



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales: Introduction and guidance

April 2021



# The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales: Introduction and guidance

## Audience

Organisations providing youth work provision within Wales.

## Overview

This document contains an introduction to the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales, as well as guidance on how to use the quality standards, indicators and grade descriptors for the three levels of the Quality Mark. It also includes guidance on completing a self-assessment should an organisation wish to apply for the Quality Mark.

## Action required

Organisations should refer to this document when using the quality standards as a tool for improving the quality and impact of their youth work provision, and when developing a self-assessment and associated evidence in order to apply for the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales.

## Further information

Enquiries about this document should be directed to:

Youth Engagement Branch

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

e-mail: [youthwork@gov.wales](mailto:youthwork@gov.wales)

## Additional copies

This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at [gov.wales/quality-mark-for-youth-work](https://gov.wales/quality-mark-for-youth-work)

## Related documents

*The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales: Bronze Level (2021); The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales: Silver Level (2021); The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales: Gold Level (2021); The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales: Guidance for assessors (2021).*

# Contents

<b>Ministerial foreword</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Context and background</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales</b>	<b>7</b>
The structure	7
Why are there three levels?	11
Who can use the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales?	14
The benefits of using the Quality Mark	16
How the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales differs from other quality standards and awards	17
<b>Applying for the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales</b>	<b>18</b>
How to apply for the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales	19
Completing the self-assessment template and preparing a portfolio of evidence	19
Grade descriptors	20
<b>Developing a portfolio of evidence</b>	<b>21</b>
Confidentiality	21
Tips for the self-assessment process	22
Preparing for the assessment visit	24
The assessment process	25
Assessment feedback	26
How long does the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales remain valid?	26
Appeals	27
Complaints	28
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>29</b>

## Ministerial foreword

Youth work provides young people with an environment where they can relax, have fun, and feel secure, supported and valued. It is delivered in many different ways, but we must always be sure that when a young person chooses to engage with a youth worker, perhaps when they have turned an emotional corner, grasped an opportunity or worked out a solution to a problem, the services provided to them must be robust and of high quality.

The [Youth Work Strategy for Wales](#), published in June 2019, set our high-level vision for youth work in Wales, and that includes ensuring we have the workforce who are able to deliver that. The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales provides us with a toolkit by which we can support organisations to challenge their practices, and help them to celebrate their achievements and work with young people, recognising the hard work and endeavour it takes them to achieve the outcomes. It can help us to drive up the quality of services being delivered, and provide a good bench mark to help organisations identify where they could improve.

There are many benefits to organisations for achieving the Quality Mark. Most notably being recognised, having a badge of excellence which signals you are truly delivering a service to young people in which you, your peers and Wales can be proud. I am really pleased that we can build on the solid work already undertaken in developing this Quality Mark. We have refreshed the standards, terminology and language to ensure it is robust, fit for purpose and achievable by all sizes and shapes of organisations now, and going forward.

I would like to congratulate everyone who has already achieved the Quality Mark and encourage those of you thinking about this to sign up. I would also like to thank everyone who has been involved in helping us to get to this point and who shared their views ahead of this refresh taking place.



**Kirsty Williams MS**  
**Minister for Education**



## Introduction

The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales (referred to for ease of reference throughout this document as ‘the Quality Mark’) is a unique tool for self-assessment, planning improvement and gaining a Quality Mark for youth work, and is divided into three levels – Bronze, Silver and Gold.

The provision of high-quality youth services has never been more important. Every organisation wants to provide the best service it can and to be in a position to demonstrate the positive results of its work. They want to be able to show what they do and how well they do it. This is essentially what good practice and quality is all about – knowing what you do, learning from it, and doing it better are key elements in the pathway to continuous improvement and to providing a service that meets the needs of young people.

The Quality Mark provides a framework for quality assurance and is designed as a support and developmental tool that provides youth work organisations with an opportunity to articulate, assess and improve their work within a structured framework.

The Quality Mark can be directly linked with the [National Occupational Standards](#) and [Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes](#) (Youth Work in Wales Review Group, 2018), and it supports the aims and objectives of the [Youth Work Strategy for Wales](#) and its related policy and regulatory connections. The Quality Mark is unique in this regard as being the only system available in Wales that can meet a profession-specific set of standards, and is recognised and embedded in the *Youth Work Strategy for Wales*. It has created a unified approach accepted by voluntary and statutory sectors and consists of two distinct elements:

- a set of quality standards that youth work organisations can use as a tool for self-assessment and improvement
- an externally assessed quality mark that is a national award demonstrating an organisation’s excellence.

It is intended to assist the wide variety of organisations that deliver youth work to demonstrate and celebrate the excellence of their work with young people. It is hoped that youth work organisations will embrace the opportunity to gain this Quality Mark – a Quality Mark which demonstrates quality youth work provision available for young people and provision which supports young people to reach their full potential. It will also provide organisations with an external validation of the quality and impact of their youth work.

