

FOREWORD

In developing this Strategic Plan Youth Council members and staff consulted widely with our partners within and beyond the Youth Service. I want to thank all who gave so freely of their time and ideas.

The Strategic Plan for 2001-2004 represents some changes in emphasis in the Council's work. This is complemented by a process of internal change, involving staff, which will develop new ways of working and improved relationships with partners and clients.

The cover of this document seeks to reflect both the Council's changing role and the synergy to be gained through co-operative effort with other partners, particularly within the youth service. Over the period covered by this Strategic Plan, a series of published Annual Reports will document the Council's progress against this plan.

I hope that this plan for the future will be of value to all those individuals and organisations who share Council's vision of the future for children and young people in Northern Ireland.

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Maire Young
Chairperson

INTRODUCTION

Strategy has been defined as the broad programme for defining and achieving an organisation's objectives; the organisation's response to its environment over time (*see Appendix 1*). The Youth Council for Northern Ireland, in producing this strategic plan, has attempted to address five simple questions:

- Who are we?
- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we get there?
- How are we doing?

WHO ARE WE?

The Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 sets out the statutory framework within which the Youth Council operates. The Council's statutory functions are:

- to advise the Department of Education, Education and Library Boards and other bodies on the development of the youth service;
- to encourage cross-community activity by the youth service;
- to encourage the provision of facilities for the youth service and facilities which are especially beneficial to young persons;
- to encourage and assist the co-ordination and efficient use of the resources of the youth service;
- to assist the effective provision of administrative services by the voluntary headquarter organisations.

In addition, Council:

- advises on the training of part-time and full-time youth workers;
- encourages the development of European/International opportunities for young people and those who work with them.

'A Youth Service for the New Millennium' report defines the Youth Service as a service which *"includes all those organisations and projects whose primary purpose is the personal and social development of children, young people and young adults"*. (Its key components are further defined in this Youth Service Policy Review document.) The Youth Council applies this definition to the term "youth service" where it is used in this document.

The term "youth work" is used in this document consistent with the description in the *'Model for Effective Practice'* document (p9):

“Youth work offers opportunities for young people to acquire and develop the knowledge and understanding, and the personal and social skills, which are necessary for them to relate effectively with others, and to participate fully in the life of their own community and beyond.”

The Youth Council will also apply the definition of the youth service age range contained in the above report; i.e. it includes children and young people between the ages of 4 and 25 years.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

This question leads to an assessment of the external (local, national and European) political and social environment in which the Youth Council operates.

The world has changed much since the Youth Council was established in 1989. A devolved government now exists in Northern Ireland with local accountability and scrutiny. Linked Government policies on targeting social need (TSN), equality and human rights active community initiative, and active citizenship all impact on the work of the Council, assisting in the process of peace-building in Northern Ireland.

During the last twelve years there has been an increasing emphasis in government, the public, community and voluntary sectors on:

- working in partnership (e.g. Children’s Services Plans);
- involving the service users in the development and planning of services;
- demonstrating effectiveness and efficiency in the use of public and funders’ monies;
- providing evidence of the effectiveness of youth work practice;
- the development of quality standards in service delivery, including accreditation of training.

The Council recognises the importance of applying these principles to its own actions.

The needs of children and young people have also changed as they adapt to the demands of living and working in the 21st Century. The Department of Education, in its strategic plan “Learning for Tomorrow’s World”, provides a framework for both the formal and informal education (i.e. youth service) sectors which defines an education service quite different from that of the 1990s.

The Youth Service Policy Review process has highlighted a number of key goals which must influence the Council’s approach and actions over the next few years:

- participation by young people in future planning and provision; and
- increased partnership and greater coherence amongst agencies within the youth service sector.

The Council is fully committed to the achievement of these goals.

Finally, the intention of the Northern Ireland Executive to appoint a Children's Commissioner, and develop a children's strategy, is a very significant initiative to which the Council will wish to make a substantive contribution.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

Vision

The Youth Council's vision of the future is one where all children and young people develop the knowledge and skills to fully participate as active citizens in an inclusive society.

Mission

The Youth Council sees its role in creating that society as:

- advocating for the youth service;
- shaping policy and strategies;
- developing youth work practice;
- peace-building and active citizenship;
- supporting and resourcing regional voluntary youth organisations.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

In contributing to the creation of that inclusive society, the work of the Youth Council is underpinned by **six** important **VALUES** which the Council will actively apply to all areas of its work:

Young Person Centered

Council believes all young people are citizens in their own right and are of equal value, regardless of age, religion, disability, including learning disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class etc. Council is committed to promoting the well being, democratic rights, active involvement and equitable treatment of children and young people, to enable them to develop as individuals and as active citizens.

