ESRI ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Evaluation of the National Youthreach Programme

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VENUE
Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise

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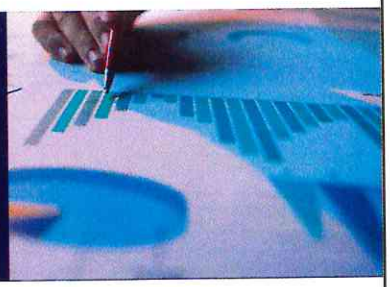

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Aims of the study

- Comprehensive analysis of Youthreach provision through Youthreach Centres and Community Training Centres
- Incorporate multiple perspectives: participants/learners, teachers/instructors and coordinators/managers
- Capture the voice of young people who have disengaged from school
- Inform policy and practice regarding provision for early school leavers

Methodology

- Desk-based research
- A national survey of Youthreach senior managers and Youthreach coordinators/ Community Training Centre managers
- Secondary analysis of administrative data and historic trends from the School Leavers Survey data
- Case-study research in Youthreach and Community Training centres
- Consultative workshops

Outline of the presentation

- Desk-based findings: an overview
- Findings from:
  - A survey of all senior managers (ETB CEOs, FET Directors, Adult Education Officers (with management responsibilities), Training Centre managers): 63% response rate
  - A survey of all 147 Youthreach coordinators and Community Training Centre managers: 86% response rate
  - Emerging issues from qualitative case-studies

Case Studies

Survey data were used to identify 10 Youthreach/CT centres for in-depth case-study analysis (ongoing):

- 10 Youthreach coordinators/CTC managers – unpack issues covered in the survey in greater detail
- Youthreach resource staff/teachers/instructors - 2 staff per centre
- Youthreach participants - 10 current participants per centre (approx. 2 past participants per Centre)

Desk-based findings

Irish and international literature :

- Retention rates
- Factors influencing early school leaving
- Consequences of early school leaving
- Mapping provision

School retention rates

- Rates of retention are improving with more young people staying in school. Of the 2010 entry cohort, 91.2% sat the Leaving Certificate Exams in 2017/ 2018.
- Gender gap of 3%
- Gap of 8.5% in retention between DEIS and non-DEIS schools
- Some geographical variation

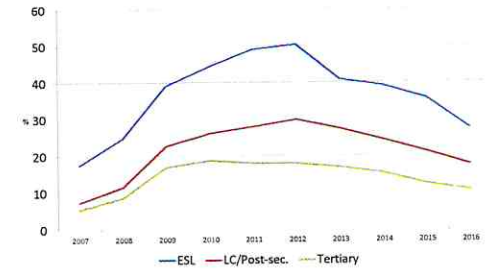
Factors influencing early school leaving

- ESL is strongly structured by family background: social class, parental education
- Prior attainment: Students with lower reading or maths scores on entry to second-level education are more likely to leave school early
- Higher early school leaving rates among those allocated to lower stream classes
- Negative teacher-student relationships are key contributors to ESL
- Punitive sanctions, including suspensions, as a trigger to ESL
- ESL as a gradual process rather than an 'event'

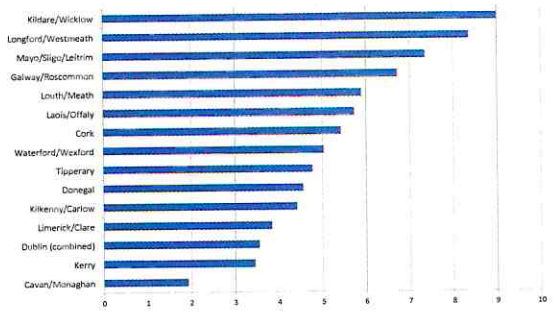
Consequences of Early School Leaving

- Early school leavers are significantly more likely to be unemployed than those with higher qualifications
- More likely to become involved in low-paid, low status work
- ESL are more likely to be dependent on social welfare payments
- ESL have lower levels of general health, report more anxiety and depression and have a higher mortality rate
- Greater risk of becoming involved in crime

Unemployment rates among early school leavers (15-24 year olds)



Ratio of ESLs aged 15-24 to the number of places taken up in YR and CTCs by ETB area



Perspectives of senior managers

- ¾ feel there are the right no. of YR/CTCs in their area (but some variation across ETB areas)
- YR is seen as providing a distinctive programme:
  - Learner centred and responsive to needs: smaller group size and adapting course content