The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales has been developed with input from a wide range of representatives from voluntary and statutory organisations that support or directly deliver youth work.

The Quality Mark has been successfully used by organisations in Wales from the Bronze Level up to the Gold Level, and has been gained by small youth organisations, local authorities and national voluntary bodies.

The Quality Mark has been designed to be used by any organisation whose work with young people fits with the key purpose and definitions of youth work above. It takes into account the wide range of organisations that deliver youth work in Wales, and recognises that youth work is delivered in a wide variety of settings and contexts. The Quality Mark focusses on their work with young people aged between 11 and 25.

The Quality Mark seeks to embrace the diversity of types of provision, styles of delivery and facilitation, and arrangements for delivering youth work rather than asserting a single model.

## Context and background

The *Youth Work Strategy for Wales* states that:

*Quality youth work is a social interaction, but doesn't have to be limited to specific organisations or distinct geographical locations. The strength of the youth work approach is its adaptability to different situations and contexts. It is driven by informed, competent, committed individuals and organisations across the voluntary, statutory and private sectors and, at its heart, creates safe spaces for young people to learn and grow.*

*To realise our vision, we must ensure that quality youth work in Welsh, English, and where appropriate an individual's language of choice, is accessible and inclusive to young people right across the country. While we must give important consideration to issues such as rurality and location of services, youth work must also be accessible and inclusive in a wider sense to all young people. It should reflect the range of diverse backgrounds, identities, experiences, and needs of young people in Wales. Youth work must, therefore, proactively remove barriers to engagement and participation, ensuring it is accessible to all, and particularly to those young people who may have experience of isolation, marginalisation, exploitation, or discrimination, including those with a protected characteristic. This requires us to rethink our approaches to deliver an accessible, active offer, no matter the access point.*

For many years Wales has demonstrated its strong commitment to supporting children and young people in many ways.

- The [Learning and Skills Act 2000](#), Extending Entitlement 2000, and the subsequent [Extending Entitlement: Support for 11 to 25 year olds in Wales](#) (2002), set the legal and main policy context for youth work in Wales since 2000, and sought to ensure appropriate support and a set of entitlements for young people through youth work and youth support services.
- In 2001, Wales was the first country in the UK to appoint a Children's Commissioner and the first country to enshrine in law the need to consider, and work toward, the well-being of future generations.
- In 2004, the Welsh Government adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the basis for policy making for children, and enshrined it in law through the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011.

- Our [Children and Young People's National Participation Standards](#) (2016) are there to ensure young people have their voice heard and participate in making decisions that affect them.

The result of this is a professionally confident youth work sector who work to a common definition of the purpose of youth work.

Youth work can mean different things to different people and, in part, this has contributed to a range of different strategic approaches to its delivery. But it is this fluidity, underpinned by distinctive values, that is one of youth work's greatest strengths. Youth work is not confined to a single setting or context, though it is undoubtedly a key part of the wider education service. Youth work practice can and does adapt, and it can do so without compromising its values, principles and purpose. Youth work can change lives.

The *Youth Work Strategy for Wales* includes the action to strengthen the Quality Mark to ensure it is suitable for both the statutory and voluntary youth work sector. The Quality Mark provides a robust peer-led independent external assessment of the quality and performance of organisations that deliver youth work. It is an important element in improving consistency, quality and providing evidence of the impact and cost effectiveness of youth work interventions. The Quality Mark has the strong support of the youth sector in Wales and is accepted generally as the assessment method of choice throughout Wales.



## The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales

The Quality Mark consists of two distinct elements:

- quality standards for youth work – a set of quality standards that organisations can use to self-assess the quality and impact of their work with young people and develop plans for improvement
- a Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales – a nationally recognised quality award that organisations can apply for through developing a self-assessment and associated evidence, which is then externally assessed.

### The structure

The Quality Mark is made up of three levels – Bronze, Silver and Gold. Within each level there are four quality standards and within each quality standard there are associated ‘indicators’. As part of the Quality Mark application process, organisations are required to provide evidence to support each indicator. The quality standards in each of the levels are listed below.

Bronze: Young people are safe and able to thrive.	
Quality standard	Indicators
1.1 Performance management	<p>The organisation has a clearly stated mission or vision and has a strategy and/or plan(s) for its work with young people.</p> <p>There is a plan which demonstrates how the organisation measures the impact and effectiveness of its work with young people.</p> <p>The organisation regularly uses a systematic approach for monitoring, reviewing and revising its organisational plan(s) and targets and/or performance indicators.</p> <p>The organisation can link its work with key local and national policies, and/or strategies and priorities for young people.</p>

