

# Federation Strategy 2017-2021

YMCAs in England  
and Wales

A close-up portrait of a young man with short, dark, slightly messy hair and light blue eyes. He has a light stubble and is looking directly at the camera with a neutral, calm expression. He is wearing a light grey, short-sleeved polo shirt. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting and a blue light source on the left.

# YMCA



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## Introduction

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YMCA is the largest and oldest youth charity in the world. From our beginnings in London in 1844, we've grown into a global inclusive Christian movement, helping more than 58 million people across 119 countries. Across England and Wales there are 116 YMCAs. Each one is a thriving and active community that is transforming lives. We focus on young people and help them play an active and fulfilling role within their communities.

For much of our history, YMCAs largely worked separately in their own communities and sectors. However, there has been a shift towards more collaborative work over the past few years and this change accelerated with the adoption of our first federation strategy in 2014. There is now clear evidence that where we join forces – on campaigns such as '#IAMWHOLE' – our impact is so much more.

Our current political, economic and social climate not only presents significant challenges, but it is also variable and uncertain. This is putting increasing pressure on our services. It's clear that we will have to work together much more closely if we're going to withstand and thrive in this climate and continue to build on the positive impact we make on people's lives.

This strategic plan won't determine all our work – local priorities will remain just that – but it will set objectives at a national level, providing clarity and consistency as to what we should be doing together; enabling us to help more people in more communities in a more consistent, efficient and impactful way. By jointly owning and committing to federation-wide objectives, we will become genuinely united as a federation. We will be stronger financially, able to exert greater influence and make greater difference, and speak with one voice - as the recognised charity for young people in this country.

# Executive Summary

YMCA is the largest and oldest youth charity in the world, helping more than 58 million people in 119 countries. Across England and Wales there are 116 YMCAs. Our vision is to be an inclusive Christian movement transforming communities so all young people can belong, contribute and thrive. At the heart of how we work in communities, and with each other, are strong and committed relationships rooted in our inclusive Christian values, approach and heritage.

As a federation and as individual YMCAs, we are facing unprecedented economic, political and social challenges and uncertainty. In response, we believe the need has never been greater for strong, locally engaged YMCAs to provide consistently high quality services with a strong national influence. However, a number of internal challenges, notably the significant deficit on YMCA's pension scheme, make this difficult.

We believe real urgency and a coherent response from the federation is required. It is also our firm belief that the way forward - to ensure we're around for another 170 years and best able to face the range of external and internal challenges proactively - is to focus on what's at the heart of who we are and what we do, our relationships and working more closely together. There is a need for much greater collaboration across the federation. Our strength comes from a **national presence with local relevance**, responding to the specific needs of our own communities. We know there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to this collaboration but we believe there are a number of reasons to collaborate more closely as a federation. These include improving measurement, strengthening the brand, improving quality, clarifying rights and responsibilities, achieving economies of scale, and improving learning and sharing to better our quality and impact.



The Federation Strategy sets out a national direction and shared priorities, providing not only a focus for the things we do together but, importantly, also a common framework for YMCAs to use and adapt in conjunction with local and sector knowledge to enhance their programmes and day-to-day working. There are three strategic objectives for the federation. There is a strong inter-relationship between the strategic objectives:

## **Be viable and sustainable**

This includes unlocking the asset value and trying to remove the pension burden across the federation along with greater collaboration, economies of scale and scope, and driving a change of income mix away from significant statutory funding.

## **Extend our influence and impact**

This includes effective, evidence-based local/national engagement with decision makers demonstrating, measuring and communicating impact across the federation.

## **Working together better, to deliver better**

This includes building capacity and skills across the federation, modelling good governance, and delivering safely and to a consistently high standard.

We are working towards achieving the strategic objectives during the 2017/18 – 2020/21 financial years. YMCA England and Wales will work with the federation to flesh out a clearer work plan for each strategic objective and will work with federation members to proactively explore and agree how we face these challenges together. Within the spirit of relationship and collaboration, YMCAs and individuals across the federation who have particular skills or expertise will be taking a leading role in driving forward parts of the strategy.