    *The main difference between Youthreach and schools is that the programme **is learner-centred** and is delivered in a small group setting. (Senior manager)*
  - Range of supports offered to learners
  - Emphasis on life skills and personal development – holistic approach

    *Youthreach is strong on building **transversal skills** – confidence, decision-making and personal and interpersonal skills. (Senior manager)*

Senior managers (2)

- Advantage of YR: national programme and flexibility at local level to adapt to learner needs:

The current configuration of Youthreach allows for flexibility in terms of design and delivery within a framework of accountability, quality assurance and operational requirements. Local needs can influence programme design. (Senior manager)

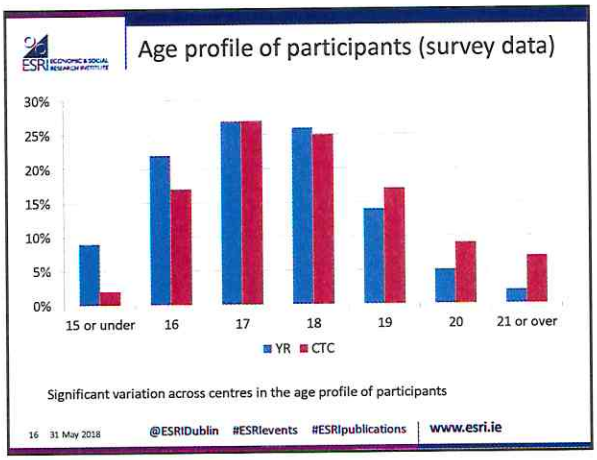
The ability to adapt the programme to changing needs ensures the programme stays relevant. (Senior manager)

Senior management role

- Oversight role: monitoring programme expenditure and quality, forward planning, monitoring the delivery of activities
- Average meetings with coordinators/managers 4 times per year but significant variation
- Centres seen as having a lot of autonomy in deciding on provision, though senior managers have some input
- Generally satisfied with governance and programme overall
- Less positive about funding (esp. lack of capital budget), premises and staff training

Profile of participants

- Both senior managers and coordinators/ CTC managers report significant changes in the profiles and needs of participants:
  - Emotional/mental health
  - Learning difficulties/SEN
  - Substance abuse
- Overall multiple difficulties and greater complexity of needs – challenges for Centres around provision of additional supports and staff CPD


Age profile of participants (survey data)
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
15 or under
16
17
18
19
20
21 or over
YR CTC
Significant variation across centres in the age profile of participants
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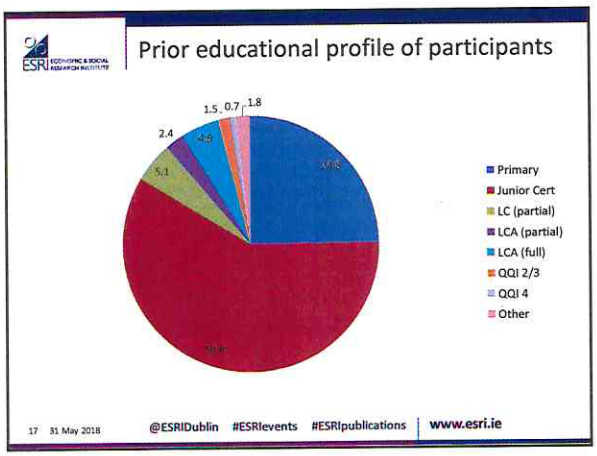
Prior educational profile of participants
1.5
0.7
1.8
2.4
4.6
5.1
Primary
Junior Cert
LC (partial)
LCA (partial)
LCA (full)
QQI 2/3
QQI 4
Other
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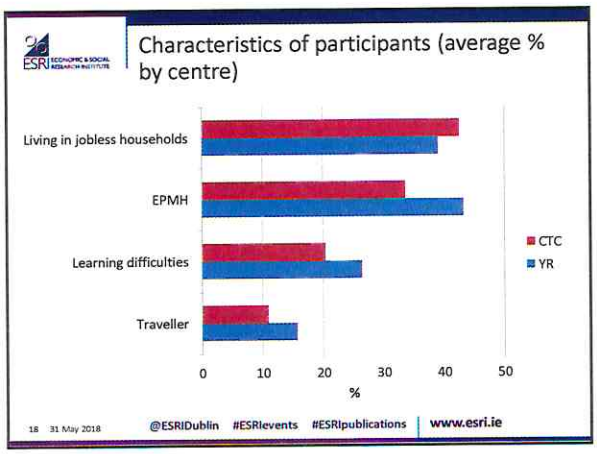
Characteristics of participants (average % by centre)
Living in jobless households
EPMH
Learning difficulties
Traveller
CTC
YR
0
10
20
30
40
50
%
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Case-study interviews: learner profile

