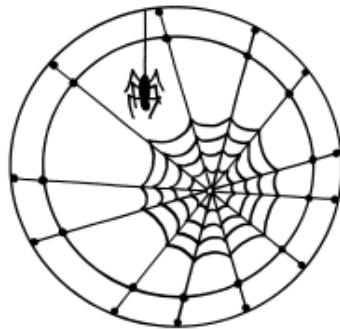


# Youthreach SEN Initiative Research Study

## Report



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# Summary

The changes introduced since 2007 in 20 Youthreach centres as a result of the Special Educational Needs Initiative (SENI) led to marked and significant benefits across a wide range of learner outcomes. When compared with their counterparts in a matched group of 20 Non-SENI centres, SENI learners showed significantly greater rates of retention in the programme, higher levels of formal accreditation, better progress in the acquisition of personal and social competencies and more successful progression. On virtually every measure examined in this research study the SENI centres outperformed the non-SENI centres.

The SEN Initiative is an innovatory and cost-effective way of addressing SEN in an educational setting. Using a broad definition of special needs, it results in organisational change and the systematic building of centre capacity to respond flexibly and practically to the unique situation of each individual learner. As well as promoting good quality teaching in a secure, ordered environment, the SENI model crucially involves listening to the learner's voice and understanding their view of the world. It augments professional support services with informal and non-formal approaches and provides additional training, guidance and support to staff. Through its emphasis on the development of learners' emotional and social competencies, the Initiative successfully piloted ways of recording and measuring soft skill outcomes along with more formal academic and vocational learning.

Initiative interventions – in particular, mentoring and inter-agency liaison – substantially increased learners' engagement in the Youthreach programme and their ability to address barriers to participation and learning. Among the biggest differences found in this study between the two groups of centres were the higher levels of SENI learners achieving success in learning and accreditation, showing initiative and willingness to take responsibility for tasks and being open to the world around them. SENI learners were more likely than their non-SENI counterparts to demonstrate self-awareness and to manage negative feelings and conflicts. More of them were willing to acknowledge their difficulties and to seek help when they needed it. In enhancing their emotional resilience, mental wellbeing and social capabilities, the Initiative also significantly increased learners' capacity and readiness for further training or work.

# 1. Background and rationale for study

## 1.1 Background to SEN Initiative

Early school leaving is associated with a wide range of adverse outcomes for individuals, including low levels of literacy, poverty, social exclusion and marginalisation, unemployment or insecure and/or poorly paid work, , alcohol and drug misuse, youth offending, lone parenting and homelessness (DES, 2008; NESSE, 2010). The Youthreach programme is the state's principal response to early school leaving, offering a systematic second chance opportunity for young people to re-engage in education, participate in vocational training and acquire key life skills.

The Special Educational Needs Initiative (SENI) was set up by the Department of Education in January 2007 to respond to the special needs of learners participating in the Youthreach programme. It was established in twenty centres on a pilot basis and has continued in them since that time. SEN is interpreted for the purposes of this initiative as representing any factor which hinders a young person's engagement in or ability to benefit from the Youthreach programme. These factors may comprise within-learner disabilities and difficulties, family and social circumstances or harmful early experiences.

A wide range of risk factors are considered to be characteristic of Youthreach learners (Gordon, 2007). These include low achievements in basic skills; reduced motivation and expectations; poor physical health and factors undermining mental health such as stress, low self-esteem, depression and lack of emotional regulation; and practical difficulties which impinge on learners' participation in the programme, possibly deriving from home or community challenges, homelessness, low income, substance misuse or engagement in criminal activities. In addition, the incidence of disability in Youthreach is estimated to be significantly higher than in mainstream schools, particularly in the areas of specific or mild general learning difficulties (Smith, 2002) and emotional and behavioural difficulties (Gordon, 2009).

## 1.2 Model of learner support used in SEN Initiative

New approaches or programmes that involve additional funding need to have a clear evidence base to the approach they are taking (CES, 2012). The particular model of support provided under the SEN Initiative was premised on psychological, developmental, systemic and ecological social psychology principles – see Gordon (2009) for a full account of the theoretical and research framework underpinning the approach. The two years that a learner typically spends in a centre are seen as an opportunity for them to grow and mature

through the formation of good quality relationships with adults and peers, through engagement in structured educational and training activities, through having the chance to identify their preferred career and life options for the future and through a combination of formal and informal experiences that foster personal and social development.

A key focus of the programme is on the development of emotional and social competencies as these have a very significant impact on both future employability and mental health: “Good social, emotional and psychological health helps protect young people against emotional and behavioural problems, violence and crime, teenage pregnancy and the misuse of drugs and alcohol... It can also help them to learn and achieve academically, thus affecting their long-term social and economic wellbeing” (NIHCE, 2009).

Under the SEN Initiative twenty centres received additional resources for the purposes of implementing specific forms of support provision for their learners and building staff capacity to respond effectively to learners’ needs. The resources were provided to each centre in the form of a general allocation of additional monies. The level of resourcing was determined by the assessment of learner needs (Gordon, 2007), comparable provision for students with SEN in mainstream schools and identified principles of best practice in the allocation of SEN resources (EADSNE, 2003). The precise amount allocated to each centre was determined by its number of learner places. In a 25-place centre this additional resourcing amounted to €38,500 per annum. €32,500 of this was assigned to staffing, with €2000 earmarked for staff training and €4000 for professional case supervision and staff support. The staffing input was to allow for the introduction, on a formal and timetabled basis, of a mentoring provision known as the WebWheel model (see Appendix A), the development of an individual action plan with each learner, the introduction of targeting teaching and support interventions to take account of each learner’s identified needs and, when appropriate, engagement in inter-agency working with local services.

Faithful implementation of the SEN Initiative model by centres (i.e. ‘programme integrity’) was managed by the issuing of clear practice guidelines and planning and reporting templates, by the provision of a specially designed programme of initial and follow-up training for mentoring staff and by the monitoring of practice through detailed annual reports from centres and regular site visits by the psychologist leading the initiative. Despite this, one SENI centre discarded the SENI model for a brief period, altering the form of support delivered to its learners to a more restricted and academically focused key working intervention. This centre was not using the WebWheel model of mentoring during the period examined in the study.

## 1.3 Previous evaluations

An external evaluation conducted in the early stages of the implementation of the initiative found that the model being used accorded well with the international research literature's identification of good practice and compared favourably with other support systems in place in Ireland for SEN, both in terms of its inclusive approach and value for money (Clarke, Classon & Phillips, 2007). Clarke et al. (2007) recommended that the initiative be rolled out nationally to all centres on a phased basis.

An internal report of the initial 18 month period of the pilot project concluded that the SEN Initiative provided an appropriate, effective and inexpensive response to high incidence special needs among Youthreach learners, including those associated with most emotional and behavioural difficulties (Gordon, 2009). Now, over four years since its inception, it was decided that the initiative was sufficiently 'bedded down' to allow for a more systematic evaluation of its outcomes and, as recommended (e.g. CES, 2012), to consider the organisational learning that has resulted.

## 2. Research methodology

### 2.1 Form of the study

The research study contained two elements. The first consisted of a comparison between the group of twenty SENI centres and a matched control group of twenty non-SENI centres. The focus was on the total differences between the two groups with a view to seeing whether there were any significant differences between them and, if there were, the direction of these differences. Variation within each group was not examined.

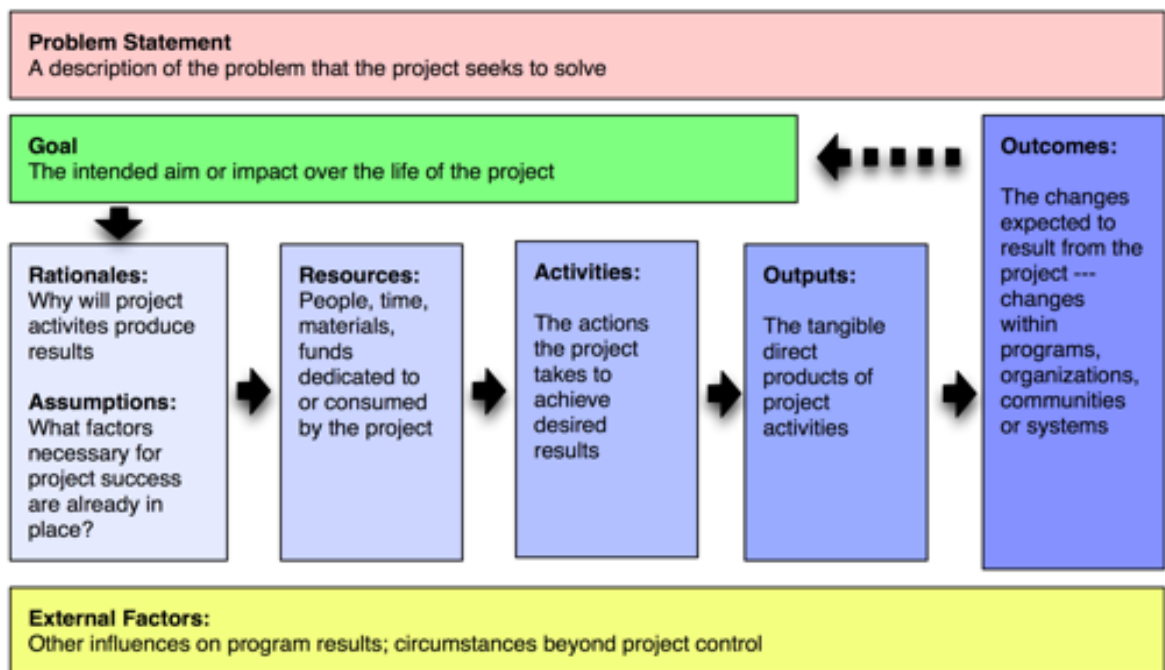
The purpose of this research was to identify the differences between the two groups both in their capacity to address their learners' special needs and in the outcomes for learners that resulted from the changes introduced. As the Youthreach programme itself was designed to provide for the needs of early school leavers it must be acknowledged that staff in all centres were aware of and responsive to their learners' needs. It was the additional capacity of the SENI centres to do this efficiently and effectively that was being examined in this research.

The second part of the study looked at the central support intervention of mentoring. The mentors were surveyed to gain an understanding of how mentoring was being organised in their centres and to obtain their perception of its effectiveness on learners and its impact on themselves as practitioners. The data collected under both parts of the study are integrated in the findings section.

#### 2.1.1 Logic model format

The logic model was used to structure both the Initiative and the research study. This model provides a way of defining the key strategic elements in an initiative introduced for the purpose of bringing about organisational or systemic change. The guidelines for the SEN Initiative centres issued by the Department, along with the planning and reporting templates, were designed to follow the stages of the logic model (see diagram below). It was the annual reporting template that formed the survey instrument used in the comparison study (this is reproduced in Appendix D). It is worth noting that the coordinators in the SENI centres were used to filling this in at the end of each academic year, while the survey was new to the coordinators in the non-SENI centres.





**Figure 1: Diagram of logic model**

In the SEN Initiative the **Problem Statement** relates to the learners' SEN as discussed above and the **Goal** to the achievement of improved outcomes for the learners in terms of enhanced personal and social capacity, including ability to cope with their difficulties. The centres in the research were asked to identify learner difficulties which impacted on their education and training, those acting against their personal and social development and those relating to factors which created barriers to their participation in the programme. The **Rationales** and **Assumptions** are based on the model of support being used in the SEN Initiative and its theoretical framework (Gordon, 2009). The **Resources** in question are the additional financial inputs provided to the SENI centres, as outlined above. These are realised concretely in the SENI centres in the form of additional teaching hours and extra provision for staff training and support. The purpose of the initiative is to put in place particular tailored **Activities** or interventions to support learners and address their needs. While these are prescribed for the SENI centres the non-SENI centres were also asked to describe the specific activities they engaged in for the purposes of supporting their learners' SEN. The **Outputs** for the most part refer to the structural arrangements made to facilitate and back up learner support activities. The **Outcomes** are the changes in the learners that result from the measures put in place to support them. While they were not specifically explored in this study, **External Factors** impinge on the initiative in a range of ways, including the progression opportunities available to learners when they leave the centre.

The following are the key areas examined in the study:

- A. Learner needs (*problem statement*)
- B. Inputs (*resources*)
- C. Structures and interventions (*activities* and *outputs*)
- D. Impact on learners (*outcomes*)

The twenty SENI centres report annually on the implementation of the initiative in the previous academic year using a report template based on this logic model. This same template was used to collect the data for this research study, with the non-SENI coordinators contributing their information on the basis of goodwill.