# Background and Context

Our vision is to be an inclusive Christian movement transforming communities so that all young people can belong, contribute and thrive. At the heart of how we work in communities and with each other are strong and committed relationships. These are a variety of relationships reflecting the variety of communities we serve, but they're all rooted in our inclusive, Christian-valued approach and heritage.

We try and achieve our vision by helping young people develop their full potential in body, mind and spirit by working across five areas: training and education, family work, health and wellbeing, accommodation, and support and advice. Our impact is significant.

- YMCA in England and Wales is made up of **116 member YMCAs** working to ensure young people have opportunities to thrive and contribute positively to their communities.
- YMCA operates in almost **740 communities** across England and Wales impacting upon the lives of more than **630,000 people** every year.
- YMCA provides a home to more than **18,000 people** experiencing homelessness each year. We are the largest voluntary sector provider of supported housing for young people in England and Wales.
- YMCA in England and Wales enables more than **68,000 people** every year to engage in education and training to enable them to improve their opportunities in the job market.
- With **60 gyms** and **125,000 people engaged** in our health and wellbeing services, YMCA is the largest voluntary sector provider of services promoting physical activity in England and Wales.
- Each year, **6,400 children** attend YMCA nurseries while we also run **40 crèches** and **90 children's centres**.
- YMCA runs **150 youth clubs** and more than **21,000 young people** attend YMCA holiday camps annually.
- YMCA provides mental health advice and counselling for more than **17,000 young people** every year.
- YMCA England and Wales runs almost **100 charity shops** across England and Wales.

\*As gathered from *Facts and Stats 2017*

As a federation and as individual YMCAs we are facing unprecedented challenges and uncertainty:

- Economically – The potentially significant economic impact of Brexit on top of a long period of austerity-based Government policies is likely to result in further reductions in household and Government spending.
- Politically – The political landscape is in a state of flux with a change in powers due to Brexit and hardening ideological positions potentially resulting in reduced protection for our beneficiaries.
- Socially – Institutional structures and communities are rapidly changing and there are clear indications of a sharp increase in societal 'problems' such as mental health difficulties among young people.

In looking at this external landscape, we believe the need for strong, locally engaged YMCAs providing consistently high quality services and a strong national influence has never been greater. However, there are additional internal challenges facing the federation, which need to be resolved:

- Cooperation and collaboration within the federation is improving, but there is potential for this to be even stronger. We have also not agreed an expression of our Christian values and approach that works for all federation members. Both matters have limited the benefits of being part of a larger federation.
- As with other charities, many YMCAs are experiencing significant financial challenges requiring good planning and strong governance to overcome them.
- There are many examples across the federation of high quality, innovative services being delivered, but they are not consistently shared between YMCAs.
- The role of YMCA England and Wales, and how it should work with the federation, along with the rights and responsibilities local YMCAs have to each other needs to be clarified.
- YMCA's pension scheme, affecting the majority YMCAs in the federation, has a significant deficit that can impact the long-term sustainability of a significant number of YMCAs.

Despite these external and internal challenges, we believe the YMCA federation is ready to step out of being a 'well-kept secret' and build on the £220m turnover and £500m+ asset base to impact more local communities and young people.

# Vision

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Our strategic plan and objectives are not just a reactive response to a range of challenges. Rather, it is a proactive roadmap for how we can increase our impact and provision across the federation and how we can best achieve our vision to be *an inclusive Christian Movement transforming communities so that all young people can belong, contribute and thrive*. We know we exist for this vision and we work tirelessly to achieve it.

We achieve this in a variety of ways and mainly through the range of approaches and activities local YMCAs in the federation take across core areas. In the core areas in which we work, we believe every young person should be able to develop their full potential in body, mind and spirit:

## SUPPORT & ADVICE

We believe every person should have someone they can trust.

## ACCOMMODATION

We believe every young person should have a safe place to stay.

## FAMILY WORK

We believe every family should have the support they need to develop and lead more fulfilling lives.

## HEALTH & WELLBEING

We believe everyone should enjoy the benefits of good health and wellbeing.

## TRAINING & EDUCATION

We believe every young person should be able to fulfil their potential.