Equity

Council is fully committed to the value of equity, both in terms of promoting the fair treatment of children and young people, and in ensuring that Council's own strategies and procedures are demonstrably equitable.

Diversity

Council believes the development and maintenance of a just and pluralist society is critical to improving the quality of children's and young people's lives.

Interdependence

Council believes in the development of a more democratic and inclusive society, in which all children and young people have the opportunity to play a full and active role, and in which different communities of interest and location live in a relationship of inter-dependence and mutual trust.

Proactivity

As a development agency, Council aims to encourage coherent and innovative strategies which will advance the quality of services for children and young people, adopting a partnership approach to ensure that issues are addressed in a holistic manner.

Quality

Council will strive for excellence in all its activities, demonstrating transparency in decision making, responsiveness to all stakeholders, an openness to challenge, and ensuring that all resources are maximised in their utilisation.

The Council's **Equality Scheme** sets out in detail how the Council will address the important tasks of promoting equality of opportunity and good community relations. The Council is totally committed to fulfilment of its statutory duties under the legislation. (The Council's Equality Scheme is available on the YCNI Website: www.youthcouncil-ni.org.uk.)

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each aim of the strategic plan has a set of **performance indicators** connected with it. The Council will regularly measure these over the period of the plan. In some cases these indicators are things that are clearly within the control of the Council; in other cases they relate to activities that the Council does not control but may wish to influence. The Council recognises that it is important to gather information on both kinds of indicators, to help inform the development of future plans.

Some of these performance indicators will require further refinement during the lifetime of this strategic plan. In a number of instances, dialogue will be required with other bodies regarding the wording and measurement of performance indicators. It may also be necessary to secure additional funding in order to measure particular performance indicators.

AIMS

Core Aims

1. Ensure that the youth service is fully valued and effectively resourced
2. Ensure that government and agency policies take full cognisance of the aspirations and needs of children and young people in the development and implementation of policies and strategies.
3. Promote and develop youth work practice by building on local, national and international best practice.
4. Promote and develop the contribution of youth work to active citizenship and peace-building.
5. Assist regional voluntary youth organisations in the delivery of efficient and effective services through the provision of guidance and support, and maximising the level of grant aid available from the Youth Council.

Supporting Aims

1. Effectively and efficiently develop, implement and manage Council's strategic and business plans, consistent with current legislation.
2. Efficiently and effectively manage the optimum annual budget of the Youth Council.
3. Develop and implement human resources strategies and systems which will support best practice within the Council.
4. Develop, implement and review new approaches and working practices, involving all Council staff in the process.
5. Develop and implement effective communications strategies for the Council and the youth service sector.

ADVOCATING FOR THE YOUTH SERVICE

The Youth Council believes that youth service agencies, both statutory and voluntary, have a key role to play in the delivery of effective services to children and young people, both within the education sector and beyond. Partnerships are crucial to achieving this goal, and also in the promotion of the youth service to external bodies. The Youth Council is committed to playing a lead role in actively raising the profile of the youth service with a wide range of agencies and within the media.

Core Aim 1

Ensure that the youth service is fully valued and effectively resourced.

Priorities (2001-2004)

- 1.1 Enhancing the status of the youth service with government and statutory agencies.
- 1.2 Producing evidence on the value of youth work.
- 1.3 Improving the image of the youth service.
- 1.4 Increasing the resources available to the youth service.

Performance Indicators

- (a) References to the contribution of the youth service and youth work by government and statutory agencies.
- (b) Public perceptions of the youth service and youth work assessed through surveys.
- (c) Media coverage of youth service issues and activities.
- (d) Percentage increase in the total resources available to the youth service sector.

SHAPING POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

Given the very wide range of agencies, both statutory and voluntary, which have an impact on the lives of children and young people, the Council believes that it is imperative that holistic, integrated policies and strategies are developed, at governmental, regional and local levels. The Council is also committed to co-operating with other agencies which share these sets of goals. Children and young people must have meaningful involvement in public decision-making in Northern Ireland, and also within Ireland, the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Core Aim 2

Ensure that government and agency policies take full cognisance of the aspirations and needs of children and young people in the development and implementation of policies and strategies.