<b>1.2 Quality of youth work practice</b>	<p>The organisation's workforce understands the needs of local areas and the needs of the young people with whom they work.</p> <p>The organisation's workforce engages young people in planning and evaluating activities.</p> <p>The organisation's workforce engages young people in informal and non-formal learning opportunities that are educative, empowering, participative, inclusive and expressive, which extend their knowledge, skills and understanding.</p> <p>The organisation's workforce develops positive relationships with young people to effectively support and promote young people's learning and achievement.</p>
<b>1.3 Young people's learning and development</b>	<p>Following engagement in the organisation's youth work provision, young people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding of themselves and their learning.</p> <p>Following engagement in the organisation's youth work provision, young people develop personal, social and emotional skills.</p> <p>The organisation enables young people to help shape the organisation's vision and aims, and involves the young people in the design, planning and evaluation of provision to meet their needs.</p>
<b>1.4 Legal requirements</b>	<p>The organisation has relevant policies, procedures and guidance, and can meet its legal requirements and safe practice.</p> <p>The organisation has effective policies and procedures for the safeguarding and health and safety of young people, staff and volunteers.</p> <p>The organisation's workforce understands and is trained and equipped to implement policies, procedures and guidance for safeguarding, health and safety, and other legal requirements.</p> <p>The organisation regularly monitors and reviews its policies, procedures and guidance, and uses the results of these processes for improvement and change.</p>

<b>Silver: Youth work is inclusive, accessible and offered by trained staff.</b>	
<b>Quality standard</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<b>2.1 Involving young people</b>	<p>The organisation has a strategy or plan(s) in place to ensure young people's continued active participation and engagement.</p> <p>The organisation monitors and evaluates their strategy or plan which ensures young people's active involvement at all levels in decision-making and contributing to their work.</p> <p>The impact of young people's active involvement in decision-making contributes to the work of the organisation, and is measured and identified.</p>
<b>2.2 Curriculum</b>	<p>The organisation has a curriculum or programme of youth work and the workforce is confident in delivering it consistently.</p> <p>The organisation carries out regular needs analysis to inform the range and type of provision it will offer young people.</p> <p>The organisation's provision addresses young people's differing needs, interests and circumstances.</p> <p>Young people benefit from being involved and participating in the youth work provision offered by the organisation.</p>
<b>2.3 Equality and diversity</b>	<p>The organisation has a proactive approach to promoting equality and diversity through its policy(policies) and practice(s).</p> <p>The organisation has a proactive approach to its use of data and information in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion policy(policies) and practice(s).</p> <p>The organisation's equality and diversity policy(policies) are implemented and result in change and improvement.</p>

<b>2.4 Workforce development</b>	<p>The organisation has a workforce development policy or strategy.</p> <p>The organisation invests in the development of skills and knowledge, and this is visible in the delivery of provision and its workforce's practice.</p> <p>The organisation has a workforce that is fit for the purpose of working effectively with young people directly or indirectly.</p>
----------------------------------	---

### Gold: Managing resources to meet the needs of young people.

Quality standard	Indicators
<b>3.1 Recognising and celebrating young people's achievement and progress</b>	<p>The organisation provides young people with access to a range of opportunities to record and accredit their learning and achievement.</p> <p>The organisation monitors and evaluates their learning opportunities, and the impact of them on young people. It celebrates the achievements of young people and their personal progress.</p> <p>The organisation promotes a learning culture and can demonstrate its impact on improving outcomes.</p>
<b>3.2 Management information</b>	<p>The organisation is clear about what information is needed, and systems to collect and disseminate accurate management information are in place and are secure.</p> <p>The organisation ensures its workforce, at all levels, understands the necessity of providing accurate and timely management information.</p> <p>The organisation uses its management information to assess and demonstrate impact and value for money, and to promote continuous improvement.</p>

<b>3.3 Partnerships</b>	<p>The organisation has a plan or strategy for partnership working that includes a range of agreements, e.g. contracts, memorandum of understanding or service level agreements.</p> <p>The organisation has an identified function within the overall delivery of services for young people and in achieving local and national priorities for young people.</p> <p>The organisation evaluates the impact of its partnership work and can demonstrate how partnership working results in improving or extending the range of services and provision available to young people.</p>
<b>3.4 Resources</b>	<p>The organisation has a plan for deploying resources linked to an assessment of young people's needs, organisational priorities, and local and national priorities for young people.</p> <p>The organisation's resources are generated and deployed in support of young people and their needs.</p> <p>The organisation regularly assesses value for money and cost effectiveness in the use of its resources.</p>

### Why are there three levels?

The three levels of the Quality Mark help organisations to understand their roles, and how they are contributing to the overall bigger picture. Each of the levels, and the associated quality standards and 'indicators', has an emphasis on the quality and impact of the organisation's work with young people. The primary goal of the Quality Mark process is to celebrate youth work and youth work practice, and how it has made a positive impact to young people lives. The Quality Mark is separated into three levels to provide scope for it to be used by a wide range of organisations of varying sizes. Each of the three levels builds on the evidence presented in the previous level(s).

