# Quality Development of Out of School Services

## An Agenda for Development
### December 2006

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# Welcome to QDOSS!

This document provides background information about the QDOSS Network and lays out in brief a number of key themes, questions, and priorities which we believe are central to the development of quality out-of-school services. QDOSS are highlighting these issues as part of an ongoing discussion requiring further research about future directions for Out-of-School Services and in recognition of the need for a national strategy with regard to Out-of-School Services – a strategy that is sensitive to the needs of local contexts.

# What is QDOSS?

QDOSS is a network that comprises a range of stakeholders who share different perspectives, expertise and a common aim. Our central aim is to enhance and develop the field of Out-of-School services to influence and enable positive educational outcomes for children and young people, particularly those experiencing educational disadvantage.

# Who are We?

Members of QDOSS participate in QDOSS as representatives of member organisations.  Member organisations have a remit in relation to education, childcare, youth work or youth development, particularly in relation to children and young people experiencing educational disadvantage. The Network aims to ensure that there is a balance between a variety of interest groups including practitioners, policy makers and researchers.  Current member organisations comprising the QDOSS network include:

- Barnardos
- Border Counties Childcare Committee
- Childrens Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin
- Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra
- Foróige
- Limerick City Childcare Committee
- Targeting Educational Disadvantage Project, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
- TIDE
- Youth Work Ireland

# What do we Mean by "Out-of-School Services"?

Out-of-school services refer to a range of structured programmes, clubs and activities for school-age children and young people (4-18) which take place within supervised environments during the times that they are not in school. As such, out-of-school activities can take place before school, after school, at weekends, during lunch hours, and during school holidays.  Out-of-school services therefore can be offered in a variety of schools, attached to school and non-school environments, including community centres, child-care centres, places of worship, libraries, parks etc. Out-of-school services are sponsored by inter alia, statutory and non-governmental agencies, schools, community-based groups, faith-based organisations, and other voluntary sector groups.

# Why Focus on Out-of-School Services?

QDOSS believes that child and young people centred Out-of-School provision has the potential to contribute to the holistic development of children and young people so that they may fully participate in the educational system, as a means of redressing inequality of life opportunities.

# What are the Guiding Principles of QDOSS?

The guiding principles of our network include:
- Working in partnership with children, young people, parents, schools and communities to develop and enhance out-of-school services
- Promoting a needs-led and strengths-based integrated approach to out-of-school service provision
- Working to influence policy and practice
- Commitment to evidence based research and evaluation, including a focus on outcomes

# Key Themes, Questions and Priorities
# related to Out-Of-School Service Provision in Ireland

QDOSS has identified a number of key themes, questions and priorities that we believe need to be addressed as part of an ongoing discussion to fully develop quality Out-of-School provision in Ireland. These include:

1   Key Structures Underpinning Out-of-School Services

2   Out-of-School Services: Bridging Health and Education Needs

3   Out-of-School Services: Contribution to Development of School Climate

4   Out-of-School Services: A Key Resource in Culturally Relevant Curriculum Implementation

5   Community Development Principles and Out-of-School Services

6   Evaluation: Structural, Process and Outcome Indicators

# 1 Key Structures Underpinning Out-of-School Services

In order to develop a strategic approach at a national and local level to Out-of-School Services, QDOSS recognises that key challenges need to be met for development of the structural underpinning of the Out-of-School Service sector.