Priorities (2001-2004)

- 2.1 Establishing and maintaining effective communication with political parties, Assembly members and committees, the Civic Forum and government departments.
- 2.2 Engaging with the Children's Commissioner in the development of co-ordinated policies and strategies affecting the delivery of services to children and young people.
- 2.3 Promoting effective youth policies within Northern Ireland, Ireland, the European Union and beyond.
- 2.4 Participating as an active partner within the Educational Initiative which may act as an Intermediary Funding Body under the Peace 2 programme.
- 2.5 Advocating for all agencies to implement and promote youth consultation.
- 2.6 Advising the Department of Education, Education and Library Boards, and other bodies, on the development of the youth service.
- 2.7 Developing youth work strategies, with partner agencies, in related domains (e.g. health, education, care, justice, arts/culture, sport).

Performance Indicators

- (a) Number of agencies co-operating with the Council in the development of new youth work strategies.

- (b) Number of government and statutory policy proposals to which the Council has responded.
- (c) Numbers of prompted and unprompted advice from the Council to the Department of Education on youth service policies and strategies.
- (d) Number of interactions between the Council and Education and Library Boards on youth service policies and strategies.
- (e) Number of policy briefings and meetings between the Council and Assembly members.
- (f) Numbers of prompted and unprompted advice from the Council to bodies outside Northern Ireland on youth policy.
- (g) Number of public bodies actively involving young people in youth consultations.

DEVELOPING YOUTH WORK PRACTICE

Good youth work offers excellent learning opportunities which support and promote the personal and social development of children and young people. Effective youth work programmes offer breadth and balance in meeting the diverse developmental needs of children and young people. An international dimension to the curriculum further enhances the benefits to them. Central to this whole process is the quality of the relationship between young people and youth workers, both paid and voluntary, who bring considerable knowledge, experience and expertise to the development of programmes for children and young people.

The Youth Work Training Board and International Committee are key fora of partner agencies which support the Council in these areas of work. The Council also assists groups to access funding from other sources in support of youth work practice.

Core Aim 3

Promote and develop youth work practice by building on local, national and international best practice.

Priorities (2001-2004)

- 3.1 Promoting continuous improvement of the youth work curriculum through research and production of curriculum guidelines.
- 3.2 Promoting two-way exchange of good practice with relevant bodies in other countries, including Ireland, and within the UK.
- 3.3 Supporting the implementation of recommendations contained in the Youth Service Policy Review's Human Resources Strategy.
- 3.4 Encouraging volunteering by adults and young people within the youth service.
- 3.5 Encouraging and enabling organisations working with young people to participate in European Union programmes and international contact.
- 3.6 Promoting and assisting the development of active linkages between youth service structures within Ireland (North and South).

Performance Indicators

- (a) Number of youth workers completing training courses recognised by the Youth Work Training Board.
- (b) Number of young people, and those working with them, participating in international programmes, facilitated by YCNI.
- (c) Number of adult volunteers acting in leadership roles within the youth service.

PEACE-BUILDING AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

The youth service has made a significant contribution to the improvement of community relations within Northern Ireland, over three decades. The legislation establishing the Youth Council specifically charged with encouraging cross-community activity by the youth service. The Youth Council is fully committed to supporting the youth service in the promotion of peace-building.

The Council is also committed to encouraging children and young people to participate as active citizens in the inclusive society which is the Council's vision for Northern Ireland. This initiative will be complementary to that under development within the formal education sector.

Core Aim 4

Promote and develop the contribution of youth work to active citizenship and peace-building.

Priorities (2001-2004)

- 4.1 Within the partnership established, providing co-ordination and facilitation, and contributing to the development of the JEDI initiative (*see Appendix 3*).
- 4.2 Embedding the principles of equity, diversity and interdependence within the policies and strategies of the Youth Council.
- 4.3 Promoting models of active citizenship.

Performance Indicators

- (a) Number of children and young people engaged in active citizenship programmes within the youth service.
- (b) Level of participation by youth service agencies and staff in the JEDI initiative.
- (c) Level of involvement by Council staff and members in the JEDI initiative within the Council.

SUPPORTING AND RESOURCING REGIONAL VOLUNTARY YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

The Council recognises the importance and value of the role played by these bodies, either in supporting the delivery of services to children and young people through local youth groups, or through the direct provision of key services to children and young people. The Council is committed to the provision of guidance, support and the securing of additional financial resources for regional voluntary youth organisations.

Core Aim 5

Assist regional voluntary youth organisations in the delivery of efficient and effective services through the provision of guidance and support, and maximising the level of grant aid available from the Youth Council.