## 2.1.2 Matching the centres

The original twenty SENI centres were chosen to represent the broad spectrum of Youthreach centre types across the country. The twenty non-SENI centres chosen to act as research comparisons were picked to match these as closely as possible in the characteristics of centre size and demographic location i.e. whether in a city or suburb, large town, small town or village. The two groups of centres were successfully matched in terms of these two variables (see Appendix B).

### Centre size

Small:	< 20
Medium:	20 – 30
Large:	31 – 50
Very large:	> 50

<b>Table 1: Matching by centre size</b>	SENI centres	Non-SENI centres
Small	2	2
Medium	8	9
Large	7	6
Very large	3	3
Total no. of places	710	706

### Centre location demographic<sup>1</sup>

Village or small town:	<4,000
Mid-sized town:	4,000 – 20,000
Large town:	20,500 – 75,000
City (urban or suburban):	> 75,000

<b>Table 2: Matching by centre location</b>	SENI centres	Non-SENI centres
Village or small town	5	5
Mid-sized town	6	6
Large town	2	3
City	7	6
Total population	1,587,500	1,483,500

<sup>1</sup> Population figures from Census Office, 2011

## 3. Research findings

### 3.1 Assessment of learner needs

The SENI centres provided fuller answers to this question, producing over two and half times the response of their non-SENI counterparts. This may be because SENI centre coordinators were more experienced in carrying out this analysis and therefore more attuned to noticing their learners' difficulties. In regard to the *nature* of the difficulties described however, there was no difference between the two groups of centres. The exact same issues were identified by both and these are summarised below, with the full list itemised in Appendix C. While it must be acknowledged that not all learners present with the problems outlined, the incidence of these problems is higher in Youthreach centres than in mainstream schools and sensitivity to them on the part of staff is a necessary prerequisite to carrying out a comprehensive assessment of learner needs.

#### 3.1.1 Education and training

Education and training difficulties were defined as those which impact on the academic and vocational training aspects of the programme and which tend to hinder the learners' ability to make academic progress. Poor attainments in basic literacy, numeracy and IT skills were cited along with a broad range of learning problems, including dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit disorders and speech and language difficulties.

Disruptive and challenging behaviours also featured frequently, linked to a lack of engagement with or belief in the value of academic achievement. Negative previous experiences of school and a history of poor attendance were also considered to have had an impact on learner attainments, motivation and engagement.

#### 3.1.2 Personal and social development

Personal and social development problems were defined as being to do with emotional, social, mental or physical wellbeing issues and as usually arising as a result of individual experiences or circumstances. The kinds of social skill deficits listed included unawareness of social norms, poor communication skills, introversion and lack of empathy. Difficulties with bullying, with interacting with peers and with managing anger were mentioned frequently.

Life skills concerning self-organisation and self-presentation also featured. Issues affecting the emotional wellbeing of learners included past or current experiences of bereavement and of physical or sexual abuse. Coordinators listed a broad range of mental health concerns – some very serious – including anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harming

and attempted suicide. For some learners, physical ill health was considered to be a significant issue, either because of the presence of specific illnesses or medical conditions (e.g. poor eyesight, miscarriage, diabetes, epilepsy) or a more generalised lack of health due to insufficient nourishment during childhood, ongoing poor diet and lack of exercise.

### 3.1.3 Barriers to participation and progress

Barriers to participation and progress were defined as factors relating to life outside the centre which had the effect of creating barriers to good attendance and participation or to successful learning and progression. Most coordinators referred to the learners’ home situations as a significant factor. For some learners it was a case of their basic needs for food and clothing not being met or of chaotic, unstable and volatile family circumstances. Learners were frequently described as lacking guidance from their parents or experiences of structure, routine and discipline. Education was generally described as not being highly valued within the learners’ families or communities.

Other contextual factors included rural isolation and poor public transport, uncertainty in living arrangements, homelessness and lone parenting. All coordinators referred to learners’ lifestyle activities and, in particular, to substance misuse as a barrier to their progress in the programme. Involvement in anti-social behaviour and criminal activities was also cited, resulting in possible engagement with the probation services, court appearances and risks of physical violence. A number of coordinators referred to the particular needs of learners who were or had been in the care of the HSE. Finally, the current economic context was mentioned as having an impact on learners’ belief in the value of learning and certification for progression to employment.

## 3.2 Inputs

The inputs being referred to in this study were the resources allocated to the SENI centres as a result of the SEN Initiative. It should be noted that these were additional to the resources available in the normal way to centres. All Youthreach centres have some, albeit limited, access to capacity building through a staff training budget and to learner support through a guidance, counselling and psychological services budget. The only difference between the two groups of centres then was in relation to the SEN Initiative inputs.

### 3.2.1 Learner places

As intended, the number of learner places between the two groups of centres was virtually the same.

<b>Table 3: Inputs by learner places</b>	SENI centres	Non-SENI centres
No. of learner places in centres	710	706

### 3.2.2 Staff working in centres

There was, however, a significant difference between the two groups in the size of their staff teams. This was due to the fact that the resources provided under the SEN Initiative were primarily for the purpose of delivering additional supports to learners by members of staff rather than, for example, by professional practitioners or services outside the centre. Thus the main impact of the initiative was to increase overall staffing levels of both full time and part time teachers by 22%.

<b>Table 4: Inputs by staff</b>	SENI centres	%ages	Non-SENI centres	%ages
No. of full time staff	95.5	126%	75.5	100%
No. of part-time staff	157	120%	131	100%
Total no. of staff members	252.5	122%	206.5	100%

### 3.2.3 Staff training

Increasing the capacity of centre staff teams to address the needs of their learners was a further goal of the SEN Initiative and a portion (5%) of the SENI resource was therefore allocated to staff training. The effect of this was to produce a small but consistent difference in the amount of training taking place for whole teams, sub-groups and individual members of staff in the SENI centres.

<b>Table 5: Inputs by staff training</b>	In SENI centres	Mean in SENI centres	In non-SENI centres	Mean in non-SENI centres
As a whole centre team	70	3.5	55	2.8
As a sub-group of staff	49	2.5	43	2.2
As an individual member on behalf of the centre or for their own professional development	61	3.0	52	2.6

The mentors' survey outlined the training inputs that they had received. Many received more than one input and some had undertaken relevant training independently.

<b>Table 6: Mentoring training inputs in SENI centres</b>	%age
Introduction to the WebWheel model	81
Review of the model	45
Mentoring skills	51
Counselling training	33
Other	40

### 3.2.4 Staff support

Likewise, the provision of staff support was an essential part of the initiative, with 10% of the budget being dedicated to two aspects of care for mentors: case supervision and professional staff support. The purpose of case supervision is to ensure that staff with no specific training in counselling or psychotherapy can engage safely in mentoring learners who might have very serious or complex problems. It provides a protection for the learners while creating an opportunity for mentors to increase their professional understanding and expertise. Professional staff support takes account of the emotional toll on staff of working as mentors, with the high level of personal engagement and commitment that this role requires. The main function of this form of support is to help mentors to establish clear boundaries around what is – and what is not – their responsibility, to be confident about referring to and linking with other professional services and to deal with the impact of this work on their own wellbeing

As would be expected, there was a significant difference between both groups of centres in the amount of staff support sessions that took place over the course of the year, whether for case supervision or professional staff support (or a mix of both in the one session) and whether delivered on a group or one-to-one basis.

<b>Table 7: Staff support inputs in SENI centres</b>	Mean no. of sessions in SENI centres	%age of SENI centres receiving	Mean no. of sessions in non-SENI centres	%age of non-SENI centres receiving
Group sessions for case supervision	5.5	70%	4.2	52%
One-to-one sessions for case supervision	8.4	60%	1.9	30%
Group sessions for staff support	2.8	50%	1.7	35%
One-to-one sessions for staff support	9.5	60%	1.2	20%
Group sessions for mix of supervision and support	6.3	75%	5.2	35%
One-to-one sessions for mix of case supervision and staff support	4.5	40%	0.1	10%

SENI centres were required to locate a fully qualified practitioner to provide their staff support. The criteria for qualification have been defined as consisting of the following: formal accreditation in psychotherapy or psychology, relevant professional practice, experience of supervising others and membership of an appropriate professional body. There is no requirement on non-SENI centres to organise staff support. Although the table above indicates that staff support is available in a significant number of the non-SENI centres the quality of that support might not be totally reliable since in only seven of those centres did the practitioner meet the full qualification criteria.

<b>Table 8: Professional qualifications input of practitioner providing staff support in SENI centres</b>	No. of SENI centres with	Percentage of SENI centres receiving	No. of non-SENI centres with	Percentage of non-SENI centres receiving
Formally qualified as a psychologist or psychotherapist	20	100%	7	35%

The mentors' survey enquired into the mentors' satisfaction levels with the supervision and support they had received. While the majority were happy with it a small number were not entirely satisfied.

<b>Table 9: Satisfaction level of staff support input in SENI centres</b>	%age
Excellent	48
Satisfactory	38
Just adequate	10
Unsatisfactory	4
Totally inadequate	0

## 3.3 Interventions and structures

### 3.3.1 Core practices

The SEN Initiative required the SENI centres to provide regular timetabled mentoring sessions to their learners, at which individual action plans would be drawn up. The purpose of these plans was to outline the teaching and support interventions that would be provided by the centre and, if indicated, any liaison with local services or agencies that would be pursued to address particular needs. It was not expected, however, that the activities listed were necessarily being provided in the non-SENI centres.

Coordinators were asked to indicate the number of their learners for whom the following support practices were put in place: key working, mentoring, development of individual action plans and inter-agency working. Both key working and mentoring are relationship-based forms of support and require the assignment of a particular staff member to interact regularly with the young person. In the survey form *key working* was defined as being to increase the learners' engagement with and participation in the programme of the centre and as having its primary focus on learning and compliance with centre rules.

In *mentoring* the primary focus was defined as being on the learner's needs or difficulties, with the mentor attempting to understand the learner's perspective and to help them with personal or other difficulties that might be placing their general welfare at risk and

interfering with their participation in the programme. The definition of *mentoring* used also contained a frequency requirement – i.e. the sessions were at least once a fortnight – while the definition of *key working* required that it only needed to happen once a term.

The development of *individual learning plans* is a normal feature of the work of centres and considered a quality standard in the Youthreach quality assurance process (O'Brien, 2005 – see <http://www.youthreach.ie/qualityframework/>). THE QFI expects that these plans will be drawn up “in conjunction with” learners. Under the SEN Initiative, a separate *individual action plan* is devised during the mentoring sessions. This specifies any actions that will be taken by the learner and/or staff members to address the issues discussed in mentoring. An individual action plan can be distinguished from an individual learning plan is that it is defined as only containing items that the learner wishes to be there. In the study the coordinators were asked about individual planning and not instructed to distinguish between learning and action plans.

Likewise, the Quality Framework promotes good communication and liaison with relevant organisations in the education, training, welfare, justice, health, youth and community sectors. It is thus normal practice for centres to engage in inter-agency working.

### 3.3.2 One-to-one forms of support

In the SENI centres the vast majority of the learners received mentoring support rather than key working. The small percentage of learners who were not allocated a mentor either attended the centre that had briefly broken with the integrity of the programme or, in the case of the other centres, had left before being allocated one. In some non-SENI centres staff were described as acting as “mentors” in the sense that they supported learners, usually a subset of the centre’s learners, in relation to their personal, as opposed to academic, difficulties. However, the mentoring sessions they conducted were never frequent enough to meet the criterion being applied in this study. The development of individual plans was a feature of the practice in most of the non-SENI centres, with over two thirds of their learners having plans.



<b>Table 10: Learner support measures</b>	No. of SENI learners	%age of SENI learners	No. of non-SENI learners	%age of non-SENI learners
Assignment of a key worker	45 <sup>2</sup>	5%	415	42%
Assignment of a mentor	803	94%	58 <sup>3</sup>	6%
Provision of regular key working sessions (at least one a term)	45	5%	474	48%
Provision of regular mentoring session using the WebWheel process (at least one a fortnight)	791	92%	0 <sup>4</sup>	0%
Development of an individual plan for/with the learner	834	97%	681	69%
Engagement in inter-agency work on behalf of the learner	570	67%	314	32%

Another difference between the SENI and non-SENI centres was in the proportion of staff engaging in one-to-one work. In the SENI centres almost half of all staff members were acting as mentors, compared to only 15% acting as key workers in the non-SENI centres.

