

**DRAFT PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT
DRAFT BUDGET 2008-11
FUNDING FOR YOUTH SERVICE**

Background to the Issues

1. The Youth Service is defined as including "all those organisations and projects whose primary purpose is the personal and social development of children, young people and young adults." 170,000 children and young people benefit from the Youth Service each year. More than 2,500 youth organisations offer young people opportunities for social, intellectual, cultural, physical and spiritual development. Latterly, emphasis has focused on social education, social group work, inclusion and the participation and empowerment of young people many of whom are growing up in our most socially disadvantaged and marginalised communities.
2. In the draft Budget for 2008-11, the funding for the Youth Service is amalgamated with Community Relations (C/R) and includes the following figures:

		2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Recurrent	Youth & Community Relations	£30.7m	£29.2m	£ 29.5m	£31.6m
	Impact		- 4.8%	+1.1%	+7.1%
	Schools' budget		+3.1%	+5.8%	+4.3%
Capital	Youth & Community Relations	£6.4m	£5.0m	£5.0m	£5.0m

Annex 1 shows how the budget is made up. The loss of £2.4m to the Youth Service in 2008/09 is absorbed into the £1,740m schools budget representing an increase of only 0.14% to that budget. In contrast, a loss of £2.4m to the Youth Service budget is a decrease of nearly 8% - a very damaging drop. A sector that exists because of a volunteer workforce that, if costed even at the lowest hourly rate, would equal £50m of manpower deserves increased support from government not cuts.

3. It is noted that, while Schools project an above inflation increase year on year, the Youth Service will have a reduction, then a sub-inflation lift and then an "apparently" more positive outlook for 2010/11 which will only result in bringing the service's budget back to 2007/08 levels, allowing for inflation. The Youth Service budget also includes a "hidden" subsidy to the schools budget given the human resource input of full-time youth workers during the school day, plus the fact that over £1m of the youth service budget is currently used to effectively subsidise schools use of outdoor education centres which are managed by ELB Youth Services.
4. The Draft Budget statement indicates (para 3.19) that "local Ministers have complete discretion to allocate the resources received in terms of their assessment of local needs and priorities". It follows that the Minister has agreed these figures and is prepared to increase the budget for Schools at the expense of the Youth Service/Community Relations although there is scope to argue for additional funding as is happening in the case of the Ministers for DHSSPS and DSD.
5. Schools with approx 99% of the Education budget will receive a 3.1% increase achieved, in part, by raiding the 1% of the total budget which is allocated to Youth Service/CR. This raises greater questions than peripheral budgetary adjustments and suggests that the contribution of youth service to education is not "valued", and clearly not understood.

6. The YCNI publication "Investing in Youth Services" (2002) questions the commitment of the Department of Education to youth work despite the ongoing statements to the contrary from Ministers and officials over the years. This question remains and is re-opened by this draft Budget.

Timing Implications

7. The timing is particularly surprising. Youth Service has always been the Cinderella of education provision dependent upon the generosity and dedication of local people in local communities. One would have expected a local Minister to give a boost to youth workers in those communities rather than demoting their efforts against those in the formal education sector through the dramatic differential made in the allocation of funding. The message underlying the cuts to Youth Service and Community Relations is that these elements of education provision are less important than what is provided by schools. Yet research into the benefits of youth work has clearly shown that many young people who experience difficulties in the formal education context respond well to the encouragement of skilled youth workers.
8. Another paradox of this timing is that this cutback is imposed on a service which is engaged in making its services more relevant and efficient. Often criticised for being the sum of too many parts, the sector has instigated the Youth Service Liaison Forum, an amalgam of the main providers who meet to act collectively and have produced the Youth Work Strategy 2005-2008. A new Strategy is about to be developed, which will potentially be undermined by the new funding allocation. In parallel with this there is the debate on the Youth Service input to the ten-year Children and Young People's Strategy, the development of the NI Network for Youth, and the demise of the EU Peace 2 Programme. The combination of these factors means that it is a particularly difficult time for the sector to be faced with redundancies and the closing down of programmes.
9. Yet another related aspect which needs to be taken into account is the need to follow up on the recommendations (numbers 28 and 29) in the Independent Strategic Review of Education 2006 (the Bain Report) in relation to harmonising planning with policy on the curriculum and with policies in areas such as youth provision.

Absence of Departmental Rationale

10. Departmental action or change of course tends to be predicated on the evidence of Inspectorate Reports. In the case of the current CSR projections, it is difficult to understand why this decision was made, given that the Chief Inspector's Report for 2006 included comments such as "the youth service makes an important contribution to the personal and social development of many young peoplein the best practice youth work makes a distinctive and valuable contribution to helping young people overcome barriers to learning and achievement, develop their social and personal skills and better understand views and cultures different from their own outreach work of the youth service provides a high standard of support for vulnerable young people Youth provision is suffering from low levels of funding over many years." This last comment makes it even more incomprehensible for the Department to propose such a significant reduction in funding.

Public Service Agreements - Compliance

11. There are 23 Public Service Agreements (PSAs) which will support the priorities in the Programme for Government. These include key actions that will be taken in support of the priorities along with the outcomes and targets to be achieved.

