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Bridging worlds: New learning spaces for new times
Evaluation Report

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Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

1

Introduction

1.1 Project Context

From the first national lockdown announced on 12 March 2020, citizens in Ireland were significantly impacted by the restrictions introduced as part of the public health response to the Covid-19. These restrictions were necessary to help mitigate the potentially catastrophic impact of the virus on individuals' physical health. However, it has been accepted that these measures come at the price of significant negative impact on young people's reported mental wellbeing, sense of isolation and connectedness to others (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2020; Planet Youth, 2021). Young people were also impacted significantly by the unprecedented disruption in schooling, cancelling of formal examinations, curtailment of extracurricular pursuits and most especially access to their social networks and peer supports. In an Irish context, as essential services, both education and ancillary youth support services were all part of the emergency pivot online. This required teachers and youth workers to engage with online learning and digital technologies in an unprecedented way and without the normal lead-in or support for such a transition. Both groups were also concerned that some of the young people who were most at risk of disengaging from education were the hardest to reach during the closure and were impacted by both digital use and digital access divides.

1.2 Bridging Worlds

The Bridging Worlds initiative was an exploratory programme with an ambitious aim: to increase the scaffolding and supports for young people by creating a wrap-around model linking the formal and non-formal education sectors. Specifically in the context of the impact of Covid-19 on the educational experiences of young people, the project focused on joining the formal and non-formal education sectors in a shared-learning initiative. It aimed to develop capacity in both the teaching and youth work community to deliver blended and online education and support the scaffolding of student engagement in a way that integrates learning outside and inside the regular classroom.

The implementation of the project was overseen by a steering group with component tasks assigned to work packages and supported by various project teams. In November 2020, a joint project team comprising of staff from Foróige and NUI Galway School of Education worked to operationalise the project aims, develop a timeline for implementation and support the collation of project materials. A key step at this stage was the recruitment of two experienced project coordinators by Foróige to implement the project. Their initial task was to recruit 40 teachers and 20 youth workers. In this way, the project aimed to impact up to 6000 young people within the Galway/Mayo/Roscommon region. A series of project phases were agreed by the project team and these were set out as follows:

Phase 1
The "Bridging the Gap" training programme was a half-day (four-hour) online training event provided by project coordinators to Transition Year teachers and youth workers in the Galway, Mayo and Roscommon areas. The training aimed to create a shared community where both groups learn together and it focused on the following topics:

- The role of the formal education sector
- The role of the non-formal education sector
- Blended learning strategies
- Creating online learning environments.

Phase 2
Both groups were then offered the opportunity to attend follow-up online training, delivered by the project coordinators, to enable participants to facilitate at least one of four of Foróige's Positive Youth Development Programmes and deliver it online.

Phase 3
Transition Year teachers and youth workers were to facilitate one of the Foróige programmes to a group of young people they are involved with in their respective areas of responsibility.

Phase 4
Teachers and youth workers were then to attend two follow-up online sessions with a Project Coordinator to review their experiences and receive further advice and support.

1.3 Report Structure

This is a report describing the project implementation from the initial recruitment drive, which began in November 2020, to delivery of the final support session in June 2021. The report will begin with a review of the key literature relevant to the initiative. It will review the emerging reports of the impact of Covid on young people in general and more specifically on the disruption of their educational provision. It will describe the emergency pivot to online learning that was central to how both education and youth services responded to young people during this time and locate this move within some of the relevant debates on the potential of blended learning and educational technology. The review considers relevant youth policy and provides an overview of what is meant by non-formal approaches to education. As this initiative is located within two specific essential service contexts, a description of both the Transition Year programme and Foróige is also provided. Brofenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework is then introduced to illustrate the theoretical rationale for creating mesosystem links across the two sectors. Finally, the literature review concludes with an outline of Wenger's (2010) community of practice, a particularly apt framework from which to explore the project's impact on creating cross-sectoral links across formal and non-formal educational contexts.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodological approach taken in this evaluation. It outlines the mixed method framework utilised, which integrated each of the project aims with a specific research question and data source. This chapter sets out the approach taken to data analysis and provides a review of the ethical safeguards in place, noting the particular logistics of conducting research during a global pandemic.

The project findings are then presented over the next three chapters. Chapter 4 provides a review of the project implementation. It sets out project engagement statistics and data arising from interviews conducted with key stakeholders from the project steering group. Chapter 5 presents findings from participant surveys which were conducted with teachers and youth workers over three periods: pre Bridging the Gap training (phase 1), post Bridging the Gap training, and in June 2021, after completion of both support sessions (phase 4). Chapter 6 focuses on the qualitative data arising from 12 interviews conducted, with an opportunity to read a sample of participants' views, both teachers and youth workers. These interviews were conducted in June and reflected on participants' overall experiences of the programme; they highlight both positive feedback and suggestions for programme development.

The final chapter provides an overview of the theoretical implication of the project findings and a review of project aims based on project findings. Finally, the report concludes with a set of recommendations based on these findings to guide the ongoing evolution of the initiative.

2
Literature Review

2.1 Covid-19 and the Impact on Young People in Ireland

At the time of writing, there are considerable restrictions in place impacting the day-to-day life of citizens as part of the ongoing public health emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic. These restrictions are deemed necessary to help mitigate the potentially catastrophic impact of the virus on individuals' physical health. However, it has been accepted that these measures come at the price of significant negative impact on individuals' reported mental wellbeing, sense of isolation and connectedness to others (Planet Youth, 2021).

The Irish Central Statistics Office has monitored the impact of the ongoing pandemic on Irish citizens. In February 2021, they stated that 60% of people reported a negative impact on their wellbeing and mental health and 40% of people reported their life satisfaction as "low". This was the lowest level reported since the pandemic began. As a comparator the previous lowest level reported was 15.3%, recorded during the worst of the economic crisis in 2013 (Central Statistics Office, 2021b). In addition, they also recorded parents' reports of the impact of the pandemic on their children's education. They found that 47.9% of parents reported that there was a major negative impact on the learning of those in fifth and sixth year of secondary school and 36.3% reported major negative impacts on children in other secondary school classes. In addition, 33.3% of parents reported negative impacts on the social wellbeing of other secondary school students. Finally, parents reported significant changes in the amount of time secondary school students spent learning online, increasing from 29.9% of young people spending 5 hours or more online during the first school closure period (March to June 2020) compared with 69.9% during the second (Jan to April 2021) (Central Statistics Office, 2021a).

In October 2020, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in consultation with the Department of Health and the Irish youth sector, published the results of an online survey of the impact of Covid-19 on young Irish people (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2020). Over 2000 young people aged 15 to 24 years responded during the summer period of 2020. The survey found that the most significant impact of Covid-19 had been on the mental health of respondents including "overthinking, concern, worry, depression and a sense of hopelessness" (p. 6).

Across the replies, individuals reported that the hardest aspect was missing their friends. While a quarter of young people reported that they found some positives during the period including time to work on a healthy lifestyle and enjoying the benefits of online technology and a slower pace of life, one-tenth of young people reported no positive benefits. The survey also reported that while one-third of respondents were optimistic about the future, 25% were anxious about what it might bring. Of particular relevance to the Bridging Worlds initiative, the survey found that young people who were involved with clubs outside of home and school reported being more optimistic about the future.

When asked what priority they would like addressed, 16% of respondents wanted the disruption of education addressed. Individuals involved with youth groups were more likely to prioritise addressing this issue. They reported that when education is reopened, it is important that students' own health issues are addressed and that there are supports provided for student wellbeing. There were also some respondents who indicated openness to continued use of online education and blended learning (p. 35).

Figure 1 below is a word cloud from the report summarising what the respondents reported as the hardest aspect of the pandemic.

Figure 1 What's the hardest part of Covid-19? (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2020)

2.2 Covid-19 and Its Impact on Education – Formal and Non-Formal

It is a truism to state that across the world, the impact of Covid-19 on the provision of education was a disruption on a scale not seen before. The impacts of this disruption will take time to fully unfold and to date, as the pandemic is still raging, its final impact can only be hinted at. There is a large body of research being undertaken and published. This review can only posit tentative conclusions based on what is currently set out in the literature. Notwithstanding those caveats, given the centrality of the formal education sector to the Bridging Worlds initiative, it is important to mine the international and national literature to spotlight the scale of and initial consensus on the disruption of educational provision throughout 2020 and 2021.

In August 2020, the UN published a policy brief focusing not just on the initial Covid-caused disruption of education but also considering the likely impact this disruption would have in the long term (United Nations, 2020). It estimated that the pandemic has resulted in the largest disruption in history affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners across 190 countries, with greater negative impacts faced by those already experiencing disadvantage. It also highlighted the many innovations that occurred worldwide with the "pivot" to online learning. The report sets out an agenda for addressing the impacts of this disruption, which should include building back educational systems more equitably and sustainably, focusing on those who need support most, addressing teachers' skills and readiness to use technology to enhance learning. The report set out the importance of considering not just the right to education but also the right to connectivity to ensure individuals have equal access to educational technology solutions. Finally, of specific relevance to the Bridging Worlds project is the recommendation to pay attention to the formal and non-formal structures that can enhance learning and help safeguard against future disruptions:

> With a view to safeguarding integrated systems, stronger linkages should be developed between formal and non-formal structures, including recognition, validation, and accreditation of knowledge and skills acquired through all types of learning. These stronger linkages will allow education systems to become more equitable and inclusive, as well as more effective in fulfilling their mission, more efficient in their operations and use of resources, and better equipped to serve the needs of their communities and society at large. (United Nations, 2020, p. 26)

As will be seen later on in this review, there is a large body of literature and practice resources to guide the use of educational technology in schools. However, the wholescale emergency pivot to online learning must not be considered a thoughtful and deliberate detailed strategy. Instead, it is more correctly termed as set out by Hall et al. (2020): "emergency remote

teaching". In their paper describing this type of education provision across a number of international contexts, the authors provide a summary of the actions within the Irish context. They trace these actions from the announcement of school closure on March 12th, 2020. They note that while additional funding was provided to support schools through supplying devices to those who needed them, a clear digital divide was apparent across the sector with some groups at particular risk of falling further behind. Teachers in the main moved their current teaching curriculum online without modification, and there was a lack of engagement with real opportunities for knowledge development, peer engagement and collaborative working, which can be incorporated into the use of ICT in a more deliberate way. To engage in this more deliberate way, teachers in Ireland, in common with their peers across other countries, will require additional support to advance their "technological, pedagogical and content knowledge and skills" (Hall et al., 2020, p. 439).

According to Hodges et al. (2020), emergency remote teaching is very different from effective online education. They define emergency remote teaching as "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternative delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. It involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face to face or as blended or hybrid courses and that will return to that format once the emergency has abated" (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 9). Effective online education, by way of contrast, is a deliberative and considered process where various dimensions including modality (online fully or blended), pedagogical approach, assessment, student role, instructor role, presentation type (synchronous/live or asynchronous/recorded materials) are considered and selected based on suitability to the course and context. Hodges et al. (2020) go on to state that it normally takes 6 to 9 months of planning to develop an online course. It is important therefore, to bear in mind in reviewing the literature and learning points from this extraordinary experiment in the provision of education during the pandemic reflects by and large emergency remote teaching rather than effective online education in its various forms.

The international literature reveals a mixed picture of the successes and failures of providing emergency online teaching during the pandemic (Alqahtani and Rajkhan, 2020; Arnett, 2021; Garcia-Morales et al., 2021; Hamburg, 2021; Paredes et al., 2020). Such is the interest in tracking the educational disruption of Covid-19, the OECD PISA international survey instrument for tracking educational achievement was updated to incorporate items related to the impact of Covid-19 (Bertling et al., 2020). Sangster et al. (2020) provided a review of Covid-19 education provision across 45 countries in the field of third-level accounting education. Using a four-stage model to track policy response in four phases from crisis response to stabilisation to recovery and then to redesign, the authors were interested in tracking insights from education provision during the pandemic that could inform future educational provision. They conclude that the move to emergency remote

learning was made possible by the advances in ICT generally over the past decade. However, notwithstanding the stresses placed on faculty and students with the transition to emergency remote provision, there is an acceptance that blended learning models with their alternative pedagogical approach are here to stay. The authors go on to state that further work is needed to ensure that these approaches are used in the most effective way to enhance learning engagement and outcomes.

Dhawan (2020) reviewed the potential of emergency online provision during Covid and other emergencies internationally. In the analysis some key strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and challenges were set out. In the context of the Bridging Worlds initiative, some of the key points can be highlighted. It is a strength of emergency online provision that a wide range of material can be made freely available to be used off-site at times that suit individuals. It is a weakness that success will be dependent on the learner's access to and confidence with the technology. The digital divide and cost of technology are highlighted as challenges, while relevant opportunities are the scope for innovation and a "radical transformation in all aspects of education" (Dhawan, 2020, p. 14).

Within an Irish context, the feedback from the primary education sector has found mixed success in engagement with online provision during Covid, with a concern that those most at risk of disadvantage would be least able to engage with the resources provided (Doyle, 2020 Flynn et al, 2020). In addition, teachers within the primary sector report a lack of confidence with ICT approaches, a general lack of preparedness for online teaching and a lack of knowledge about how much digital access their students have at home (Burke and Dempsey, 2020). Some key reports have also been published describing the impact of emergency provision in Irish secondary schools.

Mohan et al. (2020) published a detailed analysis on the views of principals regarding the impact of the first lockdown on Irish students. A survey was carried out of all secondary school principals in Ireland with a return rate of 33%. The researchers also conducted follow-up interviews to explore the survey findings with key stakeholders. Their findings included:

- The initial complete disruption of education provision followed by an immediate move to establish online provision
- The emergence of both a digital divide and a digital use divide where individuals may not have access to devices and/or sufficient broadband but also knowledge in terms of using online platforms and resources
- The impact on young people in relation to uncertainty as to how state examinations would proceed
- Evidence of an impact on learning, wellbeing and motivation especially on groups inclined to disengage from education and concerns about the potential for learning regression
- Learners with more intrinsic motivation tended to fare better than those with extrinsic motivation in the move to online learning

- Teachers required support both with the process of moving to online teaching and with their own wellbeing and morale
- It was particularly difficult to maintain a focus on pastoral care with the move online.

Mohan et al. (2020) conclude that there is a need to address the online divide across students and to provide teachers with support, especially in terms of the pedagogy of online teaching. Post pandemic, students will need support with social and emotional wellbeing.

Bray et al. (2020) also studied the impact of Covid-19 on over 1000 Dublin students attending 15 secondary schools in the Dublin area. They found negative impacts of the school closures on student wellbeing, on their engagement with learning and on their relationships with teachers. Where students reported lower levels of wellbeing, they were also more likely to report less positive relationships with their teachers. When parents were actively involved in supporting young people, this appeared to mitigate some of the negative impacts of school closures. The researchers were able to compare their findings to previous research from 2019 and could evidence the direct impact of Covid on the lower wellbeing scores reported. They also found four out of five students reporting that there was a perceived increase in their school workload and that this was a specific source of additional stress. There was also less evidence of collaborative work and communication with peers, although some students did report more self-directed learning. The authors recommended increased focus on wellbeing support and active engagement by schools with parents and home/school support. Teachers should seek feedback from students to check on their welfare and that they have access to devices and study spaces. They should also clarify workload expectations for students so that additional stresses are not created. Finally, the authors recommend that student councils may provide a forum for schools to engage directly with students on these matters to ensure students have a voice and input where possible.

A further report from the same research team focused on the impact of the Covid-19 educational provisions on teachers (Devitt et al., 2020). A survey was conducted of 700 secondary school teachers across Ireland on their experiences. The report found that teachers were most concerned about reductions in levels of student engagement. The drop off in engagement was reported to be 69% for those who are reluctant attenders, compared to a 39% reduction for youth who normally attend school. Levels of attendance for Transition Year students reduced 50%, although this may have been as a factor of the transition programme itself.

Services and supports within the youth work sector were also significantly disrupted by the pandemic. A survey of 256 youth work organisations published by the National Youth Council of Ireland (2020) reported that 68% of services found it difficult to engage young people in online activities and 67% were concerned that those most at risk were most difficult to contact.

Only 22% of the organisations represented in this survey were able to continue to provide a full service to young people, with 64% reporting a reduced service and 14% of organisations unable to provide any supports. Despite these challenges, the report noted that there was increased use of digital service provision and enhanced staff competencies in this regard.

Lavizzari (2020) reported similar findings in a meta-analysis of European published studies on the impact of Covid-19 on youth work service provision. They noted in particular the rapid move online of youth work supports and the evidence of a digital divide affecting some young people, preventing them from engaging fully with this move. Notwithstanding these challenges, the authors also highlighted the levels of innovative practice and collaborative working that was demonstrated by the youth work sector in continuing to support young people through this time.