### **Bronze Level: Young people are safe and able to thrive.**

The entry route into the Quality Mark process is the Bronze Level which is the first step and focuses on the organisation's purpose, structure, policy framework and delivery methods for the provision of high-quality youth work. This is the cornerstone for the assessment process. At this level, organisations will demonstrate how they came into being, why they were established and what they anticipate achieving through their provision. Organisations must demonstrate they have appropriate leadership and governance, monitoring and evaluation processes, are safe and act within a legal framework of policies, and provide a welcoming and safe environment for young people who can access trusted and skilled staff and volunteers.

The *Youth Work Strategy for Wales* sets out a vision for the future where:

*“all young people are thriving, with access to opportunities and experiences, in Welsh and English, which provide enjoyment and enrich their personal development through youth work approaches”.*

The Bronze Level covers performance management, quality of youth work, young people's learning and development, and legal requirements.

### **Silver Level: Youth work is inclusive, accessible and offered by a trained workforce.**

The Silver Level of the Quality Mark focuses on ensuring that youth work recognises and promotes inclusive practice, celebrates equality and diversity, ensures that provision is planned to meet young people's needs, ensures that activities make an impact on young people and their outcomes, and is delivered by an appropriately experienced and qualified workforce who involve young people in decision-making.

The importance of the Silver Level cannot be understated. The provision of youth work has its foundation on the basis of equality. Organisations must provide evidence of the diverse and inclusive nature of their provision at this level. They must also demonstrate that they have a programme of activities which is planned and delivered in partnership with young people, as well as what impact their participation strategies have made to the organisation and their community. This is an opportunity to celebrate the skills of youth workers and youth support workers, and how they have built trusted relationships with young people. At this level, organisations can also show how youth work interventions and informal and non-formal learning takes place. They can also show what methods were used to deliver activities and how these benefit young people by developing new skills and emotional and personal resilience, and if it has enabled the young people to enter into the world of work or further learning.

The *Youth Work Strategy for Wales* sets out a vision for the future where:

*“youth work is rights-based, informed by young people, and collaboratively planned and supported by a skilled workforce of voluntary and paid professional staff”.*

The Silver Level covers involving young people, curriculum, equality and diversity, and workforce development.

### **Gold Level: Managing resources to meet the needs of young people.**

The Gold Level of the Quality Mark focuses on the strength of partnership working, the use of management information and the creative use of resources in meeting the needs of young people. It also recognises achievements and celebrates young people's development, and the impact youth work and youth workers have made on the personal journey of their young people.

Many organisations provide experiences and opportunities for young people with limited resources. Resources in youth organisations are precious therefore and must be fully utilised and focused on the highest priorities at any given time. The term 'resources' can refer to a number of different types of assets, e.g. staff, volunteers, skills, equipment, funding or premises. At this level, the focus is on the organisation's people. This level questions how an organisation uses its funding to support its staff and stakeholders, whether they rely on funding alone or if they have proactive and creative partnerships which give them access to or allows them to employ a resource which meet the needs of young people, whether the organisation has embraced a new style of working, as a result of limited resource, or have they developed an abundance of resource due to imaginative community development.

The Gold Level allows organisations to demonstrate the strength of their partnership working and creative use of resource to meet the needs of young people. The use of resource is often linked to statistical information or local intelligence to meet the emerging needs of young people. This level examines how these decisions are made and the impact of how resource is used or prioritised.

The protection of information is essential and the Gold Level asks about what steps an organisation has taken to ensure personal information is protected by a policy framework, and whether or not this information is treated confidentially. This level encourages organisations to give positive examples of how this has happened in practice, encourages organisations to celebrate young people's achievement and their proactive roles within their communities, and demonstrates how youth work volunteers, youth workers and youth support workers have created opportunities for the young people and engaged with them on their journey.

The *Youth Work Strategy for Wales* sets out a vision for the future where:

*“the value of youth work is understood, with clear lines of accountability”.*

The Gold Level covers recognising young people's achievement and progress, management information, partnerships, and resources.

## **Who can use the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales?**

The Quality Mark can be used by any organisation that delivers youth work. The [National Occupational Standards](#) (2019) state that the key purpose of youth work is:

*“to enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential.”*

[Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes](#) defines youth work as being:

*“based primarily on a voluntary relationship between young people and youth workers. The Youth Service is a universal entitlement, open to all young people within the specified age range 11-25.”*



The Quality Mark can be used by any organisation whose work with young people fits with the key purpose and definitions of youth work above. The Quality Mark takes into account the wide range of organisations that deliver youth work in Wales and recognises that youth work is delivered in a wide variety of settings and contexts. The Quality Mark will focus on their work with young people aged between 11 and 25. We recognise that some organisations have a wider age range and this factor is taken into account during the application process.

The Quality Mark seeks to embrace the diversity of structures and arrangements for delivering youth work rather than asserting a single model. It encourages organisations to demonstrate the effectiveness of their unique models for delivery – by providing evidence of how they assess young people's needs; how they develop, provide or commission youth work to meet those needs; and how they assess and demonstrate their quality, impact, effectiveness and prioritised use of resource.

