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UNESCO Chair in  
Children, Youth and Civic Engagement  
Ireland  
CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE



NUI Galway  
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# Relationships Explored and Life Uncovered

A Briefing Paper on the Foróige **REAL U** Programme Evaluation







'Here you feel more confident to talk'...



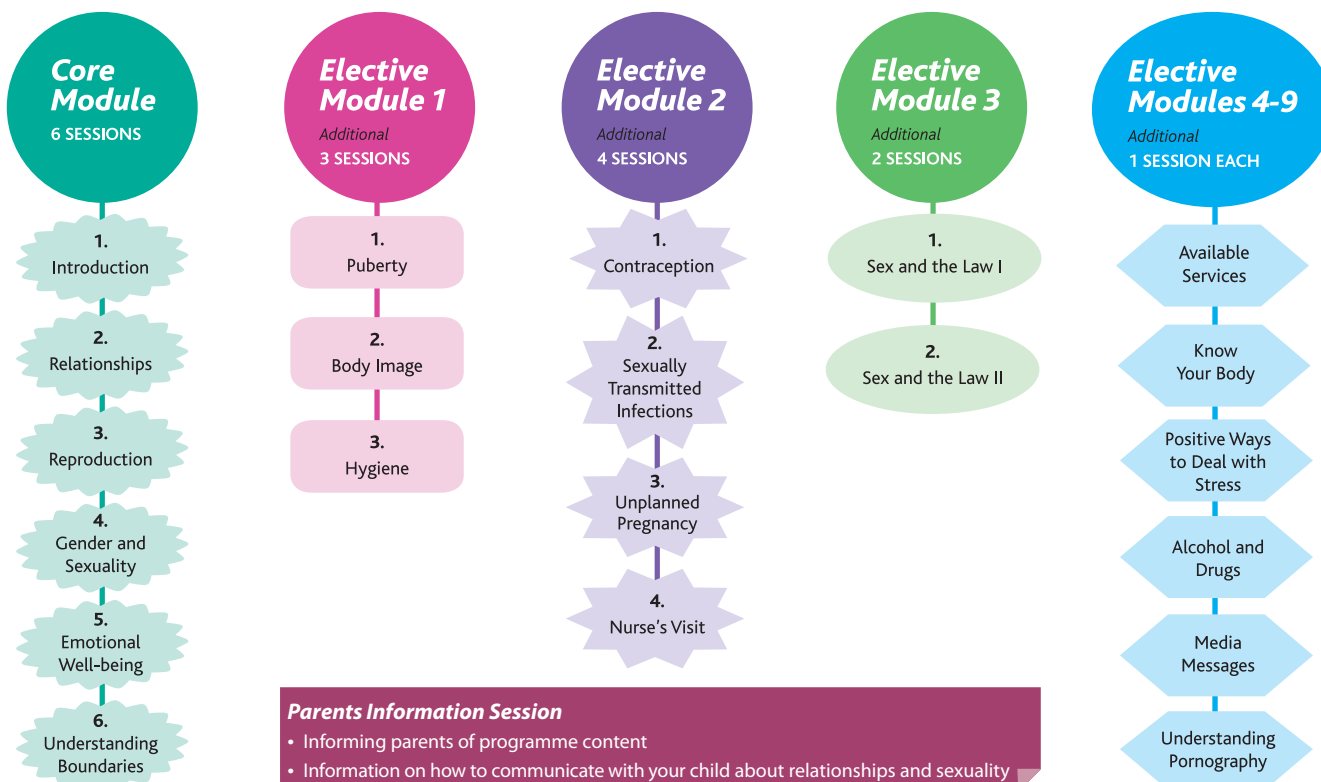
## Introduction

Foróige is an Irish national youth organisation that enables young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society'. In 2011, Foróige developed the REAL U: Relationships Explored and Life Uncovered programme, a relationships and sexuality programme for delivery to young people aged 12-18 years in youth work settings. The programme was developed in response to a need identified both in research (CPP, 2012) and among Foróige staff for new models of relationships and sexuality education for young people to enable the provision of factual information and opportunities to discuss the moral, social and emotional issues associated with sex and relationships. Many of the young people involved with Foróige's services are socially and economically disadvantaged, a group that has been identified as at greater risk of missing out on adequate relationships and sexuality education (Fullerton, 2006). This document summarises the findings of an evaluation of the REAL U programme undertaken by the UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre at NUI, Galway.



