of your national youth organisation;
- the Youth/Liaison Officer in your local VEC or
- the Youth Affairs Unit in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Tel: (01) 647 3218).

These National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups can be downloaded from the DCYA's website, [www.dcyia.ie](http://www.dcyia.ie)

# PART 2

## Guidance Notes on elements of the National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups

### General statement of purpose (what youth groups do)

This statement has been developed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and outlines what it expects youth groups and clubs to deliver for young people:

*The purpose of a youth group is to provide a safe, supportive and enjoyable environment where young people voluntarily participate and progress in a range of activities that are recreational and developmental/educational.*

### Specific statement of purpose (what our group does, why it does it and who it is for)

This is an opportunity for each youth group to state what it does, why it does it and who is it for. This statement of purpose should be clear and concise. It should endorse the General statement of purpose (above) and support the Core Principles and related Standards (below).

### Core principles

These are the 3 key principles that should structure and guide youth groups and their activities – young person-centred, safety and well-being, and developmental/educational.

### Standards

These are the 3 key standards that need to be in place to support the Core Principles.

### Indicators of achievement

These are practical and specific examples to indicate that the standards are being met.

## Core Principle 1 YOUNG PERSON-CENTRED

This principle states that young people should be central to the group. It stresses that young people should freely participate and openly contribute to the group so that their opinions and views are very much seen and heard. It also states that young people should be treated equally and should feel welcomed and included. This principle encourages a holistic approach to promoting equality, overcoming discrimination and increasing participation and involvement.

This principle supports Article 12 of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and Goal 1 of the [National Children's Strategy](#), which states that 'children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity'. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) is committed to implementing this goal by promoting and supporting participation by children and young people in issues that affect them.

Useful information sources include:

- For further information on youth participation, please refer to the DCYA website: [www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/ChildYouthParticipation/aboutus.htm&mn=chiq&nID=1](http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/ChildYouthParticipation/aboutus.htm&mn=chiq&nID=1)
- National Youth Council of Ireland (2007) *Why Don't We? Youth Participation Resource Pack*. Available at: [www.youth.ie/nyci/why-dont-we-youth-participation-resource-pack](http://www.youth.ie/nyci/why-dont-we-youth-participation-resource-pack)
- National Youth Council of Ireland (2012) *Access All Areas. A Diversity Toolkit for the Youth Work Sector*. Available at: [www.youth.ie/diversity/](http://www.youth.ie/diversity/)
- Youth Work Ireland (2010) *Youth Work Ireland Equality Policy: Ensuring Rights are a reality*. Available at: [www.youthworkireland.ie/site/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/equalitypolicy2010.pdf](http://www.youthworkireland.ie/site/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/equalitypolicy2010.pdf)

### Standard 1

**Programmes (activities), practices (how you work and how the group operates) and people (young people, volunteer leaders, etc) ensure and promote the voluntary participation, inclusion and voice of young people.**

This standard states that young people should be involved in how the group is planned and run, and in how its activities and programmes are designed and evaluated. It also stresses the importance of the group's programmes and activities being freely and equally available so that young people can get involved in the group and its activities. Youth groups should support their members to engage and participate as fully as possible in the group and its activities. This may involve adapting policies and practices within the group to ensure that individuals feel welcome, encouraged and supported, and have the confidence to participate and openly contribute to the group.

### Indicators of achievement

1. Young people are actively involved in the running of the group.
2. Young people are actively involved in the design and delivery of activities.
3. Young people are actively involved in the planning and evaluation of activities.
4. Activities are accessible and inclusive.

1. Example of how young people are involved in the running of the group, e.g. involvement in management/organising committees.
2. Example of how young people are involved in the design and delivery of the group's activities and programmes, e.g. discussions to generate ideas, organising and implementing activities.
3. Example of how young people are involved in planning and evaluation of the group's activities and programmes, e.g. feedback sought from young people about their involvement and experiences (show of hands, group discussions).
4. Example of efforts to ensure activities are as accessible and as inclusive as possible, e.g. young people who may be marginalised or lacking in confidence are encouraged and supported to participate in the group and its activities.