12. PSA 10 "Helping our children and young people to achieve through education" is defined as "encouraging all our children to realise their potential by improving access to formal and non-formal education and provision tailored to the needs of disadvantaged children and young people". There are four objectives in this PSA but, despite their absolute relevance to youth provision, none of these refer directly to the Youth Service. Rather the Youth Service is reduced to being one of the four actions set against one of the objectives and even more starkly, there is no target set against this action. The absence of a Youth Service target is a particular concern. It could be interpreted as implying that this area of work is of less significance.
13. The tone of this paper emanates from a long-standing frustration at the Department of Education failing to appreciate the potential of non-formal education to be a positive and powerful influence in the development of young people and abdicating its responsibility to promote it.
14. The crux of the real argument may be in the coming together of timing and targets. The challenges coming from RPA should be seen as a challenge to help Youth Service adapt to a changing environment. At such a critical period, it should be incumbent on the Department, as the author of Policy, to be funding and positioning the service into a new era in the development of joint targets with other providers of services to young people and a youth-led clearing of confusion over who does what on behalf of whom.
15. If one of the priorities in managing the transfer of Youth Service functions to ESA is to maintain continuity and standards of service, then the substantial cuts proposed for the youth service budget will prove an almost insurmountable handicap for the personnel involved in managing this transfer.

Statutory Sector

16. Recurrent expenditure in the youth sector is essentially for salaries and programme costs. The loss of some £2.5m each year will be the equivalent of about 80 full time youth work posts. The loss of personnel, with their hard won knowledge and experience, would be a major blow to the Service. Initiatives such as the Outreach Service may have to cease and the momentum in the development of the Youth Service curriculum would be halted. Most at risk would be those projects currently externally funded and needing to be mainstreamed. Coincidentally, these tend to be the interface provision in areas of great need.

Voluntary Sector

17. In a small area such as Northern Ireland, voluntary youth organisations struggle to maintain an individual presence which is possible only because of the extended contribution of volunteers. State aid tends to be below that necessary to stay open and any reduction however small stretches the gap between actual income and that figure necessary to survive. A reduction will be passed on and will mean casualties. As with statutory provision, without large plant and specialist facilities, the brunt of any shortfall will fall on posts and programme costs
18. The Youth Service may be open to challenge for failing to meet its obligations under Section 75 as it will be severely curtailed in its pilot schemes run in conjunction with bodies such as FACE [formerly PHAB Inclusion Matters], Mencap, Travellers etc, which should be rolled out across Northern Ireland to meet the specific needs of these target groups.

Impact on Community Relations

19. It would be tempting, from a purely Youth Service perspective, to suggest that any imposed cuts should impact more on the Community Relations aspect of the budget. However, that would be contrary to YCNI statutory responsibility to "encourage cross community activity by the youth service." It could also be prejudicial to the JEDI community relations/citizenship initiative which encompasses the entire Youth Service sector and is a global groundbreaker in the area of post-conflict youth provision. It would also be an abrogation of the Youth Service tradition of creating an equality of environment wherein its objectives may thrive.
20. It is regrettable that the draft Budget has seen fit to exclude any reference to "A Shared Future: a Framework for Good Relations in NI" published in 2005 after much debate. This aspect has been diluted to the cross-cutting theme of "a better future: fairness, inclusion and equality of opportunity" and a key priority of "promoting tolerance and inclusion." While there may be scope to look for alternative sources of funding (e.g. from Peace 3 or the Community Relations Council), this would only be for short term, localised initiatives rather than the roll out of a major policy.
21. The treatment of Community Relations in this manner exemplifies the cocoon in which this proposal exists. After years of equality legislation, with social need at the centre of policy, it is now in danger of simply being dropped. That this could be a policy change in this area is difficult to fathom.

Transfer from Capital to Revenue

22. There is no doubt that the infrastructure of the Youth Service has been underdeveloped for many years, with usually only minor works being funded. The Chief Inspector's Report 2004-06 referred to deficiencies in the Youth Service including "the infrastructure and the quality of ICT provision." While the amounts included in the budget are to be welcomed, it is a concern that PSA 16, which relates to "Investing in the Health and Education Estates", only makes reference to the schools and FE estates and does not deem to regard the Youth Sector as part of the Education Estate. That said, there may be some argument that it would be less painful for the Youth Service if part of the capital budget was transferred to the recurrent budget to offset the reductions – (but only if the challenge against the cuts fails) – but this is to accept the validity of the revenue reductions and, as such, would not be a preferred strategy.

BUDGET ALLOCATIONS

In the draft Budget, the funding for the Youth Service is amalgamated with Community Relations (C/R).

The planned figures for 2006/07 were:

• Recurrent	£29.1m
- ELBs	£21m
Includes £18m Youth	
£ 1m Children and Young People's Fund	
£ 2m Community Relations	
- YCNI	£4m
- Voluntary Sector Community Relations	£2m
- Voluntary Youth Service Provision	£1m
- DE Administration	£1m
• Capital	£6.5m
- ELB Youth Services	£3.9m
- Voluntary Youth Service	£2.6m

[Source: Report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education, December 2006]

The draft Budget for 2008-11 shows the following figures:

		2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Recurrent	Youth & Community Relations	£30.7m	£29.2m	£ 29.5m	£31.6m
			- 4.8%	+1.1%	+7.1%
	Schools	£1,719m	£1,770m	£1,870m	£1,952m
			+3.1%	+5.8%	+4.3%

The overall planned spend across all Departments (page 51 of Draft Budget) shows increases of:

3.0%	3.4%	4.4%
------	------	------

If these increases were applied to the Youth/CR budget the figures would be:

£31.6m	£32.7m	£34.1m
--------	--------	--------

The loss to the Youth/CR budget is therefore:

£2.4m	£3.2m	£2.5m
-------	-------	-------

Capital	Youth & Community Relations	£6.4m	£5.0m	£5.0m	£5.0m
----------------	-----------------------------	-------	-------	-------	-------