### Continuity of Staff and Career/Professional Development of Staff in Out-of-School Services

QDOSS recognises that relations of trust between staff and children and young people are vital to psychological wellbeing. Nurturing positive relationships serve as a key protective factor for youth at risk of early school leaving. As staff continuity is essential in order for these relations of trust to form the following issues arise:

— The development and implementation of staff retention and recruitment strategies

— The facilitation of a national strategy for staff development and progression examining training and accreditation, employment opportunities and defined career progression in the Out-of-School Service sector

### Continuity of Services throughout the Year

QDOSS believes that Out-of-School services need to be consistently available throughout the Summer and other holiday times to provide a point of stability during a time of changing experiences for children and young people

QDOSS recognise the importance of developing a consistent national and local strategy for funding holiday time projects in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, a strategy coordinated across the Department of Education and Science, Department of Health and Children, and Department of Justice and Law Reform

### Referral Strategies and Out-of-School Services

QDOSS recognises the need for flexible and varied referral strategies across Out-of-School projects, community services and schools. Nevertheless the following questions arise regarding coordination of referral strategies for children at risk of early school leaving:

■ What coordinating strategies are in place to improve targeting of pupils at risk of early school leaving for participation in Out-of-School clubs and extracurricular activities?

■ Are there wider avenues for referral than the school (teachers, principals, Home School Community Liaison) to include a more proactive involvement of parents in the referral process as well as referral from other local agencies?

■ Are children and young people's social and emotional needs given sufficient priority in the referral process ?

■ Is the option of self-referral available in dialogue with students?

In order to prevent those students most at risk of early school leaving from falling through the gaps, there is a need for a coordinated referral strategy *across* Out-of-School projects and schools

### Continuity of Out-of-School Projects from Primary to Postprimary

QDOSS recognises that extracurricular/Out-of-School activities offer opportunities for responsibility and success, decision-making and social skills, protecting against early school leaving, and that it is extremely important that any such supports at primary level are sustained at secondary level.

Key challenges for continuity include the following questions:

■ Can strategic plans be developed for continuity between those Out-of-School Services at primary level and at postprimary level?

■ How can students be facilitated to remain with the Out-of-School project as they undergo the transition from one school to another?

■ Can there be continuity in Out-of-School Services even if the student is attending a different secondary school from that of the local one?

QDOSS notes that the disruption to the social environment of the student during transfer to post-primary is well recognized and Out-of-School projects offer one source of stability within the social environment during this transition process. QDOSS suggest that continuity across primary to secondary may be even more important if the student is attending a different school from his/her peers and from those he/she was with in primary school.

### Transport Needs

QDOSS notes that transport needs to access Out-of-School Services is an issue across all sectors, urban and rural, due to difficulties with transporting children from school to out-of-school services and associated insurance costs

### Budgetary Needs

QDOSS recognises the need for ring fenced funding and to develop cycles of funding for Out-of-School projects that go beyond merely year to year funding:

— in order to ensure continuity of relations between Out-of-School project staff and pupils/students

— in order to ensure continuity of relations between Out-of-School project staff and parents and teachers

— to plan for developmentally appropriate Out-of-School project themes and activities

— to fulfil a strategy of continuity across transition from primary to postprimary

— to allow for career and professional development of staff

QDOSS notes that funding is necessary on a number of levels:

— Investment in human resources

— Infrastructure

— Ongoing training and development

— Ongoing contribution towards equipment and materials

— Development of curricular resources

— Evaluation

# 2 Out-of-School Services: Bridging Health and Education Needs

QDOSS recognises that educators, community, childcare and youth workers have a key role in the promotion of psychological and physical wellbeing and that there is a need for a coordinated strategy across schools and out-of-school services to bridge health and education needs of children, including mental health needs.

## *Continuity and Nutrition*

Current challenges with regard to the issue of nutrition include the following issues:

— the need for structures and funding to be in place to ensure continuity of service to children across breakfast clubs and after school provision so that a regular pattern is established i.e., that they are 4-5 days a week and not 2 days a week

— the need for development of a strategy of cooking skills for pupils and to maximise parental involvement in targeted life skills training for children and young people. Are programmes in place to facilitate both children and parents to enhance their knowledge of nutrition, cookery and awareness of the link between good nutrition and other life factors?

— the need for a State strategy to build kitchens in all new school buildings and to develop kitchen facilities in existing facilities

## *Out-of-School Services and Social and Emotional Development*

QDOSS recognise the central importance of social and emotional criteria for the needs of children and young people in the referral process and the importance that Out-of-School services provide an environment to feel and be safe, develop their own thoughts, explore feelings, learn to develop friendship, learn how to handle interpersonal conflict and that children and young people are given time to relax and play.

■ How best to facilitate recognition by schools, out-of-school services and private providers of the non-academic benefits of Out-of-School projects and their contribution to children and young people's wellbeing and to enjoyment of learning?

QDOSS recognises the positive effects of Out-of-School projects:

— to help students to develop their self-esteem and build resilience

— to overcome fear of failure or being ridiculed

— to overcome the danger of 'fatalism' at a community level, in other words the feeling that 'nothing can be done'

— to develop positive peer and adult relationships

QDOSS recognises that Out-of-School projects are complementary to therapeutic intervention and that a proportion of pupils and students at risk of early school leaving require therapeutic intervention. However, Out-of-School Services are clearly not adequate as a substitute for therapeutic intervention. QDOSS recognises the need for a national strategy to develop community based multidisciplinary teams, intervening at a family as well as individual level, that can also work onsite in schools and with out of school services.

QDOSS notes that such teams would be a key complementary service to Out-of-School projects and need to be developed throughout socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Ireland

QDOSS recognises that a vital feature of drug use prevention is the development of social and emotional skills.

■ How can Out-of-School projects work with schools and other local services to support the National Drugs Strategy regarding prevention?

## *Out-of-School Services as Part of a Holistic Approach to Prevention of and Intervention in Bullying in School*

QDOSS notes that it is vital to recognise the detrimental impact bullying can have on a pupil/student's self-esteem, psychological wellbeing and school attendance. QDOSS advocates that schools and out-of-school services, in developing and revisiting anti-bullying policies, consider the institutional and organisational features of schools and out-of-school projects themselves that can contribute to bullying in the first instance.

QDOSS advocates collaboration between schools, out-of-school projects and other local services to target bullying. There is a need for integration of a variety of perspectives and approaches to bullying to ensure continuity of approaches across contexts, and sharing good practice so that the child experiences a caring, nurturing, learning, social environment within and outside the school system.

# 3 Out-of-School Services: Contribution to Development of School Climate

QDOSS recognises the need for exploration with all schools and Out-of-School Services about the potential to collaborate in order to contribute to a supportive school climate. A supportive school climate is a key protective factor against early school leaving.

### Out-of-School Services and a Democratic School Climate in Teacher-Student Relations

QDOSS recognises the potential for collaboration between Out-of-School Services, schools and other local and national services to enhance positive adult/student relations in schools. QDOSS recognises the need to identify how much collaboration currently takes place so that Out-of-School Services might achieve their potential which extends beyond providing children and young people with some diversion and alternative activities for a couple of hours each week.

QDOSS believes there is a need for a State strategy for increased investment at in-service and pre-service on developing teachers' conflict resolution skills and constructivist teaching methodologies at postprimary level in particular.

QDOSS recognises that successful Out-of-School Services involve children and young people fully in service planning and activity planning and the implementation of both. QDOSS recognise that students in some schools also partake in planning and decision-making. However, QDOSS recognises that many Irish studies give accounts of the voices of early school leavers regarding their need to be consulted and listened to. Key issues include:

— the establishment of structures for pupil/student representation across all schools both at primary and postprimary level

— the establishment of structures for children and young people's representation in the running of the Out-of-School Services, as well as other services designed for their welfare

QDOSS notes that increased opportunity for active pupil involvement and participation can bring benefits to psychological wellbeing, to pupil motivation and learning and give expression to rights of the child to be consulted on issues regarding their own welfare. Key questions which arise include:

■ How much genuine consultation with children and young people takes place, rather than simply token gesture consultation that amounts to cooptation?

■ How developed are peer mentoring systems between later and younger years at primary, at postprimary, and between primary and postprimary students respectively?