# Strategic Direction

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We firmly believe the way forward - to ensure we're around for another 170 years and best able to face the range of external and internal challenges proactively - is to focus on what's at the heart of who we are and what we do, our relationships and working more closely together. **We believe real urgency and a coherent response from the federation is required.** A message coming out clearly from a comprehensive federation-wide consultation is the need for much greater collaboration across YMCA. Our strength comes from a national presence with local relevance, responding to the specific needs of our own communities. We know there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to this collaboration, but we believe there are a number of reasons to collaborate more closely as a federation:

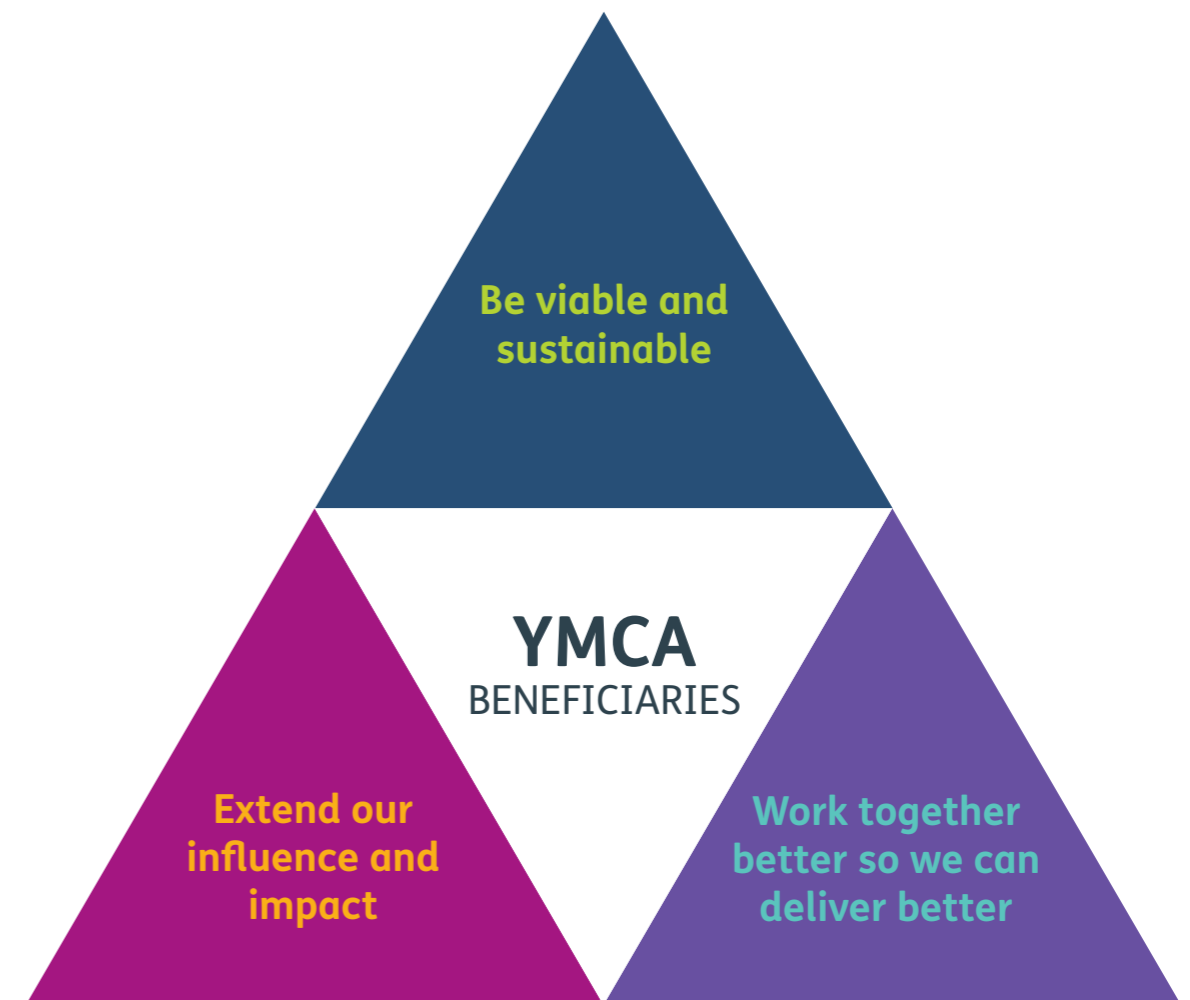
- **National presence / local relevance:** National presence can help every federation member sourcing and securing funding with access to decision makers, social and political support, et al. With our services rooted in the needs of their community - supported both by passionate and engaged leadership and local volunteers and donors - the organisation has legitimacy.
- **Measurement:** Developing consistency in measurement across the federation will allow for more robust claims about aggregate impact.
- **Strong brand:** A strong, well-developed and cohesive national brand brings huge benefits to local members of the federation. A strong reputation and brand recognition helps to raise awareness of services, confers credibility to our activities and assists with fundraising, by ensuring we are 'front-of-mind' both for trusted services and financial support.
- **Quality:** Capacity building and consistent quality standards will help reduce poor-quality services at local level, which negatively impacts on beneficiaries and on the federation's brand.
- **Rights and responsibilities:** Clearer rights and responsibilities across the whole federated structure will help make the best use of resources and help with business development.
- **Economies of scale:** Apart from the existing areas of insurance and pensions schemes, there is the potential to take advantage of collective scale to invest in functions common across the federation. This could include, for example, shared procurement of IT infrastructure and professional services such as legal services. In addition, drawing on some excellent practice in the federation, there is the potential to adopt similar HR approaches and including staff training and leadership development.
- **Business development:** Support for bidding on large-scale contracts, perhaps even brokering partnerships, could be an opportunity for central organisations to provide a valuable service.

