

## **Appendix 7 - Pre Consultation Engagement**

7.1 The Department undertook comprehensive pre-consultation to establish the views from within the youth sector and wider educational service. A range of views were gathered through questionnaires, focus groups, street-based consultations, seminars and workshops.

7.2 Youthnet, the Youth Forum and the Big Deal participation workers assisted DE in this process. Youthnet sought views from children and young people within their member organisations, as well as youth leaders and workers and senior managers within voluntary youth organisations. They also sought views in particular from communities of interest and consulted with organisations and individuals representing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, Minority Ethnic, Irish Medium Sector, Uniformed Sector, Creative Arts, Rural Communities, and Deprived Urban areas. The Youth Forum targeted young people who were not currently using the youth service and those children and young people that may be considered marginalised or socially excluded. The Big Deal Participation Workers sought to identify the main issues highlighted by children and young people in the pre-consultation, prioritise these and identify solutions.

### **Children and Young People**

7.3 Around 4,000 young people contributed to the pre-consultation, including those currently involved with youth services, and those who had not accessed provision. Inevitably, the responses from such a wide constituency indicated differing needs, motivations and opinions of youth service provision.

7.4 There are multiple reasons for young people choosing to attend youth service provision, and the perceived benefits vary among individuals. In terms of improvements to provision, those who attended wanted more age-appropriate and relevant activities, extended opening over evenings, weekends and school holidays, increased opportunities for meaningful participation and decision making, improved facilities, and access to relevant

information and support. Difficulties with transport to and from youth services were mentioned by many young people living in rural communities, those with disabilities and those living in communities without access to mainstream youth services. Concerns were raised about the provision of services to meet the needs of a variety of marginalised groups.

7.5 Some of the 16+ consulted claimed the service did not always understand and respond to their needs, were adult led and controlled. Increased leadership opportunities were suggested as appropriate mechanisms to enable young peoples' voices to be heard and for young people to influence the services on offer. Unattached young people wanted somewhere safe to go that was affordable and accessible in the evenings and weekends. Young people also raised issues around information on youth activities on offer, with many suggesting that it could be better publicised, and support should be made available for those who find universal services difficult to access. Combating negative stereotyping, especially in media portrayal, was a key issue for young people. Whilst some felt that their views were listened to by some adults, there was a general perception that their views were neither valued nor acted upon. This was most keenly felt by marginalised and disadvantaged young people.

### **Youth workers, leaders and volunteers**

7.6 There was a wide ranging response to the pre-consultation from youth workers, leaders and volunteers, with over 340 individual and group questionnaire responses received. A key issue raised by almost all respondents was the increased expectations of what could be delivered with limited resources; this impedes youth work delivery in a number of ways, including staff retention, the ability to offer varied programmes, and reducing the chance to sustain relationships with young people. There was a concern that the perceived limited understanding about the value of their work resulted in the youth service budget having a lower priority within the Department of Education.

7.7 When asked about the impact of their work on young people, workers placed different emphases on a range of outcomes, including personal and social development, spiritual development, citizenship skills, community involvement, the benefits of having a safe environment with positive activities and adult role models, developing life skills, accessing information, supporting employability, and promoting inclusion. Similarly, workers reported using different evaluation methods according to the context of their work and their professional or voluntary status.

7.8 When asked what could be done to enhance youth workers' ability to deliver youth work activities, the main responses were: increased or sustained funding, training and staff development for all paid staff and adult and youth volunteers, more or improved facilities, increased staffing, and a more joined-up approach/partnership working with other stakeholders. A number of concerns were expressed about staff terms and conditions, too much bureaucracy, and the need for additional training. Consultees, especially those from the voluntary sector, expressed concern about the perceived lack of understanding of the value of volunteers and their contribution to the service. Issues of volunteer recruitment and retention and the need for co-ordination and support for volunteers were considered essential.

## **Managers**

7.9 There were 106 responses to the pre-consultation with managers. The majority of managers felt that youth work is not valued, recognised or well-promoted, especially by Government departments and within the education system. Managers suggested the need for improved marketing of the youth service, greater investment in the service (financial and staffing), improved professional recognition, greater investment in staff development and training, and more cohesion between the statutory and voluntary sectors.

7.10 Overwhelmingly, managers wanted more recognition for youth work as part of the education continuum and wanted youth policy linked clearly with wider education and government policy. Managers welcomed the

development of priorities, as many of them wanted clear direction on the scope of the service. Emphasis was put on the centrality of personal and social development as the core aim of youth work and advised against a deficit approach to young people. A similar emphasis was placed on the need to sustain and enable participative youth work approaches, and the service providing young people with the chance to organise activities themselves and be involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating the service on offer.

7.11 Managers unanimously supported the need for universal provision, but recognised that promotion of inclusion for all may require targeting of marginalised groups and those not currently accessing services. A third of responses suggested changing the age range of the service. Opinions converged on the need for age-specific strategies and programming which would accommodate the developmental stages from childhood to young adulthood. It was considered that with limited resources there was a need for prioritisation, with the majority suggesting resources should be targeted at 11-18 year olds.

7.12 Managers recognised that accurate and up to date needs assessment was critical to the planning and delivery of activities, and emphasised the need to involve young people and local stakeholders to ensure the relevance of local provision. There was recognition of the need to demonstrate the positive impact of youth work on the lives of young people, including the need for a system for recording achievements, and the development of appropriate quality indicators which would articulate educational outcomes for young people.

7.13 Managers were concerned about the historical legacy of funding, some calling for a review of the global youth work budget, while others made specific proposals on how funding policy and decision making could be improved. Managers from the voluntary sector emphasised the need to embed the principles of the Compact and to engage regional voluntary youth organisations in the development of structures to support regional and local delivery.

7.14 Following the pre-consultation exercise, DE has continued to engage with key stakeholders to assist in developing the policy. In keeping with the remit of the Youth Service Liaison Forum (YSLF), a short term stakeholder group was established as a sub group of the YSLF to enable the Department to draw on the experience and involvement of the statutory and voluntary youth sector, both in terms of their role as representatives of their members and/or as service providers in their own right. The purpose of the group was to assist the Department in the development of the policy by providing a point of contact which could provide comment, input as necessary and contribute to the emerging thinking. The membership of, and Terms of Reference for, the stakeholder group is provided at Appendix 9.

