

7th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue

Action Research Guidance

What is action research?

Action research (also called participatory action research) is a well established qualitative research methodology that combines taking action with learning. It is based on experiential learning so has strong overlaps with youth work and non-formal education.

In the context of Youth Dialogue, action research can be used to simultaneously combine implementation and consultation. Typically participants work in small groups, meeting repeatedly over an extended period of time. They identify something they wish to change or implement and attempt to do so, meeting regularly to evaluate their progress and learning.

This can involve gathering evidence of the local situation and presenting it to local/national decision makers, in order to resolve identified issues. However, it can also include doing small volunteering projects or activities which will address the problems directly.

Within the Youth Dialogue, action research groups can also give reports of their work to the Working Groups. Writing groups can analyse this information and include it in their National reports to help raise the issues and ideas to National and European level.

This guidance gives a short overview of action research and how it might be used within Youth Dialogue, as well as links to further more detailed resources. Implementing action research will require a facilitator or researcher who is already experienced with the process. However, as it is linked to non-formal education many aspects will be familiar to non formal educators.

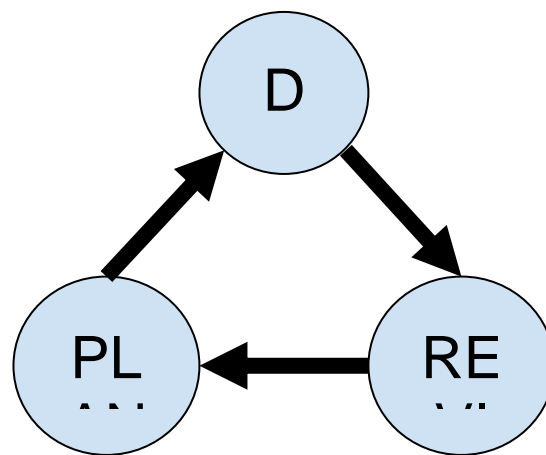
This guidance is intended for people who already have some familiarity and experience with action research and we advise that your working group only uses this method if you have access to someone who is familiar with the concept to support it.

Practicalities of running an action research project

Action research is based around facilitating small groups of people (usually no more than 15) who are committed to meeting regularly for a period of around 2 months or longer to try and make positive change. These groups can include a mixture of young people and decision makers.

The PLAN - DO- REVIEW cycle

One way of thinking about action research is as a cycle of non-formal learning (or experiential learning) which the group takes part in collectively. This can be described in three stages, which repeat as a cycle *Plan, Do and Review*. In this section we have described how this model could be used within Youth Dialogue.



Stage 1: PLAN

This stage usually takes place in one meeting. During this meeting the group comes together to identify what problem they will try to solve and what it is they are trying to take action on.

In this meeting the group should select and discuss one or more of Youth Dialogue guiding questions as a starting point. The questions which start “What measures and actions can we take....” will be particularly useful.

The emphasis of the discussion should be on what actions the group members themselves could do immediately in the next few weeks, rather than what other people need to do, or what changes need to happen in the long term.

At the end of the meeting the group should agree some sort of actions they will take over the next few weeks. These actions could include things like:

- 1) Finding out more information about or speaking to others about the problem
- 2) Lobbying decision makers
- 3) Practical activities to directly solve the problem.

At this stage, as part of finding out or speaking to others, the group might wish to consult with other young people to find out their views. If they decide to do this, some of the other

methodological tools in the Youth Dialogue could be used by them, such as the focus groups or the survey.

Stage 2: Do

This stage will last around 3-4 weeks and is focused on members of the group trying to undertake the actions they have set for themselves. Members of the group might work on their own or continue to meet as a group.

Many of the actions the group have set may not go as planned or may not be successful, this is a natural part of the process, it allows the group to learn by doing. For some young people this stage will mean trying and learning new things, and they may benefit from youth work support during this process. Some actions will also be very successful and will start to lead to new ideas.

The facilitator should decide how long this stage will last. The group has had sufficient time to attempt all of the actions - however this does not necessarily mean that all of the actions need to be completed before the next stage starts.

Stage 3: Review

This stage takes place as a single group meeting.

During this meeting the group meets to reflect on the action they have taken, and considers how successful they have been. They discuss what they have learnt from the actions and what changes have been created by them.

Through this process the group should have developed a new understanding of the situation and maybe brought about some positive change.

