

Appendix 11 – Context for Participation of Young People

11.1 Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) enshrines participation rights including the right to express opinions and have those opinions taken into account. In developing local participative practice, youth workers have a range of policy and practice frameworks to draw on, including the OFMDFM Ten Year Plan, the UNCRC, the legacy documents from the Big Deal, and the ASK FIRST Standards. The Model for Effective Practice has strengthened the participation of young people at the centre of youth work and the extent and success of their participation is a major emphasis in any education inspection activity.

11.2 The emphasis in youth work on the importance of the active and critical participation of young people, greater involvement with young people in the planning of programmes and in the running of the youth setting is consistent with Article 12 of the UNCRC and the right of the young person to have his or her view heard. Schools Councils and youth fora offer an important model to support engagement; the focus must be on delivering genuine engagement, with meaningful ways of giving young people a voice and of listening and responding to their views.

11.3 Opportunities for participation and participative structures have evolved; social networking and new techniques for engaging young people have emerged; young people's experiences and expectations have changed; and participation is now an integral part of good youth work practice. The pre-consultation for PfY highlighted that some young people felt there was still elements of tokenistic participation, and managers highlighted the need for greater recognition of the investment required to enhance and encourage active participation of members, particularly disengaged and marginalized young people.

11.4 A Model for Effective Practice states '*participation is a key element of the youth work process*'. Within youth work settings, young people should be able to articulate their needs and interests, and to be actively involved in the

design and delivery of their own projects. It is also essential that the young people taking part should be involved in the process of evaluating and celebrating their achievements, as well as being able to assess the progress they have made, either individually or as a group.

11.5 ETI has reported evidence of the involvement of young people in planning and evaluating the youth provision they access. There has been strong evidence of articulate young people organising and leading local youth events with effective support from facilitators. There have also been good examples of young people working with local council representatives for the benefit their local community. While there is variation at local centre level, in the majority of instances the management at area level, in a range of different types of youth provision, has made great efforts to develop the skills of organisation and representation on local Youth Councils and committees.

11.6 The Big Deal initiative provided the opportunity for a more strategic, joined-up approach across the Youth Sector to complement and strengthen the development of participative structures. The Big Deal programme aimed to encourage children and young people to become involved in activities that enabled them to make informed choices, enhance their personal and social development skills and promote their involvement in decision making. The legacy documents from the Big Deal provide important insights and potential frameworks for supporting participation within generic youth work settings and for supporting youth organizations, defined by youth governance or youth representation. “Participation and the Big Deal” publication and the National Council of Voluntary Youth Services provide a useful set of principles underpinning youth participation. These are:

- Young people are involved because they want to be.
- Young people have a choice about how they get involved and at what level.
- The diversity of young people is valued.
- Participation is accessible to all young people.

- Everyone is honest and open about process.
- There is equal partnership between adults and young people.
- Young people are encouraged to come up with their own ideas and solutions.
- Barriers that stop young people from getting involved are challenged.
- The value of young people's work, ideas and skills is recognized.
- Young people's involvement makes a difference.

11.7 To ensure that participation is reflective of current thinking and practice, arrangements for strengthening the active participation of young people in the youth sector would benefit from being reviewed and revitalised, with a view to bringing forward fresh proposals for flexible and contemporary practice frameworks. The youth service should provide young people with the means, the space and the opportunities to participate at local, sub regional and regional levels, including their active involvement in stakeholder advisory forums.

11.8 It is clear, following on from the Big Deal, that there is an opportunity to review the functioning of existing participation opportunities and structures in the youth service by potentially setting up a Network for Youth initially within the youth service. It will be important that this work is not driven by DE.