- **Campaign:** With a national profile, YMCA will be well positioned to carry out campaigning and advocacy with the potential to affect the policy environment at national and international level. Critically, it is the experience of local service delivery that will give YMCA England and Wales the credibility to campaign; it has the right to speak on behalf of beneficiaries because its advocacy is grounded in the lived experience of those people.
- **Communication:** Good communication and getting the story right promotes cultural consensus and buy-in across the federation, which can allow things to progress at a quicker pace. In addition, it gives beneficiaries a platform to have a national voice.
- **Learning and sharing:** Harnessing the skills and knowledge in the federation can minimise duplication and improve quality and impact.

## Strategic Objectives

The Federation Strategy sets out a national direction and shared priorities, providing not only a focus for the things we do together, but importantly also a common framework for YMCAs to use and adapt in conjunction with local and sector knowledge to enhance programmes and day-to-day working. There are three strategic objectives, which are key to the strategy being achieved: be viable and sustainable; extend our influence and impact; and work together better to deliver better. Each strategic objective, in turn, has three sub-objectives. These sub-objectives also have key-deliverables.

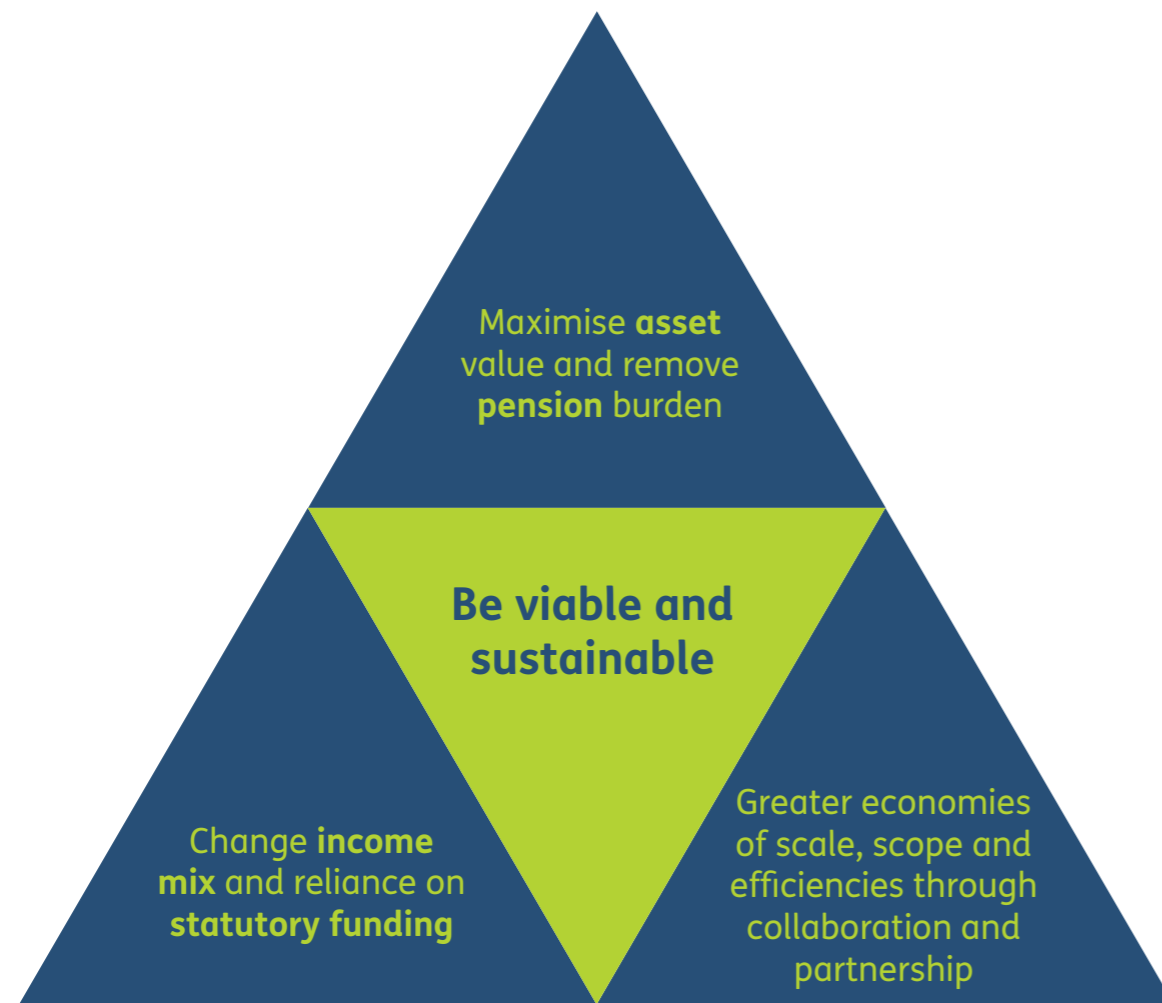
There is a strong inter-relationship between the strategic objectives. As a federation we will not be viable and sustainable if we don't work together better to deliver better and similarly this underpins our ability to extend our influence and impact. Our beneficiaries are at the heart of our strategic objectives and everything we do is to enable us to continue transforming communities so that all young people can belong, contribute and thrive.



# Be viable and sustainable

There are significant liability, income and cost risks impacting on the viability and sustainability of many YMCAs in the federation. These challenges include YMCAs having low levels of unrestricted reserves and undiversified funding streams. Our strategic objectives aim to reduce the pension liability by maximising, through collaboration, the combined value of assets across the federation. The large pension liability (currently at a buy-out level of c£100m), with its last-man-standing arrangements, means a significant number of local, and probably smaller, YMCAs can be impacted by the potential failure of a few.

Set against this, across the federation there is very significant asset base of more than £500m. Collaborative arrangements will be key to ensuring that the asset base can be used to offset the risk posed by pensions.



Economic and political challenges and uncertainty, particularly related to housing, are directly affecting significant proportions of revenue streams across the federation. Alongside that, cost and wage inflationary pressures will continue to squeeze margins.

Greater economies of scale and scope, deriving from collaboration and partnership can drive cost and operational efficiencies.

In response to the economic challenges, there is a need for many YMCAs to change their income mix and adopt more resilient and diversified business models. This encompasses not only sharing business models across the federation but also exploring opportunities to make joint funding/delivery bids.

## Be viable and sustainable

### Maximise **asset** value and remove **pension** burden

- Integrated strategy for asset value maximisation across the federation
- Integrated solution to reducing and buying out pension liabilities

### Greater economies of scale, scope and efficiencies through collaboration and partnership

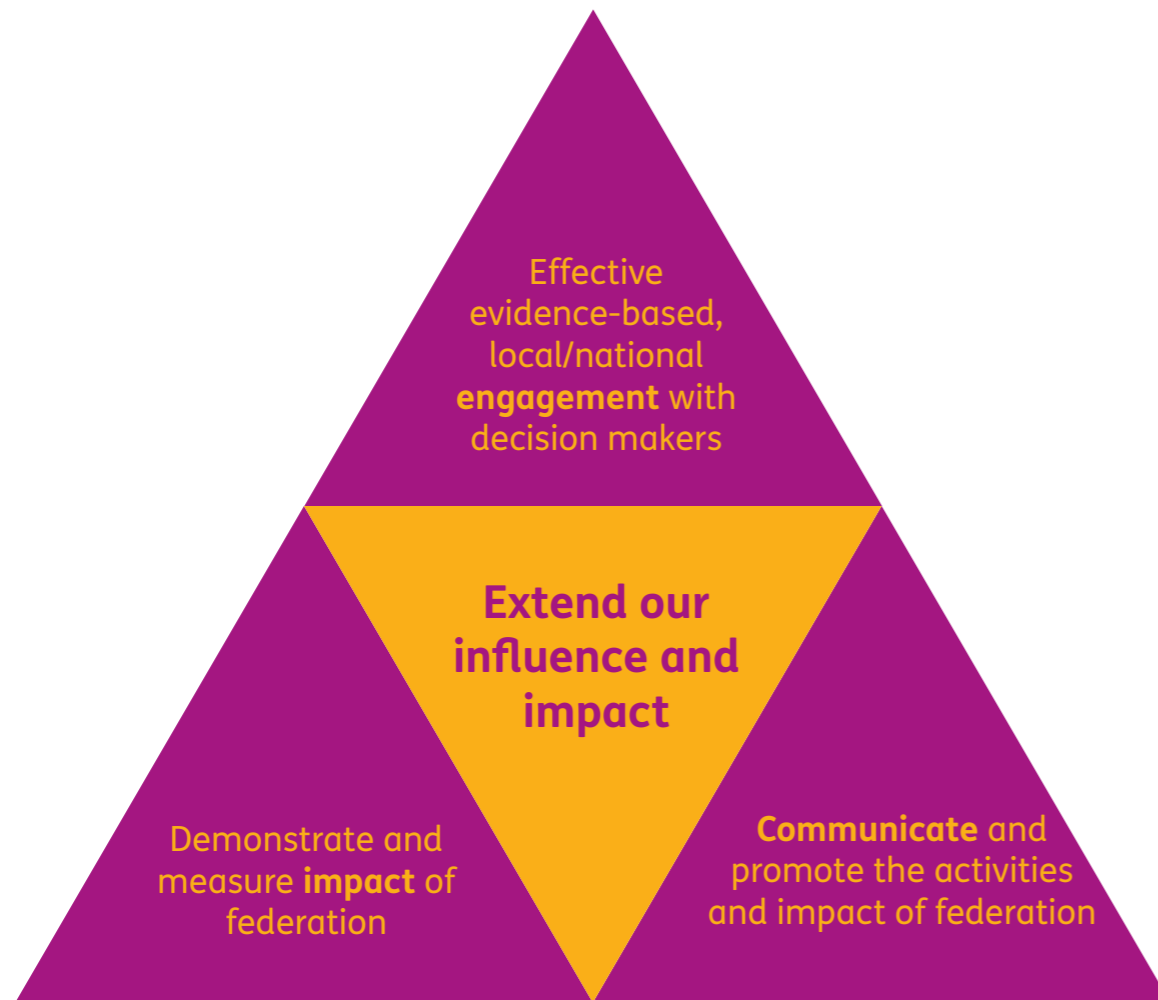
- Proactive exploration and development of collaboration opportunities
- Develop collaboration support and guidance
- Develop and implement resource sharing approaches

### Change **income** mix and reliance on **statutory** funding

- Develop and roll out range of business models
- Develop and implement approach to coordinated fundraising and tendering

# Extend our influence and impact

It's in our ability to engage robustly with and influence local and national decision makers that we will arguably have the greatest impact on the lives of our beneficiaries. Our ability to do this needs to be rooted in robust evidence and supported with sound communication.



Our range of activities, along with a large number of beneficiaries, gives us the credibility to engage decision makers and create consistent frameworks to demonstrate impact.