The Quality Mark is a badge of excellence and enables the organisation to:

- engage in an external assessment process
- gain the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales
- assure young people, their parents and carers, funders, partner organisations and other stakeholders that they provide high-quality youth work
- demonstrate their readiness to receive grant aid or be commissioned to provide high-quality youth work
- demonstrate their commitment to quality youth work, e.g. a grant awarding body might want to specify the achievement of the Quality Mark or specific levels within it as prerequisites for applying for funding or tendering for the delivery of youth work.

The Quality Mark is unique in that rather than seeking to assert criteria for what must be provided it looks at how an organisation's quality systems determine what should be provided locally and how impact is assessed and demonstrated. Used creatively, the process of identifying evidence can motivate staff, trustees, young people and other stakeholders in an organisation to work together to focus on the quality and impact of their youth work. This, in turn, enables the organisation to identify its strengths and areas for development, and ensures that what is provided meets young people's needs. Through the process of action planning the organisation can improve:

- the way it works with young people
- how it gathers evidence of its quality
- its impact on improving young people's outcomes
- its contribution to achieving national and local priorities.

At a time where resources for public services are reducing, sound evidence of impact and cost effectiveness is increasingly important to guide local and national decisions about investing in youth work so organisations need to demonstrate that they can provide value for money.

## **The benefits of using the Quality Mark**

There are a wide variety of benefits for both organisations who decide to undertake the Quality Mark and those who engage in other ways, e.g. by becoming an assessor.

As an organisation, undertaking the Quality Mark can help your development in a number of ways, such as supporting you to:

- identify your overall strengths and areas for development against a set of nationally recognised quality standards
- generate plans for improvement
- ensure you are offering high-quality provision for young people
- use specific quality standards and/or indicators to improve performance areas that you know are not as strong as others
- highlight the importance of quality assurance with stakeholders including staff, young people, trustees and local councillors
- make informed judgements about how well you are doing in comparison with other providers
- assure young people, their parents and carers, funders, partner organisations and other stakeholders that you provide safe and high-quality youth work
- demonstrate your readiness to receive grant aid or be commissioned to provide high-quality youth work.

As an individual engaging with the Quality Mark, you may also see many benefits such as:

- supporting your wider continued professional development
- helping you to understand how your role and that of your organisation can benefit from learning more about best practice
- motivation from helping others to raise their own standards and understanding of what quality youth work looks like, and help to share that best practice with others.

## **How the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales differs from other quality standards and awards**

There are a wide range of quality marks and quality standards that apply to work with young people. There are specific quality standards and awards for sports clubs, advice, information and guidance, health and safety, and safeguarding. There are also national quality standards and awards that apply to a wide range of organisations such as Investors in People (IiP), which is a nationally recognised framework and accreditation process that helps organisations to improve their performance through effective management and development of their people, and ISO 9001 that provides a set of standards and certification for an organisation's quality systems.

The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales differs from all these quality standards and awards. It has been specifically developed for the youth work sector in Wales and has the support from representatives from a wide range of statutory and voluntary organisations. It takes account of the Welsh context for youth work and encourages organisations to demonstrate how their work contributes to the achievement of local and national strategies and priorities for young people. Through the collaborative approach to design and development of the Quality Mark, there is a sense of ownership by the whole sector.

## Applying for the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales

Some organisations might choose to use the quality standards as an improvement tool, while others will want to apply for the externally assessed Quality Mark. Organisations that wish to apply for the Quality Mark must register with the contractor. This can be done either by contacting them directly, or through the awarding body at [youthwales@gov.wales](mailto:youthwales@gov.wales). For the purposes of this section the awarding body referred to is the Welsh Government, supported by an appointed contractor, and the contractor will be acting on behalf of the awarding body.

The three Quality Mark levels are intended to be undertaken in sequence – the Bronze Level, followed by the Silver Level and then the Gold Level. Smaller organisations may choose to undertake the Bronze Level only, as this would provide evidence that their work is underpinned by a sound range of policies, and enables young people to learn and develop personal and social skills. A Quality Mark will be awarded for each level that the organisation successfully completes, e.g. an organisation that achieves the Bronze Level will be awarded a Bronze Quality Mark.

In order to gain the Quality Mark at any level, an organisation must submit a self-assessment against the quality standards, supported by a portfolio of evidence. A self-assessment template is available from the contractor who is responsible for delivering the Quality Mark on behalf of the awarding body. The self-assessment and portfolio of evidence is then externally assessed by the awarding body. Organisations can choose to complete a self-assessment and portfolio of evidence for all three levels or undertake one level at a time.

In order to maintain the reputation and the high standards in the Quality Mark, only those organisations that successfully achieve the externally assessed Quality Mark will be invited use it in their promotional material.

## **How to apply for the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales**

When applying for the Quality Mark, organisations should complete the following steps.