At the end of the meeting the group should agree a new set of actions that they will undertake over the next few weeks. This then becomes the start of a new PLAN stage and the groups can now begin to repeat the action research cycle.

Reporting from action research projects to working groups

It is important you build a mechanism for reporting the messages that come from action learning groups to your working group. This will enable the working groups to gather common messages, problems, issues or solutions identified within the action research groups to use at National and European level. These messages can be included in the Working Group's Youth Dialogue report.

A simple way to do this is for each action research group to produce a short report at the end of each cycle and send it to the working group. This could detail:

1. What issues or problems were they trying to address and why?
2. What actions did they plan to take and what was the result?
3. What did they learn from this process about how these issues or problems could be further addressed or solved?

However, you might also want to consider a direct meeting between the action research group and a member of the National Working Group. The opportunity for the action research group to present their findings to the national working group can provide a valuable and rewarding climax to the project.

An example of action research in practice

Members of Smalltown Youth Project meet together to form an action group. Their group consists of 8 young people, a youth leader and a local politician.

The planning stage:

In their first meeting the group agrees to work on the question "What can we do to implement Youth Goal# 6 Quality employment for all". During the meeting they agree that within Smalltown the big problem is that young people do not have enough access to vocational education and that many young people don't get interviews when they apply for jobs.

At the end of the meeting they agree to take two actions:

1. Contact the local schools and colleges to discuss why there is not enough vocational and educational courses on offer for young people.
2. The local politician agrees to find out what sort of jobs are available by speaking to the local labour board.

The doing stage:

The young people in the group contact all of the schools and colleges in Smalltown, but only half of them agree to a meeting. They meet with these Schools and Colleges who explain that there are lots of vocational courses on offer, but they sometimes struggle to find enough students to fill all the places. These courses cover topics such as sports science, healthcare and metalwork.

The local politician and the youth leader meet with the labour board. The labour board explains that most of the jobs in Smalltown are in the field of manufacturing because a new employer has recently opened in the area that makes cars. This employer has told them that when they advertise for jobs, often many young people do not have any qualifications in manufacturing and so they don't get interviews.

The review stage

The group meets together to review what they have learnt and what to do next. Based on the doing stage they now have a new understanding of the problems in Smalltown. They decide that although there are many vocational course young people are not aware of them. They also decide that another problem is that the school and colleges do not offer the right type of vocational course. They agree that these courses should be more focused on manufacturing, as this will help young people get jobs with the car manufacturer. The young people in the group identify that they were disappointed that not all of the schools and colleges replied to them and the group agrees that their local politician might be able to encourage more replies.

For their next actions the group decides to:

1. Write a short report of what they have learnt to send to the National Working Group. This will help raise issues of schools and colleges offering vocational courses which do not match the jobs available on a national level.

2. Organise a meeting between schools, the car manufacturer and the labour board to discuss the issue further. The local politician agrees to host this meeting, to encourage more schools and colleges to join.

3. The youth leader decides to invite schools and colleges into the youth project on a monthly basis to promote the existing vocational courses to members of the youth projects.

The next cycle:

The group repeat the Plan-Do-Review cycle focusing on these three actions. The meeting with the car manufacturer, the labour board and the schools and colleges goes well. The car manufacturer agrees to work with one of the colleges to create apprenticeships. Inviting schools and colleges into the youth project to promote their courses is also successful, and a number of young people in the project sign up for courses. However the group realises that doing this on a monthly basis takes too much time. They decide that a single annual "Careers event" is better.

At the end of the next cycle, the group sends another report to the National Working Group highlighting the importance of having annual career events in youth projects.

Other resources for action research

There are a wide number of resources available online to support action research. Many of these will contain more detailed advice and practical instructions for facilitating groups and running meetings. However, as action research is a flexible process they may not all follow the same plan - do - review concept outlined in this document.

Some good examples are:

- Unicef - [Participatory Action Research Guide](#)
- Durham University - [Participatory Action Research Toolkit](#)
- Hall et al - [A Toolkit for Participatory Action Research](#)
- Unicef Innocenti Research Brief - [Adolescent Participation in Research: Innovation, rationale and next steps](#)
- Connected Communities - [Participatory action research - towards a more fruitful knowledge.](#)
- Rain Barrel Communication - [Participatory Action Research Toolkit](#)
- [PEER EU Training Manual](#) (multiple languages available)
- The Railway Children - [Be real with me](#)