



PRIORITIES FOR YOUTH-IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES THROUGH YOUTH WORK. CONSULTATION SEPTEMBER 2012.

This paper is presented as the NILGA response to the Department of Education 'Priorities for Youth' Consultation. The response was considered formally and approved by the NILGA Executive on 11th January 2013.

For further information or to discuss the contents of this paper, please contact Peter Aiken at the NILGA Offices p.aiken@nilga.org (028) 9079 8972

Derek McCallan, Chief Executive

11th January 2013

Introduction

NILGA, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, is the representative body for district councils in Northern Ireland, representing and promoting the interests of the 26 local authorities and supported by all of the main political parties in Northern Ireland. We trust that our comments will be taken into account by the Department of Education

Context

The Minister of Education in his Foreword to the Consultation Document indicated that he wished to, *"provide a clear policy remit for youth work within education and to enable a clearer focus for youth workers and managers, a refreshed approach to planning, delivery and evaluation and, crucially a high quality service for young people which can effectively demonstrate its contribution to improved outcomes."*¹

There is a recognition by the Minister of the current economic situation and the re-organisation of the Education & Library Boards when he states, *"the most challenging education budget settlement in modern history, together with the establishment of the Education & Skills Authority (ESA), provide the mandate for a converged statutory youth service which will work collaboratively with key sectoral partners in the voluntary sector to ensure young people's needs are met through a range of high quality, cost effective provision."*

The Priorities for Youth document acknowledges the uniqueness of youth work with young people of all abilities and diverse interests choosing to participate in less formal education opportunities which assist with their learning and development. It makes reference to the contents of some previous Policy Papers on the development of Youth Work. Appendix 1 to this

¹ 'Priorities for Youth-Improving young people's lives through youth work, consultation September 2012. DENI.

consultation response provides additional background information, to which the Department should make reference in developing these policies.

The Department of Education indicates that it has undertaken comprehensive pre-consultation to establish the views from within the youth sector and wider educational service, and now outlines its set of priorities with a policy framework for Youth work within Education, strategically aligned to the overall DE Policy and Vision for young people. These proposals seek to build upon the most recent youth work policy document, 'The Youth Work Strategy 2005-2008'.

Youth Work statistics

NILGA notes that it has been estimated that 157k young people access youth services annually. This equates to just over 30% of the youth work population between the ages of 4-25.

Throughout Northern Ireland there are 126 statutory youth clubs/ units or projects and 11 Outdoor Education Centres controlled and managed by the Education & Library Boards, with over 1,900 voluntary groups supported by either the Education & Library Boards or the Youth Council. The voluntary groups include uniformed and non uniformed units, church related and secular units, headquarter and umbrella bodies and residential centres. **Over 20,000 volunteers help deliver the Service to our young people.**

The Department of Education currently invests approximately £29m as revenue and £5m as capital into youth services annually through the 5 Education & Library Boards and the Youth Council.

Funding is allocated to the Education & Library Boards to support local delivery, maintain statutory units or programmes and to provide funding to local voluntary youth units who satisfy registration criteria and are eligible for funding. **Most organisations funded by the Youth Council use the grant they receive to support the day-to-day running of their regional offices, salaries and/ or the delivery of regional programmes.**

The new proposals seem to suggest that the Department is moving away from the right of all young people to access Youth Services and indeed these new proposals have been designed to reflect that the revised curriculum is in place in all schools with its emphasis on developing children and young people's personal, interpersonal and learning skills and their ability to think both creatively and critically.

Proposals

The cessation of the Education & Library Boards and the establishment of the Education & Skills Authority brings with it the opportunity to move towards the intention as signalled by the Department in 2006, 'to ensure as far as is reasonable that the commissioning and delivery of youth services is planned and carried out to meet Ministerial/ Departmental objectives, to standards set by the Department, having regard to a combination of effectiveness, economy and efficiency.'²

NILGA would bring to the Department's attention that the Youth Service RPA Policy Paper 9 'Youth Work-Review of Public Administration' indicated that this move towards commissioning was an expanded duty. Paper 9 highlights that, "*The role of Youth Work, in helping young*

² Youth Service RPA Policy Paper 9. DE 2006.

people develop their social and personal skills, is relevant to all young people in Northern Ireland.”

The Priorities for Youth document recognises the part that the new Strategy and emphasis can play in the delivery of key strategic outcomes included in the Programme for Government 2011-2015 and other Policies e.g. Children’s and Young People’s 10 year plan, Play and Leisure Policy etc.

The consultation paper says that youth work policy should be set in the context of the Department of Education’s strategic priorities and that the strategic planning of Youth Services should also be in response to the assessed need for a youth work intervention, prioritised age ranges and priority groups.

