

Appendix 4 - Wider Government policy context

4.1 Our education system is facing significant change designed to improve the quality of education services and enhance the delivery of teaching and learning outcomes for young people. It is important to identify the key drivers for change that youth work, as part of education, will be set within. The education service is being shaped by a range of government policies, and non formal education can assist in the delivery of key strategic outcomes in the Children and Young People 10 Year Plan, Child Poverty, and Cohesion Sharing and Integration.

4.2 Area and community planning have become very relevant for the planning of local services and it is important that the youth service has a clear and proactive input into these processes. By helping to deliver on all the policies aimed at improving the life chances for young people, including the five interconnected strategic priority areas set down in the Programme for Government, the youth service can demonstrate its relevance to a wider audience.

4.3 The Priorities must be considered in light of the policy environment within the north of Ireland and within the Education sector in particular. There is a substantial key suite of policies that impact upon the Priorities and which have been taken into consideration during their development. Here we have focussed on the most significant and relevant of these.

Programme for Government

4.4 The NI Executive's Programme for Government (PfG) 2011-15 highlights the key commitments and outputs it will take to drive forward priority areas. The PfG states *'The most immediate challenges lie in supporting economic recovery and tackling disadvantage. In particular, we need to rebuild the Northern Ireland labour market following the impact of the global economic downturn, while also continuing to rebalance the economy to increase living standards. While doing this, we are committed to growing a*

sustainable economy and investing in the future; tackling disadvantage; improving health and wellbeing; protecting our people and the environment; building a strong and shared community; and delivering high quality services. Equality of opportunity and sustainability are our underpinning principles.. We recognise that we cannot simply grow the economy at the expense of disregarding our endeavours to transform society and enhance our environment. A strong modern economy is built upon a healthy, well-educated population backed by high quality public services and a commitment to use prosperity as a means of tackling disadvantage.'

Priority 2 in the PFG - *Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Wellbeing* - seeks to address the challenges of disadvantage and inequality that afflict society and to address the relatively poor health and long-term shorter life expectancy of our population; its purpose is to stimulate interventions that break the cycle of deprivation, educational under-achievement, and to address health inequalities and poor health and wellbeing as well as economic disengagement. To achieve this there is a need to close the gap in educational underachievement between those who are least and most disadvantaged and improve the participation of young people in education, employment and training.

Review of Public Administration

4.6 The Review of Public Administration (RPA) was launched in June 2002 with the aims of revitalising and modernising public services, developing a new, more accountable public sector and ensuring collaborative working with a common purpose to meet the public's needs and expectations of public services. In regard to the education sector, the RPA aims to reform how education is administered, reducing bureaucracy and providing more consistent and high quality support to front-line education service providers.

4.7 Youth services remain the responsibility of the Department of Education and will be included in the remit of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). The Youth Service Policy Paper for ESA signalled the

intention for youth services managed by ESA to *'ensure as far as is reasonable that the commissioning and delivery of youth services is planned and carried out to meet Ministerial/Departmental objectives, to standards set by the Department, having regard to a combination of effectiveness, economy and efficiency'*. It also stressed that *'the themes of inclusion and participation are core to a successful modern youth service that meets the needs of young people today and into the future. In addition, the strong ethos of partnership working, particularly across the statutory and voluntary sectors, needs to be maintained. This partnership approach is central to ensuring that the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), which will be both a deliverer and commissioner of youth services, is a gateway to effective services and not a gatekeeper.'*