McCardle and Conville (2020) in their survey of youth workers in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who had continued to provide services throughout the pandemic concluded that the focus of youth work remained the same. They noted that the central value of reflective practice within the sector served it well in its efforts to maintain services and support. They noted that youth workers did make a significant difference during the pandemic as an essential service. Finally, they concluded that while undoubtedly online supports have a role to play in the future, further exploration is needed to ensure the right blend of online and face-to-face approaches to maintain that core connection with young people which is at the heart of youth work.

2.3 Education Technology

While the Bridging Worlds initiative seeks to create a wrap-around model for young people through fostering connections between school and youth programmes, the "bridge" is the use of educational technology to enable the delivery of prosocial youth development programmes across both formal and non-formal education sectors. There is a significant body of literature on the degree of adaptation of education technology by a range of educational environments. Tony Bates, a leader in the field of education technology, provides a review of the key milestones that have occurred over the past decades in the advance of educational technology (Bates, 2019). He states that arguments about what role technology should play in education can be traced back over 2500 years, when teachers first moved from the oral teaching tradition to incorporate writing into teaching. Moving into the last century, he tracks key events from the use of radio and television to provide supporting educational materials, to the establishment of the Open University and the use of computers as a learning support tool. He particularly highlights the advent of the internet and online learning environments as pivotal and concludes by referencing more recent developments with social media and education online.

Bates (2019) states that discussion about the potential of technology to aid learning is not new but what is new in the past decades is the pace of change and the amount of technology individuals use in their day-to-day lives. In particular, he notes that the internet is the most significant of these changes and that its potential for the provision of education is still being explored. Indeed the argument has been made that students at third level are already ahead of the educational provision in terms of technological literacy and engagement (Conole et al., 2008). Alrasheedi et al. (2015) conducted a systemic review of 30 articles to identify critical factors in the take up of e-learning approaches in third-level settings. They found that it was important for the technology to increase users' productivity, for the platform to be accessible, for reliable internet coverage to be available, for the learning to be interesting and for blended learning to be an option. Connolly et al. (2007) reported on a study tracking the implementation of an e-learning project in a third-level setting. They reported that the transition to online teaching requires changes to both the course content and design while also requiring different engagement by the student and tutor. Similar findings were reported by Sun et al. (2008), while Wang et al. (2013) highlight the role intrinsic learner motivation and self-efficacy plays in predicting which students succeed in online settings.

Notwithstanding these challenges, a final argument that is relevant within the educational technology literature is the sense that deployment of ICT has the potential to be a disruptive innovator and the need to address educational inequalities directly. A particular proponent of this theory is Clayton Christenson (Christensen et al., 2017; Christensen and Horn, 2008). Working from a business administration standpoint, this theorist conceptualises a role for cheaper technological solutions to be deployed in educational settings to meet needs not being addressed by traditional provision. A key benefit of this approach is that by utilising the range of blended approaches, the instructional model moves away from the "factory style" model of teaching where everyone must cover the same content together to a more student-centred and personalised approach so that the individuals can work at their own pace and be competent in an area before they move on to a new topic (Horn and Staker, 2017). It has also been posited as a very useful approach in developing countries where provision of technology may create significantly greater opportunities for learning (Horn, 2020).

The disruptive innovation potential of educational technology has been critiqued by those who have a more nuanced view of its potential (Reich, 2020; Reich, 2021). While Christensen and Horn (2008) hypothesised that the disruption of education technology would lead to 50% of all secondary education being online in the USA by 2019, Reich (2021) points out that this clearly has not happened. He goes on to describe how rather than technology becoming an equalising force, those who are more likely to benefit from innovative uses of technology are those students who are already advantaged. Undoubtedly, Reich (2020) affirms, educational technology was useful during the pandemic; however, he likens teaching through Zoom to "teaching through a keyhole" (p. 21). He goes on "School reformers like to say that we

should never let a crisis go to waste, but a global pandemic turns out to be a tough time to reinvent education" (p. 21). Reich (2021) does see potential in the adaptation of educational technology into teaching methodologies but advocates a "tinkering" rather than a "charismatic" position for ICT in education.

Some specific points in his "tinkering" approach that are relevant to the current study include:

- Teaching using technology is not easy
- It takes 40 hours of coaching and practice on average for a teacher to learn a new teaching technique
- While the use of technology during the pandemic was imperfect, teachers and students did learn how to use it in new ways; this should be built on
- Teachers need advocacy and support to get the most out of educational technology
- Curricula, assessment modalities and school schedules need to be changed to get the most from its potential.

Finally, Reich (2021) argues that there are successful examples of the widespread adaptation of education technology through communities of learners who support each other in informal peer networks. Citing the examples of the "Scratch" computer programming initiative and the "Kahn Academy", both of which have been widely adapted internationally, he advises that if schools were to take a similar approach, they would certainly reap the rewards.

The most adaptive approach where peer-guided large-scale learning can be woven into the periphery of schools in electives, extracurricular and untested subjects so that learners can practice in navigating these networks with a community of local peers and mentors to support them (Reich, 2021, p. 104)

2.4 Youth Policy Context

This initiative takes place across the non-formal youth work sector of Foróige and the formal context of Transition Year secondary school education. Key youth policies that impact the area are described below. An introduction to Foróige and the aims of the Transition Year programme are also provided.

The primary legislation underpinning youth work in Ireland is the Youth Work Act 2001. Within this legislation, youth work is defined as "a planned programme of education for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary involvement and which is complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations" (Youth Work Act: Part 1: Section 3, Government of Ireland, 1998).

A review of the provision of youth work in Ireland found that an estimated 382,615 young people take part in organised youth services. This represents 43.3% of the total youth population aged between 10 and 24 years, while 53.3% of those participating may be experiencing economic or social disadvantage (Indecon, 2012). The report found that there are over 40 separate organisations providing youth supports in Ireland with an annual budget of €79 million.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is a key policy framework document setting out government policy in the Irish youth sector (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014). Within this framework, there are five transformational goals and six outcome areas. These are set out Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014)
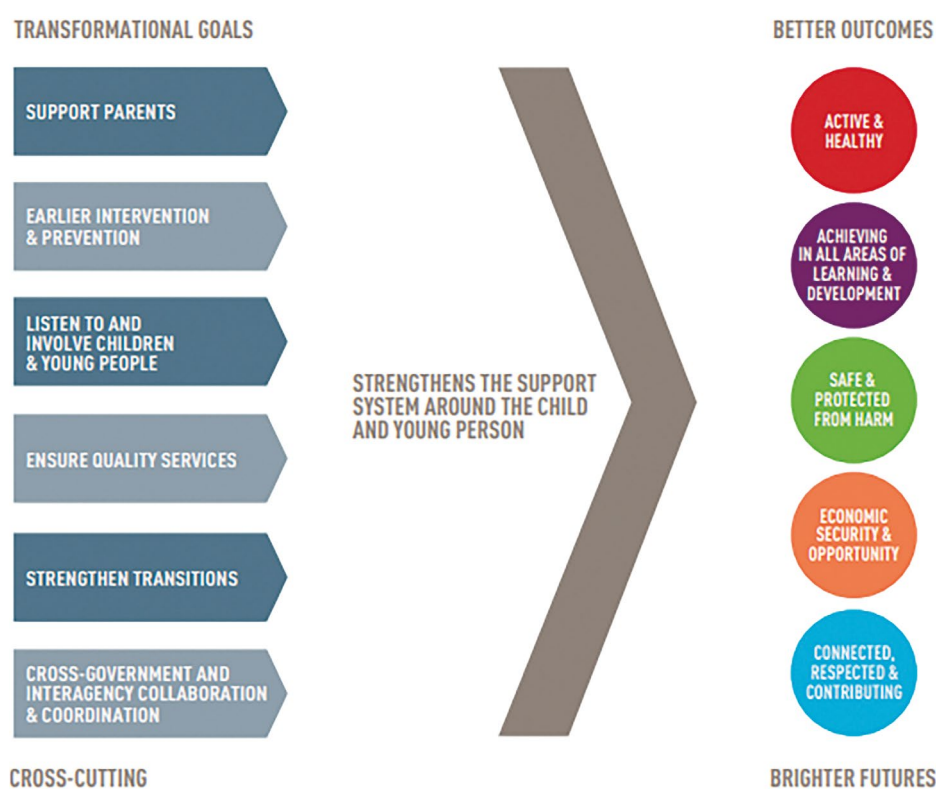
The National Youth Strategy (2015) sets out further objectives under the outcome areas set out. Of particular relevance to the Bridging Worlds project are:

- Objective 1: Young people enjoy a healthy lifestyle, in particular with regard to their physical, mental and sexual health and wellbeing.
- Objective 2: Young people benefit from involvement in recreational and cultural opportunities including youth work, arts and sports.
- Objective 3: Young people's core skills, competencies and attributes are enhanced and promoted through accessible, responsive formal and non-formal education and learning opportunities. (Department of Youth and Children, 2015, p. 3).

Non-formal education is defined by the National Youth Strategy (2015) as "an organised educational process that is complementary to mainstream activities of education and training and does not typically lead to certification" (p. 42).

Non-formal learning is defined in the Strategy as "a targeted learning process that supports the development of a person, his or her transformation potential, creativity, talents, initiative and social responsibility, and the development of associated knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. It encompasses learning outside institutional contexts (e.g. out of school), but can also take place in such contexts. Non-formal learning in youth work is often structured, based on learning objectives, learning time and specific learning support, is intentional and participation is voluntary. Non-formal learning is underpinned by a set of educational values." (Department of Youth and Children, 2015, p. 42).

Youth work involves the provision of "planned non-formal education" (p. 106). Coyne and Donohue's (2013) analysis of the range of educational programmes and approaches commonly used in Irish youth programmes is set out below.

Table 1 Youth work by areas of education from Coyne and Donohue (2013, p. 107)

Areas of Education	Approach Through	Example
Recreational	Any outdoor or sporting pursuits	Ball games, athletics, hill walking or water sports
Creative	Drama, music, art, theatre	Song, dance, acting, painting, pottery
Justice and spiritual	Legal or faith education and development	Religious topics, law and order, consumer rights
Issue-based information	Any topics based on equality, political or environmental issues	Recycling, environmental awareness, democracy
Social media	Using social media as a communicative tool	Information on using social networking sites highlighting advantages and disadvantages. Learning how to use technology positively
Intercultural and international awareness	Youth exchanges and voluntary international services	Student exchange programmes or celebrating different culture, volunteering with Goal or Concern
Welfare	Any health or wellbeing initiative involving life skills and teamwork	Health promotion, substance awareness, sexual health, first aid, relationships, bullying

According to Chaskin et al. (2018) programmes offered by Irish youth services "include an emphasis on supporting youth autonomy, fostering active citizenship, and strengthening youth voices through political, social, and civic engagement" (p. 12).

Finally, the National Youth Strategy specifically sets out a requirement that agencies work collaboratively across sectors to provide more effective supports for young people. It is in this collaborative space that the Bridging Worlds initiative is located. The review now turns to consider the two service contexts where the initiative takes place.

2.5 Foróige

Foróige is the largest youth organisation in Ireland. The organisation works with over 50,000 young people annually, aged between 10 and 20 years and in 26 counties. It combines a universal provision of community youth engagement in over 600 volunteer-led youth groups with targeted supports for more at-risk youth through 150 staff-led youth projects (Foróige, 2021). The targeted services provide specific interventions to young people at risk of marginalisation due to a range of issues. These include Garda Youth Diversion Projects, Drug Education & Prevention Projects and Neighbourhood Youth Projects.

Across both universal and targeted programmes, Foróige works to

enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of their community. We empower young people to develop their own abilities and attributes, to think for themselves, to make things happen and to contribute to their community and society. As a result, they develop greater self-confidence, self-reliance, resilience and a greater capacity to take charge of their lives. Foróige's clubs, projects and programmes are designed to achieve this aim. We work in a friendly and safe environment in which young people can meet friends and importantly have fun. We work with adults to engage them as volunteers and provide them with the required training and supports to facilitate the development of young people (Foróige, 2020, p. 4)

Jenkinson (2013) tracks developments in the youth work field in Ireland. She notes that following the economic downturn, many youth programmes were curtailed due to funding shortfalls. As a result, there has been an increased focus on providers demonstrating evidence-based practice and innovative practice models. Within the context of Foróige, efforts have been made to develop manuals that reflect an evidence-informed approach so that youth worker experts, youth voice and local context can shape the programme delivery (Brady et al., 2016; Brady and Redmond, 2017). There are four manualised programmes central to this project. Table 2 below describes each of the programmes in turn and indicates the degree of modification required for the Bridging Worlds project.

Table 2 Overview of Foróige programmes in the Bridging Worlds initiative

Programme	Description	Source
Leadership for Life	**Overview:** Aimed at young people aged 15–18, this programme works to foster in young people leadership skills and qualities so they can achieve positive change in their community through action learning projects. **Skills:** There is a focus on communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving and self-awareness. **Online Version:** The programme has been developed so that Modules 1, 2 and 3 can be completed either online, face to face, or through blended delivery.v	Foróige (2021)
Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE)	**Overview:** NFTE seeks to develop core skills in business and enterprise to support individuals to develop their talents and potential. **Skills:** Participants learn how to set up a business, they are supported with a seed grant and prepare a business plan for presentation to a panel of judges. **Online Version:** An online Google site has been developed to facilitate the course online, face to face or through a blended approach.	Foróige (2021)
Sound Surfers	**Overview:** This programme uses music technology to encourage empathy, self-discovery and prosocial attitudes in young people **Skills:** Learning to use recording technology, song writing, podcasting, poetry and other audio content. **Online Version:** Sessions have been adapted to be completed online or through a blended approach.	Unpublished Programme Manual Hesnan and Dolan (2017)
Activating Social Empathy	**Overview:** The programme aims to support the development of empathy skills in young people as a central aspect of their own personal development and also to promote better interpersonal relationships, social change and civic engagement. **Skills:** There are ten sessions, which focus on civic action and the development of inclusive societies. Individuals are provided with opportunity for self-reflection. **Online Version:** An online Google site has been developed to facilitate the course online, face to face or through a blended approach.	Unpublished Programme Manual

Shaw et al. (in press) reported how during the pandemic, Foróige had to expand its focus to engage directly with families to provide needed access to digital devices, phone credit and other practical supports. They noted that the numbers of those at risk of isolation grew considerably and that these vulnerabilities may be long lasting. While describing the successes made by Foróige in constituting an online "pivot" to continue to provide support, the authors note that some aspects of the relational type of support provided by youth workers are more difficult to provide in an online environment (Shaw et al., in press).

2.6 Transition Year

There is a direct overlap between the Transition Year programme offered in Irish secondary schools and Foróige's focus on promoting civil, social and political education while also encouraging personal and social development. The mission of Transition Year is to "promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils and prepare them for their role as autonomous, participating and responsible members of society" (Department of Education and Skills, 1993). It aims to do this by providing educational opportunities that promote personal social awareness and competence. It also facilitates programmes that provide cross-disciplinary learning and programmes that promote self-direction. Moynihan (2015) describes the history of Transition Year, a programme that is unique to Ireland. It was first introduced in a number of pilot schools in 1974, while widespread adaptation through the sector was facilitated with the release of National Transition Year guidelines in 1993.

The programme, which varies school by school, is designed to include core subjects (Mathematics, English and Irish), subject sampling (students can take taster courses in a range of subjects) and a range of personal, social and community engagement courses, including innovation and work experience. There is a focus on encouraging students to experience active learning and experiential learning with the engagement of topic experts both within the school and from the wider community.

There is a clear overlap between the holistic nature of the Transition Year programme and the prosocial focus of the Foróige manualised programmes. As Jeffers (2015) concludes "there is growing evidence that young people mature through the TY experience, that their confidence is boosted, that career and life aspirations are clarified, that voices are discovered, that personal identity is enriched, that engagement with the world beyond the school is increased, that personal agency and capacity for actions as citizens increases" (p. 268).

According to Clerkin (2018), the Transition Year programme is a year that facilitates students to develop maturity, leadership and personal and interpersonal skills. He posits the "Stage/Environment Theory" as offering a theoretical framework for understanding the programme's approach in providing space for young people to reflect on their career and personal goals so that there is a better fit between their development stage and the demands of the senior cycle when they progress to it after participation in Transition Year. In a large-scale study with over 5000 students conducted to gain feedback from those pre Transition Year, during Transition Year and post Transition Year, Clerkin (2019) concluded that four out of five students were glad they had participated in the programme and reported benefitting significantly socially and developmentally from participation. However, he also found that some students felt that the programme did not measure up to their expectations. In addition, while students in DEIS band schools were

more likely to report less satisfaction with their programme compared to non-DEIS schools, the range of activities in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools was similar. Clerkin (2019) recommended that schools ensure students are better informed about the programme in advance.

