

**Pre consultation response on the development of the
Northern Ireland Network for Youth:**



September 2007

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Introduction:

The following response to the pre-consultation for the NI Network for Youth is drawn from a number of consultation sessions with young people across Northern Ireland. In addition this information was supplemented by discussion with the Executive committee of the NI Youth Forum. The NI Youth Forum has already completed a detailed report on behalf of the Department of Education that considered a broader range of questions in relation to the Network for Youth. This document focuses on the six pre-consultation questions as outlined in the pre-consultation flyer.

Findings:

The findings of the pre-consultation are set out below:

1. What is your vision of an ideal NINfY?

The young people who took part articulated a clear vision for the Network. They wanted a structure that made a difference:

“Change must happen because of the Network.”

They also wanted a structure in which any young person who wanted to take part could take part, in which young people were in control of their own participation. They stated the network should be:

“Accessible and a place where everybody has a say.”

If the Network was working in the best way possible it would be a place where there is:

“Change for the better, no dodging issues and Increased understanding (by Government) of the issues that affect young people.”

2. What sort of values and principles should NINfY adopt?

“The Network should put people before money”.

The sentiment of this conversation was around ensuring that organisations that work with young people should share resources and information in the Network and not compete for funding or young people. Participants stated that integrity and genuineness would be values important for the Network. Concerns were

expressed around the potential for tokenism to characterise this initiative. Participants felt evidence that change has been affected as a result of the Network would work towards young people giving their support to the network.

“The network should do stuff and not be tokenistic.”

“The network should be all-inclusive and easily accessible.”

Accessibility to Government was also a key value expressed by participants; they wanted to ensure that the Network did not become unduly bureaucratic and therefore off-putting to young people.

“There should be a structure that allows for the communication of detailed views and opinions – there should be as few layers as possible to avoid what young people say being diluted.”

3. What functions should NINfY cover?

Young people should have a say in the running of the Network and should have a key role to play in recruiting Network staff. All the young people who contributed felt that the network should have an “activist” role and that as a result of the work of the network change should take place.

There was an acknowledgment from the young people that Government departments want to consult with young people on key issues, one group felt that there was an onus on the government to initiate this work and young people could respond. Other young people however felt strongly that they should be able to bring their issues and concerns directly to government and there should be an equal balance between government consultations and issues, concerns and ideas that have been generated by young people.

“A ‘give and take’ relationship between young people and government would be mutually beneficial.”

The Network should have the capacity to work on issue based work with young people following up on issues that are important to young people for example if young peoples views are being sought on bullying then there should be the capacity to support member organisations to carry out work on the issue with young people. Young people felt that there could be the potential for organisations to work together.

“Organisations should belong to the Network and come together on projects directed by the Network”

4. How would NINfY link with existing participative structures for children and young people?

This question was not explored in great depth at this pre-consultation stage however all young people that took part felt that organisations should be members of the Network and should work together for the benefit of young people in the Network. Participants felt that a presence in different areas of Northern Ireland was important:

“Any head office of NINfY should be located in Belfast, with satellites/bureaus in other large cities e.g. Derry”.

5. Are there any models in the UK or internationally that would be relevant to this initiative?

Young people spoke about online communities and groups e.g. BEBO and facebook as a model that the Network could adopt in part. They felt that this could form part of the model of the Network but should not replace face-to-face work.

“There should be a community of young people a true network”

6. What are the barriers that would stop NINfY from being effective?

At this stage participants expressed concerns around a representative model for the Network, i.e. one in which young people were selected to represent all young people within a specific constituency. They felt that a small number of young people have a limited ability to represent the views of a very diverse range of young people across Northern Ireland. They emphasized the need for the Network that was accessible to all young people across Northern Ireland and were keen to explore a range of models in the next stage of the consultation.

Additional Information

Age of the Forum:

There were other comments made during the focus groups that may be useful to the overall discussion on the Network. In a discussion on the age range that the Network should include there were a variety of views expressed. These include:

“Twelve is an ideal minimum age for members of the network. At age twelve young people have begun citizenship training in school and are becoming more socially/politically aware”.

“The Network should be open to people from about eight because at that age people know what they think about things”.

A recurring theme in the focus groups was the need to advertise and promote the Network so as to ensure young people are aware of the Network and are clear about how they can get in touch with and make their views known through the Network.

“The network should receive plenty of publicity to make as many young people aware of it as possible e.g. schools, flyers where young people hang out, big events, internet publicity, Bebo etc”.

Conclusion:

In conclusion it is clear that young people are excited about the potential of the Northern Ireland Network for Youth and want to be engaged in the process of designing the Network. Their overwhelming vision for the Network is one that is meaningful, open, accessible, and one that has sufficient resource to ensure that all young people across Northern Ireland are aware of its work, and can be participants in that work.