



# A Guide to Evaluation of Centres for Education

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# Evaluation Support and Research Unit

## A Guide to Evaluation of Centres for Education



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S  
I N S P E C T O R A T E

# 1. Introduction

Since its establishment in the 1980s, Youthreach has been a fundamental element of the response of the Department of Education and Skills and the Government to early school leaving and educational disadvantage in Ireland. Youthreach is jointly operated by FÁS through Community Training Centres and Education and Training Boards (ETBs) through Youthreach centres. Youthreach has provided a way in which young people and adults may return to, or complete their education or training in a learner-centred environment. Youthreach caters for almost 6,000 learners annually in places funded by the Department of Education and Skills.

Overall policy on Youthreach provision in ETB-managed centres is the responsibility of Further Education Section in the Department. Management of Youthreach centres, of which there are over 100 nationally, rests with ETBs within their further and adult education brief. Since 2006, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills has been involved in evaluating the quality of the education in those Youthreach centres managed by ETBs and funded by the Department of Education and Skills, as provided for in the Education Act (1998), section 7 (2) (b).

## 2. Overview of evaluation model

### 2.1. What are Evaluations of Centres for Education?

Evaluations of centres for education address the quality and effectiveness of aspects of the education provided in centres for education and they provide advice and support to teaching staffs, resource persons, centre coordinators and centre management. The evaluation takes place within a one-week period. The model provides that all meetings, document review, teaching and learning observations and feedback (at which the findings and recommendations of the evaluation are presented and discussed) will be completed within the designated week. Each evaluation will be carried out by a team of two inspectors. Following the completion of the in-centre phase of the evaluation, a short report is issued in accordance with the arrangements as described in *Publication of School Reports – Guidelines 2006* which is available on the Department's website.

### 2.2 What is the focus of the evaluation?

Inspectors will evaluate and report on:

- Attendance and retention
- Educational progression
- Teaching, learning and attainment
- Literacy and numeracy
- Life skills
- Child protection
- Management and coordination of the centre
- The centre's capacity for improvement and development

### 2.3 What are the purposes of the evaluation?

The central purposes of the evaluation are:

1. To monitor the quality of teaching and learning and the learners' overall experience in the centre
2. To identify and affirm good practice in the centre
3. To provide advice to centre management, co-ordinators and teaching staff about the quality of the education provided in the centre and how this can be improved and developed in accordance with learners' needs

4. To report on the effectiveness of the organisation and management of the centre and the Internal Centre Evaluation (ICE) processes within the centre

## 2.4 Evaluations of Centres for Education as part of the Inspectorate's work

Inspectors carry out evaluations of centres for education (and other inspections) in fulfilment of their role under section 13 of the Education Act 1998. Section 13(3)(a)(i) of the Act provides for visits to recognised schools and centres for education "on the initiative of the Inspectorate" while section 13(7) places an obligation on the board and staff of a centre to accord inspectors every reasonable facility and co-operation in the performance of their duties.

Evaluations of centres for education are carried out in accordance with the terms of the *Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate* - which is available on the Department's website.

## 3. What happens during a typical centre evaluation?

### 3.1 The pre-evaluation phase

#### 3.1.1 Formal notification

Two weeks' notice of inspection is provided to centres and the notification is copied to the relevant Education and Training Board (ETB). The chief executive officer (CEO), and the chair of the board of management, where relevant, will receive a copy of the letter of notification.

Following the official notification, the reporting inspector will contact the centre co-ordinator to outline the format of the evaluation, to arrange meetings, to arrange for distribution and completion of parent and staff questionnaires in advance of the evaluation visit and to clarify any specific issues.

#### 3.1.2 Centre documentation

During the evaluation, the inspection team seeks key documentation critical to the centre's operation in order to gain an insight into the planning, reviewing, communication and management activities that take place in the centre. This helps to inform the evaluation team of the particular context of the centre and to identify areas for discussion during the in-centre evaluation stage.