<b>Table 11: Staff engaging in one-to-one learner support measures</b>	No. of SENI teachers	%age of SENI centre staff	No. of non-SENI teachers	%age of non-SENI centre staff
Acting as key workers	5	2%	32	15%
Acting as mentors	122	48%	10	5%

### 3.3.3 Organisation of mentoring in SENI centres

Mentors in the SENI centres were surveyed to gather additional information about the mentoring provision. There was a 70% response rate from centres to the questionnaire (see Appendix D), which covered the mentors' role and experience in Youthreach, the nature of their work contracts, the organisation of the mentoring in their centre, their

<sup>1</sup> In one SENI centre monthly key working sessions rather than mentoring was provided to learners in the 2011/12 year

<sup>3</sup> In some non-SENI centres staff were described as acting as "mentors" in the sense that they supported learners, usually a subset of the centre's learners, in relation to their personal, as opposed to academic, difficulties

<sup>3</sup> In one non-SENI centre WebWheel mentoring was provided to all the learners but only four times over the course of the year.

assessment of its value for their mentees and their evaluation of the training and support they had received. They were also invited to describe any aspect of the mentoring that they found difficult and to suggest any changes that might make it easier.

In general, mentors tended to be veterans of the programme, with the majority having over five years' experience of working in Youthreach and as many as 44% with over ten years.

<b>Table 12: Youthreach experience of mentors in SENI centres</b>	%age
> 10	44
6 – 10	28
1 – 5	26
< 1	1

Mentors were equally divided between resource staff and subject teachers. Four of the centre coordinators did some mentoring and in three centres a specific SEN coordinator was appointed.

<b>Table 13: Role of mentors in SENI centres</b>	%age
Coordinator	6
Resource person	44
Subject teacher	42
SENI coordinator	4
Other	7

While the majority of mentors were full time members of staff over a third were part time. However, these part time teachers were in the centres frequently – their average contract being for 16 hours per week.

<b>Table 14: Mentors' employment contracts in SENI centres</b>	%age
Full time	63
Part time	36

Most mentors had considerable experience of mentoring by the time of the survey, suggesting that teachers who tried it were willing to continue doing it.

<b>Table 15: Mentors' length of time mentoring in SENI centres</b>	%age
5 – 6 years	56
3 – 4 years	28
1 – 2 years	11
< 1 year	6

The number of mentees varied considerably with a small number of mentors seeing over 12 learners per fortnight. The majority saw between 4 and 12, with nearly a quarter dealing with only three or less.

<b>Table 16: No. of mentee by mentors in SENI centres</b>	%age
> 12	6
8 – 12	27
4 – 7	44
< 4	23

### 3.3.4 Teaching interventions

Coordinators were asked to describe the specific *teaching* interventions their centres engaged in for the purpose of responding to the learner difficulties that they had identified. Those in the SENI centres reported significantly more interventions, producing over six times the amount of text in response to this question than their non-SENI counterparts. All of the non-SENI centres mentioned provision of literacy and numeracy support. A small number also referred to SPHE / RSE classes, to personal effectiveness or life skills training and to crime and drug awareness programmes. In contrast, the SENI centres outlined a wide range of skills development initiatives, including additional literacy and numeracy provision, creative writing, keyboard skills; English as a second or additional language; SPHE, interpersonal skills and life skills programmes; healthy eating, fitness, physical education and sports; mental health and stress reduction; music (instruments, voice and recording); art, crafts, film, photography and theatre; CPSE and community development; and career guidance. A number of the SENI centres made reference to the use of assessment (e.g. of literacy and numeracy skills, of multiple intelligences, of individual learning style, of typing speed, of fitness).

It is acknowledged that the curriculum of the Youthreach programme as a whole recognises the needs of early school leavers in a general way and that what is done in all centres, along with the methodologies employed, is a considered response to these needs. Because all their teaching interventions are part of the general programme in the non-SENI centres it is quite likely that the non-SENI coordinators did not see them as specifically tailored to learner difficulties. The SENI centres, by virtue of identifying learners' difficulties during mentoring and their additional resourcing, were in a position to tailor their teaching in more flexible and responsive ways than was possible in the other centres.

### 3.3.5 Support interventions

For this question the coordinators were asked to describe the specific *support* interventions they deployed in order to respond to their learners' difficulties. Once again the SENI coordinators gave fuller and longer answers, generating three times as much text as their

non-SENI counterparts. The types of support interventions listed were similar for both groups, with most of the centres citing the availability of individual counselling for learners. Mentoring tended to feature only in the SENI responses. In all cases, the number of support interventions listed by coordinators was significantly higher in the SENI centres. These included career guidance and/or advocacy (from the FÁS-funded Advocacy service); specific forms of counselling (e.g. addiction, bereavement, crisis, rape); various forms of therapy (e.g. art, acupuncture); programmes to address particular areas of need (relating e.g. to anger management, bullying and conflict resolution, sexuality, money management, self-harm and suicide awareness, stress management, parenting, etc); and particular structural interventions (e.g. the setting up of a learners' council or a girls' activity group, the provision of a cooked breakfast, the organisation of an annual health or mental health promotion week).

Interagency work with services outside the centre was a feature of many of the interventions. These included the arrangement of medical appointments for doctor, hospital, optician, dentist, sexual health clinic and psychiatric services; supporting learners to engage with outreach addiction facilities, sexual health clinics, probation and welfare services and housing agencies; liaison with family support and social services; engaging with learners' residential units and foster placements and supporting learners who are leaving the care of the HSE to live independently. In some cases SENI centres provide a tracking and support service to learners for the first twelve months after they leave the centre.

### 3.3.5 Inter-agency working

While inter-agency working is clearly a feature of the work of all centres the difference in practice between the two groups of centres in terms of the amount of liaison was striking. The SENI centres related to over three times as many local services and agencies as the non-SENI centres.

<b>Table 17: No. of local services liaised with</b>	By SENI centres	Mean for SENI centres	By non-SENI centres	Mean for non-SENI centres
Number of <i>local services and agencies</i> with whom centre staff liaised for information and advice and/or with whom collaborative actions were put in place for particular learners	487	24	143	7

The non-SENI centres liaised with local services in respect of one third of their learners while the SENI centres liaised in respect of two thirds.

<b>Table 18: Percentage of learners on whose behalf liaison took place</b>	In SENI centres	%age	In non-SENI centres	%age
Number of learners on whose behalf the centre engaged in inter-agency work	570	67%	314	32%

## 3.4 Impact on learners

### 3.4.1 Retention

A major and highly significant difference in outcome between the two groups relates to retention. It is this single finding that underpins many of the other outcome differences found in the study. The number of learners who did not complete the full academic year is indicated by the number of learners attending over the number of places. As is evident from the figures in the table below, the retention rate in the non-SENI centres was considerably lower than in the SENI centres, with almost double the turnover rate.

All the outcome measures described in this section are in terms of percentages, i.e. based on the numbers achieving each outcome as a function of the total number of learners attending the centre at any point during the year. The greater number of learners attending the non-SENI centres had the effect of reducing the proportions achieving each outcome relative to the SENI centres.

<b>Table 19: Learners attending over no. of learner places</b>	SENI centres	%ages	Non-SENI centres	%ages
No. of learner places in centres	710	100%	706	100%
No. of learners who attended for any part of the year	857	121%	989	140%

### 3.4.2 Certification outcomes

The learners in the SENI centres achieved a significantly higher level of accreditation than their peers in the non-SENI centres. While it may not be useful to treat all certification as summarisable in this way because of the wide range of levels involved, it is possible to compare accreditation outcomes across the two groups of centres.

In table 20 below both actual learner numbers and the percentage of learners achieving accreditation in the centres are given. In the case of the Leaving Cert Applied (when both years of the programme are counted) the differences in absolute numbers between the groups was relatively small and the non-SENI centres achieved more major awards at FETAC level 5. This suggests that more able learners may not need the supports provided by the SEN Initiative to achieve certification. In general however the SENI centres did better than the non-SENI centres, not just in percentage terms but in absolute values.

Table 20: Learner formal accreditation outcomes	SENI learners				Non-SENI learners			
	No. of learners		%age of learners		No. of learners		%age of learners	
Junior Cert (partial/Year 1)	1		0.1%		2		0.2%	
Junior Cert (full)	23		2.7%		11		1.1%	
Leaving Cert Applied (partial/Year 1)	53		6.2%		8		0.8%	
Leaving Cert Applied (full)	51		6.0%		90		9.1%	
General Leaving Cert (partial/Year 1)	12		1.4%					
General Leaving Cert (full)	23		2.7%		19		1.9%	
FETAC	Major award		Minor award		Major award		Minor award	
	No.	%age	No.	%age	No.	%age	No.	%age
FETAC level 1								
FETAC level 2	18	2.1%					15	1.5%
FETAC level 3	75	8.8%	185	21.6%	31	3.1%	195	19.7%
FETAC level 4	76	8.9%	159	18.6%	59	6.0%	114	11.5%
FETAC level 5			49	5.7%	15	1.5%	9	0.9%
Achieving any kind of formal certification	725		84.6%		568		57.4%	

Coordinators were also asked to indicate any other forms of certification achieved by their learners. The SENI centres ran a broader range of additional accredited short courses than their counterparts.

Table 21: Learner informal accreditation outcomes	SENI learners		Non-SENI learners	
	No. of learners	%age of learners	No. of learners	%age of learners
ECDL (full)	13	1.5%	19	1.9%
FIT	70	8.2%		
Gaisce	21	2.5%	9	0.9%
Safe Pass	8	0.9%		
Safe Food Award	2	0.2%		
First Aid Cert			22	2.2%
Manual Handling	20	2.3%		
Travel and Tourism	5	0.6%		
First Impressions (employability skills)	7	0.8%		
En Vision	5	0.6%		
Heart and Soul	25	2.9%		
Introduction to Coaching Soccer			12	1.2%
Boxing Certs	7	0.8%		
Benefit			3	0.3%

### 3.4.3 Competency outcomes

For this section, centres were asked to identify the number of learners who had made significant progress in a range of competency areas by acquiring new or increased abilities and skills or by showing increased levels of effectiveness. The competencies involved represent a core part of the work of centres. They are frequently less easy to measure than hard outcomes such as certification but are no less relevant for that.

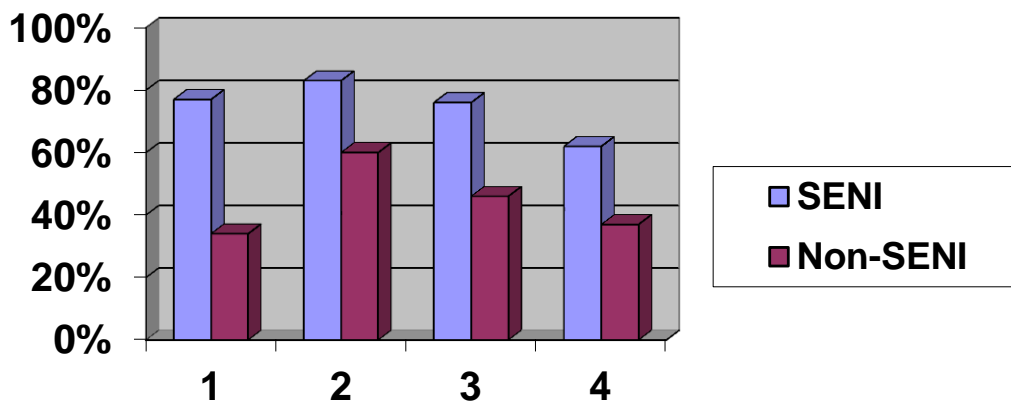
The information sought was the number of individuals making satisfactory improvement over the course of the year in key competencies associated with emotional maturation, personal and social skills development and employability. In order to assess this progress, coordinators were required to make use of a range of methodologies, including direct evidence from certificate exams and other formal tests, from portfolios of work done and objects made and from actions, behaviours and performances observed by the staff. In addition, information could be obtained from consultation with the learners themselves and from consultation with others such as peers, parents and employers. Frequently the assessment was based on the evaluative judgements of staff, considering each learner in turn against the items listed under the competency headings. Staff were asked to decide on whether the improvement in question was sufficient to constitute *significant* progress. What the staff considered to be significant required a judgement call on their part. To make these judgements less subjective, coordinators were advised to discuss with their staff teams what they would define as the standard of significant progress for each item and to consult with as many members of the staff team as possible before arriving at a decision on the areas of significant improvement made by each learner.

