

## **RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT DRAFT BUDGET 2011–2015 CONSULTATION**

The Youth Council (YCNI) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the spending and savings proposals within the draft budget.

YCNI's response will focus solely on the proposed cessation of funding for Young Farmers' Clubs (YFCU) from DARD.

YCNI has co-funded YFCU with DARD (and its predecessor) since 1990. For most of those years, both DARD and YCNI contributed an equal amount towards the core costs of YFCU. The normal pattern had been that YCNI had determined the level of grant which it had considered to be appropriate for YFCU and DARD had matched that figure.

YCNI conducted a fundamental review of its funding strategy in 2008/09, reassessed its level of grant aid for all funded bodies and determined that its grant to YFCU should be increased to £114,700 with that increase phased in over four years.

(YCNI's policy has always been to phase-in both increases in grant and reductions in order to assist voluntary organisations in managing the situation and, in the latter case, to minimise the potential for organisations being unable to continue to function.)

YCNI is most concerned that, given the past two decades of co-funding, DARD did not contact YCNI in advance of the publication of its proposal to cease funding YFCU. The assumption appears to have been made that the issue of the cessation of DARD funding could be divorced from a consideration of its impact on YCNI's support for YFCU.

Given the increasing pressures on all voluntary organisations to attract sufficient core funding to sustain their viability, YCNI is anxious that such a sudden and substantial loss of core funding from DARD may jeopardise the long-term strategic role of YFCU which has proved so beneficial to both the youth service sector and the rural and farming community.

YCNI has had a constructive meeting with relevant officials in DARD at which a number of the above points have already been raised. YCNI would strongly urge that DARD reconsider its proposal and maintain its core funding of YFCU at its current level.