- **The centre information form**  
The centre co-ordinator, in collaboration with ETB management, is requested to complete a centre information form/questionnaire in electronic format. The completed form is returned to the reporting inspector by e-mail within five working days of the date of its issue.
- **Centre documentation in advance**  
The evaluation team examines a limited range of policy and procedural documents in advance of the in-centre phase of the evaluation. These documents, which typically include those listed below, should be provided to the reporting inspector in electronic format, wherever possible.
- Documents relating to:
  - Initial and ongoing assessment of learners

- Literacy and numeracy
- Other curriculum provision
- Admission, enrolment and attendance
- Transfer and progression
- Code of Behaviour for learners

The centre is requested to provide documentary evidence of its compliance with the required aspects of *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011) and with *Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills 2011)

### 3.1.3 Administration of questionnaires

The evaluation team greatly values the views of learners, teaching staff, resource persons and parents as key stakeholders in the centre community. As part of the evaluation, questionnaires are administered to the above groups in order to get their views on the operation of the centre. The evaluation of centres for education process provides a valuable opportunity for teaching staff and resource persons to reflect on the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. In this context, online questionnaires are used to gather their perspectives about their own work and about aspects of management, leadership and learning in the centre. Confidentiality is assured in respect of all responses from staff, parents and learners.

Parent questionnaires are distributed, collected and forwarded to the Department for analysis in advance of the inspection visit. Learner questionnaires are administered on the first day of the evaluation visit and are returned immediately for analysis. Teaching staff and resource persons are asked to complete an online questionnaire.

The completed questionnaires provide an insight into the performance and operation of the centre and are a key source of evidence as part of the evaluation. Following analysis of the completed questionnaires, a copy of the aggregated data is provided to the centre. Information gained from the analysis of questionnaires may be referred to in the inspection report. Detailed statistical information will not be provided.

## 3.2 The in-centre evaluation phase

The in-centre phase of the evaluation typically takes place over three days. The evaluation team visit the centre on the days notified to the co-ordinator and the ETB.

### 3.2.1 A review of centre documents

During the in-centre evaluation phase, the inspectors examine a selection of centre documents that are relevant to the evaluation process. The main objective of this is to ascertain the extent to which the centre has engaged with the Quality Framework Initiative (QFI). In addition to the documents requested in advance (3.1.2 above), the following documentation should be available in the centre for consultation by the inspection team:

- Mission statement/aims and objectives of the centre
- Policies, procedures or protocols on self-evaluation, including documentation on:
  - Internal Centre Evaluation (ICE)
  - Communications
  - Programme delivery and review
  - Establishing and supervising work experience
  - Counselling, Guidance
  - Transport, childcare
  - Health and safety, including the health and safety statement
  - Staff recruitment and development
- Centre Development Plan
- Vocational Services Support Unit (VSSU) evaluation reports

- Policies/codes of practice on
  - Sexual and other harassment and bullying (general)
  - Anti-Bullying policy (learners)
  - Drugs/substance misuse
  - Equality and intercultural issues
  - Code of conduct for staff

### **3.2.2 Meetings and interviews**

During the in-centre evaluation phase, meetings and interviews are held to gather information and evidence to inform the evaluation. These meetings are particularly valuable in providing the evaluation team with an insight into the leadership and management of the centre.

- Meetings typically take place with senior management of the centre, including the CEO/adult education officer of the ETB and with the centre coordinator.
- A meeting is held with the centre resource person(s)/teaching staff.
- Meetings are also held with a focus group of parents and a focus group of learners. These meetings provide the evaluation team with an insight into the experience of day-to-day life in the centre from the learners' perspective. The evaluation team consults with the centre co-ordinator in selecting learners to attend this meeting to ensure that the group is representative and includes a range of learners.
- Additional meetings may be convened by the evaluation team, if deemed necessary.

