

RESPONSE FROM YOUTH ACTION NORTHERN IRE

REF: Response to Northern Ireland Network for Youth Consulta

YouthAction Northern Ireland has sixty years experience of working and young people throughout Northern Ireland aged between 10 – 25 years. Our aim is to support them as active and equal citizens whose voices are heard, respected and valued.

We are a voluntary youth organisation that works to enable young people achieve their full potential. We also seek to extend the understanding of youth work through the development of innovative models of practice.

Alongside delivering programmes in urban and rural communities we work with other voluntary, statutory and community organisations to support and assist young people as they strive to find and/or create their identity and develop their role in the community. We provide services complementary to statutory and other independent agencies throughout Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. Particular emphasis is placed on groups from disadvantaged communities who are working towards their own development.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Network for Youth Consultation and would like to make the following comments with regard to;

What is your vision of an ideal NINFY?

- An independent body which strives to be a centre for excellence on effective youth participation. The network should be a champion for young people across government where young people can effectively lobby and influence decision making. It should be a youth network recognised in legislation
- A network that is inclusive, innovative, transparent, clear in purpose and processes, has open and clear channels for communication and feedback and which recognises and values young people for their participation and contribution. This should inspire young people to help determine services and activities which will enhance their area/region and overall development

Visit our Website: www.youthaction.org

“It is important for young people to influence decisions so that they can help their community” (young person) – Youth Service Liaison Forum Youth Participation sub group research 2006

- A future vision for NINFY should reflect informal and non-formal approaches with young people developed through the youth sector and especially the development of effective models of participation.

What sort of values and principles should NINFY adopt?

- **Inclusion** – engaging with young people on the boundaries of the youth sector and formal education processes. This should include a strategic partnership approach with the 4 pillars of young people, voluntary, statutory and community sectors.
- **Creativity** – utilising well established models of youth participation while embarking on new models. This should involve preparing young people and adults for effective participation in new and challenging ways and not solely replicating an adult oriented model
- **Innovation** - Participation can take on many forms such as one off consultations, longer term consultation processes etc. Future participative models should utilise modern technologies and provide mechanisms for young people to really challenge and influence government.
- **Effective** – sufficient time, planning and resources should be available to ensure meaningful processes and results. This should ensure wide communication on an ongoing basis. The effectiveness will depend on the value of the processes as well as the products. Young people should be appreciated and recognised for their contributions such as through the YouthAction NI Youth Achievement Award scheme (recognised through ASDAN). This has proved effective across formal education alongside the youth work sector.

What functions should NINFY cover?

- **Information gathering / evidence collection from young people and workers.** This may include having an up-to-date picture of models of youth participation across sector(s); Action Research including what issues or needs assessment has already taken place with young people (and by young people). This would involve a collection of primary and secondary data especially those with young people at the core of the process; evaluations of issues raised through practice; active engagement in new needs analysis; involving young people as key informants and active researchers such as the YouthAction NI peer research group; taking presentations from existing groups.

Visit our Website: www.youthaction.org

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH CLUBS
Charity Ref: XN 47579



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

“The peer research approach has proven to work well. Young people learn through doing research and then feedback to other young people and adults in the community” (worker)

- **Commissioning out research and initiatives to engage with marginalised groups and individuals.** A mechanism needs to be developed for representing the actual voice of a diverse range of young people to enable the ‘body’ to speak with authority on the views of young people.
- **Policy advice based on evidence and research gathered.** This should involve influencing decision making across government departments and local government especially within community planning models.
- **PR and communications.** The Network needs an effective communication and lobbying strategy to enable linkages with diverse groups. Information needs to be grounded in the reality of young people’s lives. Experienced youth workers should be engaged in supporting and developing networks alongside demonstrating indicators of achievement and progress.
- **Networking** with geographical and thematic fora of young people’s decision making groups
- **Championing effective models of youth participation across government.**

How would NINFY link with existing participative structures for children and young people?

- An audit needs to be completed of all existing participative structures, regionally and thematically.
- The network should utilise the findings from the Youth Service Liaison Forum Participation sub group in exploring how young people can be at the heart of designing, planning, managing and evaluating youth work practice and policy
- It is Important that young people can contribute without creating another structure or group. There needs to be greater linkages with young people not engaged through existing youth participative structures. Rather than having one model or methodology it would be useful to adopt a variety of models and methodologies. Different groups of young people respond to different methods and methodologies.