## Extend our influence and impact

### Effective evidence-based, local/national engagement with decision makers

- Equipping and supporting local engagement
- Sector partnership development
- National campaign

### Communicate and promote the activities and impact of the federation

- Shared performance measurement framework
- Develop and implement frameworks to capture and disseminate activities across the federation

### Demonstrate and measure impact of the federation

- YMCA evidenced research reports around key areas
- Consistent adoption and application of brand
- Internal and external communications strategies/frameworks



# Work together better, to deliver better

A key strategic objective is for YMCAs across the federation to be more consistent in the quality of their delivery, their operations and their governance. This consistency is not only important to supporting the brand, but ensures better impact on the lives of beneficiaries. The main way this objective will be achieved is through closer collaboration and partnership, through increased trust and transparency between members of the federation and through an intentional approach to capacity and skills development.



It is particularly important that there is more consistency in the inter-relationships between YMCAs, underpinned by an agreed view of the most appropriate federation structure.

## Work together better, to deliver better

### Model good governance and management

- Agree and nurture most appropriate association/federation structure
- Clarify governance standards and requirements
- Clarify and adopt rights and responsibilities
- Monitoring and health checks
- Review and simplify governance mechanisms
- Clarify crisis/intervention mechanisms

### Build capacity and skills

- Coordinated approach to developing capacity and skills in key practice areas
- Develop and implement a culture and behavioural framework
- Develop and implement volunteer strategy
- Leadership development programme
- Create and nurture internal networks

### Deliver safely to consistently high quality and standards

- Articulate and roll out quality service standards
- Roll out and monitor safeguarding standards

# How We Act

How we act as a federation, as member YMCAs and as individuals is as important as what we do; this is part of what makes us distinctive.

Our focus on relationships and our Christian ethos frames how we act internally and externally.



**WE SEEK OUT** - We actively look for opportunities to make a transformative impact on young lives in the communities where we work, and believe that every person is of equal value.

**WE WELCOME** - We offer people the space they need to feel secure, respected, heard and valued; and we always protect, trust, hope and persevere.

**WE INSPIRE** - We strive to inspire each person we meet to nurture their body, mind and spirit, and to realise their full potential in all they do.

**WE SPEAK OUT** - We stand up for young people, speak out on issues that affect their lives, and help them to find confidence in their own voice.

**WE SERVE OTHERS** - We are committed to the wellbeing of the communities we serve and believe in the positive benefit of participation, locally and in the wider world.

# Adoption and Adaptation of Strategy

The strategy and strategic objectives form a framework local YMCAs can adopt and adapt to their own unique context. For this strategy to be successful, we believe it's key for all federation members to take it on. Adopting the strategic objectives will be a big change for some YMCAs and for others there will be little change. Engagement from all federation members is required and it is recognised that some YMCAs will play a very active role in driving forward the strategy, and some will not.

The strategy is an articulation of the voice of the federation; YMCA England and Wales has coordinated this process. YMCA England and Wales's role in the federation remains that of a servant leader, it exists because of and for the federation. It will on occasion take a leadership role, but it is clear that YMCA England and Wales does not have all the answers and that it will need to ask for help from the federation when appropriate. YMCA England and Wales will, on occasion, develop responses, signpost, facilitate and encourage. However, the overriding intention is to ensure local YMCAs are as equipped and empowered as they can be to maximise the positive impact on beneficiaries.

# Timescales and Delivery

The strategic timeframe being considered are the 2017/18 – 2020/21 financial years. At the end of this timeframe the strategic objectives would have been achieved.

YMCA England and Wales will work with the federation to flesh out a clearer workplan for each Strategic objective during Q1 of the 17/18 financial year. This includes engaging with YMCA Boards and senior teams across the country to explore, develop and support responses.

There are YMCAs and individuals across the federation who have particular skills or expertise, and in the spirit of relationship and collaboration, they will be taking a leading role in driving forward parts of the strategy. YMCA England and Wales will work with federation members to proactively explore and agree how we face these challenges together and how we ensure that we can continue delivering on our belief that every young person should be able to develop their potential in body, mind and spirit.

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# YMCA

YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.

SUPPORT & ADVICE

ACCOMMODATION

FAMILY WORK

HEALTH & WELLBEING

TRAINING & EDUCATION