

Record of YCNI CRED Meeting

Tuesday, 13th September 2011

1. The format of the morning was in two parts. The first involved two inputs: one was from Andrew Bell, DE, providing an overview of the CRED Policy, Guidance and its Indicator Framework; the other was by Norma Rea, updating participants on YCNI's stance on the document. Participants were given an opportunity to respond to these initial presentations in open forum. In the second part of the morning those present broke into three groups to follow a structured discussion focusing on a critique of the vision encapsulated in the CRED document and the types of structures required to enable the voluntary youth sector to fulfil this vision. Each group was asked to identify one key response and one key action they felt should be prioritised by DE / YCNI to facilitate the effective implementation of CRED. A brief plenary forum was then held at which each group made a short resumé of their discussion and key ideas from the day were synthesised. This report seeks to capture the key ideas expressed during the morning. It does so under the following headings:

- Responses to “the vision”
- Tensions influencing perceptions
- Recommended future actions.

2. The Vision

- 2.1 It is important to record that the prevailing mood of the proceedings was a positive one with participants, generally, welcoming clarification of CRED policy after a period of considerable policy uncertainty. There was a willingness to embrace the general thrust of the document while also engaging in frank discussion on its possible limitations and the challenges imposed in implementing it.
- 2.2 Participants acknowledged that the document offered direction and re-affirmed the place of community relations work in youth education.
- 2.3 Its language was aspirational and therefore participants sought exemplification on exactly how it would be translated into action.
- 2.4 It recognised the considerable contribution of youth work to community relations practice over the years.
- 2.5 There was a willingness to accept the widening out of its horizons, its provisions having responded to the changing environment brought about by the peace process, Section 75 and the growing profile of ethnic groups and other minorities.
- 2.6 The ethos it presented was in accord with ‘good youth work’ and therefore was an expression of existing effective practice.

- 2.7 Organisationally, most voluntary groups, through the influence of JEDI and other initiatives, have already come some way to embracing aspects of CRED policy in their practice and, for many, this would not be an arduous task.
- 2.8 Generally, the proposal to improve accountability was thought to be timely and desirable.

3. Underlying Tensions

- 3.1 It was felt important to include this section in the report as it was clear that feelings of previous and current vulnerabilities in the Regional Voluntary Youth Sector were very real and bound to colour participants' responses to some degree during the morning. These are noted as a series of underlying tensions that manifested themselves during discussion.
- 3.2 For many present the context for this consultation was an air of vulnerability fed by a sense that the voluntary sector had sometimes been left out of consideration in the past; and that recent financial cuts, in particular to core funding, had weakened the sector and threatened its manpower and skills capacity to carry out its community relations responsibilities.
- 3.3 While the expansion of the work to address equality and diversity issues was welcomed there were still those who guarded against any diminution of the more established aspects of community relations work.
- 3.4 There was concern that the base of community relations work was expanding at a time when resource capacity was reduced and that a more "integrated" approach to funding might remove any remaining ring-fencing for work specifically focused on community relations, thus eroding the resources available.
- 3.5 Many participants read into the initial presentations what was felt to be a disproportionate emphasis on CRED work in schools. There was a danger that this might promote a view that the voluntary youth organisations were there simply to service work in schools and that the latter would acquire the bulk of the resources. There was willingness for cooperation between the formal and non formal sectors but stress was placed on the expertise within the youth sector and the need for equitable partnerships.
- 3.6 Unease was expressed that even within the youth sector, resources and training might be skewed toward the statutory services (linked to schools through the Education and Library Boards) at the expense of the voluntary sector.
- 3.7 The relationship between a prescribed curriculum and social education was raised. A number of participants commented on the emphasis placed in the CRED document on addressing issues through existing curricula and, especially in the case of schools, fear was expressed that this might become examination influenced at the expense of the social education principles on which youth work was based.

- 3.8 Fears of an erosion of community relations expertise in the voluntary sector and the potential impact on future training for CRED were voiced. There was general support for a more integrated approach to training, involving youth workers and teachers, but real concern that the voluntary worker, on which the sector depended, would be excluded, or be the poor relation of such provision.
- 3.9 It was noted, too, that while placing policy and practice under more systematic examination was desirable, and an aspect often missing in the past, there was some uncertainty as to the compatibility of the self-evaluation and external accountability dimensions of the proposed evaluation model.