■ Can strategies for the different levels of mentoring be explored in conjunction with local organisations including Out-of-School Services?

QDOSS recognises that developing a sense of involvement and ownership applies to the physical environment of the school and classroom, and also applies to the physical location of the Out-of-School project itself. There is a need for children and young people to be consulted and given opportunity to express their opinion on how the environment (of school, classroom and Out-of-School location) meets their needs, and on how it could be changed and decorated to reflect their needs and voices.

### *Out-of-School Services: Children and Young People's Aspirations for their Future*

Even though children and young people will change their views over time regarding specific careers, QDOSS recognises that developing an individual plan for the student:

— seeks to remedy the situation that some students do not realise the consequences of early school leaving until it is too late

— could include time management skills

— provides the opportunity to explore various career options, including clarification of important features of careers e.g., opportunity to help others, chance for choice and initiative in the workplace, variety within the work, salary levels, contribution to the local community, opportunity for travel etc

— can help children and young people's motivation to learn

QDOSS recognises the need to explore the potential role that Out-of-School projects can play in informal discussions with pupils at later primary level and postprimary students about their hopes and aspirations for the future

### *A More Holistic Approach to Behavioural Issues than Suspensions*

QDOSS recognises the limitations of suspensions as an effective strategy and the need for a more holistic approach to behavioural issues

The question arises as to how Out-of-School Services can be supported to fulfil their potential for providing a key role in alternative approaches to suspension through helping to provide an individualised learning and support plan.

# 4 Out-of-School Services:
## A Key Resource in Culturally Relevant Curriculum Implementation

### *Curriculum: Centrality of the Arts in Out-of-School Services*

QDOSS recognises that the arts helps both with employing culturally relevant materials to improve literacy and with personal expression to overcome fear of failure often associated with literacy issues. Key challenges include the following questions:

■ How widely is the key potential resource of creative and visual arts used in school and Out-of-School Services for emotional expression and development, as well as in developing self-esteem, problem solving and conflict resolution skills?

■ In schools and Out-of-School Services how widely is drama, as well as other artistic media, employed as part of an integrated approach to developing literacy skills?

### *Curriculum: Literacy*

QDOSS recognises the central importance of supporting adult and community education, of the need for the State to allocate a dedicated family literacy budget as part of promoting parental involvement in enhancing children's literacy.

QDOSS notes the need for ongoing development of relations between teachers and parents to enable parents to know how they can help their child's reading ability through using everyday reading materials such as magazines, recipes and newspapers. Current challenges include:

— the need for school libraries to be adequately resourced and promoted so that they are an accessible student and family friendly facility

— the need for these libraries be developed as a resource within the community to promote community based literacy programmes

— the need for provision of more culturally appropriate books, materials and assessments in the classroom and schools to assist children from different ethnic minority groups

— the need for strategies to be put in place to empower parents whose first language is not English or Irish so that they can be involved in their children's education

### *Curriculum: SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education), School Climate and Continuity*

QDOSS recognises the need for ongoing evaluation of the implementation of the SPHE curriculum in all schools and that if SPHE is only implemented at one level of the system and not others a discontinuity in climate between primary and postprimary schools may occur.

QDOSS recognises the potential for exploration of the role of primary teachers, Out-of-School Service providers and other local services in providing feedback to postprimary school teachers (and vice-versa) about:

— what has and has not worked in creating a supportive climate of trust for pupils

— pupil needs and expectations which need to be sustained at postprimary level to minimise the culture 'shock' of acclimatisation to second level

■ Is there a strategy of continuity between local primary and postprimary schools, in conjunction with Out-of-School Services, regarding implementation in practice of Social, Personal and Health Education?

# 5 Community Development Principles and Out-of-School Services

QDOSS recognises the need for Out-of-School projects to state their commitment to adopting principles of community development. A key question is as follows:

■ In socio-economically disadvantaged areas how well in practice do local Out-of-School Services adopt principles of community development, such as representation of local people on service management structures and commitment to local capacity building through employment of local people?