NILGA acknowledges that the consultation document identifies that ‘Funding for youth provision should be consistent, transparent,’ but would question the view that it should be ‘allocated proportionate to the level of disadvantage experienced by young people’, dependent on the definition of disadvantage. This issue is dealt with in more detail within responses to the consultation questions.

Whilst the strategic aims of youth work will be:

- To contribute to raising standards for all and closing the performance gap between the highest and lowest achieving young people by providing access to enjoyable, non formal learning opportunities that help them to develop enhanced social and cognitive skills and overcome barriers to learning; and
- To continue to improve the non formal learning environment by creating inclusive, participative settings in which the voice and influence of young people are championed, supported and evident in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmes;

It would seem that resources for youth services will not be directed to engage all young people.

NILGA agrees that the principles underpinning all aspects of youth work are such that:

- Participation in youth services is voluntary and should enable young people to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to tackle the issues that are important to them;
- The active participation of young people should be fostered, supported and evident across all youth settings;
- Equality and inclusion should be fundamental to planning and implementation and the values of equity, diversity and interdependence should be at the heart of youth work;
- Young people, their families and the wider community should be involved in youth work in a meaningful way, with expectations managed within the resources available;
- Young people should expect high quality services, which follow best practice including the highest standards of child protection;
- Collaborative working between the statutory, voluntary, uniformed and faith based sectors should play an important part in securing improved outcomes for young people and the continued commitment from the youth workforce, including volunteers;
- Resources should be used to achieve priority outcomes for young people in the most cost effective way, according to best practice principles (public value);
- Activities should be fun, enjoyable and planned to deliver improved outcomes.

NILGA is of the view that the proposed new direction may not be agreed by some sectoral partners, who may not be given support to the extent that they have been in the past, even though the consultation document recognises that the support of 'key statutory and voluntary sectoral partners will be essential for the smooth transition to the new approach.'³

The Department proposes a phased approach for the reforms with full implementation by 2016. They will encourage and support the local voluntary sector to provide youth services assessed as needed.

Key Issues

Funding for Youth Services will be on the basis of a funding distribution mechanism, weighted according to disadvantage which will determine a notional distribution amount for each of the Council areas. (Funding will replace the current population based Youth Assessment of Relative Need (ARNE) and the non ARNE Education & Library Board's and the Youth Council NI allocations.)

In the absence of a definition of the word 'effective' the proposals seek the 'effective' alignment between formal and informal education activities supported by the Department of Education.

Whilst there is no direct effect on councils the re alignment and redirection of funding may create increased demand on councils to provide forms of support financial or otherwise (e.g. reduced cost to hire facilities) from groups and organisations currently receiving support.

It would be important to stress that any needs assessment does not penalise an area because of the provision of other funding e.g. assistance to local youth councils from district councils, provision of recreation and similar facilities.

Consultation Response Booklet

NILGA has considered the Department of Education consultation response booklet and is providing the information below as a considered response, formulated with the assistance from member Councils.

1 Do you agree with the vision, aims and principles of youth work supported by the Department of Education as proposed (see Section 3 of the consultation document)?

Mostly Agree.

NILGA agrees that standards should be raised for all however would question what the definition will be of 'performance gap'? The previous framework promoted the flexibility for the delivery of youth work practice with the overall aim of developing a range of skills and attributes which could help young people improve their life outcomes and contribute to their communities and economies. Wider issues outside education and non-educational issues are not referenced. For example, there is a risk that the Youth Service limits or stops engagement in the support of educational high achievers who may be encountering and having to work through social, emotional or family issues.

³ Priorities for Youth Consultation, September 2012. Page 28

2. Do you agree that youth work supported by the Department of Education should be strategically aligned with the education priorities (see paragraph 2.17 of the consultation document)?

Mostly Agree

The Youth Service has had much success with its assistance for young people outside the formal school setting. Its initiatives in enabling young people to achieve recognised qualifications outside the formal school setting are to be commended. Practical social learning and development has enriched our society. Therefore NILGA has similar concerns as those expressed in answer to question 1 above. It is as important to ensure that alignment is not seen as prioritizing activities that more directly support traditional academic educational achievement over social learning and development. Also as many young people as possible should be able to access youth services.

3 Do you consider that there is sufficient emphasis in the consultation document on enhancing participation for young people in the youth service?

Agree

It is likely that there is sufficient emphasis however the consultation paper suggests that planning, funding and delivery will be based on an assessment of need which has yet to be determined. Efforts to encourage participation by all young people in activities which will give them the skills to be better citizens are to be encouraged. However, enabling that participation may require additional resources. Indeed many youth workers and youth work organisations use sports and the arts and cultural activities to develop enhanced social and cognitive skills and overcome barriers to learning. Such activities also encourage a culture of active participation that can have a legacy in to adult life.