Finally Clerkin (2020) sought to establish evidence of improved prosocial development among students who had participated in Transition Year over those who had not. While a range of outcome areas were tracked across 1563 students in 20 schools, the study found differences only in two areas. These were that students who had participated in Transition Year were more likely to report that they felt older compared to those who had not. In addition, boys who had participated in the programme reported higher self-reliance scores than those who had not. The author concluded that there is a need for further research to evidence the reported benefits of the programme for those participating.

The final section below considers how the various aspects of the Bridging Worlds initiative might be inter-related using an ecological framework.

2.7 Bridging Worlds – Connecting the Mesosystem

Figure 3 Ecology of Bridging Worlds

Macrosystem
Impact of Covid and
Disruption of Education

Exosystem
Policy context — Education
Technology, Youth Sector

Mesosystem
Bridging Worlds

Microsystem
Foroige and TY

Individual
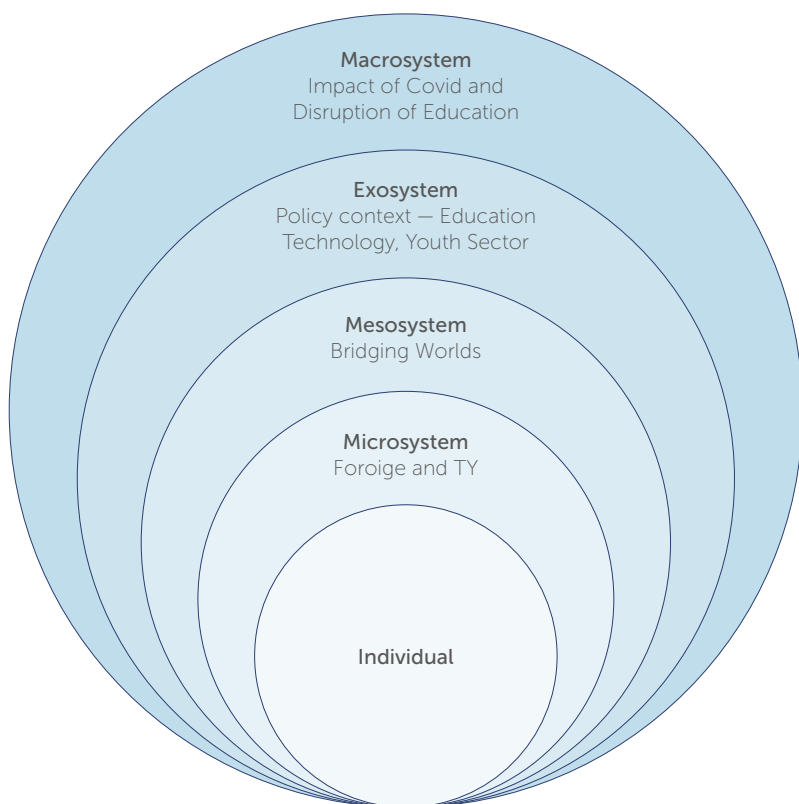
This evaluation uses an ecological approach to understand the experiences of young people and how best to support them in these momentous times. This approach is based on the Bio-ecological Model of human development first proposed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979 and further refined in the decades since (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines this theory of human development as the "progressive mutual accommodation between an active growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives as this process is affected by relations between these settings and by the larger contexts in which these settings are embedded" (p. 21).

This theory posits that human development is best understood as an interaction between the individual and a multi-layered set of contexts which have both direct and indirect impacts. Newman and Newman (2020) describe the contexts as follows:

- Microsystem: the influence of the immediate environment surrounding the young people, their family, school, community, youth group, sports club.
- Mesosystem: the overlaps between these contexts listed above, how they work together (or not) to promote the young person's development.
- Exosystem: the influence of wider policy and practice that the young person is not actively involved in but that will influence actors in their microsystem and ultimately influence them.
- Macrosystem: this layer of influence is at legal and state level, the furthest layer from the young person but yet often impacting them nonetheless.

Within this framework, the **individual** is placed centrally with focus on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on them and their day-to-day interactions and personal freedoms but also on the emerging body of evidence signposting significant negative impacts on wellbeing and mental health. These impacts will challenge services and supports in a post-pandemic era. The complete disruption of education services can be placed within the **macrosystem**. The policy arenas of both Education Technology and Youth Affairs are included within the **exosystem**. At the **microsystem** level, the specific service contexts where the initiative is located, Foróige and the Transition Year programme, have been described.

It is however in the **mesosystem** that the specific contribution of Bridging Worlds is best described from a theoretical standpoint. This is the central focus of the project as it is where the project seeks to connect the formal education context of the secondary school and the non-formal education world of Foróige.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines the mesosystem as "the interactions among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" (p. 25). He goes on to state that there are positive impacts on the developing young person where the roles and activities across settings are mutually positive and reinforcing. The main focus on the Bridging Worlds initiative is to enhance and extend the mesosystem connections between school and youth workers. This approach is also embedded in the national wellbeing strategy, which states:

> *Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development supports this view and offers a comprehensive systems-based understanding of wellbeing. It acknowledges the importance of the individual and his/her immediate relationships in their social context and in their wider community. This model demonstrates that to be human is to be relational and that wellbeing is always realised in a community (Government of Ireland, 2018, p. 10)*

Newman and Newman (2020) argue that social networks within an individual's mesosystem can impact each other by activating instrumental and social support across settings. In addition, the knowledge individuals gain about how to act in various settings can positively influence an individual's sense of self and their understanding of their place in the world. For Downes (2014), the strength of this approach is its focus on an individual's potential for growth rather than deficits. He also highlights the positive impact of settings working together to support an individual through transitions and in sustaining positive influences over time. Other researchers have also argued for the positive impact on developing young people when there is mutually reinforcing and supportive engagement across mesosystem connections (Duerden and Witt, 2010; Eriksson et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2007).

2.8 Community of Practice

Strengthening of the mesosystem as a way of enhancing positive youth engagement and support is the focus of the Bridging Worlds project. However, an additional theoretical concept of relevance is the project's efforts to develop a "community of practice" across the networks of teachers and youth workers who participate. Wenger (2010) states "A community of practice can be viewed as a social learning system. Arising out of learning, it exhibits many characteristics of systems more generally: emergent structure, complex relationships, self-organisation, dynamic boundaries, ongoing negotiation of identity and cultural meaning, to mention a few. In a sense it is the simplest social unit that has the characteristics of a social learning system" (p. 179).

By linking the formal and non-formal education sectors in the project, Bridging Worlds aims to create a community of interested parties to work together to support individuals involved in both spheres in a more effective way. Wenger (2010) sets out how participants themselves, by participating in this network, will develop their relationships with each other through:

- Engagement: Taking part in new activities, learning new skills together
- Imagination: Creating new mental maps and constructions of how the roles and expertise of members of the community overlap
- Alignment: Constructing new connections across the community as a result of participation (p. 184).

Wenger et al. (2011) describe the various types of knowledge capital that can be shared and transacted through a community of practice. These include human capital, social capital, tangible capital, reputational capital and learning capital. They go on to state "The act of participating in a facilitated network or a community as a valuable way of learning can be enlightening for people for whom formal teaching or training methods have always been seen as the only way to learn. When members have experienced significant learning in networks or communities they can transfer this experience to other contexts" (p. 20).

2.9 Conclusion

Covid-19 had a significant impact on young people in Ireland, particularly in the disruption of their education, and resulted in additional negative impacts on their wellbeing. The disruption of education was worldwide and unprecedented. There are concerns that these negative impacts will affect some more than others and be long lasting. Post pandemic, young people are likely to need increased support for mental health and wellbeing.

While education and youth work services continued to provide supports to young people during the pandemic, it became increasingly clear that there was both a digital device and a digital use divide impacting some young people in Ireland. In addition, the pivot to online provision did not reflect a move to effective online education but more accurately to emergency remote teaching. Lessons were learnt about the readiness of the Irish sector to cope with this move and, not withstanding these lessons, there is a platform to be built on to enhance future provision. Expanding online provision requires further strategic investment and development, addressing technological, pedagogical and social factors. Overall, it can be stated that the adaptation of education technology, while potentially very positive, is partial and incomplete both internationally and nationally. It can also be concluded that blended learning offers a useful hybrid approach which is likely to remain part of future provision in some form.

Finally, this review has established that there is synchronicity between the positive youth development focus of the Foróige youth programmes and the aims of the Transition Year programme. Using an ecological framework, the valid theoretical underpinning of Bridging Worlds has been set out as it seeks to strengthen the mesosystem for developing youth and create a community of practice for their supporters.

3

Methodology

3.1 Overview

This evaluation of the Bridging Worlds initiative used a mixed methods approach. According to Creswell (2017) "this approach is typically used in program evaluation where quantitative and qualitative approaches are used over time to support the development, adaptation, and evaluation of programmes, experiments, or policies" (p. 233). The evaluator worked with the project team to identify a research question and data collection methodology to match each of the project's aims. A **convergent mixed methods design** was used, where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected as required by each research question. These data were analysed separately and then integrated to provide a full account of the key learning from the project (Creswell, 2017). Table 3 below provides an overview of this process. Data are indicated as qualitative (QUAL) or quantitative (QUAN) as applicable.

Table 3 Evaluation overview

Project Goal	Research Question	Evaluation Activity and Data Type
1. To create a complementary wrap-around model for education where we support young people, teachers, school leaders, youth workers by adding value to existing structures.	How was the project delivered?	A narrative account of programme delivery provided through: • Monthly Reflective Journals completed by Programme Staff (N=5) (QUAL) • Programme Training Manuals (QUAL) • Engagement Statistics (QUAN) • Interviews with Key Stakeholders (N=5) (QUAL) • Review meeting with Stakeholders (QUAL)
2. To create formal and non-formal education partnerships by working with Foróige in this collaborative project aiming to impact at least 20 schools, 40 teachers, 20 youth workers and up to 6000 young people within the Galway/Mayo/Roscommon region.	Has the project enhanced the capacity of teachers and youth workers to engage young people and teach online? Has the project been successful in building relationships and linkages between formal and non-formal education settings?	Survey data collected from Teachers and Youth Workers at three points during the project: • Pre Bridging the Gap training (N=64) (QUAN) • Post Bridging the Gap training (N=61) (QUAN & QUAL) • Follow-up survey after completion of project activities (N=22) (QUAN) Participants interviewed to review their experiences following the project: • Teacher interviews (N=5) (QUAL) • Youth worker interviews (N=7) (QUAL)
3. To develop a professional learning component as part of the model that responds to the emerging demand for strategies and alternative ways of working with young people amongst teachers and other relevant professionals to scaffold student engagement, in a way that integrates learning both outside and inside the regular classroom.	What are the reflections of the participants on the learning supports received in the project and any further learning support needs?	This issue is explored in two of the evaluation activities set out above: • Follow-up survey with all participants (N=65) (QUAN & QUAL) • Interviews with participants (N=12) (QUAL)
4. To establish the foundations and conditions to ensure the project is scalable, with the ultimate vision of achieving national rollout and delivering radical educational change in how young people experience learning across the formal and non-formal contexts.	What learning can be drawn from the study to inform future educational provision?	All data strands both QUAN and QUAL were integrated to set out project achievements and learning and to make recommendations for project dissemination.

There were two pathways for data collection during this evaluation. Data to meet the first research question on project delivery was sourced with the support and engagement of the project coordinators recruited by Foróige to deliver the project activities. These staff members supported the conduct of the evaluation by maintaining monthly reflective journals to track project activity, sharing the programme manuals and gathering programme participation statistics. A paired interview was held with both staff to reflect on the project implementation and learning points. Three other stakeholder interviews were undertaken to round out the programme implementation account. These were with a senior manager in Foróige, a staff member from the School of Education and an external consultant to the project assigned by the project funder. The evaluator also attended a stakeholder review meeting at the end of the project and collated stakeholder feedback on the project to date. All interviews were conducted online, audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The data collection process to meet the other research questions was mapped onto the Bridging Worlds project phases as follows:

Phase 1: Bridging the Gap training programme provided by project coordinators to teachers and youth workers in the project areas.

Project coordinators worked to recruit teachers and youth workers into the Bridging Worlds project across Transition Year coordinators and youth groups in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. A pre-participation survey was developed to establish participant's knowledge, skills and attitudes to online learning, blended learning and the formal/non-formal education sectors. This online survey was completed by teachers and youth workers prior to attending the Bridging the Gap training. This online survey was then retaken after participation in the training so that specific changes in knowledge, skills and attitudes could be tracked. Participants were also asked at this point to indicate their suggestions for further training and support.

Overall, across both the pre- and post-training surveys, there were 67 participants. However, not all participants completed both the pre and post surveys. There were 64 respondents to the first survey and 61 to the second, with the number completing all items varying slightly across the surveys.

The project coordinators then worked to work with participants to deliver the project as follows:

Phase 2: Participants were offered an opportunity to attend follow-up online training delivered by the project coordinators to enable them to facilitate at least one of Foróige's four Positive Youth Development Programmes.

Phase 3: Transition Year teachers and youth workers were asked to facilitate one of Foróige's programmes with a group of young people they are involved with.

Phase 4: Teachers and youth workers were invited to avail of two follow-up support sessions to review their experiences and receive further advice and support.

Once the support sessions were delivered, the project coordinators asked participants to complete the final survey. This repeated some key quantitative items on knowledge, skills and attitudes to online learning, blended learning and the formal/non-formal education sectors to track learning across all aspects of the project. It also included open-ended items to seek feedback on each of the project components and the participant's further training needs. Finally, it included a number of items in relation to the use of digital technologies as recommended by the Department of Education and Skills (2020).

By this stage in the project, there had been some attrition. The number of participants who completed the final survey was (n=22). This issue is discussed further below as a particular challenge in conducting research during the Covid-19 pandemic. The final data collection activities of the project were then undertaken. As participants completed their final project activity, they were asked by project coordinators if they would take part in an online interview with the evaluator to review their experiences. Out of this recruitment process, 12 people were recruited, five teachers and seven youth workers. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Finally, the evaluator attended a stakeholder meeting with key members of the Steering Group to review programme implementation and discuss next steps. Minutes from this meeting were used as a data source to track stakeholder feedback on next steps.

3.2 Analysis

As a mixed methods study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyse the data. All the survey data were transferred to SPSS where descriptive statistical analysis was carried out. Where possible, mean scores were compared to track changes over time. Qualitative data analysis was carried out using the QSR NVivo software package. This enabled an iterative analysis to be carried out exploring the various data sources for trends and patterns using the constant comparative method (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As the evaluation followed Creswell's (2017) convergent mixed methods design, the outcomes from each data analysis were inter-related so that each of the research questions could be addressed and provide a holistic evaluation of the project. The timing of interviews with the programme participants was scheduled so that it took place after all project activities were completed and the final follow-up survey completed. In this way, it was hoped that the interviewees would be able to reflect on their full experience of the programme and their perspectives on future initiatives of this type.

3.3 Ethics

This project was subject to the oversight and approval of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee. All data collection instruments, information leaflets and consent forms were submitted and reviewed by this group in advance. Participant rights for privacy and confidentiality were upheld at all stages of the research process. Project data were securely stored. Additional details were provided to reassure the committee in relation to the avoidance of face-to-face data collection activities given Covid-19 and the safe conduct of online data collection activities as an alternative.

This study took place during unprecedented disruption to day-to-day life for individuals due to the pandemic. While any undertaking of this nature must be subject to additional considerations in terms of the potential risks and appropriateness of continuing, the study did conform to the provisions set out by World Health Organization (2020) for conducting research during a pandemic. In particular, it was justified under the seven standards set out of "Scientific validity, social value, collaborative partnership, reasonable risk–benefit ratio, fair and voluntary participation, independent review, equal moral respect for participants and affected communities" (p. 1). While the conduct of the research during the pandemic was appropriate and all data collection activities could be facilitated using online methodologies, some additional considerations need to be noted.

Participation Rates: The initial recruitment of participants took place during the worst month in terms of Covid-19 rates in Ireland. In January 2021, schools did not open as planned following the Christmas break and there was widespread uncertainty regarding what the implications of the rising case numbers might be. Ultimately, schools were to remain closed for three months for Transition Year students, and youth workers were also unable to provide face-to-face youth group activities. While these developments may have re-focused teachers and youth workers towards the use of online and blended approaches, the stress and uncertainty faced by individuals undoubtedly impacted the ability of participants to both get involved and remain involved with the project through its various stages. As such, difficulties in achieving participation must be seen in the light of coping with Covid-19 rather than particularly due to the project.