QDOSS recognises that collaboration between schools and community agencies in tackling social exclusion involves developing, managing, delivering, funding and evaluating activities and is different from simply 'contracting out' interventions.

Key challenges to advancing the Community Development role of Out-of-School Services include the following issues:

■ How well developed are strategies to develop communication and collaboration between schools, Out-of-School projects and other local services, while respecting the professional boundaries of each?

■ How much is the school available to the community as a local resource?

■ How can obstacles be overcome to the school being made available to the community as a local resource, obstacles such as insurance and funding for caretakers after school hours?

■ Is there to be a State strategy to require that new school buildings be consistently available as a resource for the local community?

QDOSS recognises the importance of the school being a focal point of community education in each area.

### Out-of-School Projects and Ethnic Minorities

QDOSS recognises the need to ensure that out-of-school services, schools and other community services are genuinely inclusive settings for all students who take part, including ethnic minorities.

■ How well developed is mentoring between Irish students and foreign nationals, as well as with students from the Travelling Community, whether at school or Out-of-School service level?

■ How inclusive are local services, including Out-of-School projects, with regard to employment of staff who are from a range of ethnic minorities living in the area?

QDOSS recognise the importance of developing community leaders, including accredited community leaders, from a range of ethnic minority groups living in the local area.

There is a clear need to develop national and local strategies for active collaboration with ethnic minorities in the planning of short, medium and long-term interventions targeting the needs of adults and children from their ethnic groups.

*Out-of-School Projects and Parental Involvement as Part of a Community Development Strategy*
QDOSS recognises that Out-of-School projects have a role to play in conjunction with other services in developing parent to parent mentoring, for example, with regard to facilitating parenting strategies for at risk youth and for speech and language development of younger children. Key issues which arise include the following questions:

- How well established are programmes in which parents become partners and mentors for each other, facilitated by schools and community services, for example with regard to speech and language, literacy and behavioural management issues?

- How well developed is the role of Out-of-School projects in developing pupils' and students' pride in their local community and sense of contribution to the local community and wider world?

- How well developed is public recognition at a community level for youth achievements to publicly validate the talents and voices of children and young people?

Regarding information gathered from parents, QDOSS note that Out-of-School Services need to have policies on:
— Who has access to this information

— How this information is shared with other staff members

— Parents' access to their own child's information

# 6 Evaluation: Structural, Process and Outcome Indicators

QDOSS recognises the need for a sufficiently broad approach to evaluation of Out-of-School Services that includes structural, process and outcome indicators. Key challenges for evaluation include the following issues:

- Are qualitative methods and specifically process-oriented approaches to evaluation given suffcient importance in evaluation?

- To what extent are contextual factors that cannot be experimentally or statistically controlled given sufficient importance in evaluation?

- How best to ensure that evaluation recognises the importance of reaching the most marginalised children and young people?

- How best to ensure that Out-of-School Services which work with those most alienated from the educational system are not merely to be narrowly assessed with regard to outcome indicators?

- How cognisant are evaluations of the role of service users beliefs and values in shaping outcomes?

QDOSS notes that self-evaluation is a process which helps management and staff to:

- Clarify what the service is aiming to achieve

- Focus on the quality of all aspects of their service

- Reflect on current practice and provision

- Identify and celebrate areas where the provision is good and needs to be maintained

- Identify and prioritise areas which need to be improved

- Identify information, training or resource needs

- Plan for development

- Engage in professional development

- Raise the standards of the provision

QDOSS recognises that self-evaluation is a systematic process involving all management, staff, parents and children. Furthermore QDOSS recognises the cyclical pattern which involves design, implementation, evaluation and modification. A key question which arises is the professional development of staff to undertake such evaluations.

For more details on QDOSS please contact our member organisations:

Barnardos
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