

RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DRAFT BUDGET 2011–2015 CONSULTATION

The Youth Council (YCNI) welcomes the statement made by the Minister to the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Committee on 18 January 2011 in which she indicated that a number of important areas would be protected, including youth services. Later in her statement, she made reference to “the aim to protect mainstream budgets in schools, youth, pre-school and early years”.

However, it is not clear what the term “mainstream budgets” includes in respect of the youth service. Therefore, in this response, YCNI will not assume that any earmarked funding streams are “protected” and will put forward the case for their retention.

1. YCNI Grant-in-Aid

This response will first focus on the level of grant-in-aid which YCNI receives from DE on an annual basis.

YCNI’s annual grant allocation letter from DE makes reference to YCNI’s “mainstream expenditure”. It highlights funds in respect of “management information” and also in relation to activities carried out by YouthNet in respect of “the development of the TSN workers and participation from the voluntary sector”.

YCNI has also noted the reference in the draft budget to a planned reduction in ALBs Administration and Management levels, which it recognises will apply to YCNI. YCNI has already submitted proposals to ESAIT and DE whereby significant savings can be achieved in its own operating costs. Given the Minister’s statements (see above), YCNI assumes that any savings which it makes within “administration and management” will be retained within the overall youth service budget.

However, YCNI would wish to stress that the great majority of its staff costs should not be perceived as “administration and management” since most of its staff are deployed in actively supporting the youth service sector, both statutory and voluntary agencies, in fields such as training, curriculum, CRED, and international programmes which feed through to enhance direct delivery of services to young people.

The “management information” service, referred to above, has already proven to be essential to DE, ETI and ELBs. YCNI understands that a similar service will become even more important in supporting the roll-out of the Department’s ‘Priorities for Youth’ Strategy.

The funding which DE has provided to YCNI in respect of YouthNet (described above) has been important in supporting its member organisations in areas such as governance, outreach projects, cross-sectoral funding applications, and also promoting greater collaboration between its member organisations. These roles are consistent with the principles contained in the draft ‘Concordat for Relationships with the Voluntary and Community Sector’, published by DSD in January 2011.

2. Earmarked Funding Streams

(a) DE's funding of a Child Protection initiative within the youth service has been a very significant intervention which has greatly enhanced the competence of the sector within this crucial field. However, it is essential that funding to support this strategic project continues.

Related to this issue is that of Access NI costs. DE's proposal to transfer the cost of the Access NI pre-employment vetting check to the person who is to be offered the job will have a disproportionate impact on the many part-time youth workers who are employed within the youth service sector.

(b) The voluntary sector's access to Youth Outreach resources, managed through YouthNet, is particularly important. It facilitates outreach to young people in Section 75 categories, including gay and lesbian young people, and enables participation in youth service programmes by young people with physical and sensory disabilities.

(c) CRED. YCNI has welcomed the funding which it received from DE during 2010/11 under this heading. This proved invaluable in helping to sustain YCNI posts which are crucial in supporting a new approach by the youth service, consistent with the new CRED policy. In addition, the CRED funds distributed by YCNI have acted as a catalyst for a number of very significant strategic projects in this field involving consortia including a wide range of key voluntary youth organisations and, in some cases, statutory partners.

Without continued CRED funding, it will be very difficult for such projects to maintain momentum, achieve even more tangible long-lasting benefits, and to disseminate their learning across the sector. YCNI would therefore urge DE to continue to earmark funding for CRED initiatives during 2011/12 and beyond.

3. Capital Expenditure

While supporting the primary need to protect front-line services to the greatest extent, YCNI would also recognise that some youth service capital funding will still be essential in respect of minor works, for health and safety reasons in particular, but also to support provision targeting disadvantaged young people and a range of Section 75 categories.

4. Departmental Administration

YCNI notes that significant savings are proposed in relation to Departmental administration which will assist in the protection of front-line service delivery. However, YCNI would wish to highlight that, in at least some instances, that has a direct impact on YCNI as its staff will perform roles and carry out tasks which had previously been the direct responsibility of DE staff.