## Core Principle 2 SAFETY & WELL-BEING

This principle aims to ensure that young people are safe and supported and that the physical and social environment and the activities of the group promote their safety and well-being. Safety and well-being must take account of Child Protection Policy and procedures.

**Standard 2**  
Programmes (activities), practices (how you work and how the group operates) and people (young people, volunteer leaders, etc) ensure and promote the safety, support and well-being of young people.

This standard states that the leaders and young people, the activities and environment of the group should all support and contribute to the safety and well-being of the young people involved.

Groups should make every effort to ensure that young people are safe and supported by having appropriate policies and procedures in place. These will depend on the nature and purpose of the group and may include policies and procedures focusing on the health and well-being of young people, in addition to those that are required to be in place, such as a child protection policy and appropriate insurance cover.

In particular, each group must ensure that it has health and safety procedures in place. This involves having a **Health and Safety Statement** for the premises (the group's own statement if it owns the premises, otherwise that of the owner).

Organisations should have clear reporting and recording procedures for child welfare and protection concerns. In particular, each group should have a **Child Protection Policy** (its own or parent organisation) in place - this should be cognisant of any legislation, enacted or proposed. Groups should also have a named designated person (its own or parent organisation), a code of behaviour, relevant training for leaders and clear guidance on recruitment and selection of leaders. All volunteers must have completed the Garda vetting process before starting work with the group.

Useful information sources include:

- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011) *Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. Available at: [www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/Child\\_Welfare\\_Protection/ChildrenFirst.pdf](http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/Child_Welfare_Protection/ChildrenFirst.pdf)
- Health Service Executive (2011) *Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook*. Available at: [www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/services/Children/WelfarePractice.pdf](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/services/Children/WelfarePractice.pdf)
- National Youth Council of Ireland's *Child Protection Programme* and for more information and access to training, see [www.childprotection.ie](http://www.childprotection.ie)
- National Youth Council of Ireland (2006) *'Let's Beat Bullying': An Anti-bullying resource for those working with young people in Youth Work Settings*. Available at: [www.youth.ie/nyci/lets-beat-bullying](http://www.youth.ie/nyci/lets-beat-bullying)
- Health and Safety Authority, *Health and Safety Legislation*, see [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie)
- City of Dublin Youth Services Board (2009) *Toolkit of Essential Guidelines for Good Youth Work Practice*. Available at: [www.cdysb.ie/publications/publications\\_details.cfm/pckey/27](http://www.cdysb.ie/publications/publications_details.cfm/pckey/27)

## Indicators of achievement

1. Appropriate insurance cover in place.
2. Health and Safety procedures in place.
3. Child Protection Policy and procedures in place.

1. Evidence of insurance cover, e.g. for on-site and off-site activities.
2. Evidence of Health and Safety procedures, e.g. Health and Safety Statement, trained first aiders, first aid kit, fire drills.
3. Evidence of Child Protection Policy and procedures, e.g.
  - Child Protection Policy;
  - named designated person;
  - Garda vetting process;
  - parental/guardian consent forms;
  - sign-in forms.

## Core Principle 3

### DEVELOPMENTAL/EDUCATIONAL

This principle aims to support and encourage the development of the knowledge, skills and values of young people to meet their social and personal needs, to help them realise their potential and to participate constructively in community life.

## Standard 3

**Programmes (activities), practices (how you work and how the group operates) and people (young people, volunteer leaders, etc) ensure and promote the development, achievement and progression of young people.**

This standard states that volunteer leaders promote and support young people's personal and social development by providing a range of programmes and activities which are developmental and/or educational.

The programmes, activities and practices of the group should provide opportunities for young people that are challenging and fun and respond to their interests, needs, abilities and aspirations.

## Indicators of achievement

**1. Young people's needs and interests are recognised and responded to.**

**2. Young people's abilities and potential are developed.**

**3. Young people's participation and achievement are recognised.**

**4. Support and training is provided for volunteer leaders**

1. Example of how young people's needs are taken into account and/or responsive programmes or activities provided.
2. Example of how young people's abilities are improved, new skills learned, e.g. leadership skills development, team working.
3. Example of how young people's achievements are recognised, e.g. award events, certificates of completion of programme/activity.
4. Example of supports and training provided for volunteer leaders, e.g. leadership/group work/child protection training, information nights, informal and/or formal support from other volunteer leaders, parent organisations.