The competencies considered for this section are mostly soft rather than hard and often involve a combination of skills and attitudes. They relate to academic learning (i., iii.), to vocational training (iii., iv.), to practical life and employability skills (i., ii., iv., v., vi.), to socio-emotional development and the enhancement of factors promoting mental health (vi., vii., viii).

#### 3.4.3.1 The development of basic skills

By basic skills is meant the communication skills of oral language, literacy, numeracy and IT. Basic skills are necessary for educational progression but also constitute important life skills for living effectively in society. The greatest difference found between the two groups was in relation to the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills.

<b>Table 22: Basic skill outcomes</b>	SENI	Non-SENI
1. Acquired literacy and numeracy skills	77%	34%
2. Acquired information and communication technology skills	83%	60%
3. Were effective in the use of oral communication skills	76%	46%
4. Were able to apply processing skills when studying (e.g. attention, memory)	62%	37%



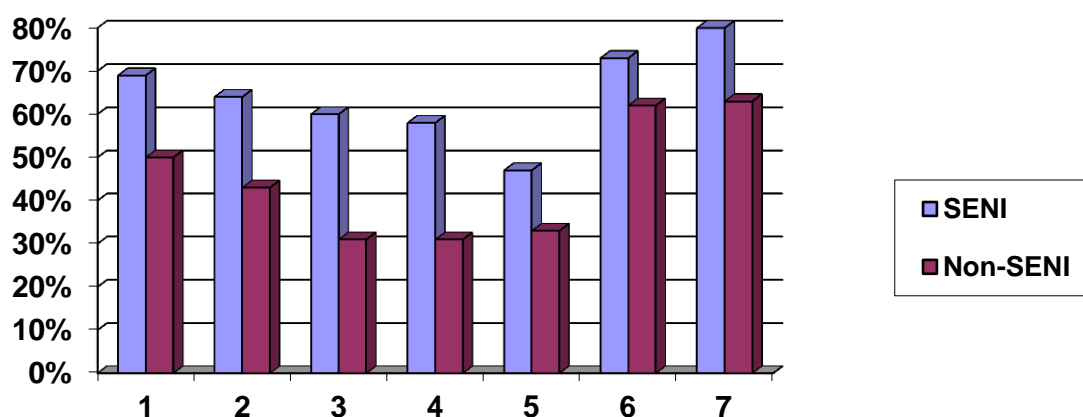
**Figure 2: Graph of basic skill outcomes**

### 3.4.3.2 The development of life skills

Life skills consist of the kind of practical knowledge and competencies that are needed to live effectively in Ireland in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Practical knowledge and skills in relation to accessing public facilities and services might include sourcing information, filling in forms and opening a bank account. Presenting appropriately refers to issues of practical competence, reliability and appearance. Engagement in the world would be demonstrated, for example, by participating in community events and travelling outside the locality. Budgeting, planning and saving are involved in the effective management of money and being at ease eating in public refers to being comfortable eating in the presence of others and having the table skills to be relaxed eating in a restaurant. The biggest difference found between the two groups related to the increased willingness of the SENI learners to engage with the wider world.



<b>Table 23: Life skill outcomes</b>	SENI	Non-SENI
1. Showed practical knowledge and skills in relation to accessing public facilities and services (e.g. sourcing information, filling in forms)	69%	50%
2. Presented appropriately (e.g. in terms of practical competence, reliability, appearance, etc)	64%	43%
3. Showed knowledge and understanding of the world outside the locality	60%	31%
4. Engaged in the world (e.g. participating in community events, travelling outside the locality)	58%	31%
5. Managed money effectively (e.g. budgeting, planning, saving)	47%	33%
6. Were at ease eating in public (both inside and outside the centre)	73%	62%
7. Were able to play and have fun with others (e.g. joke, tease, enjoy recreational activities)	80%	63%

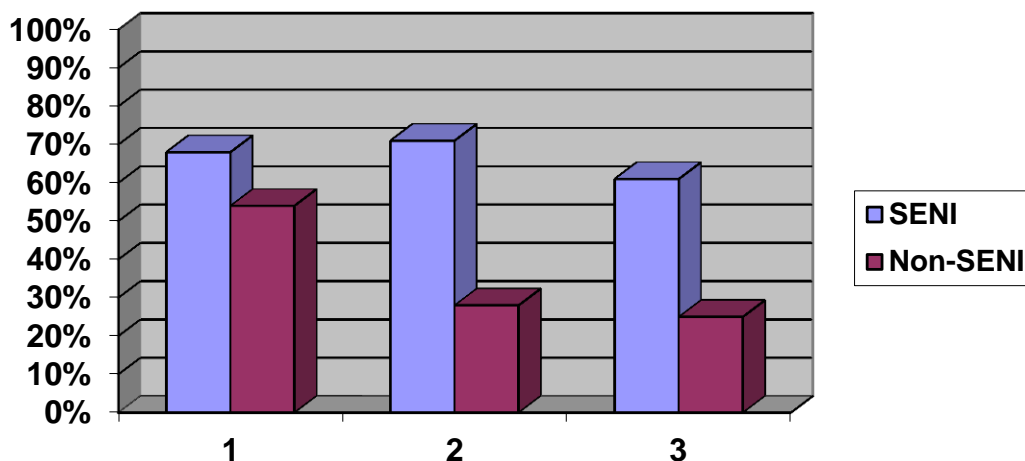


**Figure 3: Graph of life skill outcomes**

### 3.4.3.3 The acquisition of formal accreditation in academic and vocational subjects

Formal accreditation refers specifically to FETAC, Junior Cert and Leaving Cert and Leaving Cert Applied. This section also looks at learners' attitudes to formal academic learning. It was these attitudes that showed the greatest difference between the two groups.

<b>Table 24: Learning outcomes</b>	SENI	Non-SENI
1. Achieved accreditation in formal study areas whether academic or vocational	68%	54%
2. Showed motivation to learn and made real progress in understanding and study skills	71%	28%
3. Showed academic ambition and an interest in progressing to further education or training after they leave the centre	61%	25%



**Figure 4: Graph of learning outcomes**

### 3.4.3.4 The acquisition of vocational skills

While vocational learning is formally accredited through FETAC and state exams, the focus of this section is on the actual acquisition of vocationally-related skills, whether accredited or not.

	SENI	Non-SENI
1. Gained practical skills in useful but non-formal vocational skill areas	72%	63%
2. Achieved non-formal or informal accreditation in:		
a. Driving, safe pass, computer skills, First Aid, etc	55%	36%
b. Music, sound technology, drama, performance, etc	52%	41%
c. Art, design, photography, film, graphics, etc	30%	18%
d. Gaisce, Failte Ireland, Enterprise, etc	19%	9%
e. Sports, fitness, outdoor pursuits, etc	73%	55%
f. SPHE, sexual health, life skills, Copping On, etc	73%	59%
g. Other (Drugs Programme)	20%	7%
3. Gained practical skills in vocational subjects	77%	48%

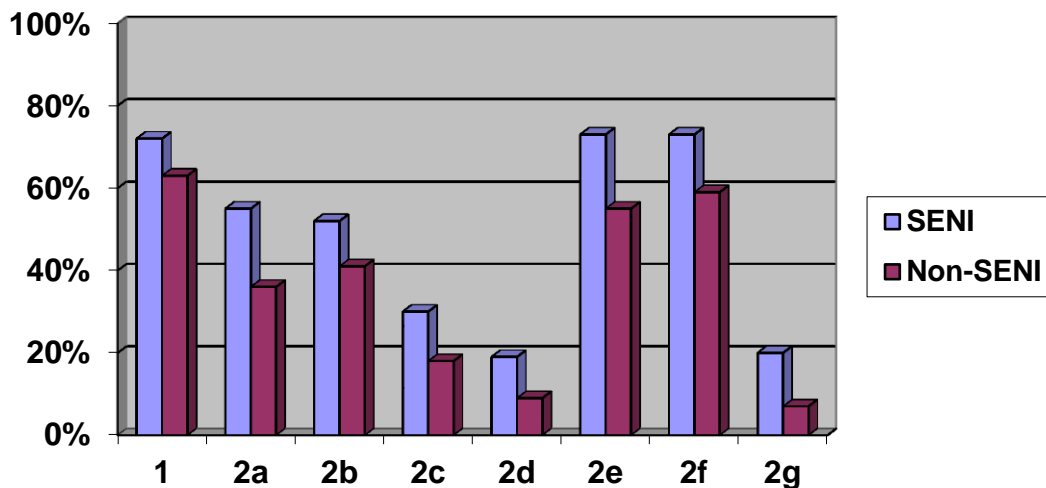


Figure 4: Graph of vocational skill outcomes

### 3.4.3.5 Development of effectiveness in work and learning settings (e.g. study skills, time management, working with people)

Effectiveness in work and learning settings requires a range of soft skills, such as study skills, time management and ability to work collaboratively. A career path plan can be in relation to work, further education or family life. The SENI learners were considered to have more of these soft employability skills, and particularly to show more willingness to take responsibility for tasks and work on their own initiative and to cope effectively with complex situations.

Table 26: Effectiveness in work and learning settings outcomes	SENI	Non-SENI
1. Behaved appropriately in context	74%	50%
2. Participated in and engaged with learning experiences	81%	58%
3. Successfully completed work experience placement(s)	60%	48%
4. Developed a personal career path plan (e.g. in relation to work, further education or family life)	67%	42%
5. Showed a willingness to take responsibility for tasks	69%	40%
6. Were able to work on their own initiative	64%	33%
7. Were able to work as part of a team	73%	49%
8. Were able to cope with complex situations and make reasonable judgements in them	63%	25%

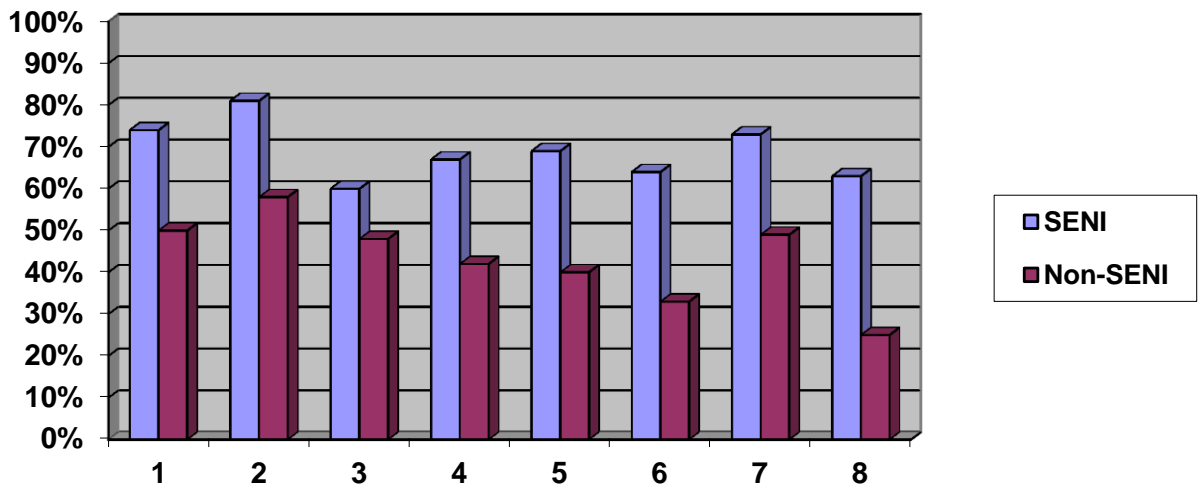


Figure 5: Graph of effectiveness in work and learning setting outcomes

### 3.4.3.6 Socio-emotional development (i.e. ability to manage emotions and relationships)

This section deals with awareness of emotions, ability to deal with them effectively, sensitivity to others and ability to manage relationships. The greatest differences found were in the ability to manage negative feelings, self-awareness and effectiveness in dealing with conflict.