Visit our Website: www.youthaction.org

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH CLUBS
Charity Ref: XN 47579



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

- Taking on board the previous point there is now a real opportunity for creativity, innovation and really engaging with young people on the margins. We need to move from the notion of traditional forums and committees to creative dialogue and methods of expression for a larger proportion of the youth population in communities, local government and regionally.
- The relationship between a youth worker and young person is paramount in considering any proposal for the network- this relationship is unique in that it can be genuine, honest, open and empowering and one which reaches out to those most marginalised.
- The Network should have key linkages with existing groups/bodies such as the Youth Service Liaison Forum and Participation sub group, effective links with voluntary, statutory and community organisations and linkages with local area/community planning agendas. The voluntary sector have a history and significant role in proactively supporting young people to play an advocacy role in affecting real action and change within their local communities and the wider policy arena.
- Strategic linkages should be made with the NI Youth Work Strategy particularly within the participation objective.
- Linkages should also be encouraged and supported with the formal education sector through models such as schools council i.e young people represented on these bodies having the opportunity to be involved in the network.

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

- Peer Research (YANI, YMCA, UK Youth) Young people are key informants in assessing needs within a local area or a thematic work focus where they are collectors of data within a robust research framework, Established models within YouthAction NI include the Young Women's Research Advisory Group linked to the University of Ulster and the Young Men's Forum linked to the Centre for Young Men's Studies. These groups are embedded in gathering quantitative and qualitative data.
- Shadow Councils
- Thematic groups such as LGBT, Disability etc
- Young Farmers Clubs

Visit our Website: www.youthaction.org

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH CLUBS
Charity Ref: XN 47579



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

- Big Deal Youth Participation (sectoral)
- Rural young people joining locally with regeneration and community activists in order to affect change locally.
- Scottish Youth Parliament
- Dail Na N'og and National Youth Council –Hear by Rights (Republic of Ireland)
- Uniform groups especially sections that cater for older age groups i.e Rangers and Venture Scouts

What are the barriers that would stop NINFY from being effective?

- Tokenistic and jargonistic forums. Using exclusive and elaborate language in which young people may 'tune out'. Terminology and language should be a crucial consideration when encouraging young people to participate in complicated processes with which they are not familiar. Consideration needs to be given to conditions for effective working between young people and adults i.e. place, time, venue, facilitation etc
- Lack of resources to support real engagement with a diverse range of young people. Effective participation is achieved through long term investment and often compliments community development approaches in working in tandem with adults in the community.
- Not demonstrating results, progress or outcomes. Lack of clear benchmarks and developments. It is important to monitor and evaluate and apply a critical reflective approach in which the learning encompasses the challenges and opportunities for young people and workers
- Using only existing structures of youth participation. Not being independent and dynamic. Generally young people cite that they would like to be more involved and active but that they either don't know how to get involved or the mechanisms prohibit their involvement i.e intimidate them. This willingness by young people often comes through their involvement in developmental youth work programmes within their local area. Proactive and innovative methods should be employed
- The youth sector not being fully involved in driving this initiative. There needs to be support staff to broker between young people and policy makers.

Visit our Website: www.youthaction.org

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH CLUBS
Charity Ref: XN 47579



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

- Not being representative of all young people. How do we ensure that young people outside the sector are taken account of? Having a static core group of the 'usual suspects'. Inequality and lack of diversity of young people's involvement.
- NINFY may not be effective if Governmental and regional plans /consultations having little impact at local level.
- Consideration needs to be given to consultation fatigue. The process needs to be kept real, participative and fun. Young people need to be updated on progression following consultations. Young people not being listened to or recommendations not being acted upon.

“Grass roots consultations ensure that policy is owned and developed by the people that matter. There is a whole opportunity for the community to learn together” (Worker)

“Young people are asking ‘what has happened with our ideas?’” (Worker)

Hoping these comments are useful. If you require any further discussion or information please do not hesitate to contact us.

Visit our Website: www.youthaction.org

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH CLUBS
Charity Ref: XN 47579



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE