

# **Network for Youth consultation**

## **An overview of responses (short version)**

### **January 2009**

---

## **Background**

In 2007 the Department of Education, on behalf of the Government, set up a working group to advise on the development of a Network for Youth. The purpose of the Network would be to '**strengthen the direct voice of children and young people (aged 0-25) in all relevant aspects of government provision**'

The working group conducted a pre-consultation exercise in 2007, followed by a formal consultation process which closed on 30 November 2008. The working group would like to thank all those who responded, either by completing an individual response postcard, by taking part in a group response, or by sending an organisational response. Thanks are also due to all those working with children and young people who helped to facilitate the consultation.

The following report provides a brief summary of the consultation responses. The full-length report is available at [www.ycni.org](http://www.ycni.org) or by contacting the Youth Council NI at 028 90643882

## **Summary of responses**

**Numbers of respondents** : 790 individual response postcards were received, with at least 93% of these being from under 25 year olds. In addition to these, twenty two group responses representing the views of approximately 350 children and young people were received, along with twelve responses from organisations in the voluntary and statutory sectors.

**Vision and Values** : There was almost unanimous (99.7%) endorsement of the proposed vision for the network, and 95.5% agreement on the proposed values. A small number of respondents expressed the view that the target age range of 0-25 was unrealistic, and there were some suggested additions or revisions to the proposed values.

**Preferred option** : Of the 790 who responded using individual response postcards, 44% voted for the Youth Assembly, 23% for the Regional youth-led option, 19% for a Network of Networks, and 14% proposed combinations of two or more of these options.

Responses from the 22 groups of children and young people illustrated the diversity of opinion, with half of the groups unable to reach a group consensus on a preferred option, and a quarter proposing alternative plans to combine two or more of the options.

Eight out of the twelve organisations which responded selected the Network of Networks option.

### **Reasons given for choice of option :**

Individuals who selected the **Regional youth led option** felt it would be open and accessible, had a youth-led agenda, had a good local and regional structure, that it would be easier to have a voice, that a full range of existing groups could connect with it, and it would have social benefits. Feedback from the group responses tended to highlight the importance of the local structure and ease of access to local decision makers. It was also felt that this option would be open to those not involved in existing groups.

Individuals who selected the **Network of Networks option** felt it would be based on existing groups, be more inclusive of a wider range of children and young people, be cheaper/simpler to operate, provide a social aspect, provide an easier way to communicate, and offer adult support. Feedback from the group responses indicated that this option was viewed as the most conducive to excluded and minority groups and those with disabilities, as it would allow children and young people to express their views in familiar settings. This view was reiterated by organisational responses, which suggested the option provided greatest opportunities for inclusion and would help to build on, rather than duplicate, existing provision.

Individuals who selected the **Youth Assembly option** felt it would ensure that young people are heard, that it has a direct link to government, would be more likely to have an impact, would have a range of educational and image benefits for young people, was based on a clear local /regional structure, and would be high profile. Feedback from group responses echoed all of these points, with an emphasis on the local structures and the need to ensure these were fully inclusive. Three of the organisational responses advocated including a Youth Assembly within alternative proposals. It is notable that the option of a Youth Assembly

generated the highest number of comments from respondents – both positive and negative.

### **Alternative proposals**

14% of the individuals felt the network should comprise a combination of the options. Alternative models proposed by groups tended to focus on ensuring full inclusion at local level, and also full information flow between local structures and the diversity of local groups.

Two organisations proposed alternative models which would incorporate elements of the other options.

### **How to involve younger children**

Some respondents felt that the network should operate with different age bands using different methods. Proponents of the Network of Networks suggested that this option would be inclusive of the range of existing groups which work with younger children. Many other respondents suggested that local structures associated with either the Youth Assembly or regional youth-led should ensure that they connect with the full range of local groups, including those for younger children.

A majority of respondents also suggested that younger children could be involved through play-based and fun workshops or roadshows visiting primary schools and youth groups. Responses from younger children indicated their positive interest in the idea of a network, and highlighted that children should be provided with a range of ways to participate. Many of the children indicated that they would want to remain in familiar settings when expressing their views.

### **Additional issues raised by respondents**

Some respondents made additional suggestions or observations which could have significant impact on the development of any model for a Network, as follows:

1. The provisional title 'Network for Youth' is inappropriate for the age range 0-25 and should be revised.
2. Several respondents affirmed the efforts made by the working group to include children and young people during the consultation process, but proposed that these stakeholders must continue to be involved in the ongoing development of the model for the network.

3. Some young respondents – and particularly those who took part in focus groups and who could be identified as marginalized – expressed high levels of cynicism as to the likely impact of this initiative. From these respondents, and some of the facilitators who relayed their views, there was a strong message that if the network is simply a talking shop or 'window dressing' for government, then there is no point in taking it any further.

4. The need for capacity building and support systems was highlighted by many respondents, both young people and professionals. Some suggested that a specific role of the network should be to enable and develop the skills base for children and young people to engage in participation, and some proposed that the work of the Big Deal initiative could be tied into the role of the network on a long-term basis. Similarly some respondents pointed to the role and value of the Participation Network in terms of building capacity within the public sector to ensure adults are equipped to engage with children and young people in a meaningful way. It was proposed that the work of the Participation Network should also be connected to the workings of the Network for Youth.

5. The focus groups in particular highlighted that young people want the network to act proactively – raising issues and lobbying – rather than simply responding to the governments agenda.

6. Some of the organisational responses proposed that to maximise the impact of the network, there should be cross departmental co-operation and a line of reporting to OFMDFM. It was also proposed that the network should have a formal remit to monitor the 10 Year Strategy for Children and Young People.

7. One respondent proposed that the policy decision relating to the Network for Youth proposal must adhere to section 75 and therefore undergo impact assessment.

---

*The full length analysis report is available at [www.ycni.org](http://www.ycni.org) following the link to Network for Youth. Further information is available on the site, including the*

*report from the pre-consultation, all consultation materials, the composition, terms of reference and minutes from the working group, and the final briefing paper submitted to the Department of Education in January 2009.*