Table 27: Socio-emotional development outcomes	SENI	Non-SENI
1. Were able to manage negative feelings and express them appropriately	77%	28%
2. Showed self-regulation	58%	33%
3. Showed self-awareness	67%	31%
4. Showed skill at interacting with others	71%	46%
5. Showed understanding and consideration for others	65%	38%
6. Were assertive and confident when dealing with conflict and showed a willingness to employ problem-solving approaches	53%	20%

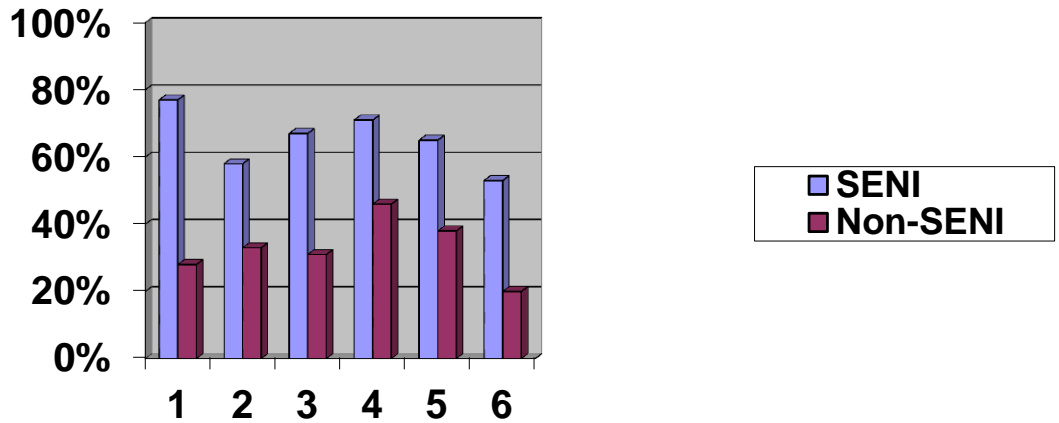


Figure 6: Graph of socio-emotional development outcomes

### 3.4.3.7 Resilience and mental health (including confidence and self-esteem)

This section is about ability to cope with one’s life and to be able to be reasonably happy and confident. The biggest difference between the two groups related to openness to new experiences, which accords with the previous finding of SENI learners being more willing to engage in the world.

	SENI	Non-SENI
1. Showed happiness or contentment	63%	41%
2. Showed self-esteem and confidence	60%	40%
3. Were able to cope with their circumstances	65%	47%
4. Were open to new experiences	73%	40%

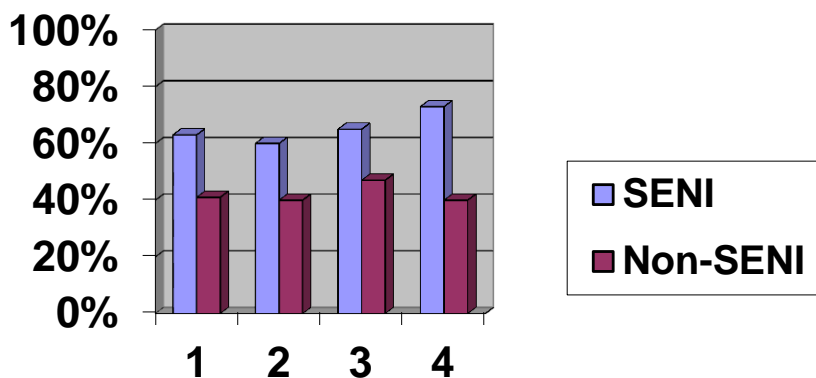


Figure 7: Graph of resilience and mental health outcomes

### 3.4.3.8 Ability to acknowledge difficulties and to seek out and benefit from available support services within and outside the centre

When life is not going well for a learner can they recognise what their problems are and act to try to resolve them? Acknowledging difficulties may well mean an increase in the reporting by learners of serious difficulties (including suicidal thoughts, risk-taking activities, self-harming behaviours, drug and alcohol misuse, involvement in abusive relationships). However, acknowledging difficulties is also the first step to taking action to deal with them. This is central to the promotion of resilience and mental health. The mentoring sessions provided SENI learners with the experience of receiving both practical and emotional support and this in turn led to their greater willingness to recognise what was not going well for them, to see alternative possibilities and to act to pursue improvements in their situations.

<b>Table 29: Ability to acknowledge difficulties and seek support outcomes</b>	SENI	Non-SENI
1. Were able to acknowledge their difficulties to themselves	72%	31%
2. Were aware of available supports inside and outside the centre	82%	56%
3. Were willing to accept suitable help when it was offered	72%	37%
4. Were pro-active about seeking support when they felt they needed it	59%	19%

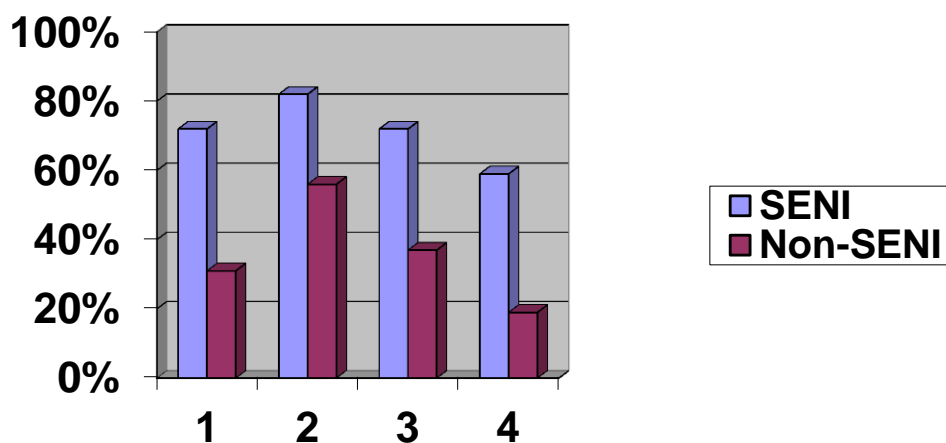
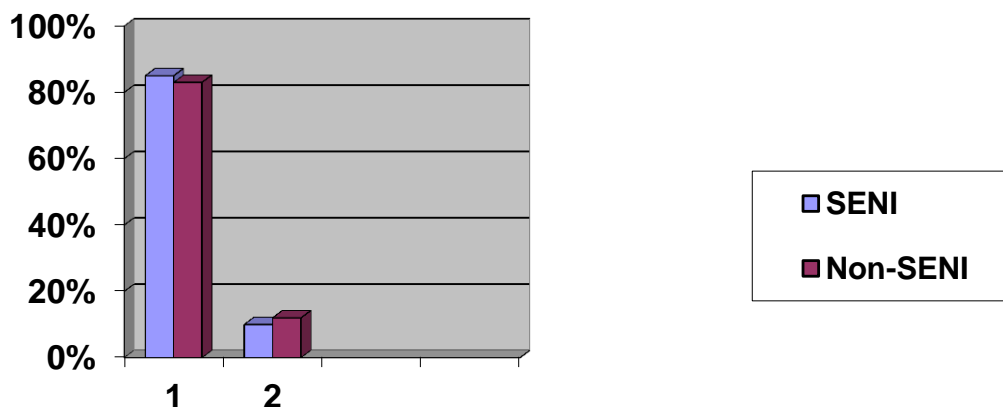


Figure 8: Graph of ability to acknowledge difficulties and seek support outcomes

### 3.4.3.9 Benefit from participation in the Youthreach programme

It is interesting to see that both groups of coordinators believed that the vast majority of their learners benefitted from their participation in the Youthreach programme in their centre. The difference between the two groups is not significant.

<b>Table 30: Percentage of learners considered to have benefited from participation in Youthreach programme</b>	SENI mean percentage	Non-SENI mean percentage
1. Benefited <i>significantly</i> from their participation in the Youthreach programme	85%	83%
2. Did not benefit to <i>any significant extent</i> from their participation	10%	12%



**Figure 9: Graph of learners considered to have benefited from participation in Youthreach programme**

In the mentor survey, the majority of respondents considered the mentoring to be extremely beneficial to their mentees, with 17% seeing it as somewhat beneficial and 4% indicating that the mentoring had not been beneficial in the case of a small minority of their learners.

<b>Table 31: Learners considered to have benefited from mentoring in SENI centres</b>	%age
Extremely	83
Somewhat	17
Not very	1
Waste of time <sup>5</sup>	3

<sup>5</sup> Specifically in the case of particular learners, while judged to be extremely or somewhat beneficial to others

### 3.4.4 Progression outcomes

Having identified the total number of learners who had attended the centre for any part of the academic year, even if they had not engaged fully with the programme and/or left after just a few weeks, coordinators were asked to identify their current location or situation within six months of the end of the year in question. These were the outcomes that were most affected by external factors. Clearly since the Initiative was introduced in January 2007 the economy has declined substantially, greatly reducing the opportunities for learners to obtain employment and increasing the competition for places in further education colleges and on vocational training courses. Analysis of the differences on this measure indicated that much of the variation between the two groups of centres was not statistically significant. The biggest differences found were in the greater number of non-SENI learners reported to have completed the Youthreach programme but not yet progressed to further education, training or employment (at the 0.05 statistical level of significance) and the greater number of non-SENI learners choosing to leave without completing the programme (at the 0.10 significance level).

<b>Table 32: Progression outcomes for learners attending for any part of the 12 month period</b>	No. of SENI learners	%age of SENI total of 857	No. of non-SENI learners	%age of non-SENI total of 989
Returned after the summer	480	56%	443	45%
Progressed successfully to further training	131	15%	111	11%
Progressed successfully to employment	41	5%	57	6%
Completed the programme but have not yet progressed to further training or employment	56	7%	130	13%
Left the centre for a practical reason like moving away, having a baby, going to prison	61	7%	68	7%
Dropped out of the centre by their own choice	63	7%	136	14%
Left as a result of being asked to leave by the board of management / VEC	45	5%	32	3%



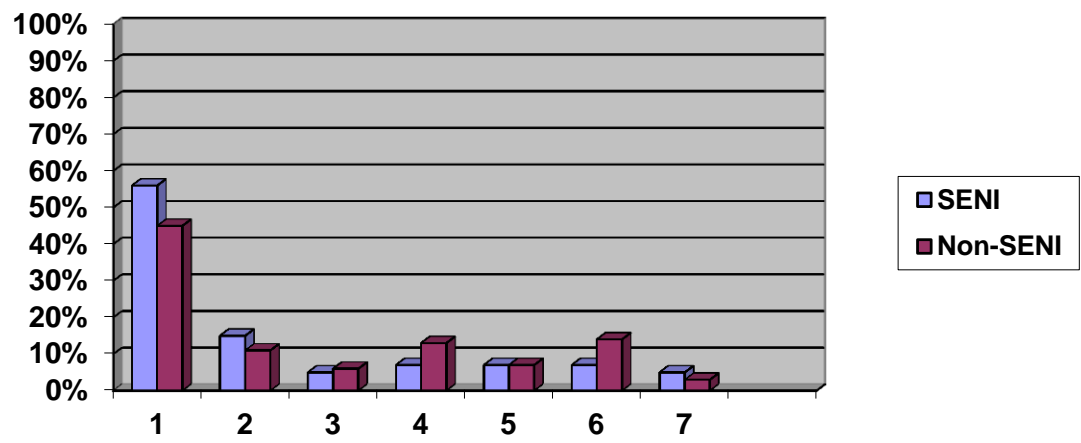


Figure 10: Graph of estimate of benefit to learners of mentoring in SENI centres

## 4. Discussion

The differences found in this study between the two groups of centres are significant and comprehensive. The resourcing and programmatic changes introduced as a result of the SENI Initiative led to distinctive differences in the interventions and supports that were made available to learners and to the capacity-building activities engaged in by the staff. These outputs and activities were consistent with the recommendations in the literature on good practice in vocational education and training for learners with special educational needs (EADSNE, 2013). They also accorded fully with the premise that secondary education (defined broadly so as to include centres of education) has a clear role to play in the development of emotional and social competencies (NIHCLE, 2009) and the promotion of mental health and wellbeing (Barry & Jenkins, 2007; Weare and Gray, 2003).

Specifically, the SEN Initiative utilised mentoring as its principal mechanism of learner support. This has been identified as a key factor in programmes that are effective in preventing early school leaving (NESSE, 2010) and in increasing disaffected young people's involvement in education, training and work (Newburn & Shiner, 2006). Research into the strategies that can be shown empirically to lift engagement and completion rates for at-risk students has identified mentoring and the coordination of welfare needs as effective targeted interventions when underpinned by an institution-wide commitment to a supportive culture and the use of what the researchers termed 'familial-based contexts' – i.e. small scale institutions such as mini-schools or centres (Lamb & Rice, 2008).

Another key factor that is strongly recommended in the literature is the building of staff capacity and the addressing of teachers' own emotional and social needs (e.g. Weare & Gray, 2003). These were addressed in the SEN Initiative through the inservice and staff support elements. In their survey the mentors indicated that they valued the training they had received and would welcome more on specific aspects of the role. They also found the professional support and supervision important. While some were satisfied with the level and form of support they received, others wrote that they would like to have more access to a supervisor and more opportunities to share their practice with mentors in other centres.