- Register their intention to make a submission to the contractor delivering the Quality Mark on behalf of the awarding body and provide details of the likely timescale for submission.
- Complete the self-assessment template and prepare a portfolio of evidence in electronic format.
- The self-assessment and portfolio of evidence should be sent in the post, or shared electronically, with the contractor.
- The contractor will conduct a quality check on documentation for completeness.
- The contractor will then assign a lead assessor for the assessment process.

Organisations may apply for the Quality Mark through the medium of Welsh or English.

### **Completing the self-assessment template and preparing a portfolio of evidence**

The self-assessment process provides organisations with an opportunity to review the way they work and identify evidence of what they do well and where they could improve. It is important for organisations to understand the scale of this task and to allocate sufficient resources to complete the self-assessment and prepare the portfolio of evidence. Trustees and/or senior officers should be aware of the Quality Mark process, the commitment required and the resource needed, and should commit to providing the appropriate support. It is recommended that a nominated individual takes overall responsibility for leading the collation of evidence for the portfolio, completing the self-assessment template and for applying for the Quality Mark. Organisations should work as a team to collate evidence and to take ownership of the Quality Mark process. Young people should also play a part in the process and be made aware of the Quality Mark and its benefit to their youth organisation.

Templates for self-assessment for each of the three levels (Bronze, Silver and Gold) are provided by the contractor. When completing the self-assessment templates organisations must:

- describe and evidence how each indicator has been met
- submit succinct and quality evidence that clearly demonstrates how it links to the indicator
- include details of any learning and plans for improvement identified during the self-assessment process
- demonstrate a 'good practice' grade from the grade descriptors.

## Grade descriptors

The Quality Mark is made up of twelve quality standards – four in each level. Each quality standard has associated ‘indicators’ which can be seen in the specific level document. To help organisations develop an accurate self-assessment, grade descriptors are provided for each indicator. The grade descriptors are intended to assist organisations in making a judgement about their current level of performance. The grade descriptors are noted below.

- **Good practice** – There is good overall performance in this area. Policies and plans are up-to-date and consistently implemented. There are effective working arrangements that benefit young people.
- **Some development needed** – Policies and plans are generally appropriate, although practice is not always consistent and some young people do not receive the same quality of service as others. Some gaps exist, which managers/leaders plan to address.
- **Considerable development needed** – Policies are not widely understood or consistently implemented. Plans and working arrangements are generally weak, adversely affecting the quality of service offered to young people.

To be eligible for the Quality Mark, an organisation must complete a self-assessment with a portfolio of evidence and participate in an external assessment process to demonstrate that a ‘good practice’ grade has been achieved for each indicator within the level for which they are applying.

## **Developing a portfolio of evidence**

Within each quality standard there is a list of suggested evidence. These lists are not exhaustive and are only intended to provide a guide. The portfolio of evidence should begin with a brief introduction about the organisation, its origins, its purpose, key priorities and the make-up of the community it operates within.

Organisations are encouraged to be creative and to identify the evidence that best demonstrates their quality and performance. It is essential to include quality evidence linked to indicators. The amount of evidence submitted within the portfolio of evidence may vary according to the size of the organisation. The use of media files and digital work can also be included.

All documents that have been referred to in the self-assessment narrative should be included in a portfolio of evidence and organisations should note that a piece of evidence may be relevant to more than one indicator.

Evidence should come from a range of sources and should be:

- reliable – strong and robust, dependable and from a trusted source (where cross-checking with other evidence provides the same or similar results)
- valid – directly relevant to the indicator and be within the range of between 6 to 24 months old to demonstrate impact on young people and any changes to youth work practice
- sufficient – it should provide enough information upon which to base a sound judgement.

## **Confidentiality**

The self-assessment process is intended to be confidential. All information provided to the contractor will be kept confidential except where there is potential for harm to an individual or a group of people or evidence of misconduct.

Organisations should take steps to ensure that their evidence complies with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and their own data protection policy.

## Tips for the self-assessment process

The following points should help organisations to complete their self-assessment.

- Organisations should use the self-assessment process as an opportunity to highlight and celebrate what they do well. This is an opportunity for the organisation to celebrate and provide evidence of the quality of their work with young people.
- The narrative for each indicator should be used to describe the organisation's policies, processes and practice. It is important to 'tell the story' about how the organisation meets each indicator and provide evidence that demonstrates the 'good practice' grade.
- It is helpful to think clearly and systematically about what should be the first piece of evidence in each indicator. This will probably be a policy, strategy or guidelines that describe the context and arrangements for implementation.
- It is important to provide evidence from a range of projects so that the self-assessment provides a full picture of the organisation's work with young people. Where an organisation is involved in the delivering a wide range of youth work, there is an expectation that evidence will be provided from open-access provision and targeted youth work.
- Any evidence referenced in the narrative should be underlined and provided in either an electronic file or hard copy. For example, an organisation's annual plan would be useful evidence for the quality standard on 'Performance management' at the Bronze Level and part of the narrative might say "*The Annual Plan with performance targets demonstrates one way in which we measure impact and effectiveness. The Quarterly Reports provide evidence of a systematic process for monitoring and reviewing performance.*" In this case, the annual plan and quarterly reports should be provided as supporting evidence. Further information on how to present evidence in the self-assessment narrative can be provided by the contractor.
- It is important to provide evidence of how performance is monitored and reviewed. Most organisations have processes for monitoring and reviewing their performance and should be able to provide evidence of how these processes are implemented, e.g. minutes of team meetings where performance is reviewed, regular performance reports, notes from supervision meetings where performance is discussed.