Priorities (2001-2004)

- 5.1 Developing and implementing a revised long-term grant aid strategy for regional voluntary youth organisations.
- 5.2 Developing and implementing a revised strategy for the funding of community relations activities by regional voluntary youth organisations.
- 5.3 Advocating for increased government funding for enhancing the total grant aid available for regional voluntary youth organisations.
- 5.4 Promoting and supporting the application of New Targeting Social Need principles to all funding processes within the youth service.
- 5.5 Providing effective guidance to regional voluntary youth organisations on youth service issues (including curriculum, training, research, and international).
- 5.6 Ensuring effective consultation and communication with regional voluntary youth organisations (consistent with the "Compact" between government and the voluntary sector).

Performance Indicators

- (a) Total level of funding for regional voluntary youth organisations.
- (b) Level of satisfaction with Council's support services experienced by regional voluntary youth organisations.
- (c) Level of satisfaction with Council's arrangements for consultation with regional voluntary youth organisations.

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGY

Council members take the lead role in setting out the Council's vision for the future and ensuring that, through its staff and resources, it supports and develops effective youth work with 4-25 year olds in Northern Ireland. The formulation of the Council's overall strategy is the key mechanism used by members.

Supporting Aim 1

Effectively and efficiently develop, implement and manage Council's strategic and business plans, consistent with current legislation and its statutory functions.

Priorities (2001-2004)

- 1.1 Establishing effective arrangements for consultation with key stakeholders (*see Appendix*).
- 1.2 Developing and implementing annual business plans for the Council.
- 1.3 Establishing and maintaining mechanisms for the regular assessment of progress on the implementation of Council plans.
- 1.4 Ensuring Council members have the support, training and information required to enable them to fulfil their role.
- 1.5 Implementing the Council's Equality Scheme, monitoring its operation and reporting to the Equality Commission.

Performance Indicators

- (a) Level of satisfaction of stakeholders with the consultation arrangements
- (b) Level of satisfaction of Council members with the performance of the Council against agreed targets.
- (c) Progress against timetable for implementing Equality Scheme.
- (d) Level of satisfaction of Council members with the support, training and information provided.

ACQUIRING AND MANAGING FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The Council is committed to securing funding from a range of sources in order to realise its Strategic Plan, and to maximise the impact of such resources through good management.

Supporting Aim 2

Efficiently and effectively manage the optimum annual budget of the Youth Council.

Priorities (2001-2004)

- 2.1 Securing additional grant-in-aid for the Council in order to increase the level of grant aid to regional voluntary youth organisations.
- 2.2 Securing additional funding in order to effectively implement the Council's annual Business Plans.
- 2.3 Managing the Council's income and expenditure to remain within budget.

Performance Indicators

- (a) Annual percentage increase in total grant aid to regional voluntary youth organisations.
- (b) Annual percentage increase in Youth Council income.

MANAGING AND DEVELOPING HUMAN RESOURCES

The Council is committed to equipping staff and members with the skills, knowledge and opportunities to fulfil their roles effectively and develop their own potential, thereby laying the foundation for securing Investors in People accreditation.

Supporting Aim 3

Develop and implement human resource strategies and systems, to ensure compliance with legislation and also to support best practice within the Council.

Priorities (2001-2004)

- 3.1 Developing and implementing a performance management system.
- 3.2 Securing Investors in People accreditation.
- 3.3 Developing and implementing annual training plans for Council staff and members.
- 3.4 Developing and implementing a Human Resources Planning Strategy, covering Council's short-term and long-term needs.

Performance Indicators

- (a) Level of staff satisfaction with the annual training plans.
- (b) Progress towards achievement of liP accreditation.
- (c) Effectiveness of staffing arrangements in relation to the delivery of annual business plans.

EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

In line with the Council's commitment to strive for excellence in all its activities (see "Quality" value), and as part of the Council's "Change Programme", the Council will review a range of systems and procedures to maximise efficiency and deliver an enhanced service. These reviews will involve all Council staff and will be taken forward using a Project Team approach.

Supporting Aim 4

Develop, implement and review new approaches and working practices, involving all Council staff in the process.

Priorities (2001-2004)

- 4.1 Developing and implementing appropriate systems to support the co-ordination of Council activities, and monitor their effectiveness.

Performance Indicators

- (a) Level of staff satisfaction with the new approaches and working practices implemented.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The Council recognises the importance of good communications both internally to improve its operation, and externally in developing and supporting its relationships with a wide range of stakeholders (*see Appendix 2*).

Supporting Aim 5

Develop and implement effective communications and public relations (PR) strategies for the Council and the youth service sector.