For much of its data set, the comparative study relied on the professional judgements of centre coordinators and tutors about the gains made by learners. A factor in the differences found may be due to the greater experience that staff in the SENI centres had relative to their non-SENI peers of monitoring and reporting on learner outcomes. The SENI coordinators were more familiar with the information being sought in the survey because they provided an outline of their own practice and their learner outcome details on an annual basis. This, along with the mentoring itself, meant that they observed their learners

more closely, were more aware of their difficulties and more involved in both supporting and measuring the progress made by them over time.

The main finding of this research study was that the interventions introduced as a result of the SEN Initiative led to marked and significant differences in learner outcomes across every element of the Youthreach programme.

A major factor in the substantial differences in learner outcomes between the SENI centres and non-SENI centres resulted from the significantly greater retention of learners in the SENI centres. This was evidenced by the smaller throughput over the course of the academic year, with the non-SENI centres having almost twice the number of learners failing to stay. The higher percentage of learners in the SENI centres achieving accreditation and a wide range of personal and social competencies was thus in large part due to their more successful retention in the programme.

The Youthreach programme is regularly evaluated through internal quality assurance processes (O'Brien, 2005b) and external inspections (DES, 2010) and was designated an efficient and effective programme under a recent value for money appraisal (DES, 2008). It is well-regarded internationally (e.g. European Commission, 2010, 2011; CEDEFOP, 2010, 2011; OECD/CERI, 2000; Nevala & Hawley, 2011). Thus completing the programme in itself leads to a wide range of benefits for the early school leaver and increases their chances of progressing successfully to further education, training or employment.

The interventions made possible by the Initiative – in particular, the mentoring and inter-agency liaison – increased the learners' engagement with the programme and their ability to address barriers to their participation and learning. The greatest differences between the SENI and non-SENI learners in terms of personal and social competency outcomes were found to be in the areas of engagement with learning and accreditation, initiative and willingness to take responsibility for tasks, self-awareness and ability to manage negative feelings and conflict, openness to the world around them and willingness to acknowledge difficulties and seek help. These competencies represent core employability skills as well as being indicative of greater levels of social capability and of mental wellbeing and resilience.

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# Appendix A The WebWheel model

## Rationale for mentoring

Early school leavers are at greatly increased risk of poor levels of literacy and maths, problematic alcohol and drug use, youth offending, lone parenting, homelessness and unemployment. The incidence of disability in Youthreach is very high, especially in the areas of dyslexia and mild general learning difficulties and of emotional behavioural difficulties. There is a connection between negative early experience and subsequent psychopathology or mental health problems.

Mentoring provides support at the practical, action-oriented level. The goal of mentoring is the development of an individual action plan that makes sense to the learner and takes account of their interests and desires for themselves. If there are any areas of difficulty in the young person's life these can be discussed and addressed. If the centre can help with a difficulty the action plan will detail how this will be done. If the problem is outside the brief and competency of the centre the learner will be referred to an agency or service that can help and the action plan will outline how this will be done. The centre will liaise with, or work in tandem with, outside agencies whenever any kind of joint action would be helpful to the learner.

Mentoring provides support at the motivational, future-oriented level. Engaging with the learners at a personal level, knowing what they are interested in and what they want for themselves, is the key to finding what is motivating for them. It has to be their agenda. Good relationships, the warmth and safety of the centre and the experience of success in learning all open up possibilities for the future that the learner may not have seen for themselves before.

Mentoring provides support at the connectional, reflective-oriented level. Theories from developmental psychology and psychodynamic practice emphasise the importance of the social context for the developing child and the interactions and relationships they have with their primary caregivers. These have a powerful influence on their personality development and, if inadequate or negative, can lead to social difficulties and mental health problems. Good attachment experiences provide the opportunity for acquiring important emotional, social and cognitive tools. Their absence leads to an adolescent who is characterised by mistrust, shame, doubt, guilt and a sense of inferiority. The development of *secondary attachments* later in life, however, can be a means of changing young people's negative models of themselves and of the world and allow them to acquire these emotional, social and cognitive tools.

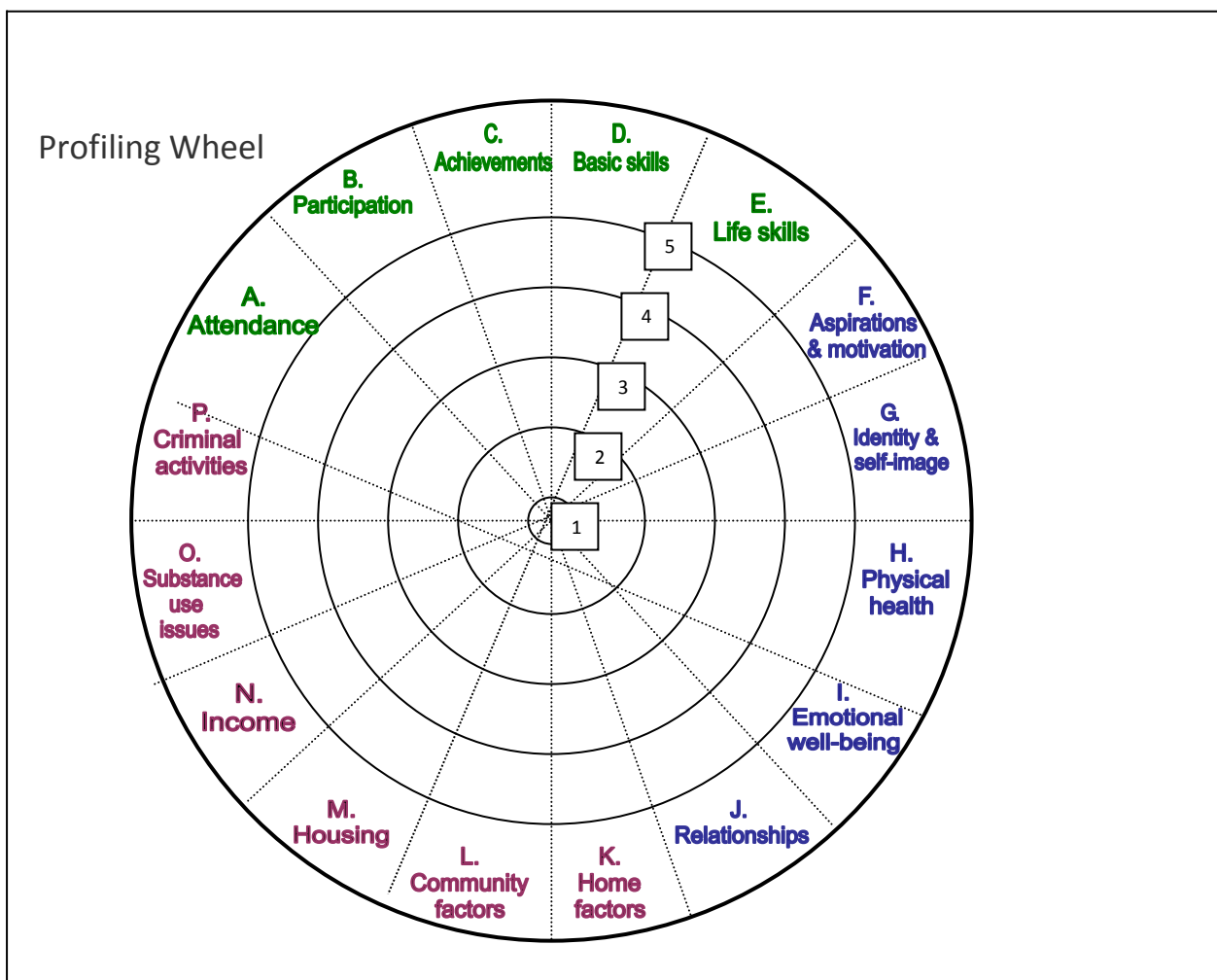
## The WebWheel process

The process is introduced to the learners in advance so they know what it is about and understand the level of control they have before they start. The focus of the sessions is on the drawing up of an individual action plan. Mentoring is best done relatively informally. The atmosphere should be relaxed and friendly but business-like. Cups of tea can be brought into the room and if a learner is very anxious or uncomfortable the session can take place in the kitchen or even over the course of a snooker game or walk. Having something to do or look at during the session can make it more comfortable and less like a counselling session.

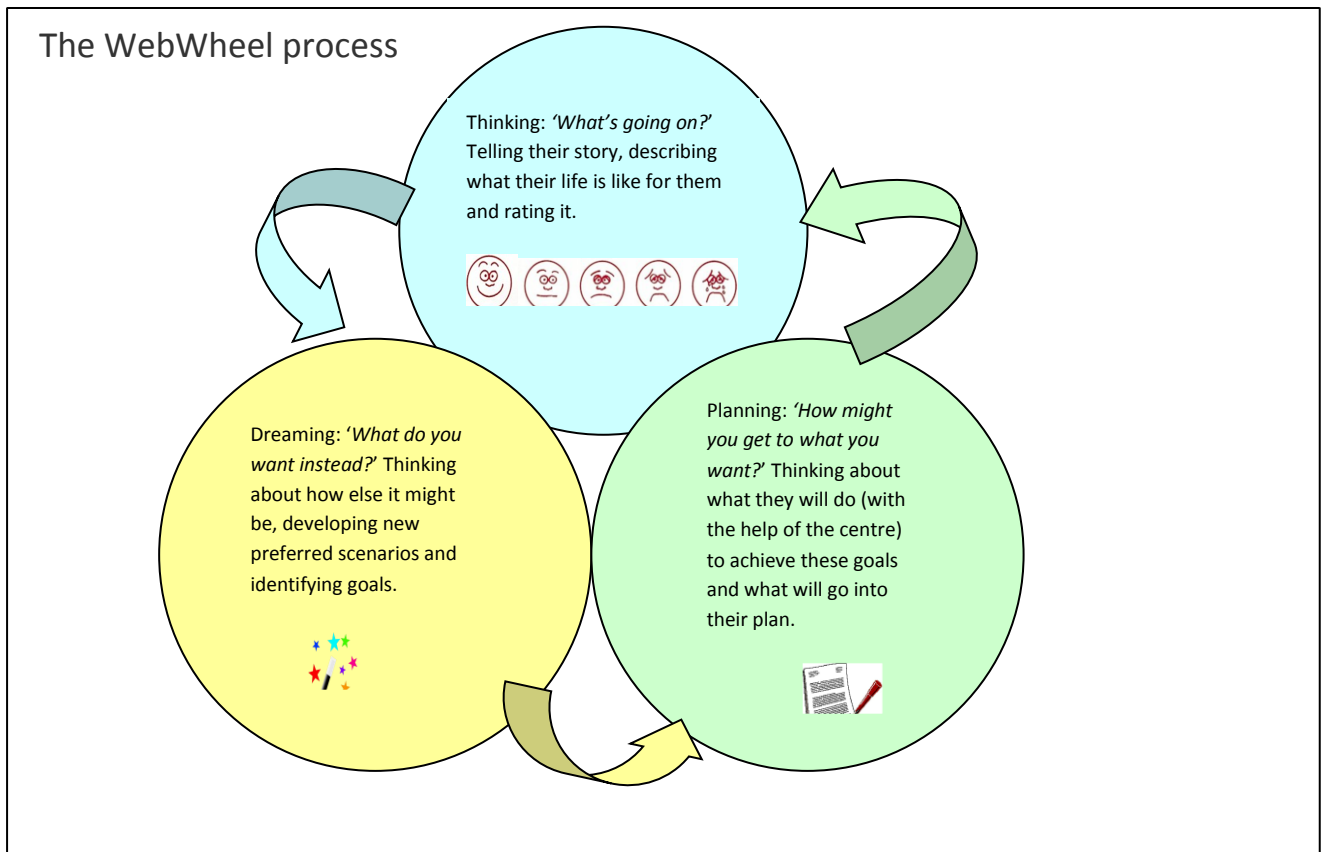
The primary skill needed by the mentor is the skill of listening. The mentor doesn't probe – the learner decides what they will tell. If they don't feel under pressure to talk they will be less likely to make things up and will be more honest and real in the sessions. Mentors need to note the difference between their teaching role and their mentoring role and to plan how they will move between them.

Mentoring is about offering help. This help largely takes the form of practical support, but it does so by paying attention to the young person and trying to understand their view of themselves and of their world. Paying close attention like this is also a form of emotional support and may in the end be what is most helpful to the learners. However, it is important that the session be managed in a simple, straightforward fashion and experienced by the learner as ordered, practical and friendly.