## Description of the REAL U programme

The REAL U programme engages young people aged 12-18 years in developing and building positive relationships. The programme is set out in a comprehensive manual, designed for use by a trained facilitator leading a group of 10-15 participants aged between 12 and 18 years old. It is recommended that the programme be delivered over 12 weeks for one hour and 30 minutes every week, drawing on modules appropriate for younger and older age groups. Two days training in delivery of the REAL U programme is provided by staff of the Foróige Best Practice Unit for youth workers both within and outside of Foróige. Foróige received funding from the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme to fund the design, print and roll-out of the manual beyond the Foróige organisation over a three-year period.





YOUNG PEOPLE LEADING  
HAPPIER, HEALTHIER  
& MORE FULFILLED LIVES



## Aims and methodology of the study

The key aims of the study were to assess the outcomes for young people taking part in the programme and to explore the perspectives of stakeholders regarding the programme, its implementation and outcomes. The evaluation was mixed methods, with a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods used to address the research questions.

Outcomes from the programme were assessed using a quasi-experimental strand, whereby quantitative data were collected from youth participants in the REAL U programme over three time periods (between September 2012 and March 2013). A total of 231 young people completed online surveys at one or more times. The survey included questions in relation to: attitudes to relationships, attitudes to sexualities, mental and social well-being, assertiveness, sexual assertiveness and knowledge of issues related to sexuality. There was also scope within the online instruments to provide feedback in relation to the programme. In order to gather qualitative feedback from young people in relation to their views on the REAL U programme, four focus groups were held throughout Ireland. In addition, a total of 110 practitioners trained in the REAL U programme (51% of total) completed a survey as part of the evaluation, while youth workers throughout Ireland also took part in focus groups.



## Key findings



**There is a significant need for the programme:** Baseline data gathered from young people indicates that there is a need for the programme, with misinformation regarding sexual knowledge and prejudicial attitudes evident among a minority of the participants. The need for the programme was also highlighted strongly by youth work practitioners.

**There was evidence of effectiveness in two key areas:** Outcomes data showed statistically significant effects for the young people who had taken part in REAL U in relation to attitudes to LGBT and knowledge about sex.

**Young people value and enjoy the REAL U programme:** Young people rated the programme highly, with 98% rating it as good, very good or excellent, while 84% said that they would recommend the programme to other young people. Qualitative data highlighted that young people found the programme to be relevant, fun and insightful and participants said that it made them better informed and more aware of the consequences of their actions.

**Youth workers believe the programme is effective:** A survey of staff trained in the REAL U programme indicated that all respondents believe the programme is effective in meeting its objectives. Asked if they felt the REAL U programme is effective in what it sets out to do, 100% of survey respondents felt that it was. This view was also expressed in staff focus groups and young people's focus groups. The reasons for effectiveness identified were as follows:

- The programme is 'perfectly pitched' to the needs, interests and concerns of young people and scenarios are easy for them to identify with. They therefore engage fully and maximise their learning from the programme.
- It encourages openness around sexuality among young people & dispels myths.
- It is considered an excellent resource for facilitators as all the information needed is provided. An attractive ring-bound manual allows for relevant sections to be taken out as needed.
- The content can be adapted based on needs and interests of particular age groups.
- The programme supports staff to address difficult topics such as pornography, STIs, contraception and negotiating consent.
- It places sexual health in a broader context of holistic well-being, particularly emotional health and relationships.



While participants in the research indicated a high level of satisfaction with the programme, some minor suggestions regarding improvements to the programme were made.





## Conclusions

The study found that the REAL U programme is filling a gap with regard to relationship and sexuality education for young people in Ireland. The REAL U programme is seen by practitioners as effective in engaging young people, responding to their needs and impacting on their knowledge and attitudes in this area. The availability of a comprehensive, flexible programme of this nature in youth work settings represents an important development in the move towards comprehensive sex education for young people in Ireland.

The full evaluation report can be accessed at [www.foroige.ie](http://www.foroige.ie)



## Quality Assurance Statement

*This is by way of confirmation that the independent evaluation of the Foróige REAL U: Relationships Explored & Life Uncovered Programme was conducted to a high level and reviewed by subject matter experts. The results accruing from the study indicate a rigorous evaluation of the programme and are presented in a fair and unbiased manner.*

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