Zoom Fatigue: Early in 2020, "Zoom" became a buzz word as individuals began to "pivot" to using online tools to promote communication and engagement. However, by mid-2021, "Zoom fatigue" became the more common term as following a year of online life, the lack of face-to-face communication took its toll (Cutter, 2021). As both project and data collection activities took place online, the potential that individuals' attitudes to online learning in general may have impacted their attitude to the project in particular should be borne in mind.

Youth involvement: While the main subjects of this project are the teachers and youth workers who participated, it is usual in studies of this nature to ensure that space is provided for the voice of the intended beneficiary, in this case young people participating in Transition Year and local youth groups. However, the ongoing impact of Covid-19 restrictions severely curtailed the involvement of young people in the project. It had been planned to conduct focus groups with young people both in school settings and youth groups once they had participated in a programme delivered as part of this initiative. When schools were unable to run the programmes within the constraints of the school year and youth groups struggled to recruit young people to online workshops during the summer, it was not possible to conduct the focus groups as planned. It is important that as the initiative is developed further, the direct experience of young people receiving these integrated supports is captured. Care should be taken to ensure that when capturing youth voice in this way the focus is on their feedback on the wrap-around model being delivered as opposed to general feedback on the programme of support being rolled out. One way to capture this feedback is to seek case vignettes from teachers and youth workers to explore how this integrated model may work in practice. This issue should be explored further with stakeholders including youth advocates to ensure this valuable feedback is obtained in the most effective way.

4

Project Implementation and Stakeholder Review

4.1 Introduction

This section details the implementation of the Bridging Worlds initiative, which took place between November 2020 and June 2021. This was a time of unprecedented disruption to the provision of education and youth work services as well as the normal running of civil society given the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic. As rates of infection increased and school closures were re-imposed, all project activities were conducted online and project staff had to regularly amend project schedules and approaches to facilitate this. It is a reflection of excellent communication skills and project management techniques across the project that notwithstanding these challenges the project was successfully implemented. This section sets out an overview of the main project implementation activities and describes successes and challenges that arose. It concludes with signposting some considerations for the future development of the programme. In providing this account, it draws on:

- Engagement statistics
- Programme manuals
- Reflective journals completed by project coordinators
- Interviews with project coordinators (2), Foróige management (1), NUI Galway School of Education staff (1) and an external consultant to the project (1)
- Implementation notes prepared by the external consultant to the project
- A strategic review meeting with project stakeholders in June 2021.

4.2 Engagement Statistics

Table 4 Bridging Worlds engagement statistics

Phase	Attended
Bridging the Gap	65 (71 registered)
Participated in Foróige Programme Activating Social Empathy Sound Surfers Leadership for Life NFTE	72 training places (52 participants) 43 15 9 5
Support Sessions	Session 1: 36 out of 50 registered Session 2: 24 out of 36 registered
School Participation Summary Youth Worker Participation Summary	19 schools, 35 teachers 17 projects, 30 youth workers

Additional demographic details on the participants are set out in Chapter 5. It should be noted that the project surpassed its aim of recruiting 60 participants. Indeed it was successful in maintaining contact with most of these participants over the full implementation period. However, the recruitment and retention of participants in the project was also a central challenge and this will be discussed in further detail below.

4.3 Bridging the Gap Training

This part of the initiative was an essential and foundational element of the project in how to "bridge the gap" across education and youth support services. It aimed to bring participants from both sectors together to jointly explore their roles in youth development with a view to fostering and developing the connections between them. It also specifically set out to explore with both groups their understanding and experiences of blended learning and creating online learning environments. It aimed to build on these experiences, share current best practice guidelines and facilitate participants to work together in supporting each other to build their knowledge and confidence in the area. The project team set out the following learning outcomes for participants:

- Describe the similarities and differences between the two education sectors and the supports they provide.
- Identify blended learning strategies and state the challenges and benefits associated with blended learning.
- Explain how an online learning culture is created and state how this can be used to enhance our work.
- Identify connections between the sectors and state how these can complement each other moving forward.

  Source: Bridging the Gap Training Programme Manual

The resulting session was delivered online over a four-hour period. This introductory session was offered on five separate dates in January and February 2021, to facilitate individuals to attend across a number of dates. A detailed programme manual was developed by the project coordinators and NUI Galway School of Education staff to underpin this training. Handouts and resource materials were prepared and circulated to participants following the training. Participants completed evaluations following the session. Further details of their feedback on the learning outcomes are included in Chapter 5. Specifically, however, the coordinators sought feedback on the training overall and what additional training and support needs the participants would identify. Overall feedback was very positive:

I really enjoyed this training. The facilitators were excellent and very professional. The variety of resources used and break out rooms added great interaction and engagement for everyone (Youth Worker 774)

I felt it was very good. Everything was very well explained and I felt comfortable getting involved and voicing my own opinions and experiences (Teacher 2497)

Where participants indicated further training needs, these in the main concerned seeking additional guidance on the use of learning platforms and tools.

More resources for all types of blended learning not just online so we can have them for after lockdown and Covid (Youth Worker 3075)

How to use different platforms effectively in a blended learning environment (Teacher 3963)

Given the iterative nature of the project, the coordinators were able to incorporate this feedback into the planning and delivery of the support sessions.

As a result of this phase of the project, there are a set of resources available as a Bridging the Gap training module, developed with the expertise and experience of both academic educationalists and programme specialists, which has been field tested and approved.

4.4 Foróige Programme Training

Once participants had completed the initial Bridging the Gap training, they could self-nominate to attend one or more of the Foróige training programmes available through this project. The four training programmes were:

- Activating Social Empathy
- Leadership for Life
- Sound Surfers
- Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE).

As noted in Table 4 above, 72 training places were provided in this part of the initiative. The Activating Social Empathy was the most subscribed course and as a result the coordinators had to arrange additional dates to provide this training. Of particular note is that to deliver this part of the project, the project team worked with Foróige programme leads to ensure that each programme had an online version and updated e-manual. Some of this work had been initiated prior to the pandemic. However, during the course of the Bridging Worlds project it was possible to complete this conversion. This work was enhanced by the engagement of a web technician to complete the conversion of the NFTE and Activating Social Empathy programmes to online resources. As with the Bridging the Gap training, these resources provide a valuable project legacy.

4.5 Support Sessions

The project coordinators aimed to use support sessions to facilitate further learning on the topics covered in Bridging the Gap training and to support the two groups to share experiences of facilitating the youth programmes, and in so doing to facilitate further learning and networking between the participants and sectors. As set out earlier, the original plan had been to provide these support sessions once participants had facilitated one of the youth programmes in their respective areas of work. However, as the project was implemented, it became apparent that this was not going to be possible in most cases. For schools, the school term was proving too short to allow for sufficient time to implement the youth programmes as designed. While youth workers had indicated plans to facilitate these over the summer holidays, it became apparent that young people were not keen to sign up for online programmes in the short term and were reporting "Zoom fatigue". In order to maintain project momentum and respond to some of the training needs identified by participants in the Bridging the Gap evaluations, the coordinators worked with NUI Galway School of Education staff to develop further resources for two support sessions. These sessions took place after all participants had the opportunity to attend training on at least one of the Foróige programmes.

The content of Session 1 focused on extending participant learning in relation to online learning tools and platforms. A range of tools were explored and participants had the opportunity to practice these and provide feedback to each other on their experiences.

Session 2 focused on the interconnections between the two sectors. Throughout the project, the coordinators worked to arrange breakout activities with teachers and project workers from the same geographic area in an effort to create an informal local network across the two sectors that would remain as a project legacy. In addition, with the support of NUI Galway School of Education staff, this session focused on exploring with participants how these connections could be developed locally.

Following each session, project participants completed evaluations, indicating high levels of satisfaction with these sessions.

Figure 4 Word cloud based on participant feedback after Support Session 1
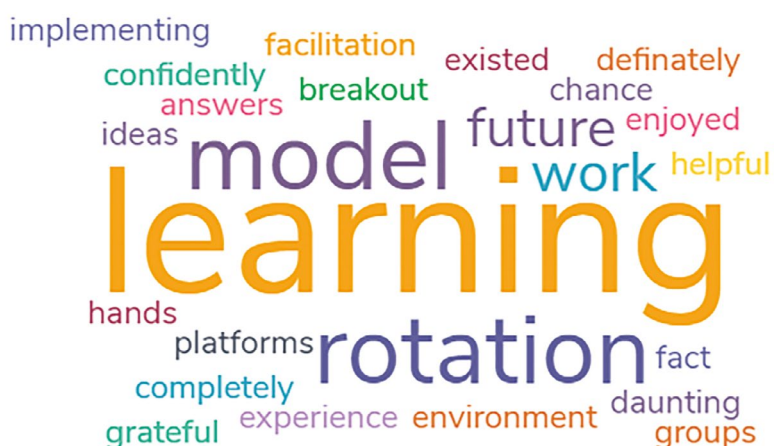
4.6 Implementation Success

Across all stakeholders there was a strong sense that this project was very well implemented and successful, especially given the short timeframe and the ongoing public health emergency. Respondents were highly positive in recognising the project's achievements in recruiting participants and delivering high-quality supports in the area of online and blended learning. The project also was successful in providing information and networking opportunities for cross-sectoral working across a group of teachers and youth workers in the project area. Some key themes emerged when the project's achievements were reviewed with stakeholders.

This project was implemented by a group of stakeholders who have significant experience in the area and in working together and who have a culture of encouraging active problem solving and joint working. Despite the considerable challenges in implementation given the impact of the pandemic and Level 5 restrictions, stakeholders successfully networked and pivoted where necessary to ensure that the project could be implemented.

Several stakeholders named specific "built-in" resources of the project which sustained it in the challenges it faced. These included:

- Commitment to the goal: This project emerged from stakeholder concerns that with the disruption caused by Covid-19, a group of young people were becoming further alienated and marginalised. This "common sense" of the urgency of linking sectors together to support young people was a key driver and maintained project focus across stakeholders as the project was implemented.

   So we ourselves, NUI Galway, the UNESCO Child and Family research centre, the School of Education came together and said, we need to do something, and we need to do something now. So that if Covid hit again, that there wouldn't be just be a falling off the face of the cliff that young people could continue to be connected with the formal education system supported by the non-formal system and we thought, if we could connect teachers and youth workers together in spaces, create formal connections, as well as informal connections, and provide them with, with programmes that they both had knowledge of and both had skill set, when it came to facilitating, that young people would be supported and connected (Foróige Line Manager)

- Knowledgeable and experienced staff: Across the project consortium from practitioner expertise to project and line management skills to academic theoretical frameworks, this initiative benefited from a collation of "inputs" which proved valuable to the project. In addition, because these stakeholders have a long tradition of joint working on a cross-agency basis, inter-departmental communication and problem solving were particularly effective.

   The individuals, and some of their pre-existing relationships were of enormous value so that was a common thread, both from fairly junior team members through to the very experienced senior team members that people had previous relationships that were in place before they started this work, that allow them to work efficiently in a trusting way. (External Consultant)

- Strong communication and networking skills: These skills in particular were critical to the project's success and were specifically demonstrated by the two project coordinators in working to recruit and support participants throughout their engagement with the project. In addition, the project benefited from local knowledge, which helped in addressing some of the recruitment issues which came to the fore, especially when Level 5 restrictions were re-imposed in December 2020. Throughout the project, communication networks were set up with school principals, youth worker line managers and participating staff. This work all supported the dissemination of information about the project and enabled recruitment to proceed. However, communication and responsiveness were ongoing, as this extract illustrates.

  Meeting managers and senior staff members in Foróige before contacting the staff directly, this created buy-in.

  Regular contact with schools and follow-up calls and emails to provide extra information.

  Linking with Foróige staff to use their links with schools within the community.

  Opening up the pool of schools we were contacting, the initial list was 22, we added 34 extra schools to the list, this included extra DEIS schools being added. (Reflective Practice Diary – Project Coordinator Jan 2021)

- Joint academic and practitioner experience in designing the resources: It was also noted that the model of practitioners and pedagogical specialists working together to develop training resources ensured that the resulting product was well suited to the purpose for which it was designed.

  I think at a very kind of micro level, the likes of discussions that the coordinators and I had were very much about what works on the ground in a classroom or what the pedagogical approach is or what technique can work here. And I do think that combination of pedagogue and youth worker in designing those aspects is a hugely valuable, and I was learning from them, they were learning from me, it was a very good knowledge exchange experience at that programme design level and I think the feedback that we seemed to get from those who participated reflected that kind of dialogue and conversation about willingness to exchange, and to try new things (NUI Galway School of Education staff)

- Evidence-based positive youth development programmes: This was an important ingredient for success. All of the youth programmes made available through Bridging Worlds have been evaluated and were attractive products for the participants to be able to access through the project. This is especially true for the Activating Social Empathy programme, which, prior to this initiative was not yet widely available to youth workers.

We also felt having Activating Social Empathy was a real draw for youth workers especially and was actually very relevant to a lot of the teachers. So Activating Social Empathy was only piloted in Foróige before Christmas so it's not open to all staff members. So we found for the recruitment phase, it really kind of drew youth workers in because they can't access the programme otherwise, they nearly had to come through Bridging Worlds, which is positive, but also it was a very open programme that appeals to a lot of people. So that was a real draw point (Project Coordinators)

4.7 Implementation Challenges

The ongoing health emergency placed a high premium on developing strong communication links with participants and being as flexible as possible with scheduling and project activities. Despite this flexibility and active communication management, the following learning points were apparent in relation to project engagement:

- Recruitment: This first challenge faced by the project team was how to recruit teachers and youth workers to the project within a short time frame. While the internal resources and local knowledge of the project ultimately facilitated a successful recruitment process, consideration should be given to how the various project registers and contact lists could be expanded in advance to alleviate this in the future. It is also noteworthy that of the 19 participating schools, only one has an assigned DEIS status. The recruitment list had been expanded to include DEIS schools; however, only one school participated in the project. The reason for this requires further exploration. It may have been because this group of schools already had sufficient supports of this nature in place. It did not impinge on the project aims of supporting youth at risk as this group are present in all schools and also throughout the youth projects. However, in any further extension of the project, this is an area that will require a specific focus.

  Insights: prepare the school list to the required standard (size, named contacts) ahead of time. Recognise the importance of an 'attractive' course to drive sign-ups. Consider semi-automating reminder emails to reduce admin burden (External Consultant Implementation Notes)

  I think we just said potentially going forward to link in with Access Centre, in NUI Galway again, trying to reach more of those DEIS schools, and potentially linking in with the ETBs in the area, as well as we actually did link in with the ETB. But it was kind of mid-project to give them an update. And the meeting went really well. I think if we were going into new areas, we'd do that more at the start and try to create that buy-in at the start as well (Project Coordinator)

- Timing: It was difficult to recruit schools into the project when the project call was launched in November/December. However, the upside is that the decision to impose Level 5 restrictions in January gave opportunity for participants to be available for online training in a way that they may not have been had the schools reopened as scheduled in January. In addition, the ongoing pandemic continued to highlight the importance of online and blended teaching and promote awareness among the target group of participants of the importance of upskilling

in this area. Notwithstanding this, throughout the project, the timelines were very tight to complete the programme components within the constraints of the academic year. This ultimately led most participants to decide to defer programme delivery to young people until the following school year.

And then the timeframe, I suppose of, of the recruitment, as well would have been, you know, something that we might look at going forward, you know, finishing up at the end of the year, they're trying to finish off and get into contact with principals and teachers and getting people on board was difficult around that time, kind of late November, December. So maybe looking at that, and September stage for the recruitment might work well, going forward (Project Coordinator)

• Amending the programme schedule: Mid-way through the project, it became apparent that participants would be constrained by the timing of the academic year to both complete their own programme training and deliver a positive youth programme to a group of young people as envisaged by the project. While participants indicated to the project coordinators that they would implement the programmes in the new school year or in the case of the Foróige staff over the school holidays, the timing of the support sessions had to be altered. These originally had been scheduled to take place after participants had implemented a youth programme. As a result, the support sessions took place before most participants were able to implement one of the Foróige programmes. While participants indicated satisfaction with these sessions, consideration will need to be given to whether some form of support can be provided following programme delivery.