Priorities (2001-2004)

- 5.1 Develop and implement an effective communications strategy to promote the youth service sector, in collaboration with other relevant agencies.
- 5.2 Develop and implement an effective communications strategy for the Youth Council.
- 5.3 Develop and implement an effective IT system to assist the Council with knowledge management (i.e. the effective and efficient transfer of knowledge within the organisation).
- 5.4 Ongoing review and updating of the Council's website as a mechanism for communication with internal and external stakeholders, consistent with government's commitment to implement an "online citizen portal".

Performance Indicators

- (a) Knowledge of the youth service sector by a range of key stakeholders.
- (b) Level of satisfaction of Council staff with internal communications.
- (c) Level of satisfaction of Council members with internal communications.
- (d) Level of satisfaction of external bodies with communication from the Council.

APPENDIX 1

CONTEXT

The Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order sets out the statutory basis for the Youth Council's operation. Its sponsoring department is the Department of Education. In the preparation of its Strategic Plan, Council noted a range of developments in the wider environment. These are summarised below.

- Changing views and needs of children and young people;
- Need to promote the involvement of children and young people in decision-making;
- Outcomes of the Youth Service Policy Review process
- Implications of the Compact between government and voluntary and community sectors;
- Needs of community-based youth work projects;
- Impact of short-term funding streams on youth provision (e.g. Peace 2, Lottery, including New Opportunities Fund, Executive Programme Funds);
- Need to support and encourage youth organisations in contributing towards peace building and active citizenship;
- Need to develop closer links between formal and non-formal education;
- Implications of "Learning for Tomorrow's World" - Strategic Plan for the education sector;
- Implications of "Investing for Health" initiative;
- Implications of the "Unlocking Creativity" strategy;
- Impact of the Northern Ireland Executive "Programme for Government";
- Need to promote and participate in effective interagency initiatives;
- Need to embed New Targeting Social Need into policies and practice;
- Impact of equality legislation upon Council policies and procedures;
- Implications of Human Rights legislation within Northern Ireland;
- Expectations of, and interactions with, the new political structures (the Assembly, its Committees and members, Civic Forum);
- Implications of a Children's Commissioner post and related central strategies;
- Need to develop North/South relationships within Ireland;
- Need to develop East/West relationships between Britain and Ireland;
- Increasing importance of the European Union and its programmes;
- Impact of rapid technological change in information and communications technologies, together with the expectation of electronic-government.

APPENDIX 2

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- Young people
- Youth workers (paid and voluntary)
- Local youth/community based groups
- Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations
- Other significant voluntary organisations
- Education and Library Boards (Youth Services in particular)
- Other relevant public bodies (within Northern Ireland, and with an influence on or interest in issues affecting young people)
- Minister/Department of Education
- Northern Ireland Executive/Ministers/Departments
- Civic Forum
- Northern Ireland Assembly/Assembly Committees/Political Parties
- National Youth Agencies (statutory and voluntary, in other countries)
- European Commission
- General Public, especially those categories as defined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Religious belief | <i>Protestants, Catholics, people of non-Christian faiths, people of no religious belief</i> |
| Political opinion | <i>Unionists generally, Nationalists generally, members/supporters of any political party</i> |
| Racial group | <i>White people, Chinese, Travellers, Indians, Pakistanis, Black people</i> |
| Men and Women generally | <i>Men (including boys), women (including girls)</i> |
| Marital status | <i>Married people, unmarried people, divorced or separated people, widowed people</i> |
| Age | <i>Children under 16, people of working age (16/65) people over 65</i> |
| Persons with a disability | <i>Persons with a physical, sensory or learning disability as defined in Sections 1 and 2 and Schedules 1 and 2 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995</i> |
| Persons with dependants | <i>Persons with personal responsibility for the care of a child, persons with personal responsibility for the care of a person with an incapacitating disability, persons with personal responsibility for the care of a dependant elderly person</i> |
| Sexual orientation | <i>Heterosexual people, homosexual people, bisexual people.</i> |

APPENDIX 3

JEDI Joined in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence

In the autumn of 1998, a partnership was created from across the Northern Ireland youth service to address issues around the development of community relations and education for citizenship with the sector. This partnership brought together senior policy makers from the Youth Council, the youth departments of the Education and Library Boards, the umbrella body of voluntary youth agencies - YouthNet, and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum. These groupings were joined by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, the International Fund for Ireland (Community Bridges Programme), and the Department of Education. Collectively, they devised a programme proposal which became known as the "JEDI Initiative".

This initiative received funding in 1999 from IFI, the European Structural Funds (through the Department of Education), the Education and Library Boards and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland. In April 2000, four working groups involving policy makers, managers and those working directly with young people were established. These working groups focus on:

- Policy Development;
- Research and Evaluation;
- Practice Development; and
- Training.