I believe that the kids who are coming out of school now have much more issues that what we were dealing with, say 25, 30 years ago...there's much **more mental health issues** with the young people. (Coordinator/manager)

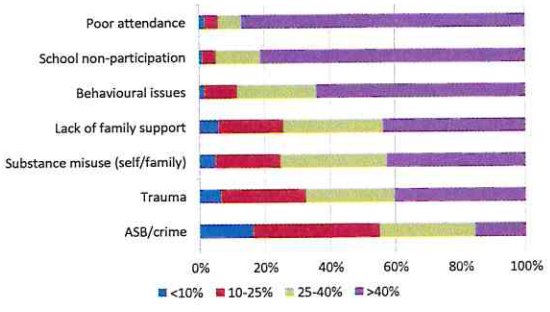
It seems to be that the students that were kind of bullies, or that were kicked out of school, we were taking in. It seems that the students now are the other side...the schools are trying to hold on and work with the bullies but then the other **people that are being bullied are leaving**. So we would have a lot of students now that would have mental health issues. (Staff)

Mixed ability profile of learners

When I was teaching maths first, they would all be very bad at maths...**now there's a mixture**. You've got guys that are brilliant at maths and you're kinda going 'why are you out of school?' or the other side of it, people who are illiterate, who couldn't read a sentence. (Staff)

[It's] so **varied**. I have people in my class who are really computer quick and savvy and fast learners and bored almost with the level of the work and I have to give them more interesting stuff to do and in the same class I might have somebody who can't switch on the computer. (Staff)

Participant experiences prior to programme



Leaving school – the voice of young people

I was very bold, didn't want to learn...very immature. Then after I left school I wanted to do my Junior Cert, I was sorry then. That's why I went back to Youthreach to try and get education. (Young person)

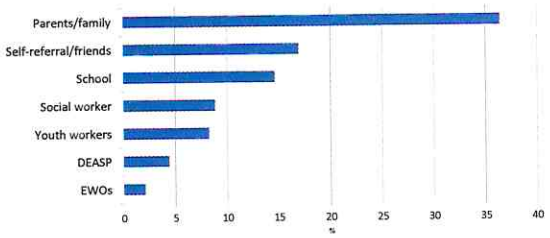
They were saying to me I was getting too messy, that if I don't leave I would get kicked out. So I'd rather leave than get kicked out. (Young person)

We were constantly getting suspended, constantly getting out, constantly getting detention. A week before my Junior Cert I got suspended and I just never went back. It was stupid decision, but I was young and stupid. (Young person)

I was getting in trouble for the littlest of things, I was getting sent home and it wouldn't be a reason for getting sent home. (Young person)

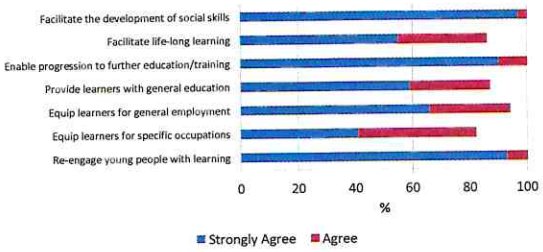
They were trying to kick me out...they said it to me. I don't know why like. I never really went to school. I'd go on the mitch. (Young person)

Referral into the programme



Differences in requirements in relation to young people enrolling in CTCs compared with Youthreach Centres

Purpose of the programme (coordinators/ managers)



Almost half would like to see an even **stronger emphasis on soft skills** in the programme goals.

