

New Post-Primary Arrangements and Proposal for a draft Education (Northern Ireland) Order



YouthNet response

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1.0 Background

YouthNet is the voluntary youth agency for Northern Ireland. It is an independent agency which represents the interests and aspirations of voluntary youth organisations. Our 75 member organisations cover a broad range of activity for young people across Northern Ireland, including local, front line delivery of youth work in small community groups, local youth projects and regional and national organisations for young people. YouthNet operates as a Sectoral Partner in an Intermediary Funding Body through the PEACE II Programme.

2.0 Introduction

YouthNet welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the reform of the education system in Northern Ireland. We think that the current reform presents a chance to provide a better education system with greater flexibility, more choice and better suited to the needs of pupils. However, it will be important to ensure that issues around admissions are fully considered.

Article 21

YouthNet is committed to partnership and collaborative working. We believe that the arrangements for schools working together present a valuable opportunity for pupils and schools. A greater choice of courses will enable pupils to study a wider variety of subjects than at present. There is also a significant opportunity to promote greater cross-community relations and to further the aims of *A Shared Future*. It would be helpful to strengthen this section by stating a commitment to encouraging cross-community collaboration.

Arrangements will need to take account of timetabling, transport and costs in drawing up partnership agreements. It will be important to ensure that pupils in rural areas and in low income families are not disadvantaged. There is no mention of partnership arrangements with voluntary providers in the draft

Order. YouthNet would be interested in how such partnerships may be facilitated.

Article 28

YouthNet understands that regulations about admissions criteria are yet to be determined. We would like to stress the importance of using admissions criteria which are socially inclusive, for example, such as those in use for the allocation of nursery places.

Financial Effects of the Order

YouthNet is concerned about the additional costs of implementing the Order. The Explanatory Memorandum states that there is £24.7m to support the introduction of new elements but also states that the overall costs cannot be determined and that additional costs will be met through existing budgets. However, in the climate of increased budget cuts, the current level of service cannot be maintained so it is difficult to see how further services could be added.

YouthNet appreciates the opportunity to contribute and would welcome feedback on the consultation.