For example, Belfast City Council has indicated that nearly 40 per cent of audiences and participants taking part in culture and arts activities funded by Belfast City Council are under 25 years old, and the Council's Cultural Framework for Belfast 2012–15 identifies children and young people as a priority target group. Culture and arts can help them become more confident and accomplished. They can develop skills and experiences to become valuable employees and accomplished entrepreneurs. They will be our future artists and audiences. Furthermore, the Cultural Framework is underpinned by the values of access and equity and will target in particular 'hard-to-reach' audiences and participants, including children and young people with disabilities, from minority ethnic backgrounds and living in areas of deprivation.

4(a) Do you agree with the proposed actions in Priority 1 (see paragraph 4.5 of the consultation document)? (See Question 4(b) which seeks comments specifically on proposed age bands.)

Mostly Agree

With Local Government Reform on the horizon and a proposed new general power of competence for the 11 post-reform councils, NILGA is of the view that the new councils must be

included in those groups which would be created to advise ESA on what should be in their plans for youth work delivery.

Appendix 10 to the consultation document is a practical example of an Outcomes Framework and is welcomed, with the caveat that more detail is required as to how it will be measured and what the overall success criteria would be, in the context of the proposal that ESA will 'develop an annual report for youth work to provide a high level summary of investment, activities, and outcomes achieved. Would some overarching targets be developed?

4(b) Do you agree with the proposed age bands for youth provision, as set out in action 7, paragraph 4.5 of the consultation document?

Mostly Agree

Recognising the consultation and the reasoning behind youth services embracing the ages 4-25 NILGA believes that the priority years for youth service intervention is 9-18 years.

5(a) Do you agree with the proposed actions in Priority 2 (see paragraph 4.7 of the consultation document)? (See Question 5(b) which seeks comments specifically on the action on additional targeted provision).

Agree

In the context of this section of the consultation document and the question asked, NILGA is of the view that youth work can assist with the development of our young people and can help close the gap between those who do well and those who struggle. It also helps to ensure greater equality.

5(b) Do you agree that additional targeted provision should be supported to help meet the needs of specific groups of young people assessed as facing barriers to learning, as proposed in action 3, paragraph 4.7 of the consultation document?

Mostly Agree

There may be young people in our community who may be at risk of social exclusion, marginalisation or isolation, who may not experience any barriers to learning, who would benefit from youth work e.g., those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender;

The comment that outreach and detached youth workers have not been deployed in response to the need identified is concerning and naturally with the change in emphasis in youth work delivery new deployment responses will be identified.

6. Do you agree with the proposed actions in Priority 3 (see paragraph 4.11 of the consultation document)?

Mostly Agree

NILGA agrees that it is important to ensure that there is adequate training and support given to staff and volunteers. One of the strengths of the youth service is the commitment of volunteers especially in those youth work settings which are outside the formal statutory sector. Concern is expressed as to the level of support and continuing professional development that will be made available to those volunteers including their management committee volunteers. The approach outlined in the consultation document acknowledges the strong commitment to ensure that the statutory sector is supported. It will be necessary to ensure that there is no conflict between this strategy and the DSD Volunteering Strategy.

7. Do you agree with the proposed actions in Priority 4 (see paragraph 4.17 of the consultation document)?

Mostly Agree

There is a concern that with a realignment of funds in line with the new priorities for the youth service, there may be work being undertaken or facilities provided for schools and the community which may be needed but which does not meet the criteria. It is important that withdrawal of resources is gradual so as to enable alternative sources of support to be found and arrangements made. In terms of Outdoor Education Centres there may have been subsidies provided by Youth Services towards mainstream education which would now need to be borne by the schools themselves. Many school budgets are stretched and there is a risk that the social skills learnt by young people at school through their attendance at the Outdoor Education Centres may be devalued through lack of provision going forward.

NILGA notes in Appendix 11 (referenced at 4.16 of the consultation document) the importance of the voice of the young person. As stated at 11.5 'there have also been good examples of young people working with local council representatives for the benefit of their local community.' It is hoped that such participation can be continued and that the new councils with the power of general competence can engage in the proposed Network for Youth initiative.