The mentor's job is to assist in bringing rationality into the learner's thinking by helping them to make sense of their situations, to identify their options and to make decisions about what they will do. The Wheel helps with this task.



The WebWheel process employs the Egan *skilled helper* approach (Egan, 1998), taking the learner from a) thinking about their situation in relation to a wide range of factors and evaluating how they feel about it, b) to imagining how else they would like things to be, to c) to making a plan that will help to make their situation better.








## 1. Thinking about the current situation

Mentoring is an invitation to the learner to talk about their lives and so the Wheel contains a range of factor areas to facilitate this. The development of self-awareness is a key part of the process and exploring the factors of the Wheel in a systematic way helps with this as it allows the learner to separate out different aspects of their life. It is beneficial for them to recognise what is going well as well as what is causing them problems. The same amount of time does not need to be spent on each factor as they are not all equally relevant to the learner at any particular time.

Acknowledging that something is a problem is the first step to addressing it – it doesn't matter who else thinks it's a problem if the learner doesn't, and vice versa. Applying a rating requires the learner to make some kind of evaluation of their situation and this creates distance between themselves and their problems. It also 'socialises' their situations – their problems become something they can talk about and, as a result, something they can receive help with.



## The Wheel 5-point rating scale

	<p>5: They give a rating of 5 if they feel happy about the situation under consideration or if it is an area of positive strength for them</p>
	<p>4: They give a rating of 4 if they feel they have no particular problem in this factor area</p>
	<p>3: They give a rating of 3 if they feel they have a bit of a problem in this area</p>
	<p>2: They give a rating of 2 if they feel that they have quite a big problem with some or all aspects of the situation under consideration</p>
	<p>1: They give a rating of 1 if they recognise that they have a very serious problem or feel that they are not coping generally in their life</p>

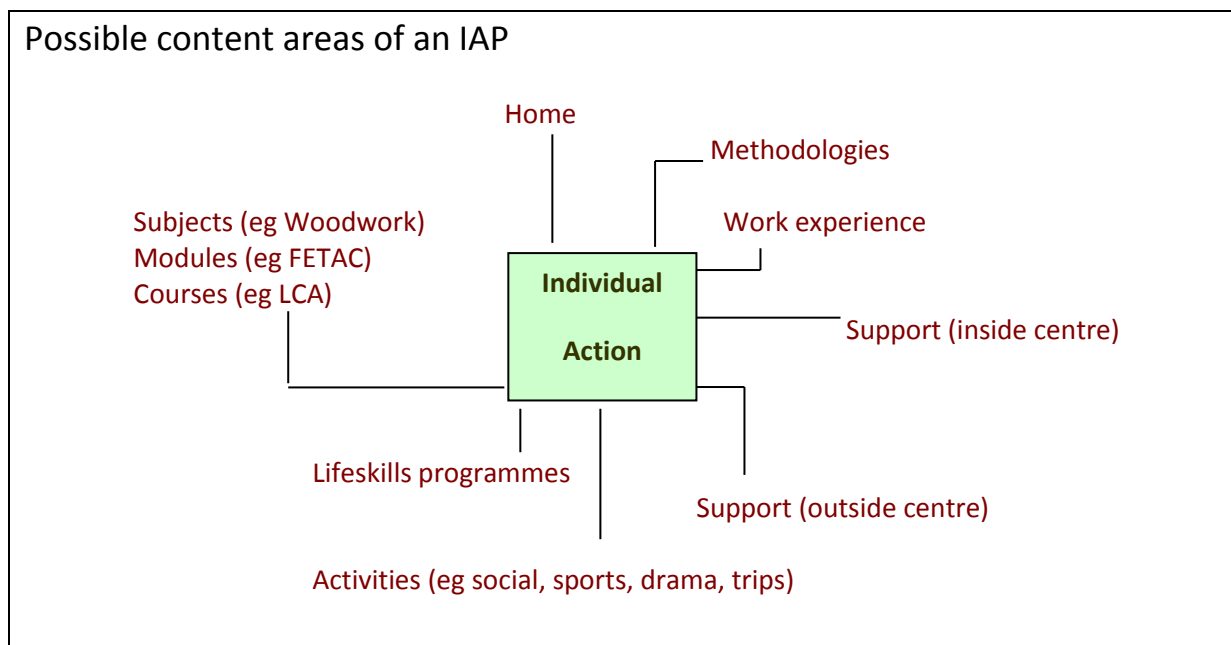
<p>Rating values:</p>	
<p>5</p>	<p>Strengths / resources / resilience factors</p>
<p>4</p>	<hr/>
<p>3</p>	
<p>2</p>	<p>Problems / difficulties needing attention</p>
<p>1</p>	

### 2. Imagining how else it might be

In order to be able to dream, the learner has to be able to get in touch with their desires. Dreams are the motivators for action and change. This is potentially the most powerful part of the process and should be given time as long as the learner is comfortable talking about their dreams and the possibilities that they can see for themselves.

### 3. Drawing up an individual action plan

The focus of the session is on action. The purpose is to come up with ideas for actions that will, hopefully, help the learner achieve their goals. The first step in the plan may simply be to do some research about what might be possible. Sometimes urgent action will have to be taken and the centre needs to have plans in place for these situations. The IAP only contains what the learner decides or agrees to. It is their document (the staff have their own teaching and centre plans that they are operating out of) and what is written in the IAP must have the learner's commitment if it is to mean anything to them.



The implementation of the plan is the responsibility of whoever is named in it – the young person themselves, the mentor, other members of staff, the centre counsellor or therapist or agencies outside the centre. The plan is continually reviewed and revised as it is a working document.

Some situations will require immediate action. Being prepared for situations that require urgent action is something that needs to be addressed in advance at staff meetings. At these meetings possible scenarios can be discussed and procedures agreed for how they will be dealt with. The contact details and referral routes for local services should be compiled and updated regularly, especially those that provide help in an emergency. Clear roles should also be allocated to members of staff in advance so that everyone knows what is required of them in an emergency situation. Critical incident plans should be devised and centre protocols drawn up and recorded.

Liaison between staff and with local agencies is necessary for the implementation of individual plans. Procedures for sharing the plans among all relevant staff are needed. The need for liaison between teachers and between teachers and support personnel will arise. It will also be important for all mentors to be aware of the local services that the learner can receive support from and the sources of practical information that are available. It is highly recommended that good communication arrangements and relationships be established between the centre and local services.

## Staff training and support

WebWheel mentoring must not be carried out without appropriate training and without staff support and supervision arrangements being put in place. The case supervision and mentor support elements are essential to the safety and welfare of both the learners and the members of staff who engage in mentoring.

It is imperative that case supervision and staff support be provided by suitably qualified personnel. This means a psychotherapist or psychologist with relevant qualifications and experience. They need to have engaged in a minimum of three years supervised clinical practice themselves. In addition to having a recognised qualification in a branch of psychology or psychotherapy they need to be a member of an appropriate professional body (e.g. the Psychological Society of Ireland or British Psychological Society, the Irish Council for Psychotherapy, the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, the Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy).

Staff support may be provided through group or individual sessions, or through a combination of both (perhaps with individual sessions being available to staff on the basis of need rather than as a matter of course). Case supervision and staff support are linked processes but can be organised as separate sessions if the centre prefers.

# Appendix B Participating centres

## Centres matched by size

### SENI centres

Miltown Malbay (13)

Kilrush (13)

Sallynoggin (25)

Sherrard St (25)

The Glen (25)

Tralee (25)

Naas (25)

Kells (25)

Granard (25)

Ballyshannon (25)

Tuam (33)

Arklow (35)

Hospital (35)

New Ross (37)

Sligo (40)

Galway (44)

Mountmellick (50)

Bonnybrook (60)

Blanchardstown (74)

Limerick (76)

### Non-SENI centres

Scarriff (14)

Tramore (18)

Birr (20)

Rush (25)

Knocknaheeny (25)

Kilkenny (25)

Carlow (25)

Killarney (25)

Portumna (25)

Athy (30)

Ballymahon (30)

Ballinrobe (40)

Letterkenny (40)

Clondalkin (50)

Ballaghaderreen (50)

Wexford (50)

Tallaght (50)

Harmonstown (52)

Ballyfermot (52)

Drogheda (60)

### Size:

Small: < 20

Medium: 20 – 30

Large: 31 – 50

Very large: > 50

Centre size	SENI centres	Non centres
Small	2	2
Medium	8	9
Large	7	6
Very large	3	3
Total no. of places	710	706

## Demographics of centre location

### SENI centres

Hospital (Village; 500)  
 Miltown Malbay (Village; 1,000)  
 Granard (Village; 1,000)  
 Kilrush (Small town; 2,500)  
 Ballyshannon (Small town; 2,500)

Mountmellick (Mid-sized town; 4,500)  
 Kells (Mid-sized town; 6,000)  
 New Ross (Mid-sized town; 7,500)  
 Tuam (Mid-sized town; 8,000)  
 Arklow (Mid-sized town; 13,000)  
 Sligo (Mid-sized town; 19,500)

Naas (Large town; 20,500)  
 Tralee (Large town; 23,500)

Galway (City; 77,000)  
 Limerick (City; 91,500)  
 The Glen (City; 198,500)  
 Bonnybrook (City; 1,110,500)  
 Blanchardstown (City; 1,110,500)  
 Sallynoggin (City; 1,110,500)

### Non-SENI centres

Scariff (Village; 1,000)  
 Portumna (Village; 1,500)  
 Ballymahon (Village; 1,500)  
 Ballaghaderreen (Small town; 2,000)  
 Ballinrobe (Small town; 2,500)

Birr (Mid-sized town; 6,000)  
 Athy (Mid-sized town; 10,000)  
 Tramore (Mid-sized town; 10,500)  
 Killarney (Mid-sized town; 14,000)  
 Letterkenny (Mid-sized town; 19,500)  
 Wexford (Mid-sized town; 20,000)

Carlow (Large town; 23,000)  
 Kilkenny (Large town; 24,500)  
 Drogheda (Large town; 38,500)

Knocknaheeny, (City; 198,500)  
 Tallaght (City; 1,110,500)  
 Harmonstown (City; 1,110,500)  
 Ballyfermot (City; 1,110,500)  
 Rush (City; 1,110,500)  
 Clondalkin (City; 1,110,500)  
 Sherrard St (City; 1,110,500)

### Location:

Village or small town: <4,000  
 Mid-sized town: 4,000 – 20,000  
 Large town: 20,500 – 75,000  
 City (urban or suburban): > 75,000

Centre location	SENI centres	Control centres
Village or small town	5	5
Mid-sized town	6	6
Large town	2	3
City (urban or suburban)	7	6
Total population <sup>6</sup> (with cities)	1,587,500	1,483,500

<sup>6</sup> Counting Dublin only once in each list

# Appendix C Learner difficulties assessment

## Difficulties affecting education and training

### **Learning issue and behavioural issues**

Broad range of learning difficulties (including Mild GLD) – not always diagnosed  
Literacy difficulties  
Numeracy difficulties  
Lack of basic skills  
Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD) / dyslexia  
Short attention span, poor concentration  
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)  
Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)  
Poor gross/fine motor skills / dyspraxia  
Speech impediments  
Poor language skills – e.g. finding the right word to express themselves, holding a conversation  
Poor IT skills  
Auditory and visual processing difficulties  
Gifted students requiring own programme  
Disruptive behaviours  
Challenging behaviours  
Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)  
Theft of items in the centre

### **Motivation and engagement in education**

Lack of engagement with and/or interest in centre activities  
Lack of interest in academic achievement  
Poor time-keeping and attendance  
Lack of drive and clear long-term goals  
Lack of personal responsibility taken for learning  
Lack of self-belief in possibility of progression  
Lack of confidence in value of progression  
Attendance for allowance only  
Youth of some learners (only 15 years of age)

### **Previous school experience**

History of poor school attendance and achievement  
Interrupted history  
History of being bullied in school  
English as second language  
Expulsion from school  
Negative preconceived ideas about education  
Lack of experiences of success

# Gaps in personal and social development

## **Social**

Lack of social skills  
Lack of social niceties / awareness of social norms and rules  
Difficulties interacting with peers / poor personal and interpersonal skills  
Poor communication skills  
Difficulties in forming relationships with peers  
Lack of personal awareness  
Introversion, social phobia  
Lack of empathy  
Asperger Syndrome  
Delayed maturation  
Aggression  
Anger management issues  
Knowledge of or interest in political system