So given the limited timeframe, when people were trained, maybe in February or March, and then students were off for Easter, and then they were finished in May and June. It didn't give them I suppose enough time to run it. Well, it did give them enough time to run it. But when things are coming up if there were bank holidays or if they were off on midterm breaks, trying to finish up and get everything covered by the end of the year, prevented them from facilitating the programmes (Project Coordinator)

• Releasing teachers for training: A related issue to the timing difficulties is that as the project continued that there was a level of attrition in the participation levels. This is most likely due to the recommencement of onsite school towards the latter part of the year and increased demands on participants' time. Consideration should be given to applying for accreditation so that teachers can get released to attend training. Such accreditation would have made it much easier for teachers to attend and sustain their involvement for the course of the project.

And so getting cover for a teacher during the day for an hour or two it's just very difficult. And because it's not from the NCEA the PDST, there's no sanction for it, so there's no money for it, so that's one of the challenges there was where the training was situated in you know in terms of time (NUI Galway School of Education staff)

- Hub creation: A key focus of the project was to support the development of connections across the youth workers and teachers in geographic areas. However, feedback indicates that this was challenging. The coordinators noted that it was only possible to assign groups to the relevant local grouping if there were teachers and youth workers from the same area available to attend the same session. This eventuality could not be planned for as attendance was primarily arranged alongside individual availability and whether or not a teacher and youth worker from the same area signed up together. In addition, the approach taken was to foster connections and encourage individuals to create local networks. While this approach may prove successful where a local youth worker and school staff established those connections, it was not possible across all the project groups.

  But the one thing that maybe could have been a bit more smooth was the creation of the hubs. So if there was a bit more time, we feel these could have gone a little bit better, or if the region was smaller. So because we were trying to create hubs in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, it depended on how many teachers signed up and how many youth workers and services were close by per school (Project Coordinator)

  So that was the biggest question that arose from us is like, how would those hubs look moving forward? And do you just create that space? We were saying, if we're doing that training next time around, we would potentially kind of give them like 15 minutes to log off and research in the area what are the supports or the schools and then come back with a plan themselves. (Project Coordinator)

- Streamlining: The project combined a range of elements comprising training for teachers and youth workers, access to four evidence-based youth programmes, sharing of new online versions of these programmes and hub creation. All of these elements had their own communication, coordination and resource imperatives. The team were supported in a practical away by additional administrative supports within the Training, Learning and Development team in Foróige. Consideration should be given to perhaps simplifying the range of programmes on offer or reducing the administrative burden, which may lead to a more streamlined process should the project be extended.

  There was some reliance on others – notably the training coordinator – and the 'admin' side of the work needs to be resourced appropriately (External Consultant Implementation Notes)

  And then potentially have less programmes to choose from but there's pros and cons to this so they had four programmes they could choose from such as Leadership, NFTE, Activating Social Empathy or Sound Surfers, which is great to give them options but it meant people were getting emails from four different people or four different staff teams as well (Project Coordinator)

4.8 Stakeholders' Thoughts on Next Steps

This review of project implementation concludes by setting out some of the stakeholders' reflections on the project so far and on what useful next steps might be. These are presented here as initial considerations and will be revisited when setting out report recommendations.

- Project Culture: Given the pre-existing relationships across Foróige and NUI Galway staff, the programme resources already in place, and the project management and local knowledge, the project was on strong foundations from the outset. As noted by the external consultant, any project extension or development with new team members should make sure to capitalise on this "secret sauce" by including reflective practice and team appraisal as a method of ensuring this proactive project culture continues to flourish in support of the work of the team.

  There's almost a secret sauce here that has allowed this to work so well, and that I would be delighted if it's given even kind of a position on the agenda regularly to reflect on that. I don't think it has to become all of our culture, right, but I do think that where you've had the success in a challenging context, and further complicated by Covid, that it would be remiss not to give [it] an equal status with kind of more technical aspects of the project (External Consultant)

- Support Programme Implementation: There was a strong sense from stakeholders that every effort should be made to maintain contact with the participants who have yet to implement a programme and provide follow-up support as required. This would allow the full implementation of the model as intended and provide a complete narrative of how Bridging Worlds can work once fully operationalised. Alongside this was a recognition that as participants had engaged fully online, if possible some follow-up activities should be conducted face to face. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly, it would model for participants how blended learning can work. Secondly, it would allow for informal peer-to-peer contact, which is so important in creating the linkages and connections that foster local networks of support between youth workers and teachers in their community settings. Thirdly, while the initiative sought to include Transition Year teachers, some teachers who work with first, second and third year students participated. It will be important to explore how those teachers experience the programme implementation as a key learning point.

  For some schools, they have done the training in the programmes, but they may not have implemented it yet. And they might be holding off until September to do it. So I think there's a bit of support for those teachers to you know, they may have got training in in March or April and then they might not be using that until September, so some support for them (Foróige Line Manager)

- Enhance the Hubs: There is a recognition that further development work is needed to strengthen the hub connections across participants. This area will require more focus and engagement. It will most likely be enhanced once strong exemplars are shared across the network of how youth workers and teachers working within their own purview can share resources and foster positive youth engagement. These strong exemplars should serve to show that this cooperative space can be developed without changing the roles of or obligations on either party but by linking the inter-connecting spaces.

  What we're trying to promote it as if two people did an Activating Social Empathy project, there's nothing saying you can't, in an evening, do a showcase event together. And maybe that's where we might be in moving forward, being clear on how people can work together (Project Coordinator)

- Youth feedback: This initiative so far has focused on the teachers and youth workers as participants and aims, through their use of project resources, to have a positive impact on the young people they support. However, it is important that further research is conducted to collect youth perspective on this enhanced wrap-around model of support. It will be important that this feedback focuses on youth experience of the model as opposed to feedback on the programmes, which have a separate established evidence base. Options that could be explored include seeking case vignettes of young people supported by both sectors working together. It might also be possible to seek samples of project outcomes produced by young people as a result of their involvement.

  We always really want to hear the voice of the young people, but because the outcomes were more aimed at the professionals, we're not sure how truly to get at that voice in Bridging Worlds if that makes sense (Project Coordinator)

- Embed the Project: The overwhelmingly positive feedback on the initiative to date indicates that there is considerable potential in this initiative for cross-sectoral working and positive engagement across the youth and education actors. There is also significant good will from those involved to make a difference in the lives of young people. However, the initiative took root in the midst of a pandemic and further time is needed to fully implement its constituent parts and to facilitate participants in setting up networks of support to sustain their connections into the future.

  There's also a piece for Bridging Worlds to go a little bit more in-depth, so as to embed what's happened in the three counties, as well as scaling. So it's not about here is a service, and then let's move on, and there's no support for people to continue those networks. And that's something that's, that's really important. And so for Bridging Worlds it's about embedding what we have already (Foróige Line Manager)

5

Bridging Worlds Participant Survey Findings

5.1 Introduction

As part of the evaluation, participating teachers and youth workers completed surveys at three separate time points during the project. On each occasion, participant information leaflets and the online survey link were circulated by email to participants. Survey completion rates varied across the project as set out in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Survey completion rates

Time Point	Number Completed	Percentage of Total Participants
Pre Bridging the Gap	64	98%
Post Bridging the Gap	64	98%
June Follow-up	22	34%

The survey data were imported to SPSS and descriptive analysis was carried out. The results are presented as follows:

- Participant demographics
- Comparison of items between pre and post survey
- Feedback on items relating to the Bridging the Gap training in the post survey
- Comparison of items tracked across all three surveys
- Overall feedback on the project from the June follow-up survey.

Figure 5 Participant location
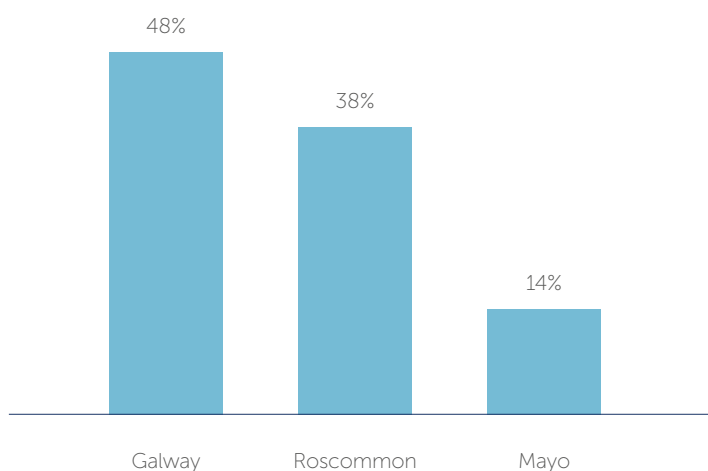
The largest grouping of participants was in Galway City and County, with the smallest in County Mayo.

Figure 6 Participant role
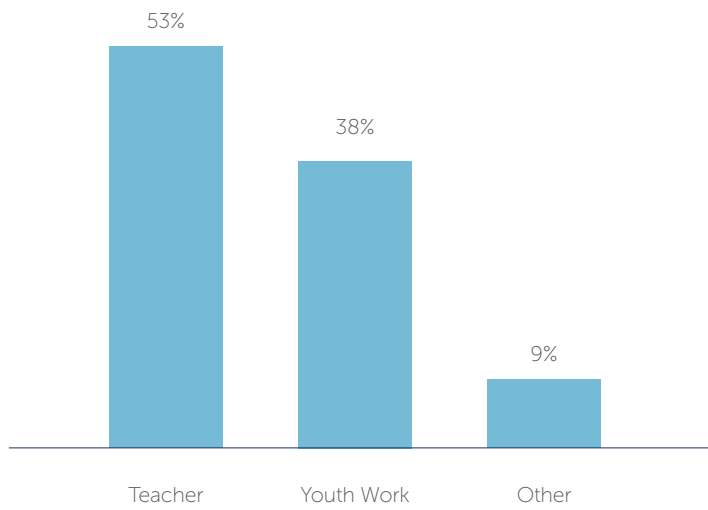
The largest group of participants were teachers. Participants who indicated 'other' were in the main students or staff who identified as both teachers and youth workers at various points in their career.

Figure 7 Length of time working in your current role
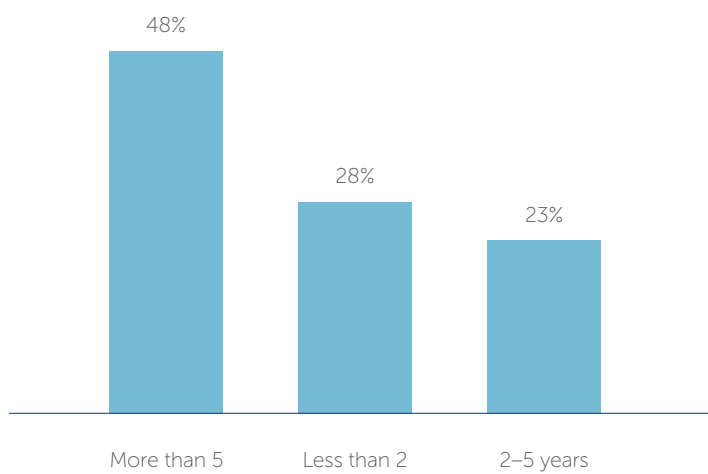
This sample is a relatively experienced cohort across both sectors with only 28% working less than two years.

Figure 8 Reasons for taking part
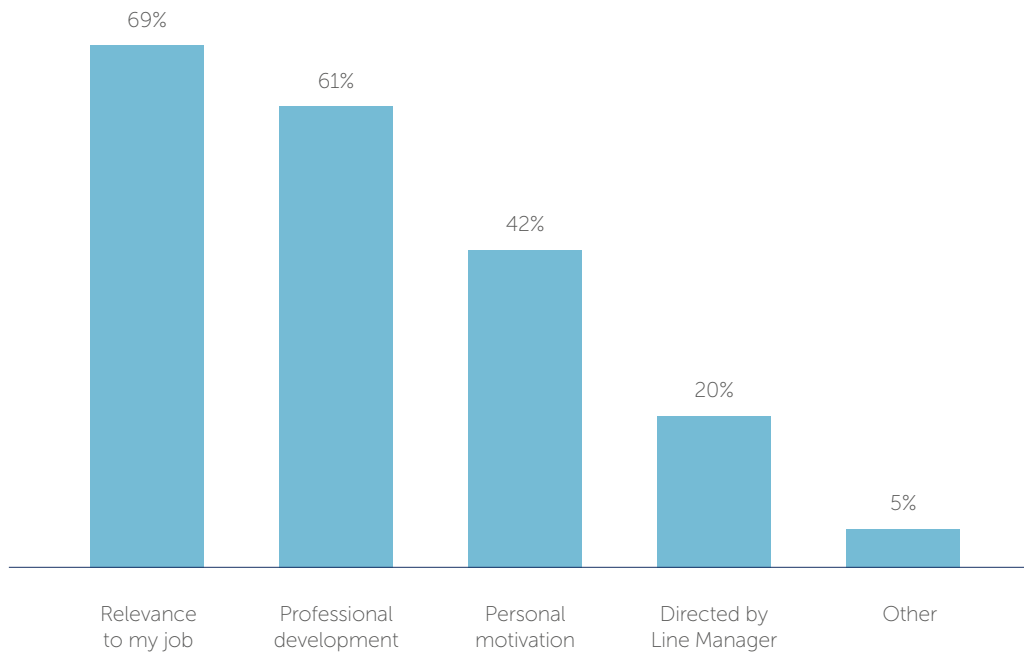
In this graph describing the range of reasons individuals selected for taking part, the total number is greater than 100% as most participants selected more than one reason.

5.2 Comparison of Items Between Pre and Post Survey

Figure 9 Mean scores across each group when asked if they would apply the training received
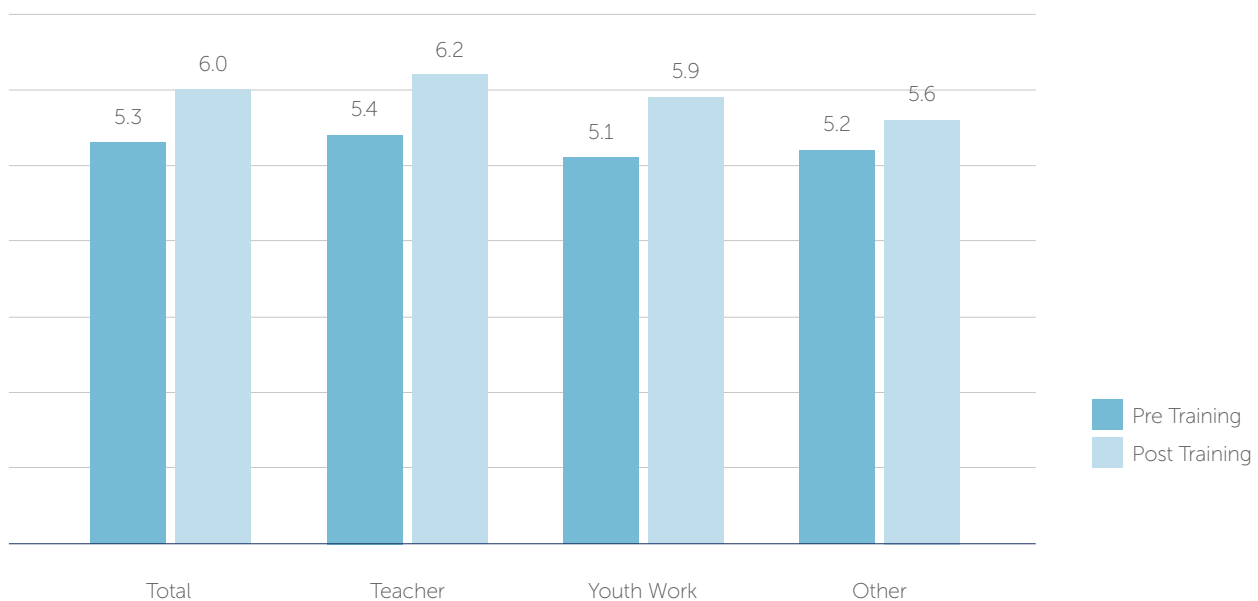
Figure 9 illustrates the mean scores across each group when participants were asked on both occasions if they would apply the training received. The mean score was based on a minimum of one to maximum range of seven. While there was an increase in mean scores across this data, it was not statistically significant, most likely due to a relatively high initial mean score.