NILGA agrees with the comments reflected in the EU Strategy for Youth- Investing and Empowering 2010-2018 that *“European cooperation in the youth field should be evidence based, pertinent and concrete. It should produce clear and visible results which should be presented, reviewed and disseminated on a regular basis and in a structured manner, thereby establishing a basis for continuous evaluation and development.”*⁴

8. Do you agree with the proposed actions in Priority 5 (see paragraph 4.21 of the consultation document)?

Mostly Agree

⁴ EU COUNCIL RESOLUTION of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)

As noted above it is important that changes to historic funding arrangements are phased in. Application forms for resources should be as simple as possible and monitoring processes not too onerous. Smaller organisations can be unfairly disadvantaged by complex application and monitoring processes especially where they are not proportionate to the amount of money being offered.

There must be recognition that youth work funding may be required to deliver cross department and cross sectorial projects e.g. DHSSPS Fit and Well, Changing Lives, 2012-2022 Policy Proposals.

9. Please use the space below for any additional comments you wish to make about the Priorities for Youth.

The Youth Work RPA Paper 9 of November 2006 talks of youth work providing important opportunities for young people from all backgrounds and of its role in helping young people develop their social and personal skills. It is an important form of non-formal education which makes a distinct and vital contribution to the development of young people in what is still a divided community at many different levels. Whilst acknowledging the DE Vision Statement, 'Every young person achieving his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development' it is evident that in future youth service resources will be aligned to DE educational priorities of need and therefore there could be areas of the community which will lose out in youth interventions.

NILGA notes the suggestion that the strategic 3 year Regional Youth Development Plan (RYDP) when published by ESA will demonstrate the levels of demand for youth work within the framework of DE priorities, and the supported provision in areas. However it should be noted that there may be those more academically gifted who experience difficulties and for whom youth work interventions will provide the necessary support. This should not be overlooked.

We would also be against the introduction of any system that totally ignored for funding, an area because of the availability of other funds or support. In this economic climate and recognizing the value of partnership working it is important that such an approach is not adopted as it could discourage other agencies and philanthropists from contributing to a project.

NILGA on behalf of its member councils would be pleased to engage with the Department of Education in representing the local government sector on the further development of the proposals for youth work in Northern Ireland.

DISCLAIMER

The Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) endeavours to ensure that the information contained within our Website, Policies and other communications is up to date and correct.

We do not, however, make any representation that the information will be accurate, current, complete, uninterrupted or error free or that any information or other material accessible from or related to NILGA is free of viruses or other harmful components.

NILGA accepts no responsibility for any erroneous information placed by or on behalf of any user or any loss by any person or user resulting from such information.

APPENDIX 1. Background Information relating to the Youth Service.

In 1997 the Youth Service developed a non statutory curriculum endorsed by the Department of Education entitled, 'Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice'. This framework promoted flexibility for the delivery of youth work practice with the overall aim of developing a range of skills and attributes which could help young people improve their life outcomes and contributors to their communities and the economy. The stated policy aim of the Department for Education for the Youth Service is, "To ensure the provision of opportunities for children, young people and young adults to gain for themselves knowledge, skills and experience to reach their full potential as valued individuals, to encourage the development of mutual understanding and to promote recognition of and respect for cultural diversity."⁵

In the intervening years since 1997 various studies have been carried out into the Youth Service and much of that work has assisted with the development of this Priority for Youth document. In 2004 the 5 Education and Library Board's commissioned its Central Management Support Unit to carry out a Fundamental Review of the Youth Service. At that time the Key Objectives of the youth service were stated as being:⁶

- To encourage social development and social education, shaped in part by young people, based on learning from experiences in safe and enjoyable environments
- To promote health and well being at all stages of development
- To build positive self esteem and well being at all stages of development
- To build positive self esteem, self awareness and self acceptance as a support to young people in making informed life decisions
- To promote respect for individual differences and an acceptance of the individual's right to personal choice
- To encourage and give opportunities for involvement in initiating, planning, management and evaluation of youth work, at all levels and in all areas
- To encourage understanding of diverse groups in society and the involvement in peace building and conflict transformation
- To challenge young people to develop their role as active citizens and to identify issues at personal, local and global levels and create strategies for action

The Department of Education's 2005-2008 published desired Strategic Outcomes⁷ included:

- Motivated young people who enjoy and are engaged in learning, encouraged and supported by their parents or carers.
- All young people having access to an Education and Youth curriculum in settings that meet their individual learning needs.
- Young people with the self esteem to be confident, happy and ambitious and contribute positively to their local community and wider society.
- Young people who are creative and have developed, to their full potential, the skills, attitudes and expectations needed to live, work, learn and play in a global society.
- Young people educated in a safe and caring environment where they are respected and receive the support they need.

⁵ North South Working Group Paper- March 2012 (DENI website 2011)

⁶ Education & Library Board's CMSU Fundamental Review of Youth Services 2004.

⁷ Youthnet Big Deal Evaluation Report 2010