## **Mental health**

Lack of hope / belief in future  
Poor coping skills  
Depression and apathy  
Insecurity and anxiety  
Mood swings  
Low self-esteem, lack of confidence, feelings of worthlessness  
Bullied  
Self-harming  
Negatively impacted by suicides or overdoses in local community  
Attempted suicides / suicidal ideation  
Panic attacks  
Eating disorders  
Bereavement  
Phobias  
Experience of sexual or physical abuse  
Tourette's Syndrome

## **Physical health**

Health issues, including mental health  
Problems with sexual health  
Pregnancy and miscarriage  
Poor physical health, incl. diabetes and epilepsy  
Weight issues, poor diet, low nutritional value – underweight and overweight  
Abuse of sunbeds  
Lack of exercise  
Poor eyesight

### **Self-presentation and -organisation**

Weight issues, poor diet, low nutritional value – underweight and overweight  
Low standard of hygiene and self-presentation  
Inability to organise self  
Lack of basic life skills

## **Barriers to participation and progress in the programme**

### **Lack of support from home**

Lack of structure, routine and discipline in home  
Absence of parental figures / parental guidance  
Parental substance use or mental health difficulties  
One parent families  
Uncertainty about living arrangements / short term homelessness  
Responsibility for caring for family members  
Lack of nourishment  
Lack of social conscience  
Basic needs for food and clothing not met

### **Difficulties in the home situation**

Chaotic living circumstances  
Unstable home environments  
Volatile family circumstances / violence, conflict and relational difficulties  
Lack of positive relationships in the home  
Difficult financial circumstances and worries

### **Detrimental lifestyle choices**

Substance misuse – both prescribed and illegal drugs, alcohol  
Poor time management – e.g. playing computer games throughout the night  
Involvement in criminal activities  
Anti-social activities and offending behaviour  
Involvement with the courts / justice system / probation services  
Gang membership  
Gambling  
Prostitution  
Debt  
Threats of physical violence

### **Community or cultural issues**

Peers opting out of education  
Peer pressure  
Travelling community culture, incl. early marriage  
Lack of motivation  
Lack of vision for the future  
Education not valued or promoted



Community violence, including family feuding  
Poor English (in foreign nationals)  
Different cultural priorities (e.g. weddings, funerals, etc)  
Fear of moving out of locality  
Lack of role models

### **Lone parenthood**

Parenting commitments  
Childcare difficulties

### **Rural isolation**

Lack of public transport  
Lack of access to support services

### **Housing**

Poor housing  
Uncertainty about living arrangements / short term homelessness  
Homelessness

### **In care or living alone**

In the care of the HSE  
Transition from care to independent living  
Inability to manage bills, authority figures and landlords

### **Current economic context**

Lack of motivation to complete courses in light of current economic situation

# Appendix D Comparison study survey form

Centre  
Coordinator  
Date  
Number of learner places in centre  
Total no. of learners who attended for *any* part of the year  
No. of full time staff (including coordinator)  
No. of part-time staff

## 1. Assessment of learner difficulties

Under each of the three headings below, please describe three or four difficulties that you noticed in your learners during the year:

- a) *Education and training:*
- b) *Personal and social development:*
- c) *Barriers to participation and progress in the programme:*

## 2. Core practices

a) How many learners attended your centre for any part of the last academic year?

For how many of these learners were the following measures put in place?

- i) *Assignment of a key worker*
- ii) *Assignment of a mentor*
- iii) *Provision of regular key working sessions (at least one a term)*
- iv) *Provision of regular mentoring session using the WebWheel process (at least one a fortnight)*
- v) *Development of an individual action plan for/with the learner*
- vi) *Engagement in inter-agency work on behalf of the learner*

b) Please say *how many* (if any) members of your staff were acting as key workers and *how many* learners each one was doing key working with.

c) Please say *how many* (if any) members of your staff were acting as mentors and *how many* learners each one was mentoring.

d) Please describe, if applicable, how you timetabled *keyworking* sessions (e.g. length and frequency of sessions) and any other follow-on work that was related to keyworking.

e) Please describe, if applicable, how you timetabled *mentoring* sessions (e.g. length and frequency of sessions) and any other follow-on work that was related to mentoring.

f) Please describe any specific *teaching interventions* that occurred in small groups or one-to-one settings to address the special needs of particular learners and indicate the number of learners that received these.

g) Please describe any specific *support interventions* that occurred in small groups or one-to-one settings to address the special needs of particular learners and indicate the number of learners that received these.

h) Please name any *local services and agencies* with whom centre staff liaised for information and advice and / or with whom you put collaborative actions in place to address the special needs of particular learners.

i) Please describe the *work experience* preparation, practice and review sessions that were carried out and indicate the number of learners that engaged in work experience.

j) What staff training courses or sessions (if any) did your staff attend during this period  
i) *as a whole team*  
ii) *as a sub-group of your staff*  
iii) *as an individual member on behalf of the centre or for their own professional development*

k) Please describe *how many* staff support sessions (if any) took place during the year  
i) *for case supervision (i.e. to discuss students' needs or difficulties only)*  
*Group sessions*  
*One-to-one sessions*  
ii) *to support staff (i.e. with a specific focus on staff members' needs or difficulties)*  
*Group sessions*  
*One-to-one sessions*  
iii) *for both case supervision and staff support within the same session (i.e. focusing on either or both learner and staff member difficulties)*  
*Group sessions*  
*One-to-one sessions*  
iv) *to build and maintain the staff team (i.e. with a focus on centre organisational development)*  
v) *to support the coordinator in their role as centre manager*  
*What qualifications did the person(s) providing case supervision and/or staff support have?*

### 3. Outcomes

a) Please describe the *formal accreditation*, i.e. Junior Cert, Leaving Cert, FETAC and other awards that was achieved by your learners during the year.

Certification	No. of learners achieving	
Junior Cert 1- 3 subjects		
Junior Cert 4 - 6 subjects		
Junior Cert 7 - 9 subjects		
Leaving Cert Applied 1 – 3 subjects		
Leaving Cert Applied 4 - 6 subjects		
Leaving Cert Applied 7 - 9 subjects		
General Leaving Cert (full or partial)		
FETAC	Major award	Minor award <sup>7</sup>
FETAC level 1		
FETAC level 2		
FETAC level 3		
FETAC level 4		
FETAC level 5		
ECDL		
Other (please specify)		

b) How many learners in total attended the centre for any part of the 12 month period from Sept 2011 to Aug 2012?

How many of these learners:

Returned after the summer?

Progressed successfully to further training?

Progressed successfully to employment?

Completed the programme but have not yet progressed to further training or employment?

Left the centre for a practical reason like moving away, having a baby, going to prison?

Dropped out of the centre by their own choice?

Left as a result of being asked to leave by the board of management / VEC?

c) By the end of the year for how many of your learners was some kind of contact made between the centre and an outside agency or service (e.g. a referral organised, a collaborative arrangement made, a joint initiative put in place)?

d) Please identify the number of your learners who made significant progress in the following subskill areas by acquiring new or increased abilities / skills or by showing increased levels of competence and effectiveness. Only count those who you consider showed a satisfactory level of improvement over the course of the year:

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>7</sup> Please specify the number of *learners* who received minor awards for each level (and not the number of records of achievement or awards received)

<b>The development of basic skills</b>	No.
<i>Acquired literacy and numeracy skills</i>	
<i>Acquired information and communication technology skills</i>	
<i>Were effective in the use of oral communication skills</i>	
<i>Were able to apply processing skills when studying (e.g. attention, memory)</i>	

<b>The development of life skills</b>	No.
<i>Showed practical knowledge and skills in relation to accessing public facilities and services (e.g. sourcing information, filling in forms)</i>	
<i>Presented appropriately (e.g. in terms of practical competence, reliability, appearance, etc)</i>	
<i>Showed knowledge and understanding of the world outside the locality</i>	
<i>Engaged in the world (e.g. participating in community events, travelling outside the locality)</i>	
<i>Managed money effectively (e.g. budgeting, planning, saving)</i>	
<i>Were at ease eating in public (both inside and outside the centre)</i>	
<i>Were able to play and have fun with others (e.g. joke, tease, enjoy recreational activities)</i>	

<b>The acquisition of formal accreditation in academic and vocational subjects</b>	No.
<i>Achieved accreditation in formal study areas whether academic or vocational</i>	
<i>Showed motivation to learn and made real progress in understanding and study skills</i>	
<i>Showed academic ambition and an interest in progressing to further education or training after they leave the centre</i>	

<b>The acquisition of vocational skills</b>	No.
<i>Gained practical skills in vocational subjects</i>	
<i>Achieved non-formal or informal accreditation in:</i>	
<i>Driving, safe pass, computer skills, First Aid, etc</i>	
<i>Art, design, photography, film, graphics, etc</i>	
<i>Music, sound technology, drama, performance, etc</i>	
<i>Gaisce, Failte Ireland, Enterprise, etc</i>	
<i>Sports, fitness, outdoor pursuits, etc</i>	
<i>SPHE, sexual health, life skills, Copping On, etc</i>	
<i>Other</i>	
<i>Gained practical skills in useful but non-formal vocational skill areas</i>	

<b>Development of effectiveness in work and learning settings (e.g. study skills, time management, working with people)</b>	No.
<i>Behaved appropriately in context</i>	
<i>Participated in and engaged with learning experiences</i>	
<i>Successfully completed work experience placement(s)</i>	
<i>Developed a personal career path plan (e.g. in relation to work, further education or family life)</i>	
<i>Showed a willingness to take responsibility for tasks</i>	
<i>Were able to work on their own initiative</i>	
<i>Were able to work as part of a team</i>	
<i>Were able to cope with complex situations and make reasonable judgements in them</i>	

<b>Socio-emotional development (i.e. ability to manage emotions and relationships)</b>	No.
<i>Were able to manage negative feelings and express them appropriately</i>	
<i>Showed self-regulation</i>	
<i>Showed self-awareness</i>	
<i>Showed skill at interacting with others</i>	
<i>Showed understanding and consideration for others</i>	
<i>Were assertive and confident when dealing with conflict and showed a willingness to employ problem-solving approaches</i>	

<b>Resilience and mental health (including confidence and self-esteem)</b>	No.
<i>Showed happiness or contentment</i>	
<i>Showed self-esteem and confidence</i>	
<i>Were able to cope with their circumstances</i>	
<i>Were open to new experiences</i>	

<b>Ability to acknowledge difficulties<sup>8</sup> and to seek out and benefit from available support services within and outside the centre</b>	No.
<i>Were able to acknowledge their difficulties to themselves</i>	
<i>Were aware of available supports inside and outside the centre</i>	
<i>Were willing to accept suitable help when it was offered</i>	
<i>Were pro-active about seeking support when they felt they needed it</i>	

e) Of all the learners who attended your centre during the last academic year what percentage, in your view:

<i>Benefited significantly from their participation in the Youthreach programme</i>	%
<i>Did not benefit to any significant extent from their participation</i>	%

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<sup>8</sup> This would be indicated by increased reporting by learners of difficulties (including serious ones such as suicidal thoughts, risk-taking activities, self-harming behaviours, drug and alcohol misuse, involvement in abusive relationships)

# Appendix E Mentor survey questionnaire

Please respond to the following anonymous questionnaire. The identity of the centre is required but not of the individual mentor completing the questionnaire.

## Name of centre

### 1. Experience

For how many years have you been working in Youthreach:

>10 years      6 – 10      1 – 5      < 1 year

What is your role in the centre?

Coordinator      Resource person      Subject teacher  
Counsellor      SEN coordinator      Other (please specify)

Do you work full-time

or part-time in the centre

If part-time how many hours are you working per week this year?

How many years have you been WebWheel mentoring?

5 – 6      3 – 4      1 – 2      < 1 year

How many learners did you mentor last year?

< 3      4 – 7      8 – 12      > 12

How beneficial do you think the mentoring was to your learners?

Extremely beneficial      Somewhat beneficial      Not very beneficial      A waste of time

### 2. Training

What training in mentoring have you received?

Introduction to WebWheel model		Year
Review of WebWheel model		Year
Mentoring skills course		Year
Other training in mentoring skills	Details:	Year
Training in counselling or psychotherapy	Details:	Year

### **3. Support and supervision**

Who provides staff support and supervision to mentors in your centre?

What are their professional qualifications?

Please rate your level of satisfaction with this support and supervision:

Excellent      Satisfactory      Just adequate      Unsatisfactory      Totally inadequate

Please outline the nature of any further support you would like to receive in relation to your mentoring work:

### **4. Evaluation**

Please outline any aspect of the mentoring work that you find troubling or difficult:

Are there any changes that would make your mentoring job easier?