Case-study interviews: purpose of the programme (staff)

It is **self-development** as well. It's not just academic. (Staff)

They're more able to get up and get in and **relate to people**... it's those little things that I think are probably the biggest, for me, would be the biggest achievement or the most positive outcome. (Staff)

With the learners, getting them in and **getting the confidence** to go out into the workplace is the important thing. They would never dream of doing that themselves, you really have to hold their hand the whole way. (Staff)

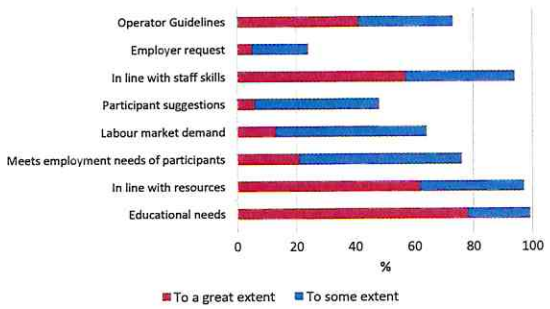
Case-study interviews: quality of relationships with staff (learners)

They'd notice straight away [if something is wrong] and would pull you out and say 'how's home?'. If something at home is bothering you, you could tell them...They're like second parents, for me, if you are ever in bad form, they talk to you. (Young person)

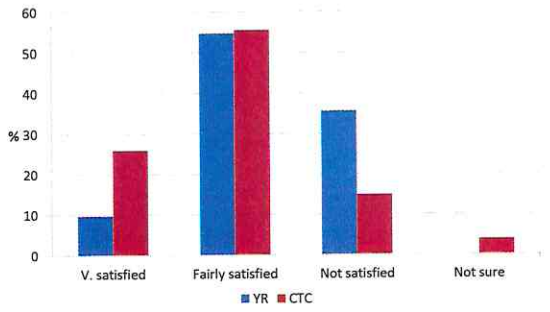
Like a family. (Young person)

Like talking to a friend. (Young person)

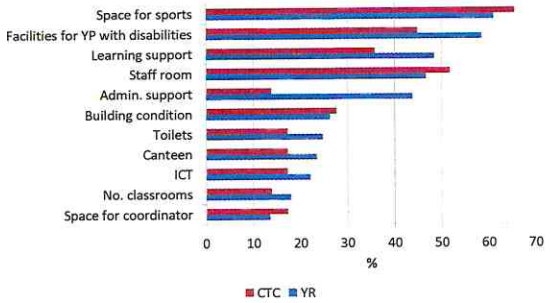
Influences on course provision



Satisfaction with funding



% 'not satisfied' with resources



Support measures needed

- More counselling/ mentoring support
- Literacy and numeracy support
- Positive staff-student relationships

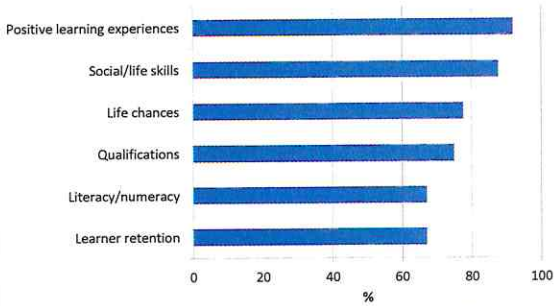
Learner engagement

- Attendance issues are reported in relation to half or more of the learners in just under half of Centres (but significant variation in attendance across Centres)
- Rates of 50%+ non-completion in 1/5 of centres
- Interviews: young people are much more positive about their learning experiences in the Centres compared to school

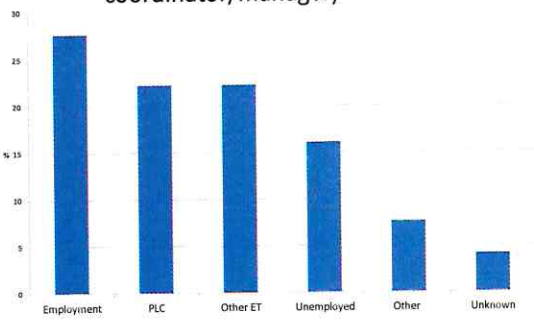
What is a successful outcome for participants? (Coordinators/managers)

- Progression to further education, training and employment (45%)
- Development of soft skills (37%)
- Certification (13%)
- Positive experience of education (4%)

Perceived impact of the programme (% 'to a great extent')



Participant outcomes (as reported by coordinator/manager)



Issues arising

- Geographical coverage
- Target group:
  - Only pre-LC leavers?
  - Implications of changes in complexity of need
  - Attracting other early leavers
- Difference between YR and CTC in governance and learner route into the programme
- Differences between and within Centres in staff terms and conditions
- How can learner engagement be enhanced? (Attendance, completion)
- Relative emphasis on soft skills development and certification
- What metrics best capture learner outcomes?