- In order for the self-assessment to be more than a 'snapshot' taken at a particular point in time, the narrative and supporting evidence should identify any ongoing or planned improvements that arise out of routine monitoring, evaluation or undertaking the self-assessment process for the Quality Mark.
- It is important to identify evidence that demonstrates impact. This evidence might be provided in a variety of ways, e.g. numerical data, case studies, young people's evaluation of their learning, and evidence of how engaging in youth work has improved young people's outcomes and/or life chances.
- Avoid presenting raw data. The self-assessment should provide evidence of how data has been analysed, what this analysis indicates and how it is used to inform plans for improvement. For example, when providing evidence for the quality standard on 'Recognising young people's achievement and progress' at Gold Level, an organisation might submit data on the number of young people that take up opportunities to have their learning accredited. The commentary should identify trends in this data, which might be an increase or decrease in the number of young people involved in accredited learning. It should also identify the reasons for this change, e.g. it might be that numbers are rising because staff are promoting these opportunities more effectively or because young people find qualifications useful in applying for education, training or employment.
- When using documents as evidence, it is useful to reference specific sections or pages within the narrative. If an electronic portfolio is submitted, where possible hyperlinks to the evidence should be included. This makes the task of reviewing the evidence much easier for an assessor.
- It is very important to include direct evidence from young people, e.g. evidence of their engagement in planning and evaluation, their views on what they've learnt, their feedback or case studies. Often this is the evidence youth workers gather on flipcharts, in photographic displays or on feedback sheets. It can be provided either in electronic form, hard copy or through focus groups during the assessment visit. Remember, young people often provide the best evidence.
- Ensure that when an abbreviation is used the full name or term is provided on its first use in the self-assessment narrative.
- Provide full contact details for the person within the organisation leading on the Quality Mark, which will be shared with the awarding body.
- It is important to remember that a small number of well-chosen documents demonstrating that the organisation has achieved a 'good practice' grade will be more helpful than lots of information that partly address the evidence requirements.

- Remember that assessment is less about the volume of evidence and more about good evidence which clearly demonstrates a 'good practice' grade for each indicator.

## **Preparing for the assessment visit**

Once the contractor receives the completed self-assessment template and portfolio of evidence, a lead assessor will be appointed to undertake an initial assessment of the submission. The number of assessors appointed will depend on the size of the organisation and the amount of evidence submitted, and will be decided by the contractor. At this stage, the lead assessor may seek further clarification and request further evidence. It is possible that the lead assessor may find that the self-assessment does not indicate a 'good practice' grade. In this case they will contact the organisation to negotiate a revised timescale for the assessment.

If the submission meets the required standard for a 'good practice' grade, the lead assessor will contact the organisation to agree a timescale for the assessment visit, clarify arrangements for any additional evidence that should be available during the visit and confirm who they will need to meet. The assessment visit will usually take a day for each level of the Quality Mark that is being assessed. Depending on the level that is being assessed, the lead assessor may wish to arrange meetings with the following stakeholders:

- the head or chairperson of the organisation or service
- senior managers/trustees/governors/(in the case of a local authority) elected members
- a range of staff and volunteers from different levels and with varying roles
- young people
- partners and stakeholders that the organisation considers useful for an assessor to meet.

Assessors will also request to observe youth workers and young people in a live session.

The timetable and assessment process should be discussed and agreed between the lead assessor and the organisation before the assessment takes place.

The lead person or group of people who have worked on preparing the self-assessment from the organisation should be available for the assessment visit to answer queries about locating evidence, interpreting or accessing documents, and providing directions for visits to provision. Ideally, a room should be made available to the assessor team with access to the evidence.

## The assessment process

Assessments can be completed using a blend of approaches, e.g. digital and face-to-face meetings or observations of practice. This is dependent on the organisational need and the availability of interviewees and assessors. Digital conferencing and practical visits to organisations will be used by assessment teams in the future to overcome geographical and capacity issues.

The assessment consists of:

- a desk-based review of the organisation's self-assessment and supporting evidence
- meetings with stakeholders
- a small number of visits to the organisation's youth work provision, some of which may be digitally based.

The stages in the assessment process for the Quality Mark are as noted below.