4 Recommended Future Actions

During the course of the morning a number of recommendations were made as to how the CRED strategy might be improved and implemented effectively. An attempt is made below to identify responses which gained a measure of credence amongst participants. These are reported under the headings of:

- Structural provision
- Training needs
- Practice considerations

4.1 Structural Provision

- 4.1.1 If CRED is to receive due attention its value must be recognised not only by DE but by all government departments, including OFMDFM and DEL. For example, the latter makes provision for the related areas of NEET young people and teacher education. That way there can be efficiency of funding but also more money might be made available through shared responsibility to counteract the impact of recent funding cuts on the voluntary sector.
- 4.1.2 Greater cross sector co-operation is necessary and desirable to ensure a more cohesive approach. This should take the form of a real partnership between schools and the youth services, where the strengths of each are recognised at strategic and planning levels.
- 4.1.3 Within such structures the role of voluntary youth organisations needs to be articulated in a way rarely done to date, and such organisations should be recognised as valuable and legitimate educational service providers.
- 4.1.4 Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations must demonstrate greater cooperation and cohesion themselves. One way to work toward this would be for YCNI to facilitate a “CRED reference” group to represent their interests, provide a forum for ideas and open up links with DE and other government departments with responsibility for policy and funding.

4.2 Training Needs

- 4.2.1 While participants were confident of the professional expertise available amongst community relations orientated workers to develop the CRED policy, there was also recognition that financial cuts had reduced this capacity and that expertise diminishes considerably as one moves out from the core of committed teachers and youth workers. Disseminating effective practice to volunteer workers presents special challenges. There was general support for a more co-ordinated approach to training which built on the school / youth work partnerships advocated above and which brought teachers and youth workers together for in-service development based on CRED principles.
- 4.2.2 However, pragmatic considerations alone would make it difficult to include volunteer workers in such provision. One function of the proposed CRED reference group within the YCNI structures should be to develop CRED training and support for volunteers.

4.3 Practice Issues

- 4.3.1 The interface on the day between organisations, practitioners and DE was welcomed. In order to move CRED policy beyond the aspirational there was a strong sense that dialogue with DE must be maintained to ensure that a vision for implementation in practice becomes embedded across the various educational sectors.
- 4.3.2 Systemic links between teacher education and youth work training, drawing particularly on strong youth work practice in this area, should ensure that the experiential dimension of the work remains central and that practice does not become narrowly focused on a curriculum outcomes approach.
- 4.3.3 A number of practitioners drew attention to the crucial importance of residential experiences in effective community relations work with young people and expressed concern that there was no specific reference to this in the CRED document. This was especially significant in that recent funding cuts have threatened residential work. It was advocated that steps be taken to ensure that such work is not lost as the new policy evolves.

5. **Postscript**

There appeared to be a consensus that the morning had been a worthwhile one. This generally positive response was tempered by genuine concerns. Notwithstanding, there seemed to be a wish to avail of further follow up events to maintain dialogue around the implementation of CRED policy.

ATTENDEES

ORGANISATION	NAME
Belfast Community Circus	Will Chamberlain
Boys' Brigade	Jonathan Gracey
Bytes	Laura Couser
Catholic Guides	Marian Stewart
Comhairle na Gaelscolaiochta	Aine Ni Mhurchu
Duke of Edinburgh Award	Kate Thompson
Girls' Brigade	Chloe Hemphill
Girlguiding Ulster	Claire Flowers
Harmony Community Trust	Karin McKinty Helen Honeyman
NICE	Carmel McCavana
NI Scout Council	Ken Gillespie
NI Youth Forum	Chris Quinn
Ocean Youth Trust	Bronagh Cappa
Public Achievement	Deborah Erwin Andrea Gibson
Scouting Ireland	John Meikleham
Spirit of Enniskillen	Michael Arlow Rebecca Bell Liam McCusker
St John's Ambulance Brigade	Hazel Patton
The MAC	Clare Lawlor
Volunteer Now	Roisin Timlin
Wheelworks	Karen McIlvenny
YMCA Ireland	Stephen Turner Geraldine Stinton
Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster	Michael Reid
YouthAction	Clare Conlon Martin McMullan
YouthLink	Paddy White John Peacock
YouthNet	Ben Ewan