Figure 10 Mean scores across total group on knowledge, skills and attitudes
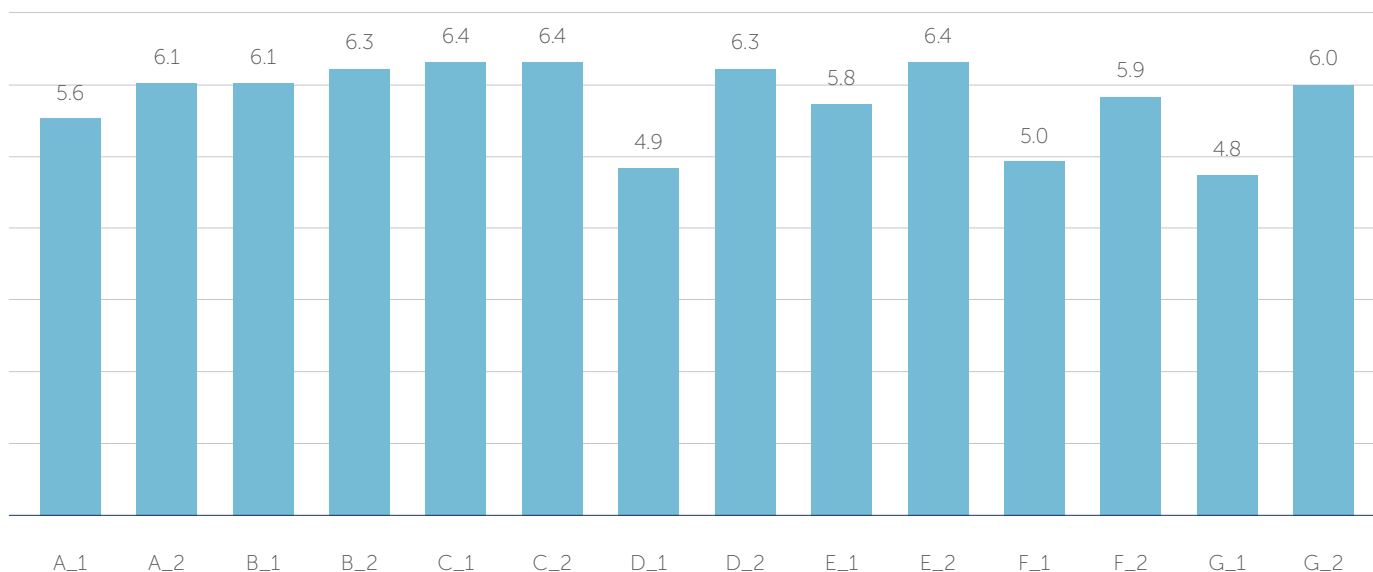
Figure 10 illustrates the mean scores across the total group when asked a range of items related to their knowledge, skills and attitudes to blended learning, online culture and the non-formal/ formal education sectors. The mean score was based on a minimum of one to maximum range of seven. Pre scores are labelled A to G (_1) and the post scores are labelled A to G (_2). While all mean scores increased, it was not statistically significant, most likely due to a relatively high initial mean score. However, the items with the largest relative increase were:

• Item D: I feel well informed about the similarities/differences between the formal and non-formal education sectors
• Item G: I am able to make connections in subject areas between different disciplines/sectors.

5.3 Bridging the Gap Training in the Post Survey

Figure 11 Mean scores across total group on Bridging the Gap training
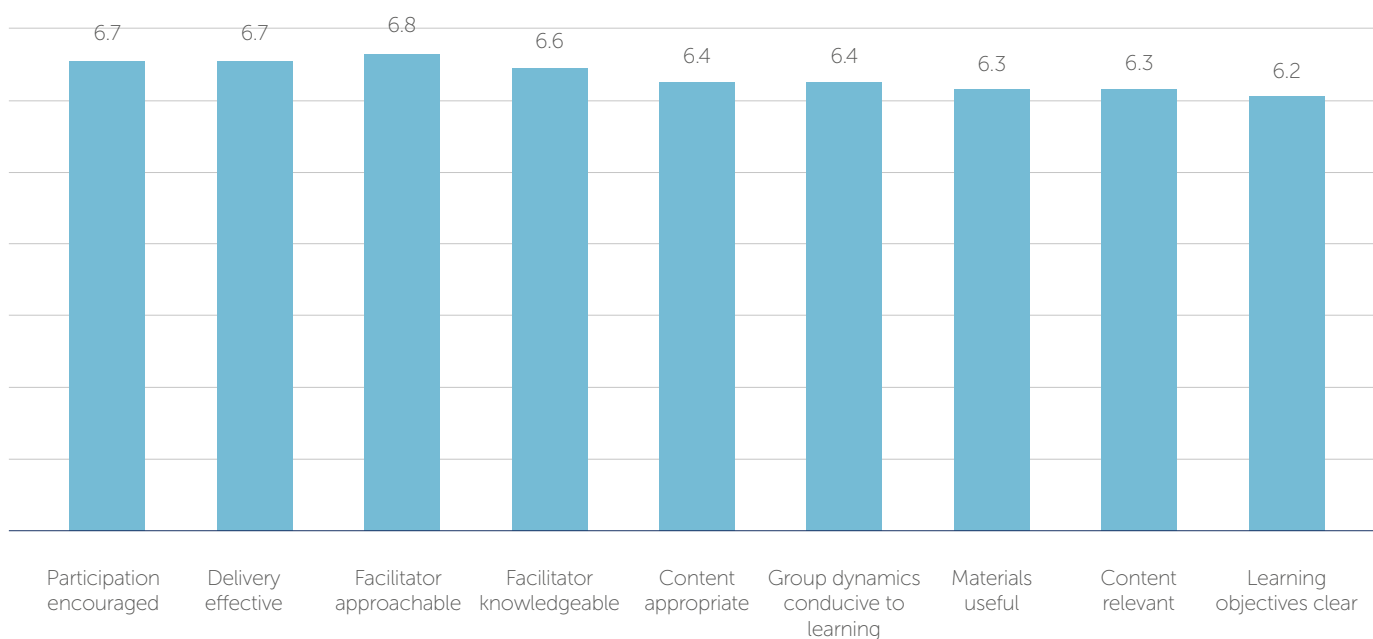
Figure 11 illustrates the mean scores across the total group when asked a series of items seeking feedback on the Bridging the Gap training. The mean score was based on a minimum of one to a maximum range of seven. The bar chart illustrates very positive feedback and high scores across all the feedback items.

5.4 Comparison of items tracked across all three surveys

Figure 12 Mean scores across total group on training expectations
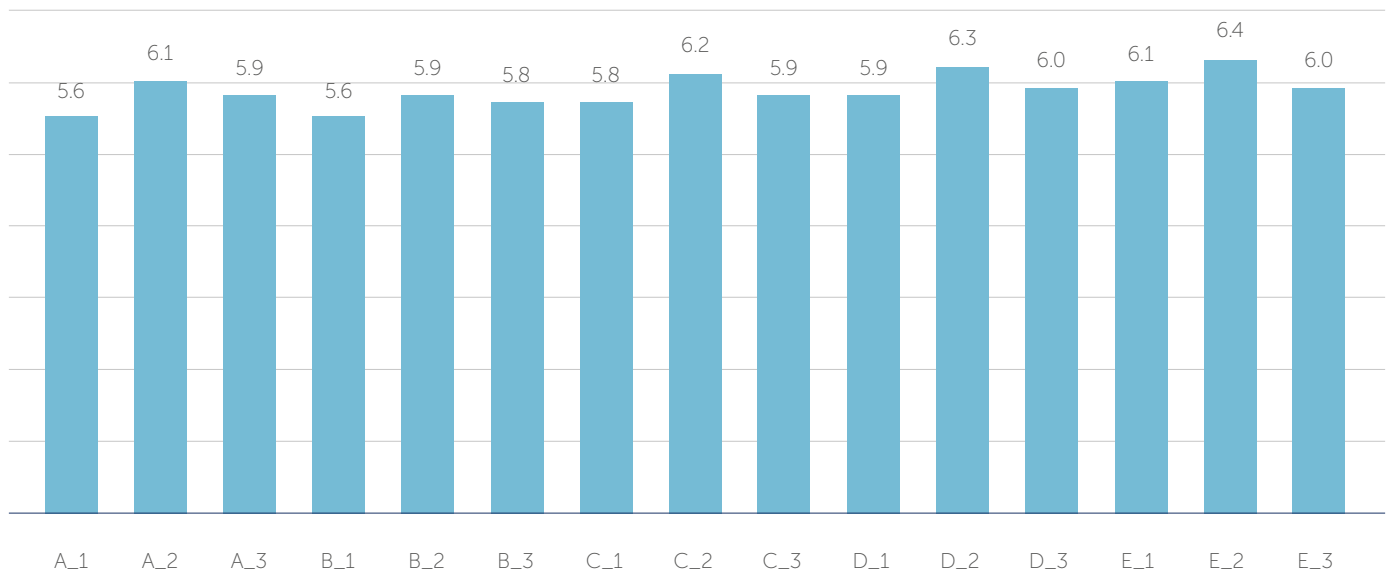
Figure 12 illustrates the mean scores across the total group when asked a range of items exploring their beliefs about: whether the training would improve their ability and confidence to teach online and use blended learning techniques, knowledge about the non-formal/formal sectors, and whether the training was a good use of their time. The mean score was based on a minimum of one to maximum range of seven. Pre scores are labelled A to E (_1), post scores A to E (_2) and follow-up scores A to E (_3). There was no statistically significant change in score as measured using ANOVA, most likely due to a relatively high initial mean score. A slight fall off is noticeable on each item for the final data point. Again, this is not statistically significant and is more reflective of a smaller sample with full data for the third time point (n=20)[1] vs the other two time points (n=64).

[1] Not all the 22 respondents to the final survey answered this item.

Figure 13 Mean scores across total group on beliefs about improved outcomes
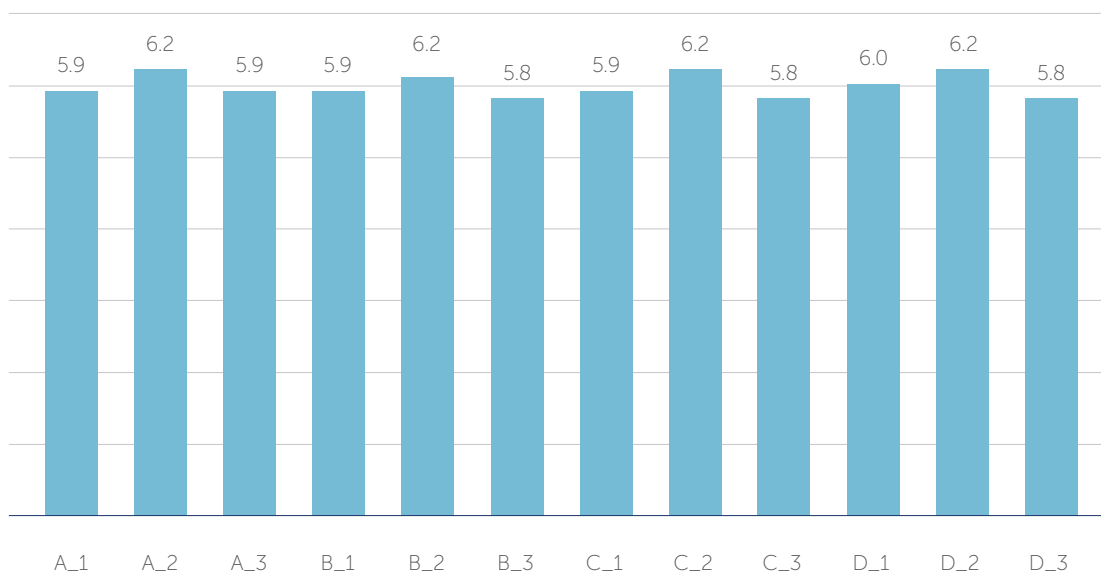
Figure 13 illustrates the mean scores across the total group when asked a range of items exploring their beliefs about whether the training would improve their ability and confidence in supporting young people and lead to better outcomes. The mean score was based on a minimum of one to maximum range of seven. Pre scores are labelled A to D (_1), post scores A to D (_2) and follow-up scores A to D (_3). There was no statistically significant change in score as measured using ANOVA, most likely due to a relatively high initial mean score. A slight fall off is noticeable on each item for the final data point. Again, this is not statistically significant and is more reflective of a smaller sample with full data for the third time point (n=20)[2] vs the other two time points (n=64).

[1] Not all the 22 respondents to the final survey answered this item.

5.5 Overall feedback on the project from the June Follow-Up Survey

The final survey was completed by 22 participants. Some additional overall feedback items were included in this survey. A number of open-ended items were included and these will be presented separately in Chapter 5 with other qualitative feedback. The data arising from the quantitative items in the follow-up survey are presented below.

Figure 14 describes the aspects of the project that respondents participated in.

Figure 14 Participation
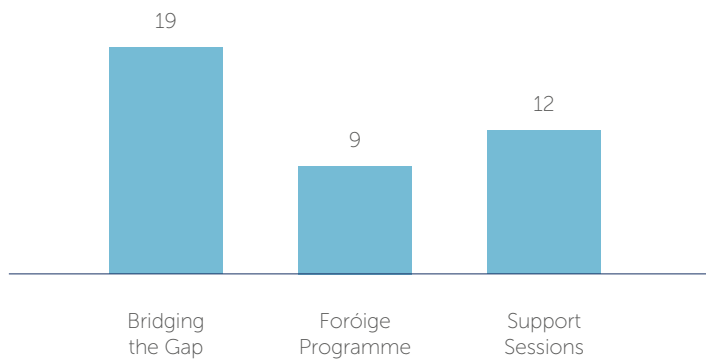
Figure 15 Foróige Programme
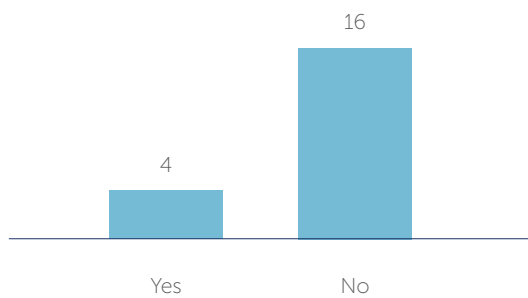
Figure 15 describes whether participants have run the programme that they received training in as part of Bridging Worlds.

Figure 16 Feedback on usefulness of project components
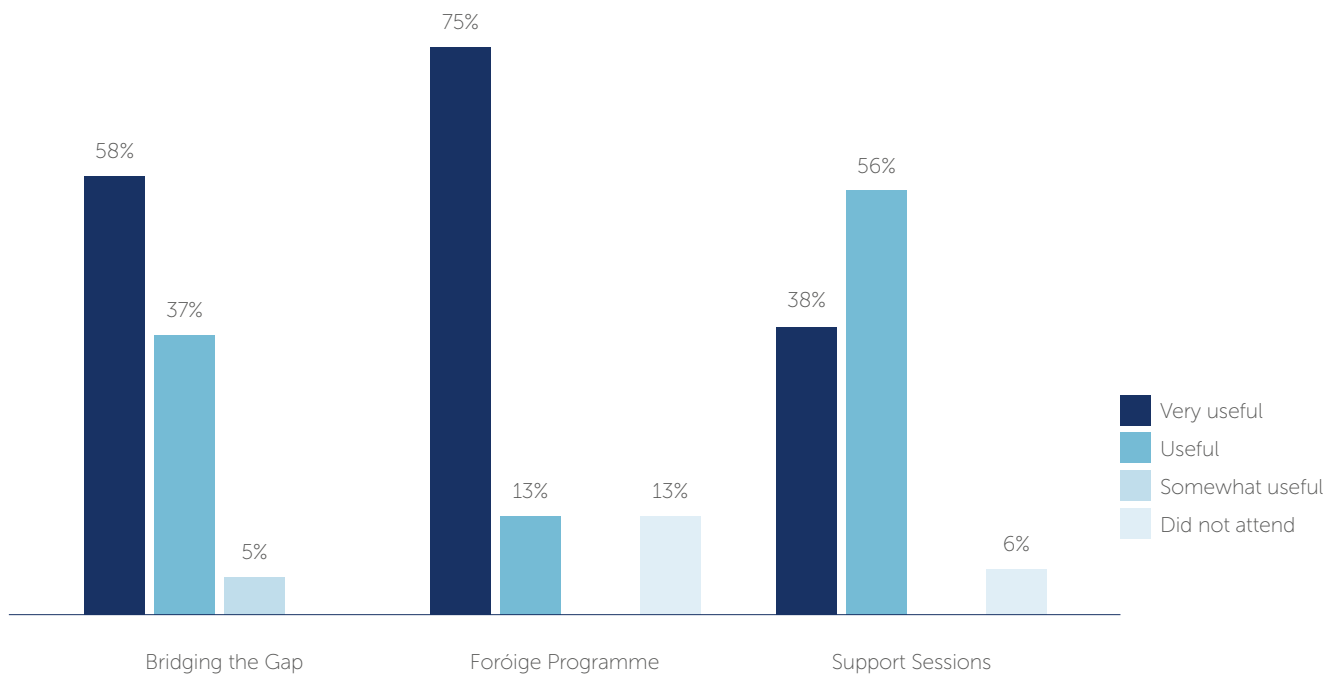
Figure 16 illustrates participant feedback on the usefulness of various project components. While the feedback indicates that participants found the various aspects useful, the Foróige programmes are the most highly scored. However, it should also be noted that this group of respondents represents only those who responded to the follow-up survey (n=22).

Figure 17 Feedback on knowledge acquisition
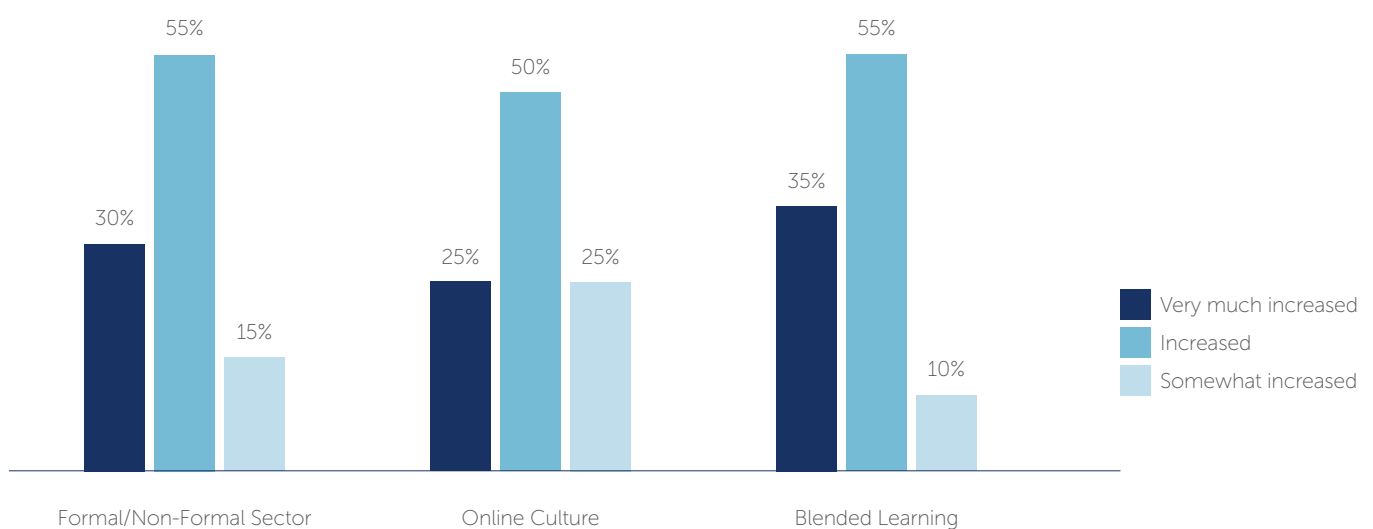
Figure 17 illustrates participant feedback on whether their knowledge increased following the project. Data indicate a positive trend in knowledge increase, across this group of respondents (n=22).

Figure 18 Feedback on increase in confidence
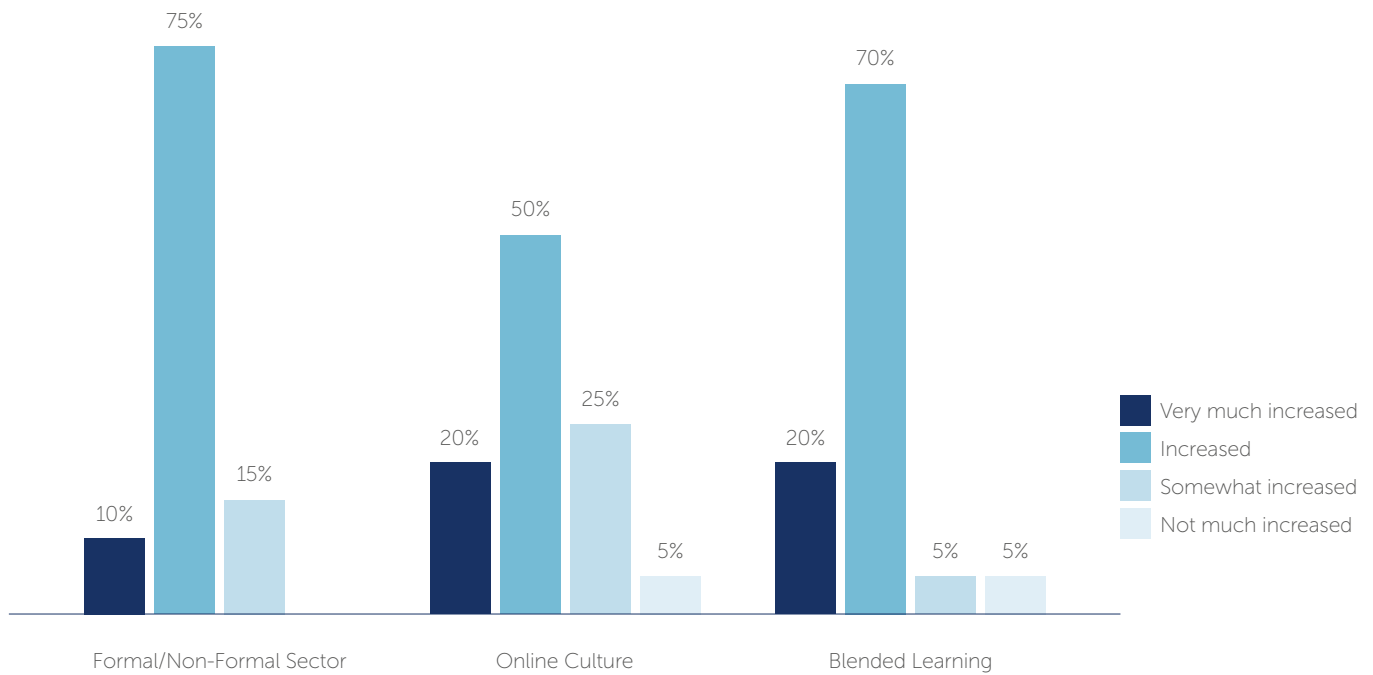
Figure 18 illustrates participant feedback on whether their confidence increased following participation in the project. Data indicate a positive trend in confidence increase across this group of respondents (n=22).

5.6 Survey Findings Summary

Across the three data points, participants consistently indicated high levels of satisfaction with the support received from the Bridging Worlds project across each of the programme elements. Participants also indicated that their knowledge and skills increased across the various learning outcomes. The results indicated that the various programme components were enjoyable and useful. Respondents also reported increased confidence across the target areas. Of the various programme elements, the training in the various Foróige programmes received the highest score. It should also be noted that in each of the surveys, items in the main received highly positive feedback. To gain a more in depth understanding of programme impact, consideration should be given to using specific data instruments that measure confidence in using technology and or self-efficacy in online delivery.

6

Bridging Worlds
Participant Feedback

The collection of qualitative data as part of the Bridging Worlds evaluation was designed to answer specific research questions as well as feed into the overall evaluation findings as per the mixed methods approach. Within this approach, the function of the qualitative data set is to set out a "thick description" to explore the respondents' feedback and strengthen the overall analysis of findings. This chapter reports on an analysis of qualitative data and presents each set of findings under the relevant research question. This section begins with an overview of the analysis methodology.

6.1 Data Sources

Two sources of qualitative data were used for the purposes of this analysis.

Interviews: Towards the end of the school year, the researcher engaged with the project coordinators to recruit an opportunity sample of six teachers and six youth workers who would be willing to participate in an online interview to review their experiences of the project. In total, 12 interviews were conducted, although the final sample was five teachers and seven youth workers. It did prove challenging to set up interviews with teachers in the interval between completing the Bridging Worlds sessions and prior to the summer break. However, project coordinators worked hard to facilitate the process and eased communications where possible. All interviewees received participant information leaflets and consented to participate. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and imported into NVivo for analysis.

Survey Items: The second data source was a series of open-ended items included in the final survey sent to all participants (n=65). A total of 12 teachers and 10 youth workers responded to the survey and while not every respondent completed all open-ended items, all replies were downloaded and imported into NVivo for analysis. Both sets of data were then coded separately using auto code by question. All auto codes were then reviewed by the researcher to ensure a suitable descriptive code was assigned to the data. After this initial coding, a series of categories was developed in order to link the findings from both data sources into one narrative account. Finally, the categories were inter-related to the corresponding research question as set out below.

6.2 Has the Project Enhanced the Capacity of Teachers and Youth Workers to Engage Young People and Teach Online?

Figure 19 Word cloud of all references to digital and online learning pedagogy

The project did deliver useful and timely resources to support participants in developing their online skills. The first training session, Bridging the Gap, had a specific focus on online and blended learning, and this was particularly welcomed as interviewees reported that they had in the main pivoted online the previous March to emergency online teaching and support. This programme provided a welcome opportunity to acquire **learning tools and techniques** and to share ideas with peers. Yet most interviews indicated that this was the first time participants had focused in this way with online and blended pedagogy.

Yeah, it's funny because, like you know we had obviously been doing it since last March and obviously a lot of the online work and it was something that I suppose every lockdown we got better at. But it was so interesting to learn about all the different blended learning, and the you know the face to face in all the different types, you know (Youth Worker 2)

Based on participant feedback from the first training sessions, the coordinators identified a specific training need in the area of online platforms. They worked with NUI Galway School of Education staff to develop a specific support session that would focus directly with participants on this area. Interview feedback indicates this support was well received by participants and especially welcomed was the practical way the session was facilitated so that participants could try out the platform themselves.

the follow-up sessions I know we were looking at different platforms and, you know, this was like the stage with maybe we thought we'd used them all but there's a few different ones that we got to learn about that we can use. I know they work in other areas of our work, or different programmes and groups as well. So that's helpful too (Youth Worker 3)

A key component of the project was the introduction of participants to at least one of four Foróige programmes using online platforms and resources. The objective was that these resources could then be available to teachers to implement with young people either online, face to face or in a blended way. Notwithstanding the disruptions that prevented most participants from implementing a programme this school year, most indicated that they would be doing so in the coming year and planned in some way at least to use blended approaches in that implementation.

I would like to use the blended. Because if we don't, then we are not using what we were shown to its full effect. You know, that was the whole purpose of doing that, you know and to try to be as creative with blended. And also it's good for students to see that we're able to do it, you know, yeah. They get more enjoyment out of it as well if we can do it. You know (Teacher 5)

When the interviews were conducted, the school year was drawing to a close and the concept of Zoom fatigue was widely discussed. By then, most schools had just returned for the final month of school for face-to-face teaching after spending most of the first and second term online. This undoubtedly led to reports of individuals' lack of interest in online provision. It was also reported in the youth worker sector and felt by some to impact any plans to run online groups over the summer

I think our young people are just so dying to get back into our project but I will definitely, think we've got a few grants for different ICT equipment with new iPads and computers. So I'll definitely use blended but within the face-to-face space if that makes sense (Youth Worker 4)

A number of specific open-ended items were included in the follow-up survey to explore participants' opinions on whether there was a digital divide or access divide for the young people they supported. Opportunity to comment on this issue was also provided in the interviews. While one teacher reported that the government funding had ensured that those who needed access would avail, most respondents noted concern that there was a gap for young people in access to both technology and Wi-Fi that needed to be addressed.

Make sure all young people have access to internet and devices to engage online. And find out the different tools (example Padlet, annotate, mentimeter etc.) the young people feel comfortable [with] and like using and develop my skills around these tools (Survey Reference 5)

There could be grants and aid for internet costs and connections to homes, and an affordable rental bank for young people who need equipment. Internet cafe type of venue or hub in rural areas for young people could also be funded be the government (Survey Reference 6)

Finally, when asked about their own further training needs in this area, most interviewees were keen to put what they had learnt into operation and to practice their new skills first to consolidate the learning. Where they did indicate a support need, it was in relation to keeping up to date with changing technology and issues of data security.

Not really, for blended learning I don't think it's necessarily training required. I think there is an initial training required but in these things I think the onus is on the teacher to throw themselves on it. Obviously just because you have had the training doesn't make you good at it. I think that sometimes we make the mistake that you have had the training now go and do it. Somethings these are slow processes, you have to do it a few times before you feel confident (Teacher 2)

Just keeping up to date with the change and it changes so fast I suppose, all the technology and internet and everything else and I suppose maybe something. You know we have a huge problem now with hackers or these different things from that, and I wouldn't be 100% on things like that I'd be very cautious. I suppose maybe something I don't know around that to help us overcome that side of it especially when you are dealing with young people's information, so we wouldn't get hacked (Youth Worker 5)

6.3 Has the Project Been Successful in Building Relationships and Linkages Between Formal and Non-Formal Education Settings?

Figure 20 Word cloud of all references to formal and non-formal connections

Throughout the interviews, there was a recognition that it makes **intuitive sense** for the formal and non-formal sectors to develop closer links and that the main beneficiary of this would be young people themselves. Despite the recognition that this connection is of value, there was a strong sense that these connections had happened incidentally where specific initiatives had taken place and that in the main there was considerable lack of connection across the sectors in the region.

> we never get the chance to get involved in, I suppose, in a wider aspect of what's going on with others, like, with social workers, social care, youth workers, all of that, where an awful high percentage of kids are on a daily basis involved in. You know, so, it is like building the bridge between the two, you know, definitely. And it's important that the students also see oh the teachers are very much like youth workers, and the youth worker is very much the teacher and you know, there's a bit of a parallel going on there, you know, yes one teaches but another one does something else you know but you know they're kind of on the same wavelength (Teacher 5)

A second area of feedback focused on interviewee recognition that **young people** themselves would be happy to have these connections more lined up in their lives and that it would help their sense of social support.

> I mean I give a lot of one on ones with students and so if somebody's name came up, then I'd be able to make the link with a youth worker and they love to know that you know those people as well, you know. They'd often say, you know him, you know him and I'm going, No I don't. So, you know, they love to think, especially ones that are very vulnerable and struggling with school, I suppose they like that there's a kind of a group of people involved in their, looking out for them. So, they would very much like and that has happened numerous times, you know him, you know her. And they'd love that because they'd love that the people who advocate for them are connected up (Teacher 3)

and it's often that it's a talking point then for me with the young people and they might see that, you know, he does care like he knows what we're doing at school (Youth Worker 2)

Other benefits for developing closer relationships highlighted by interviewees included **sharing resources** and **learning new techniques** from each other

I think the real benefit that I found was learning that we have so many similarities but there is I suppose, learning more maybe about the differences as well. And when I remember there was great conversation on that session when we were learning about each other in the breakout rooms, I'd be asking, you know, how would you deal with challenging behaviour, or, you know, is there something you have to follow and then I'd be telling them about our different policies and the way we work, and so obviously I suppose there are differences but it was really interesting to find out that we are very similar (Youth Worker 3)

Some participants, while open to developing closer relationships across the sectors, referenced a **range of experiences in the past**.

I think, the structure is probably a lot better. And it's not necessarily assigned to one person. As such, in that there's a drop-in where they can go in and, there is an actual physical building I think, which is great. I just think, you know, for kids that have youth workers, we need to be able to communicate together, you know, really (Teacher 3)

Foróige had a lot better relationship with the two other secondary schools in the area so to kind of just to go into them. And to get that relationship kind of built up with that school, and like, they hadn't, to be honest with you, they hadn't a clue what we did, even the after-school groups (Youth Worker 2)

During the training, due to **attendance patterns** it was not possible to link up youth workers and teachers in the same area. This resulted in a lack of connection and respondents indicating that they were not sure how to progress the hub idea in their area. This can be contrasted with where it was possible to link attendees, which in turn led to increased communication following attendance at project events. This uneven pattern of establishing connections will need further follow-up.

We were discussing how could we potentially get the two sectors to work better together and I know there was a bit of a feeling that it's not always the easiest thing in the world to do, to get the Foróige staff into the school or vice versa, there seem to be obstacles to that. They clearly do a lot of very good work, very positive stuff, but in terms of how to properly tie in together I didn't feel there was any very clear pathway (Teacher 2)

While youth workers were positive about the opportunities that closer connections with formal education provided them, a number raised concerns about how that might work in practice. One issue related to the need to ensure these closer connections could be established within **funding constraints** that require youth workers to work alongside schools rather than within the school itself. Secondly, one interviewee wanted to ensure that clear space was maintained so that the **youth worker identity** remained separate and recognisable as a separate space for young people who may be disengaging from other supports.