- The organisation submits a draft self-assessment document to the contractor who will critique the evidence provided to ensure the organisation has met the quality standards. Once finalised this is shared with a lead assessor. If for any reason the quality standard(s) have not been achieved, e.g. if the assessment uncovers large gaps in evidence, the organisation will be informed and asked to submit at a later date when issues have been rectified.
- The lead assessor carries out an initial assessment of the organisation's self-assessment and portfolio of evidence to ensure there is sufficient evidence to proceed with the assessment process. If, at this stage, the submission is not at the required standard, the assessor will contact the organisation to negotiate a revised timescale for the assessment.
- The assessor(s) will carry out an in-depth desk-based review of the organisation's self-assessment and portfolio of evidence to identify where there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate a 'good practice' grade, to identify where further evidence is needed, and to develop a plan for the assessment visit.
- The lead assessor will contact the organisation to agree a date and a schedule for the assessment visit. They will also clarify any additional evidence that should be made available during the visit and confirm who they will need to meet.
- The assessor(s) will visit the organisation to meet young people, the workforce and other stakeholders, and will visit youth work provision.

- At the end of the visit the assessor(s) will provide the organisation with brief verbal feedback on the assessment.
- If a 'good practice' grade has been achieved for all quality standards within the level(s), a brief report of the findings and a recommendation are prepared and sent to the contractor for moderation and approval. If a 'good practice' grade is not achieved against all indicators the organisation is invited to identify a timescale for improvement and reassessment.
- The assessment report is moderated by a moderation panel from the contractor. If the moderation panel agrees that the organisation has demonstrated a 'good practice' grade, the Quality Mark will be awarded by the awarding body.

## Assessment feedback

There are two possible outcomes of the visit.

- **A 'good practice' grade has been achieved against all quality standards.** This decision is subject to moderation\*, approval and ratification by the contractor. A brief assessment report commenting on the indicators and confirming that a 'good practice' grade has been achieved will be presented to the awarding body for approval.
- **The quality standard(s) have almost been achieved.** A 'good practice' grade has almost been achieved, with conditions which could be met within a six-month timescale. A report detailing the conditions will be sent to the organisation. The lead assessor will invite the organisation to identify a timescale of up to six months to satisfy the condition and for their review of reassessment, e.g. conditions might be appropriate if situations arise where assessors have been unable to complete assessments or make judgements due to practical visits being unavailable due to a health and safety or safeguarding issue.

\* On a quarterly basis, the awarding body will convene moderation panels who will approve and ratify assessment reports. If the moderation panel agrees that the organisation has demonstrated a 'good practice' grade, the Quality Mark will be awarded.

Organisations that achieve the Quality Mark for all three levels will be regarded as being a centre of excellence for youth work.

## How long does the Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales remain valid?

The Quality Mark remains valid for three years. After this time organisations are invited to update their self-assessment and supporting evidence and reapply for the Quality Mark.

## Appeals

The Quality Mark process is an open and fair-minded process. Organisations often find external scrutiny of their work daunting and can be fiercely proud of their work with young people. The celebration of their work when entering into the Quality Mark process is therefore often their main aim.

Assessors and contractor staff will do all in their power to ensure the process is open, transparent and fair. They will follow a code of conduct to ensure they keep to these values. However, should an organisation feel that they have grounds to appeal against a judgement made on their practice by the Quality Mark team, they have the right to appeal that judgement.

If an organisation wishes to appeal against the outcome of the assessment, they must do so in writing within 28 days. The appeal should be addressed to the Chair of the Quality Mark Steering Group and should clearly outline the grounds for the appeal. An appeals panel will consider the appeal. The appeals panel will be representatives from the contractor, the awarding body (the Welsh Government) and assessors who were not involved with the organisation's assessment process. To support their appeal, the organisation will be invited to submit evidence to the appeals panel and send representatives if required.

The decision of the appeals panel is final and will result in one of the following outcomes:

- appeal upheld
- appeal upheld with conditions
- appeal dismissed.

In all cases the decision of the awarding body is final.

## Complaints

As previously stated assessors acting on behalf of the contractor will be trained to adhere to a strict and robust code of conduct. If in the Quality Mark process of assessment or in the delivery of training or information seminars the professionalism of the Quality Mark team is wanting, organisations have the right to complain.

If an organisation is not satisfied with any aspect of the way in which an assessment is conducted, they are invited to contact the lead assessor to raise the issue and seek a resolution. If the issue cannot be resolved with the lead assessor, the organisation should contact the Quality Mark Development Officer. The officer will work with the organisation and the lead assessor to seek a resolution and to ensure the assessment is conducted in line with the assessment process.

If the complaint cannot be resolved using the above processes, the organisation is invited to write to the Youth Engagement Branch at the Welsh Government within 28 days of the assessment. They will then arrange for the complaint to be formally investigated.

The Youth Engagement Branch can be contacted by e-mailing [youthwork@gov.wales](mailto:youthwork@gov.wales).

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to acknowledge the time and commitment that the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services (CWVYS), Education and Training Standards (ETS) Wales, assessors, holders of the Quality Mark, representatives from the Principal Youth Officers Group, and numerous youth work practitioners have put into the development of this Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales.