

Introduction

The Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI), under the Youth Service (NI) Order 1989, has responsibility to advise on the development of the youth service; and encourage and assist the co-ordination and efficient use of resources of the youth service.

Council members hosted a seminar with **45** delegates, to examine and report on the transitional issues facing the thirty six regional voluntary youth organisations (RVYOs), previously funded by YCNI. A survey had also been completed by RVYOs to provide additional information. This would form advice to the Minister and to the Youth Service Reform Partnership, set up by the Department of Education (DE) to oversee a smooth transition of funding arrangements to the Education Authority.

The Minister for Education Mr Peter Weir (MLA) attended the opening of the seminar and participated in an open discussion.

During a transitional year for YCNI, an opportunity for a new invigorated role was discussed, with the emphasis on a greater strategic position. Providing leadership and offering an independent, central voice during a critical period in the regional and local youth sector was identified as crucial.

The positive contribution of the RVYOs to civic society was acknowledged, as supporting front line services for young people and delivering on *Priorities for Youth* (PfY). The added value of over 22,000 volunteers and additional income generated from other sources for youth work should not be under estimated.

Written advice to the Minister for Education, following discussions.

1. Transitional funding arrangements

RVYOs acknowledged 2016/17 as a transitional year, with new relationships to be nurtured, and different administration systems in operation by the Education Authority (EA).

During Quarter 1 (April – June) of 2016 /17 both the Education Authority and the regional voluntary youth organisations (RVYOs) worked to ensure Letters of Offer (LOO) were issued and all paperwork returned appropriately. 36 LOO were issued by EA by 9th June and 26 organisations had received funding on completion of paperwork by 30th June.

Concerns were raised by RVYOs about the timings of payments, with EA being at least two months behind previous schedules. The severe financial risk this caused to charities to remain a going concern should not be underestimated.

These concerns were detailed in the RVYO survey, which had a 65% response rate. RVYOs' comments included:

"The delay has caused cash flow difficulties."
"We have to draw on reserves to pay salaries."
"We need a payment schedule to help with cash flow."
"We have had to let go a number of staff in May as the uncertainty did not allow us to pay them beyond that..."
"Late payments have impacted on cash flow and caused problems keeping to budget. Quarter 4 payments must be paid promptly before December payroll."

YCNi advised the Minister of the negative impact of these practical funding arrangements on the sustainability of the RVYOs.

2. New funding policy

RVYOs strongly advocated that a new funding policy needed adequate time for consultation and implementation. A further year of transitional funding was required to provide stability and establish new arrangements and working relationships with EA.

RVYOs reported:

"Time is running out to introduce a new funding policy in 2017, to enable proper consultation"
"Timeframes must take account of need to put staff on notice; indicative funding levels required by November."
"Consult with sector before agreeing funding policy."
"The new policy should reflect Priorities for Youth strategic funding for infrastructure organisation."
"Realistic timeline and contingency planning for those falling outside funding parameters is required."

YCNi advised that a further transition year for the current funding arrangements is required. This will ensure a new funding scheme is appropriate to enable RVYOs continue to deliver on Priorities for Youth. This will also create some stability in the sector.

3. Scope of voluntary youth sector

RVYOs raised concerns that the diverse range of church, youth and community groups in excess of 5000 registered with the RVYOs may not be recognised by EA as contributing to *Priorities for Youth*. A YCNi report in 2013 recorded **5271** local groups registered in RVYO membership networks. These local groups provide a variety of learning opportunities for young people, with RVYOs providing Child Protection training, leadership training and programme support.

In contrast **1712** local groups are registered with EA (YCNI 2014).

YCNI advised that, in order to ensure the continuation of the breadth and diversity of the voluntary youth sector; and to protect young people and improve standards; those local organisations in the membership networks of RVYOs should be regarded as contributing to *Priorities for Youth*.

RVYOs should continue to contribute to services that ensure leaders are well trained, governance structures are appropriate and children are safe, in local and regional groups.

(Advice issued 22nd September 2016)

Engagement structures within the youth sector

Priorities for Youth emphasises the shared values and principles of the 2011 Concordat between the voluntary and community sector and the Northern Ireland Government, and makes commitments to working with partners towards the implementation of Concordat (PfY page 4).

The distinct nature of the youth sector, with a large volunteer base, and independent charities, both local and regional, requires effective partnership working across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, to improve outcomes for young people.

Current processes for engagement and collaborative working include the Regional Advisory Group (RAG) and the sub groups

for the Practice Development System (PDS) and Planning and Monitoring Group (PMG). The transitional Youth Service Reform Partnership (YSRP) and the latent Youth Service Liaison Forum (YSLF) also provides opportunities for engagement.

During a period of transition, further consideration should be given to how partnership working and advisory roles remain positive, strategic and impactful on young people's lives .

Considerations for YCNI

Seminar participants made the following recommendations to YCNI members to consider:

- Issue a clear public communication on the current status and functions of YCNI.
- Strongly advise on a further transitional year for funding to allow for a thorough consultation process and impact study of the new funding policy.
- Facilitate a dialogue between EA and the voluntary sector (local and regional) to build trust and develop collaborative working arrangements for the future.
- Commission an impact study of EA's new funding policy and report to DE during the consultation period.
- Set up two forums (local and regional) to provide two way communication to inform YCNI's strategic plans.
- Investigate and make recommendations on effective working models and relationships across statutory and voluntary sectors.
- Carry out an impact assessment of the reach and impact of RVYO's with a focus on value for money.

Key messages from YCNI

- **YCNI can provide leadership and an independent voice for the youth service and youth work in Northern Ireland.**
- **The Minister for Education supports a strategic role for YCNI and does not plan to repeal the Youth Service (NI) Order 1989.**
- **2016/17 is a transitional year for YCNI, to establish a reinvigorated purpose.**
- **A period of engagement with stakeholders across Northern Ireland will take place to shape a three year YCNI strategic plan.**
- **YCNI members' terms of office end on 30th September 2017.**

YCNI Members

Maire Young ~ Chairperson

Bertie Falkner ~ Vice Chair

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