I suppose the one thing, and it has been raised, or was raised in the training was from a youth work perspective, our funding is always changing in terms of how much we're allowed to work with schools and not work in schools (Youth Worker 1)

I was kind of thinking about that afterwards and looking back on it thinking young people see the youth worker and youth space as their space, and if you bring teachers into that space [it] might take a little bit away from that for them. I don't know maybe, like, not, not blending in too much, that the young person still has their space that's not interfered with from the education side (Youth Worker 5)

Finally, across the data sources, respondents indicated that not only should this type of cross-sectoral engagement continue but a range of other topics or areas could be jointly explored in order to enhance the support both sides could offer to young people.

I was actually just chatting to a parent about yesterday about consent, because I know a lot of the schools. And I don't know unless it's maybe changed … but I know Foróige have good programmes that have been developed on that, and again maybe coming in from a neutral position as opposed to, you know, you're the math teacher, but you're also trying to you know, deal with these kind of hard enough topics to deal with at times. And so that would be just one thing I think that, you know, if you could join up on something like that would be really really great (Youth Worker 1)

6.4 Reflections of the Participants on the Learning Supports Received in the Project and Any Further Learning Support Needs

Figure 21 Word cloud of all references to their overall experience of Bridging Worlds
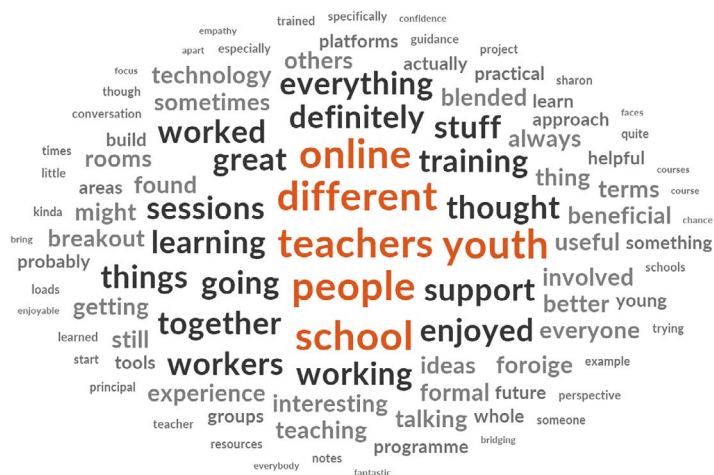
The largest category of comments in this analysis were those linked to positive feedback by participants on the project itself, the opportunity to learn new skills and make connections across the sector, and the timeliness of the programme. Across all the feedback from teachers and youth workers, whether through the interviews or the open-ended survey items, there was a strong sense that Bridging Worlds was the **right project at the right time delivered by the right people**.

I found the girls (the project coordinators) very, very good, and I thought I suppose what went really well with this session was that there was a lovely kind of informality, even though everything was very formal as such, but there was a lovely atmosphere, and they in a very nice way made sure everybody was confident with the IT side of it and the Zoom and all the different bits and pieces that were part of it. So it was really well structured regarding teaching [and] learning (Teacher 3)

I think the training is really well developed. It is going really well. I think the timing was perfect because we were really in need of that. But what I think is really well done in a way, that is, pulling all our thoughts together... So I think it's really good, and I think it's really the best moment to start implementing this kind of work (Youth Worker 6)

Interviewees commented on the **quality of the training** received and the professional delivery and support provided by the **project coordinators**. They valued that it was possible to continue with the **programme online** during the school closures. By experiencing the programme online, participants were able to observe how project coordinators used the **various tools and platforms** to promote participation and this was a valued outcome. Interviewees were also appreciative of the opportunity to learn how to deliver a **Foróige programme** and most plan to deliver this programme in the new school year to the young people they support. Interviewees also provided feedback on how their participation in the programme will lead to positive impacts on the **young people** they support.

They were great I mean the two ladies were super, Jessica and Sharon, you know, they were very patient with all of us and I suppose the fact that they, you know broke us into the breakout rooms and had some of us working together and again we had the combination of the Foróige staff with teachers and teachers from different areas, you know, so I suppose the ideas that came forth were good and to pool all of our ideas and thoughts you know and then everything made available to us to peruse you know at a later date especially when we do go to introducing it into our tuition system. I think it's really nice to have everything to go back on, you know (Teacher 4)

It was helpful to hear about other people's experiences, what worked well and not so well for them and why. Understanding how the different platforms are used by other people helps to build up how I use the platforms helping to shape how I use them in the future (Survey Reference 22)

While the overall feedback was highly positive, some suggestions for amending the programme further were made by interviews. Most significant of these was a strong recommendation that consideration be given to **securing accreditation** for the course so that schools could release staff officially to attend and arrange for substitute cover for attending teachers. The lack of staffing cover was more of an issue once teachers returned to school after April 2021.

The biggest challenge was, I think one of the things that I would like to [have] seen and it would have made easier for me was, there was no there was no substitute. So normally if you do a course, they pay substitution. So, two days I had to do it in school, and one day was a fiasco because I had a class in the morning and an incident arose that I had to get involved with and I had to deal with a student, it was a real emergency. I missed out on time and then there was a problem with the internet. So it was like it just was one of those days, so we sorted out the first problem and then we're good to go and there's more at the door (Teacher 3)

The second main amendment suggested by participants was that consideration be given to arranging for the networking activities to be provided in a **face-to-face session**.

Obviously if it was in person, it would be a million times more effective, because you've got to meet people in the flesh and you know, "where are you based" and all that chitter chatter that goes on. That's all gone in these kind of formal online things. So, I suppose, the link is made now and the fact that there's a body, we have the email addresses and, like, and then the girls, I presume, I could contact the girls if I need to get, but I, you know, like, I sometimes think the teachers and youth workers, you know, in those cases are working, both working, for the same purpose and it would be wonderful if there was just more communication, you know, really (Teacher 3)

A related issue was the **timing difficulty** that arose in trying to complete their own training and run a youth programme within the constraints of a Covid-disrupted school year. This was also an issue for youth workers, who reported a lack of interest from young people as they were tired of online provision.

And it's just you would need the year. And to be honest with the transition years unless I have it for more time I would be able to do it completely by myself. It's you'd need one class a week uninterrupted, that they would guarantee to be there to carry it out. So if I had somebody else working with me, we could probably do between two of us (Teacher 1)

One interviewee suggested **narrowing the focus** of the programme offer to make it clearer to participating staff what the specific requirements would be and this may attract more staff into participating.

So it's not to be critical but I was thinking there were a lot of different strands to it, there was the blended learning, the Bridging Worlds in terms of the school and the youth work, and for me there was the activating empathy, so at times maybe it felt a little confusing, in terms especially what are we going at today and how do the various parts all tie in (Teacher 2)

Survey respondents also set out feedback in relation to their **further support needs**. Across the replies, there was a sense that further practical support would be appreciated when participants implemented the youth programme in the new school year. In particular, a number of respondents noted that a further support session would be a benefit at that point.

If I were to implement the programme I may need support in the implementation of it re time tabling as it is difficult in a school setting with rigid timetables to adhere to (Survey Reference 1)

To continue going on training courses that will build up their skills. Also for teachers and youth workers to have a platform where they can communicate with one another when not engaging in courses, to seek help, support and guidance off one another. Something similar to a WhatsApp group that includes teachers and youth workers from the area, or where they have a space to meet face to face once a month and discuss topics that affect them all (Survey Reference 11)

6.5 Interview Findings Summary

Throughout each of the interviews, the feedback indicated that participants enjoyed the Bridging Worlds project and were very positive about their involvement. Both teachers and youth workers agreed that there was a strong rationale for increasing the connections between their sectors and were open to exploring how that might happen. Where programme amendments were identified, these in the main concerned suggestions to make it easier for them to participate in terms of substitute cover or to have some of the networking aspects of the programme conducted face to face.

7

Evaluation Report Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

Covid-19 had a significant impact on young people in Ireland, particularly causing disruption to their education, social activities and peer relationships, and it also resulted in additional negative impacts on their wellbeing. The disruption of education was worldwide and unprecedented. While education and youth work services continued to provide essential supports to young people during the pandemic, the literature review has set out how studies have found there was both a digital device and a digital use divide impacting some young people. It was also noted that expanding online provision requires further strategic investment and development, addressing technological, pedagogical and social factors. Into this context, an innovative project was developed to connect formal and non-formal education supports using blended learning and prosocial youth development programmes as a bridge to create a strong and sustaining network.

This report has provided a detailed account of the Bridging Worlds project. It has located the initiative in the relevant theoretical literature and used an ecological framework to provide a rationale for the project's central focus on the connections between the formal and non-formal education sectors. Using a mixed methods approach, a series of research activities were carried out to track project implementation and stakeholder and participant feedback. Findings from each of these data sources were presented and discussed. This chapter reviews the theoretical implications of these findings. It considers the findings in relation to the specific project goals as set out in the project proposal. The report concludes with a set of interim report recommendations to guide the next phase of project evolution.

7.2 Theoretical Application

The Bridging Worlds initiative used training in the area of educational technology to strategically connect two sectors seeking to support positive youth development. It is noteworthy that in the pre-Covid-19 literature the adaptation of technology by educational settings is a mixed and nuanced picture. In normal times, most authors recommend a detailed resourced transition to using these approaches. To successfully adapt blended learning, there is a need for institutional changes that will sustain the initiative into the long term (Philipsen et al., 2019).

For Bates (2019), the choice of blended learning methodology should match the course, the student and the context. In addition, he recommends that in moving to blended learning, a slow deliberate process be followed so that students gain experience and confidence in how to learn independently. However, the emergency pivot online during Covid-19 did not allow for such an approach. This initiative serves as an exemplar as to how a longer-term, strategic and sustainable approach could be taken to promote the use of technologies to enhance youth participation and development while also scaffolding the environments in which that development takes place. The Bridging Worlds project demonstrates the considerable potential of this type of network-led approach even in such disrupted times.

Feedback across the various data sources indicated that respondents were very supportive of creating networks of support across both formal and non-formal educational contexts. The ecological orientation of the project demonstrates the theoretical underpinnings of this approach and the rationale for creating mesosystem links, especially for those whose support networks are more fragmented. Throughout the interview feedback in particular, both teachers and youth workers highlighted the importance of these mesosystem connections and reflected that these connections were especially valued by the young people concerned.

Yet, it must also be accepted that newly created connections within Bridging Worlds are reliant on the informal contacts that were made between youth workers and teachers on the training events. Further support will be needed to create stronger and sustainable connections where participants take control of their shared space and create their own self-sustaining networks. Given that these social networks have yet to be formalised, Wenger's (2010) prompts would be useful to explore with participants at further support sessions.

The discipline of domain: What is our partnership about? Why should we care? Are we likely to be useful to each other? What is our learning agenda? What specific set of issues does it entail?

The discipline of community: Who should be at the table so the partnership can make progress? What effects will their participation have on the trust and dynamics of the group? How do we manage the boundaries of the community?

The discipline of practice: How can the practice become the curriculum? How can it be made visible and inspectable? What should participants do together to learn and benefit from the partnership?

The discipline of convening: Who will take leadership in holding a social learning space for this partnership? How can we make sure that the partnership sustains a productive inquiry? Who are the external stakeholders and what are their roles? What resources are available to support the process? (Wenger, 2010, p. 194)

7.3 Review of Project Goals

Goal 1: Create a complementary wrap-around model for education where we support young people, teachers, school leaders and youth workers by adding value to existing structures.

The project developed a suite of training materials and resources to support the implementation of the Bridging Worlds model. These included the Bridging the Gap training resources, online training resources and support sessions, which were curated, collated and delivered to participants. Across the range of data sources, findings indicate that this programme was very well received. It

provided timely and valued support to the participants. Both teachers and youth workers engaged actively in the programme and reported high levels of satisfaction with the support received. The expertise of project staff and the high quality of the training materials were recognised and they contributed to the project's success. The topics focused on were of particular interest given the emphasis on online learning due to the Covid pandemic and concerns about individuals' wellbeing during this time.

Goal 2: To create formal and non-formal education partnerships by working with Foróige in this collaborative project aiming to impact at least 20 schools, 40 teachers, 20 youth workers and up to 6000 young people within the Galway/Mayo/Roscommon region.

The project succeeding in recruiting 65 teachers and youth workers in very challenging times. However, with the Covid restrictions, it was not possible for participating teachers and youth workers to roll out the programmes they received to young people in their areas of responsibility. This rollout is planned for the autumn term 2021. The most significant feedback across all the participants in relation to this project goal was widespread agreement that the development of connections across the formal and non-formal sectors made intuitive sense and was welcomed. Both teachers and youth workers reported that they benefited from learning about each other's roles and sectors. While there was strong interest in fostering and developing better connections across the sectors, there was a recognition that further support is needed in this area.

Goal 3: To develop a professional learning component as part of the model that responds to the emerging demand for strategies and alternative ways of working with young people amongst teachers and other relevant professionals to scaffold student engagement, in a way that integrates learning both outside and inside the regular classroom.

The Bridging Worlds initiative developed a professional learning component through joint engagement of academic staff and practitioner expertise. Resources on the following topics were curated and provided to participants:

- Blended Learning
- Online Culture
- Formal and Non-Formal Education Sectors.

In addition, the project supported the adaptation of two evidence-based programmes into online versions/sites: NFTE and Activating Social Empathy. The other two programmes, Sound Surfers and Leadership for Life, had been adapted for online, face-to-face or blended use separate to this project. All Bridging Worlds participants had the opportunity to be trained in these four prosocial youth development programmes. These resources are available as a project legacy and for further dissemination.

Goal 4: Establishing the foundations and conditions to ensure the project is scalable, with the ultimate vision of achieving national rollout and delivering radical educational change in how young people experience learning across the formal and non-formal contexts.

The findings to date indicate that there is considerable potential in this initiative for cross-sectoral working, positive engagement across the youth and education actors, and significant good will on the part of those involved toward making a difference in the lives of young people. However, further time is needed to fully implement the project's constituent parts and facilitate participants to set up networks of support to sustain their connections into the future.

7.4 Recommendations

1. Extend the project: The overwhelmingly positive feedback on the initiative indicates that there is a strong case to be made for further support to extend and embed the project to allow it to fully deliver positive outcomes for young people.

2. Maintain the project culture: This project had a number of built-in resources in terms of knowledgeable and experienced staff, strong communication and project management skills, access to evidence-based prosocial youth programmes and a joint practitioner–academic collation of resources. Any project extension should ensure that this positive proactive project culture is fostered and facilitated through strategic use of project management techniques.

3. Enhance the hubs: Further development work is needed to extend the hub development in the project area. It is recommended that strong exemplars be shared across the network illustrating how youth workers and teachers working within their own purview can share resources and foster positive youth engagement. These strong exemplars should serve to emphasise that this cooperative space can be developed without changing the roles of or obligations on either party but by linking the inter-connecting spaces.

4. Provide further support sessions: Given the fact that most participants have yet to implement the youth programme in their area of responsibility, consideration should be given to providing a further follow-up session to participants after they have implemented a programme. If restrictions allow, this aspect of the programme may be particularly effective conducted in a face-to-face environment to promote the development of informal connections across the participants.

5. Consider releasing teachers for training: Consideration should be given to applying for accreditation for the Bridging Worlds initiative with the relevant national bodies so that teachers can get sanction to be replaced by a substitute teacher when they attend training. Such accreditation would have made it much easier for teachers to attend and sustain their involvement over the course of the programme.

6. Manage timing and recruitment: In any programme extension, the timing should be managed so that participants can be recruited at the start of the school year. This would allow more time for the full implementation of the project components across the school year. In addition, recruitment could be further streamlined through the review and enhancement of school contact lists to maximise the publication of the project in advance and engagement of all relevant stakeholders, especially through creating links and connections with DEIS school principals.

7. Gather youth feedback: This initiative so far has focused on the teachers and youth workers as participants and aims, through their enactment of project resources, to have a positive impact on the young people they support. However, it is important that further research is conducted to collect youth perspective on this enhanced wrap-around model of support. It will be important that this feedback focuses on youth experience of the model as opposed to feedback on the programmes, which have a separate established evidence base. The use of case vignettes with anonymised accounts of this wrap-around model in action may be a useful methodology in this regard.

8. Measure participant learning outcomes: Further consideration should be given to using a more extensive measure of participant learning outcomes so that programme impact on specific learning outcomes of the Bridging the Gap programme component can be more easily tracked.

7.5 Conclusion

This project implemented in a time of considerable upheaval and disruption. The fact that it was so successful in achieving stakeholder buy-in and good will at such a time is an indicator of the intuitive good sense of the initiative and the quality of supports that were provided to participants. Further time is needed to fully embed the initiative and create stronger exemplars of cross-sectoral hubs to guide and support individuals who wish to work in this innovative way.

8
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