### **3.2.3 Observation of teaching and learning**

Inspectors evaluate learning and teaching in a number of lessons. The daily schedule of lesson observations is provided to the centre co-ordinator at the beginning of each day. The focus of these observations is not limited to specific subject areas, and lessons are selected from across the curriculum offered in the centre.

Lesson observations focus primarily on evaluating the quality of learning and teaching. As lessons vary in duration, nature and style, inspection methods also vary in order to obtain evidence upon which to base judgments about learning and teaching. During the lesson visit, the inspector's activities may include:

- Brief introduction and discussion with the teacher/tutor/resource person
- Appropriate introduction by the inspector of himself/herself to the learners
- Observation of learning and teaching
- Interaction with learners
- Review of learners' work
- Recording observations
- Concluding discussion with the teacher/tutor/resource person

At an agreed time the inspector provides brief oral feedback to the teacher/tutor/resource person. This may be immediately after the lesson or at another time during the day. The purposes of this discussion are:

- To discuss the lesson visited and any other issues related to the quality of learning and teaching observed
- To identify, acknowledge and affirm good practice
- To provide supportive and constructive feedback to the teacher/tutor/resource person
- To make recommendations (where appropriate)

## **3.3 The post-evaluation phase**

During this period the evaluation team reviews the evidence collected and drafts the key findings and recommendations arising from the evaluation. The evaluation team returns to the

centre to present and discuss the findings and recommendations with key centre personnel to include:

- The centre co-ordinator
- ETB management (CEO and/or Education Officer or other)
- Centre staff
- Board of management

The post-evaluation phase culminates with the issuing of the evaluation report to the centre co-ordinator, the board of management and the CEO of the ETB.

## 4. The evaluation report

The draft inspection report will be finalised following the completion of the post-evaluation feedback meeting. The inspection report will be processed through the normal quality assurance procedures of the Inspectorate and will be issued to the centre for factual verification and later for centre response as prescribed in *Publication of School Inspection Reports: Guidelines* (DES, 2006). The final report and the centre's response, if appropriate, will be published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

The framework for the evaluation of centres for education forms the core of the report template. This is shown in Appendix 1.

## 5. Review of inspections

A member of the teaching staff or of the board of management or a co-ordinator affected by an inspection may seek a review of the inspection using the procedures outlined in *Procedures for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13(9) of the Education Act (1998) (Revised 2006)*, published on the Department of Education website.

## 6. Publication and revision of this Guide

This Guide has been prepared following consultation with the education partners as required under Section 13(8) of the Education Act, 1998.

The Inspectorate is committed to improving the ways in which it carries out its evaluation and advisory work in centres of education and the provisions of this Guide will be reviewed from time to time.

# APPENDIX 1

## Report

The report reflects the evaluation framework for evaluations of centres for education. Typically, a report will be of 1,000 to 1,200 words in length and will be presented in bulleted format.

### Introduction

A focussed evaluation of XXX Centre was undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in *(Month) (Year)*. During that evaluation, aspects of the centre's work in relation to attendance, retention, progression, attainment, literacy, numeracy, and life skills were reviewed. The evaluation involved interviews with centre personnel (and others), review of centre documents and records, observation of teaching and learning and other activities, inspection of learners' work, questionnaires for learners, staff and parents, and focus group meetings with learners and parents. Following the evaluation, a meeting to discuss the findings was held with the co-ordinator and a number of staff.

### 1 Key findings and recommendations

#### *1.1 Key findings*

#### *1.2 Recommendations*

### 2 The Learners' Experience

#### *2.1 Attendance/Retention*

#### *2.2 Educational Progression*

#### *2.3 Teaching, Learning and Attainment*

#### *2.4 Literacy and Numeracy*

#### *2.5 Life skills*

#### *2.6 Child protection*

### 3 Centre Organisation and Management

#### *3.1 General operation of the Centre*

#### *3.2 The Centre's capacity for improvement and development*