## VOLUNTEER LEADERS

Volunteer leaders are central in supporting groups to achieve these National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups. They should be appropriately selected and supported so that they can actively and competently support the purpose and principles listed above.

### Selection and support

This involves adhering to best practice guidelines when recruiting and selecting volunteers, such as using application forms, checking references etc. and ensuring that all those working with the group who have substantial unsupervised access to children and young people have gone through the Garda vetting process. Following the selection process, leaders should have access to, and be encouraged and supported in availing of, appropriate training to enable them to fulfil their roles within the group.

### Roles and responsibilities

It is also important that, in as far as practicable, the leaders' roles and responsibilities are clearly designated and defined. Groups using a committee structure (either leader- and/or member-based) should detail the roles and areas of responsibility, e.g. Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer. Other groups operating on a short-term, project-specific basis may assign roles related to the project without using a committee structure. The most important issue is that volunteers are clear about their roles and responsibilities, e.g. who is the 'leader in charge', who manages the finances, etc.

### Records and administration

Groups should ensure that they maintain records and implement appropriate administrative procedures. This will normally include using a variety of forms, such as:

- membership registration forms;
- parental/guardian consent forms;
- medical consent forms;
- incident/accident forms;
- appropriate recording forms for child protection concerns;
- financial procedures and records, e.g. have a bank/Post Office/Credit Union account in the name of the group, with two authorised signatories and an annual statement of income and expenditure.

Parent organisations can provide guidance on the above. Also the CDYSB *Toolkit of Essential Guidelines for Good Youth Work Practice* (2009) includes sample forms. Available at: [www.cdysb.ie/publications/publications\\_details.cfm/pckey/27](http://www.cdysb.ie/publications/publications_details.cfm/pckey/27)

## REGIONAL YOUTH/DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS of national youth organisations and VEC YOUTH/LIAISON OFFICERS

Where a youth group is affiliated to a national youth organisation, the **Regional Youth/Development Officer** of that organisation will actively support the implementation of these National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups with their respective groups. **VEC Youth/Liaison Officers** will support their implementation with non-affiliated youth groups in their areas and will also liaise with Regional Youth/Development Officers of national youth organisations.

## Acknowledgements

Our thanks to the following for their help in developing the National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups:

### National Youth Work Organisations

- Kerry Diocesan Youth Service
- Catholic Youth Care
- Church of Ireland Youth Department
- Youth Work Ireland
- Foróige
- Irish Girl Guides
- YMCA, Cork
- Ogra Chorcaí
- City of Dublin Youth Service Board
- Scouting Ireland
- NYCI Specialist Organisations

### Regional consultations

- **Wexford:** Staff, volunteers and young people from Scouting Ireland, Irish Girl Guides, Foróige and FDYS including Caim Youth Club
- **Cavan:** Staff, volunteers and young people from Co. Cavan VEC Youth Service, The Cailin Club, Community Youth Projects, Cavan, The Face Off Project, Breiffne Integrated
- **Monaghan:** Youth Work Ireland
- **Donegal:** Donegal Marching Band (young people and volunteers)
- **Cork:** Ogra Chorcaí volunteers and young people and in particular the Cairde Cathedral youth group
- **Dublin:** CDYSB Independent Clubs including Nullamore Youth Club and Kilmore Youth Club
- **Wicklow:** Foróige Youth Group, Baltinglass
- **Kildare:** Appleteenies, Kildare Youth Service and,  
Siobhán McGrory and Louise Monaghan who facilitated many of the above consultations

### VEC Youth Officers

### City of Dublin Youth Service Board

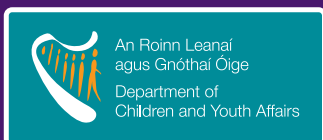
### National Youth Work Advisory Committee











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